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Helen Parr

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Remembering the Falklands war in Britain: From Division to Conviction?

HELEN PARR
Keele University, UK

This article examines how the Falklands war has been remembered in Britain. By looking at how ideas of the Falklands war reached public audiences, the article traces changing British understandings of the composition of the conflict. In the 1980s, the war was regarded as politically divisive. Since the 1990s, political divisions faded, and the perspectives of veterans, particularly as represented in the memoirs of lower ranked soldiers, became prominent. This has resulted in focus on new themes, such as experiences of combat trauma and relationships with the Falkland Islands and islanders. These changes illustrate shifts in civil–military relations in Britain and encouraged new interpretations of what the Falklands war meant for Britain. In the contexts of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly that of Iraq, Britain's engagement in the Falklands came to be seen not only as politically legitimate, but also as the right choice to have made.

KEY WORDS Falklands war, British war memory, combat trauma, 1980s Britain, military memoirs

In Richard Eyre's film, *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983), James Penfield, a young journalist of working class background, is writing a book about the 1956 Suez crisis when the Falklands conflict starts. James' book argues that during Suez, the British military held up well. He says that there was something curious about the left-wing British elite that denigrated Britain in the political fall-out. The French did not suffer such spasms of national distaste. Eyre's film, written by Ian McEwen and shown on Channel 4, echoed the contemporary left's concern that the Falklands war was used by the Conservative right to redeem Britain after the political embarrassment of Suez (Aulich, 1992: ix). James befriends a wealthy socialist historian, Ann Barrington, the mother of a girl he wants to attract. To

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her, he pretends to be socialist. She — although married — tries to seduce him. Over a 'ploughman's lunch', Ann's husband tells James that he can get involved with her if he wants. The husband, who works in advertising, says that the ploughman's lunch is a deliberate falsification of history. It was invented by advertisers to sell a meal that appeared simple and rustic: 'an invention of advertising campaigns they ran in the early sixties to encourage people to eat in pubs' (Monaghan, 1998: 95).

The film is partly about social class, but mainly about the manipulation of history. It finishes at the Conservative party conference of 1982, as Margaret Thatcher declared that Britain has found itself again in the South Atlantic and will not look back from the lessons it has learned. At that conference, James realizes that Susan, the girl he wants, is having an affair with his best friend. His friend and Susan are both from upper middle class backgrounds. His friend excuses his behaviour by saying that he and Susan are 'old allies'. James' book is published with much success. He has been avoiding his father's telephone calls to come and see his sick mother. The film ends as he and his father are standing at his mother's graveside. He looks at his watch. He is ashamed of his background and seems to want to forget it. He has been caught up in the new tide, a tide of nationalism perhaps, but also a wealthy social network in which he seems destined never fully to belong. James' success is a 'ploughman's lunch', a reworking of history to suit the present.

Eyre's film chimed with widespread academic analysis of the Falklands war. That analysis was that the Falklands war enabled Margaret Thatcher's government to break decisively with a collective memory of the Second World War as the 'people's war'. In its place, Thatcher evoked a triumphalist narrative (Eley, 2001; Connelly, 2004; Noakes, 1998: 103–33; Monaghan, 1998; Foster, 1999; Aulich, 1992; McGuirk, 2007; Anderson, 2011; Mercau, 2019). Her rearticulation of history foregrounded not the collective contribution of the British people to the war effort, marked by the creation of the welfare state after the war. Rather, she argued that Britain had 'ceased to be a nation in retreat'. The Falklands war reconnected Britons with a deep-rooted national spirit and determination. The volunteer armed forces — our boys — displayed their superior training, skill, and endurance on behalf of the British people. Their effort set an example. McEwen used James' ambiguous class position to make his point further. To fit in with the wealthy socialites, James feels he must abandon his class background. He pretends his parents are dead. When Ann Barrington tells James that her beloved brother was killed in World War Two, she seems to be expressing a regret about the necessity of warfare no longer present in James' — and, by extension, Thatcher's — more celebratory front.

Britain's military success in the Falklands of course marked a political turning point. It secured Margaret Thatcher's influence in the Conservative party and Cabinet, altered the mood in the country, and contributed to the Conservative success in the 1983 election. Further, the Falklands victory seemed to override, at

least temporarily, a more traditional, conservative attitude towards the use of military force expressed by some politicians in Thatcher's cabinet and party who had seen warfare themselves (Vinen, 2009: 134–53). Their attitude was that military force should only be deployed in defence of national interests and as a last resort. Its use was to be deplored and never vigorously to be cheered. Foreign Secretary Francis Pym or former Prime Minister Edward Heath would probably have gone further in attempting to avoid war over the Falklands, even if, once Britain was committed, they supported the war and its outcome (Parr in Edmunds, Gaskarth and Porter, 2014). The Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, in his sermon at the memorial service at St Paul's cathedral in July 1982, reminded listeners that nationalism was a false God, and that war should always prompt regret and reconciliation (Parr, 2018: 209–11).

Whether the Falklands conflict enabled the Conservative government to move decisively from a national memory of the Second World War as a 'people's war' towards a more nationalist military patriotism, however, is more uncertain (Edgerton, 2021: 951–3). In some ways, far from breaking with a widespread notion of the 'people's war', the Falklands conflict consolidated it, as the left, centre-left and sometimes the centre-right looked back to a period that seemed to have been one of a cross-party political consensus that was now lost. Angus Calder's 1969 book *The People's War,* for example, detailed the grim horrors hundreds of thousands of British people endured in different ways on the 'home front'. His 1994 My*th of the Blitz* reworked that history, partly in reaction to the Falklands conflict, to criticize a notion that the *People's War* arguably had not displayed, that there were innate national characteristics shaping the responses of British people in wartime. Nevertheless, the purpose of this article is less to ask how the Falklands war transformed narratives about Second World War Britain, instead to focus on memories of the Falklands war, and how those have changed over time.

The article uses the term 'memory' broadly, to refer to how ideas of the Falklands conflict were brought to the British public. This broadness allows the article to trace the main ways Britons came to know about the war: press and political debate during 1982, films in the 1980s, military memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s. Its focus suggests some interesting shifts in British thinking, both about the Falklands war, and, more widely, about the British use of military force. In part, those shifts relate to the relationship of the Falklands conflict to the Second World War. When the Falklands crisis began, the memory of World War Two was a living one. It had only ended thirty seven years previously. During World War Two people's lives had been disrupted. Millions had been conscripted, people had been forced to move or to separate from their spouses and children, and the British had endured the Blitz. The Falklands war, by contrast, did not directly affect mainland Britain, was fought only by professional armed services, and lasted only a few weeks. The proximity of the Second World War shaped how that conflict was perceived in 1982, but in the forty years since the Falklands, the living memory of the dislocation war can cause, and the personal experience of armed service, has eroded. In 1997, 20% of those

born between 1952 and 1962 had personal links with individuals with military backgrounds, but the same was true for only 7% of those born between 1973 and 1981 (Strachan, 2000: xv). Further, as Mary Dudziak observes of the United States, when populations at home are unaffected by the conflicts in which their armed services fight, 'distance' grows between the public and the combatants' engagement with and understanding of conflict (2018a, 2018b).

That growing distance is one main factor altering the context within which representations of the Falklands war, or indeed, any other war, have been received in Britain. Despite, or perhaps because of, that distance, the Falklands war revealed a new tendency to see British serving personnel in a more familiar way. After the Falklands, bodies of soldiers fallen on land were repatriated for the first time in Britain's history, if their families chose. Discussions around repatriation illustrated that the public no longer understood combatants only as servants of their nation, to be buried where they had fallen with their comrades, but also as individuals, professional soldiers who had chosen to join up, and who left behind families who loved them. Further, the Falklands stimulated a public shift in attitude and interest towards the emotional legacies of war, and it also heralded a public move in attitude and interest towards service personnel, and particularly towards lower ranked soldiers (Parr, 2018; Woodward and Jenkings, 2018: 46).

These transformations happened alongside changes in cultural production about the Falklands war. When Margaret Thatcher was still in office, film makers and playwrights interested in the conflict tended to equate the Falklands war with the state of 'Thatcher's Britain'. From the early 1990s, as D. George Boyce notes, political interest in the war receded, and intellectuals ceased making art about the war (2005: 177–90). Cultural production or memory work resided increasingly with those directly affected by the conflict: service personnel, and the Falkland islanders. From the early 2000s, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan helped to prompt a rearticulation of the reasons why Britain had gone to war in the first place. By the time of the fortieth anniversary of the war, the Falklands war occupied a different place in the public imagination than it had in 1982. The 1980s party political division had gone, to be replaced by a new conviction that Britain's participation in the war had been right.

1982–1983: the press and political debate

On 2 April 1982, Argentine forces landed on East Falkland and, after a fire fight, raised the Argentine flag at the governor's residence, claiming sovereignty of the islands. After the news reached Britain, the Falklands conflict was the only story. This was hardly surprising. Although very few people in mainland Britain had heard of the Falkland Islands in 1982, British territory had been invaded. Parliament convened on Saturday 3 April and was united in its resolve to dispatch a Task Force (Barnett, 1982: 23). There was serious criticism that Britain had failed to deter the invasion. Since the late 1960s, Britain and Argentina had

engaged in occasional negotiations to see if a way could be found to transfer sovereignty to Argentina. Britain's withdrawal of the HMS *Endurance* from patrol in the area, part of the 1981 defence cuts, contributed to the Argentine junta's false impression that Britain had lost interest in the islands.

The occupation of British territory by a military dictatorship led many commentators to see echoes of the days in May and June 1940, when Labour and Conservative politicians came together in parliament to depose the pro-appeasement Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Leader of the opposition, and founder member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Michael Foot, had been one of the authors of the anti-appeasement pamphlet *Guilty Men* in 1940. Now, he argued in the House that Britain must not appease a dictator, and that the people of the Falklands islands had a right to look to Britain 'at this moment of their desperate plight': 'we have a moral duty, a political duty, and every other kind of duty to ensure that it [the wish of the islanders to be associated with Britain] is sustained' (House of Commons 3 April 1982: col.639).

The press concurred with parliament and drew on language common from the experience of the Second World War. The *Sun* argued: 'our whole experience with dictators has taught that if you appease them, you have to pay a far greater price', and featured a cartoon of Churchill riding a lion and 'defending our islands' (6 April 1982: 2, 5 April 1983:6). The *Daily Express* called Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington and Defence Secretary John Nott 'guilty men' for allowing the invasion to take place, and the *Daily Mail* called on Thatcher to sack Carrington (Harris, 1983: 39). As the conflict progressed, the public largely supported British actions in the Falklands. Opinion polls showed support for the government's course. Approval of Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister grew. Support rose rapidly during April, as the fleet sailed south. It dipped slightly in early May, when the Argentine ship the *General Belgrano* was sunk, and when the British first lost life, as the HMS *Sheffield* was hit and sunk, but rose again from late May onwards as victory looked more likely (MORI polls, The *Economist*, 3 Apr-29 May 1982). Left-wing historians attending a history workshop on patriotism were bewildered as to why the 'anti-war half' of the nation did not oppose it (Samuel, 1989: x).

If there was an 'anti-war half' of the nation, it focused less on the rights and wrongs of the sovereignty dispute over the islands, than on the emotional language within which the resort to force was discussed. Baroness Jean Ewert-Biggs, whose husband Christopher had been assassinated by the IRA on 21 July 1976 after becoming British Ambassador to Ireland, recalled that she did not go to the House of Lords on 3 April. She listened to the Commons debate on her car radio with 'mounting horror to the note of bellicosity and of wounded national pride in the voices of the majority of the speakers. I could hardly believe the emotive language used' (Carr, 1982: ix). The writer Margaret Drabble quoted Dr. Johnson: 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel', adding that it might also be the 'last refuge of unhappy governments': 'one of the things that most depressed

me in the miserable Falklands business was the spectacle of the British public being encouraged by the government and pro-government journalists to indulge in a fervour of patriotic sentiment' (Woolf and Moorcroft Wilson, 1982: 31). There was a protest march in Hyde Park in May, attended by left-wingers Tony Benn and Judith Hart, but it was overshadowed by reports of the supportive crowds on the docks at Portsmouth when the fleet had set sail and returned.

In parliament, the attack on the Argentine cruiser the *General Belgrano* on 2 May created more opposition. Some commentators felt Britain, not Argentina, was now the belligerent power. Criticizing not the whole British response, but this part of its conduct, Labour Foreign Affairs spokesman Denis Healey asked whether Britain was deploying 'minimum force' (House of Commons, vol.23, 4 May 1982, cols.30-31). The most enduring criticism of the *Belgrano* sinking was probably that the government had misled Parliament. The civil servant Clive Ponting sent documents to Labour MP Tam Dalyell that showed the *Belgrano* had been heading away from the Total Exclusion Zone when it was hit. In the Commons, Defence Secretary John Nott had said the cruiser had been 'closing on elements of the Task Force'. Ponting's documents proved this was wrong. For eleven hours before the attack, *Belgran*o had been sailing away from the Task Force and towards the Argentine coast (Ponting, 1985: 96–7). For Dalyell, the *Belgrano* sinking represented a manipulation of Britain's parliamentary tradition, an overturning of that episode in May-June 1940 when Labour and Conservative politicians used parliamentary conventions to bring down a Prime Minister wedded to the wrong course. Instead, the *Belgrano* sinking was an aggressive and political act on the government's part (Dalyell, 1983). Britain's emphatic victory in the Falklands, and the undoubted boost this gave to Mrs Thatcher's authority and popularity, hardened division further. Some argued that the Argentines had been ready to settle for a peace deal brokered by the President of Peru, and the *Belgrano* sinking made peace impossible (Gavshon and Rice, 1984). The implication was that Margaret Thatcher had been looking for war.

The inquiry into the discharging of government responsibilities during the conflict, the 1983 Franks Report, put the *Belgrano* issue to rest, despite opposition claims that it was a 'whitewash' (Freedman, 2007, loc16177-16416). In 1985, Ponting was tried at the Old Bailey under the Official Secrets Act. His defence was that he was acting in the public interest. The trial judge indicated he had no defence in law, but the jury acquitted him. Despite these reminders of the political faultlines of the Falklands war, for the wider public, the *Belgrano* sinking faded from memory and, outside Argentina, the feeling never took hold that the government had committed a war crime.

1980s: British films

The Falklands war was an occasional backdrop in British films in the 1980s, and very few were made with the events of the Falklands war as their focus. All the

relevant films were made by the BBC or the Channel Four, the UK's second independent TV station, broadcasting for the first time in November 1982. These films connected the conflict to perceptions of Margaret Thatcher and the social changes taking place throughout that decade; and they probably say as much about a particular period in British broadcasting history as they do about the Falklands conflict.

The most directly critical of these representations was a play: Steven Berkoff's 1986 *Sink the Belgrano*. Berkoff crudely represented Margaret Thatcher as 'Maggot Scratcher' seeking pleasure in the death of 1,000 young Argentines in the *Belgrano*. 'Britain does not rule the waves. She simply waives the bloody rules', as the advertising flyer said (https://www.stagesofhalfmoon.org.uk/productions/sink-the-belgrano-1986/). The 1988 film, *For Queen and Country*, featuring Denzel Washington, shows a young black paratrooper, Reuben James, coming home to his East London high rise estate. Reuben left the Parachute Regiment in 1988 and wanted to see his old friend Tony, who saved Reuben's life in Northern Ireland and had lost a leg in the Falklands. Walking towards the estate, Reuben is stopped and searched by the police and called 'jungle bunny' until he shows them his military ID: '2 Para mate'. Reuben tries to find legitimate employment but it is difficult. He acquires tickets to Paris but discovers that as he was born in St Lucia, he no longer has British citizenship. A change in the British nationality law in 1981 has stripped him of it. He looks to escape by going back to St Lucia, but the film gets bleaker, ending as all the male characters shoot each other. Its message is clear. Reuben might have served his country, but he returned to find no job, his nationality taken away. He was killed because there is no way out of the housing estate where he grew up and which has been plunged into poverty by the economic policies of the 1980s.

Like *Ploughman's Lunch*, *For Queen and Country* comments also on nation and class. It echoed concerns in postcolonial literature that the Falklands war illustrated the racism of the political right's nationalism. The Falklanders were seen as an 'island race'. They were white and wanted British allegiance despite Argentina's anti-colonial claims (Monaghan, 1998: 25–7). Even the fact that the Falkland Islands economy was dominated by sheep farming could be seen as tapping into a deep vein of English identity, as it evoked a pastoral, Christian past (Foster, 1999: 22–30, Warpole in Samuel, 1989: 125–40). Paul Gilroy (1987) argued that the Falklands war enabled a racist, nativist culture — linking 'patriotism, xenophobia, militarism and nationalism' — as part of a Conservative rebirth (second edition 1992: 46). That rebirth, Gilroy suggested, was partly a reaction against immigration and the coming to maturity of a generation of black children born in Britain to immigrant parents, children who sometimes clashed with police in decaying inner cities. Thatcher emphasized Britain's inherited greatness but ignored that non-white immigration stemmed from Britain's colonization of much of the world (Hall et al., 1978, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982).

For Queen and Country is also about masculinity and violence in the conditions of the 1980s when, commentators emphasized, opportunities for working class men to find rewarding, or even legal, work were limited. It regarded the Falklands war, much as *Ploughman's Lunch* did, as reflecting the economic interests of an upper middle class who claimed to stand for Britain, while destroying the natural communities of Britain's working classes. Nick Perry's *Arrivederci Millwall,* first shown as a play in 1985, then as a short BBC film in 1990, develops similar themes. Billy, who runs with a Millwall 'firm' of football hooligans, enjoys violence, and speaks a nationalist and racist language — 'they are all spics, all the same to me' — although his best friend Cass is black, and he is Catholic, and on good terms with the Italian owner of a café his gang frequents. Billy's brother Bobby is killed in the Falklands. Billy's gang travel to Spain to watch England in the World Cup and to look for fights. Before he left for the Falklands, Billy told Bobby he liked to fight because he did not want to be seen as a coward. Bobby replied: 'there ain't no hard men, Billy, believe me'. Perry's film places the reality of the violence of war against the orchestrated violence of football hooligans. In the environment in which Billy and Bobby live, there seem to be no other options for young men, other than the state-sanctioned violence that takes Bobby's life, and the willed-for violence that ultimately ruins Billy's.

Two films centred on the armed services, *Resurrected* (1989) written by Martin Allen and directed by Paul Greengrass, and *Tumbledown*, written by Charles Wood and directed by Richard Eyre for the BBC in 1988, also addressed the themes of masculinity and violence, albeit in different ways. In *Resurrected*, and the memoir that inspired it, *Summer Soldier*, Scots Guard Philip Williams is shown to be gentle and humane, uninterested in violence (Williams with Power, 1990). He joined the Army because there was no interesting work for a boy with no qualifications. At Tumbledown, he was knocked out at the start of the battle. When he came to, presumably many hours later, the battle was over and everybody had gone. Disoriented, alone, and hungry, he wandered aimlessly until he came upon a farmhouse. By the time he was found, the war was over, the battalion had left for home, and his parents had been told that he was missing, presumed dead. When he came home, his mother was glad he was alive, but some of his neighbours were angry. They had bought flowers and best clothes for his memorial service. They felt they had been tricked into handing over their money and denigrated him for not being a hero (Walsh in Aulich, 1992: 43–4). On return to his battalion, his fellow soldiers believed he had taken fright and hidden, deliberately to avoid the battle. He was bullied, and badly beaten. He found it hard to recover from the ordeal. *Summer Soldier* and *Resurrected* present Williams' unusual story. Both memoir and film portray army culture as brutal.

The film *Tumbledown*, based on a joint memoir by Wing Commander John Lawrence and his son Robert, an officer in the Scots Guards, was more ambiguous. Wing Commander Lawrence had spent twenty eight years in the RAF. He was proud of his service and of the armed forces tradition in Britain. Robert joined

the Army in part to follow in his father's footsteps. Lawrence was shot in the head towards the end of the battle of Tumbledown. He had bayonetted an Argentine soldier, and, advancing up the mount, had shouted to his men 'isn't this fun'. He survived, but sustained injuries that meant he was partially paralyzed and incontinent. He had to leave the Army. The Lawrences' memoir was a clear-sighted examination of difficulties accessing medical support after the end of the war. The facility Robert was sent to was spartan and the former officer treated as if he was stupid. The Army welfare bureaucracy made assumptions about his mental state. In one questionnaire he was asked if he had become sexually aroused while killing an enemy soldier. John Lawrence could barely believe the Army and government could provide so little for men who had been willing to lay down their lives for their country. Robert recognized that if it was hard for him, whose father was an established military man with resources, it must have been impossible for men and families who were neither (1988: 232). The ambiguity revolved around words Robert had spoken when he first saw his father on return to Britain while still very badly wounded. He said: 'Daddy, it wasn't worth it'. John understood that Robert spoke in a moment of extreme duress, believing he had let his men down, but John was haunted by those words and looked deep into his own beliefs. Robert ended the memoir explaining that he still believed that what he did in the Falklands 'had to be done' (231).

The film set up a conceit absent from the book. Robert and his friend Charles, also a Scots Guard officer but uninjured in the war, drive to the country house of a girl one of them likes. The girl does not want to see them and hides upstairs in her bedroom. Her parents provide lunch for the two men. They talk endlessly about the war, about what happened to Robert, about the relationship between them. After lunch, the father sees Robert out. He reveals that he had been a conscientious objector — digging potatoes, weeding asparagus — during the Second World War. He said he was 'frightened', not so much of death, but of killing. Once Robert and Charles leave, his wife calls them 'two killers' and says that when she was young during the war, fighters were thought to be heroes. Were they heroes? 'Don't know yet', the husband replied, 'haven't read the myth'.

1990s–2000s: military memoirs

After the 1980s, the Falklands war lost some of its political resonance, and cultural production focused increasingly on the experiences of military personnel. Stuart Urban's *An Ungentlemanly Act,* shown by the BBC in 1992, moved away from the politics of 1980s Britain. It depicted the Argentine occupation of the islands, the mood of the islanders and what happened to the small band of Royal Marines who were stationed on the islands when the Argentine forces arrived. Shane Meadows' film *This is England* (1996), for Film Four, returned to themes of social deprivation, but focused on the perspectives of a gang of punks and skinheads. Shaun, whose father was killed in the Falklands, falls in with an older group

who look after him. Combo, released from prison and unstable, is drawn into white nationalist violence and takes Shaun with him. Combo becomes profoundly jealous of the close family of Milky, the black member of the gang, and beats Milky so severely he nearly kills him.

Lynda La Plante's BBC six-part series and book *Civvies* (1992) examined the lives of a group of former Parachute Regiment soldiers in the late 1980s, trying to make their way on 'civvy street'. The series illustrated the men's struggles as they tried to find legitimate or interesting work, when white-collar crooks often wanted to call upon their services for their own economic gain. La Plante dramatized the legacies and difficulties of escaping from violence, but also humanized the ties between them and the relationships with their wives and children, now that those wives often worked themselves and the men could no longer assume dominion in the home. Grant Mitchell, a stalwart character in the BBC's long-running London-based soap opera *Eastenders*, was in some ways similar. He was an ex-paratrooper who had fought in the Falklands. He arrived in Albert Square, the home of Eastenders' fictional residents, in 1990 to embark upon complicated and sometimes violent relationships with a series of women but is portrayed essentially as sympathetic. His difficult background and proud masculinity prevented him from grasping the domestic harmony that periodically seemed within his reach.

From the late 1990s, cultural production about the Falklands war shifted towards the military memoir, and a new trend was for lower ranked soldiers to write them (Jenkings and Woodward, 2014: 2). Before 1997, about two-thirds of Falklands memoirs were written by officers, but after 1997, two-thirds were written by soldiers (Robinson, 2011: 571). The focus of these memoirs was often different to more traditional military books. Officers Julian Thompson, Nick Vaux or Nicholas van der Bijl, for example, spoke from their own perspectives, but also aimed to establish 'what happened' in certain units or specific battles (1985, 1986, 1999). The newer perspective was to examine experiences of intense combat, often in elite units. This perspective was popularized by the runaway success of Andy McNab's memoir *Bravo Two Zero* (1993), about his SAS patrol during the Gulf War. Although these were military memoirs, they were also stories of boys from hard backgrounds. McNab was a foundling who grew up illiterate. They were initiated as elite soldiers and they overcame extraordinary difficulties during combat and after. Lucy Robinson described their form of writing as 'the fragmented self and the collective body' (2012: 91–104). The writer, Robinson suggested, wrote to try to make sense of an experience for which they had trained hard, and which they had willingly accepted. However, later removed from the 'collective body' of their Regiment, they found it difficult to reconcile what had happened to them.

The attention given to the violent experiences of lower ranked soldiers marked a cultural shift. In the 1950s and 1960s, working class writers had written about the everyday hardships and complexities of working-class lives and masculinities. Alan Sillitoe, the son of an unpredictable and illiterate bicycle factory worker, criticized

authority and disliked the discipline institutional authorities used to inculcate wayward youth into more genteel sensibilities (1959). The young men who wrote after the Falklands were different. Like Sillitoe, perhaps they wrote because 'I didn't want to die' (Desert Island Discs, BBC, 2009), but they supported the state institutions that had given their lives purpose. Their focus was experiences of delivering and witnessing the effects of state-sanctioned violence. In the British society of the 1990s and 2000s, they offered writing about lives that were not widely known, and they promised a rawness and authenticity that the publishing industry and the public sought (Woodward, 2008: 368-78; Woodward and Jenkings, 2018).

The memoirs described in detail the horror of combat experience, and sometimes the subsequent descent into trauma (Weston, 1989, Bramley, 1991, Lukowiak, 1993, Curtis, 1997, Eyles-Thomas, 2007, McNally, 2007, Banks, 2012). The authors recorded a loyalty to their comrades that Rachel Woodward calls 'mateship' (2008). Further, army training inculcated men into the ethos and history of their unit or regiment. The men had been trained together, and they stood together in the spirit of the past. Their unflinching loyalty to their Regiment, alongside the complicated feelings they may have had after battle, created an imperative to remember comrades who had died (Parr, 2018). The insistence to remember increased over time as the implications of battle continually revealed themselves, and as they feared the war would be forgotten, or that they might forget their comrades. They shared a bond civilians did not. Only they had been there, together, having to accept they would die. Paratrooper Ken Lukowiak concluded his memoir guiltily, recognizing that he did not think of his dead comrades every morning and every night (1993: 179–80). In that way, the memoirists found themselves unable to escape the past.

2000s: the Falkland Islanders

In the 2000s, cultural production about the Falklands war was increasingly in the hands of those directly affected, and representations of the politics of the war changed. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher was often shown as heartless. Initially written by Ian Curteis for the BBC in 1983, *The Falklands Play* was turned down in 1986 because Michael Grade, then controller of BBC One, thought its presentation of Thatcher too sympathetic. It was broadcast in 2002 and illustrated Thatcher shedding tears upon news of the deaths of British soldiers (Boyce, 2005: 171–90). The 2011 film the *Iron Lady* also portrayed Thatcher's emotions. She was shown as decisive over the *Belgrano* attack but anxious and upset about the fate of the troops. The *Iron Lady* suggested that Thatcher perceived the jeopardy that they — and she — were in. The film countermanded the 1980s view that the gains of conflict for Thatcher had been obvious, and easy.

Representations of the war generally focused on Britain, not Argentina. Argentine playwright Lola Arias' 2016 play *Minefield* toured internationally and showed at several locations in England and Wales. The play was based on the

experiences of six British and Argentine veterans, who played themselves on stage. It recreated moments from their histories of the war and connected their experiences and understandings of what it meant to have fought there, and now to be a veteran. Memoirists and former paratroopers Lukowiak and Bramley both travelled to Argentina. Lukowiak's visit ended in his being accused of war crimes; but Bramley met Argentine veterans and was taken by their warmth and hospitality. His second book included Argentine perspectives of the battle of Mount Longdon (2009). In 2010 paratrooper Tony Banks travelled to Argentina to return a trumpet he had taken from an Argentine prisoner of war, Omar Tabarez. He found solace meeting Omar and talking together about the war (Banks, 2012).

International reconciliation was, however, relatively unusual, and it was perhaps telling that Banks' story was only told on national TV in Scotland (*From War to Peace*, 2010). For the most part, veteran stories began to involve travel to the Falkland Islands, and connections with the Falkland islanders (see Jenkings and Beales, this issue). The greater prominence of the islanders themselves reflected two main factors. First, growing economic prosperity on the islands enabled the islanders to devote more time and resource their self-governance. Secondly, during the Kirchner governments, Argentina reasserted their sovereignty claim (Dodds, 2012: 697). Consequently, in 2008, the Falkland Islands government passed a new constitution, emphasizing their independence from colonial ties, and in 2013 held a referendum that showed the islanders' desire to remain British (Dodds and Pinkerton, 2012: 413–6). The islanders took care to record and pass on to their children their history and memory of occupation and war (Watson, 2010, Maltby, 2016a, 2016b). Connections with British veterans and relatives of those who had been killed reflected the islanders' recognition of the sacrifice made and was an element in the Falkland Island government's strategy to remind Argentina of their wishes.

The centrality of the Falkland Islands and islanders also revealed a changed climate into which stories of combatant trauma were received. In 1997, the veteran-led South Atlantic Medal Association (SAMA82) formed to sustain a sense of 'pride and comradeship' amongst veterans and to 'maintain and strengthen' links with the people of the Falkland Islands (https://sama82.org.uk/aims-and-purpose-of-sama-82/). SAMA82 aimed to support those who had been wounded or changed psychologically by their experiences. It was partly inspired by men like Welsh Guard Simon Weston, who had been badly burnt when the *Sir Galahad* was bombed, and who became a public figure. Weston and others spoke not just about their physical injuries, but also about the psychological scars of the war. In 1982, recognition that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder might exist, or that anyone in the professionally trained armed services might suffer from it, had been limited. The 15th anniversary of the war illustrated a shift in the Army's recognition of and attitude towards trauma.

On the 25th anniversary of the war, the Falklands Veterans Foundation (FVF) opened Liberty Lodge in Port Stanley as a place for returning veterans and relatives

of the dead to stay. The FVF formed in 2002 and realized that visiting or returning to the islands could assist the healing of former combatants (http://www.falklandsveterans.org.uk/index.html). Some relatives also found getting to know the Falkland Islands and islanders therapeutic. The parents of Private Craig Jones, 3 Para, were gifted a small piece of land in Teal Inlet, close to where Jones and other paratroopers had initially been interred. Renamed Craig Island, it became a permanent memorial to their son and brother, and to the other men who were killed alongside him. A BBC documentary, *The Falklands: Remembering Craig* (2012), told the story of their journey to the islands during the 30th anniversary of the war.

A further 30th anniversary documentary — ITV's *Return to the Falklands*, featuring Simon Weston — also made visiting the islands its way for Weston to remember the conflict and to find some sort of peace (2012). Former combatants frequently mentioned the returning to the islands as part of the process of accepting their feelings (Hilton, 2011). One former paratrooper carried a photo of two island children who had been kept captive in the community centre at Goose Green, liberated when 2 Para arrived. On return to the Falklands, he met those children, now grown up with children of their own. He felt he had played a part in giving them the lives they had had (Parr, 2018: 271). Connections between former combatants, the islands and islanders reinforced many military personnel's feelings that defending the islands had been worth it.

Conclusions

The 'distance' between the British public and the troops that fight in Britain's name has grown since 1982, as the number of people with personal memory of the world war, or with personal experience of armed service, has diminished. That distance has grown alongside changes in cultural production associated with this conflict, and this has meant that ideas of the Falklands war in the public imagination have changed since 1982. In the 1980s, film makers and intellectuals were interested in the political impacts of Britain's victory in the Falklands. Most cultural representations of the war linked the war with criticism of 'Thatcher's Britain' and saw the armed services as the armed wing of the state. Over time, attention turned to the perspectives of those most directly affected by the conflict itself: service personnel and Falkland islanders. By the fortieth anniversary, ideas of the war were anchored in recounting of experiences of intense combat, particularly for young soldiers, and in the liberties the conflict enabled for the Falkland islanders.

These changes in representations of the Falklands conflict illustrate deeper shifts in the relationship between the armed services and wider British society, changes that have arguably influenced how British people look back on any conflict. The growth and popularity of the military memoir written by lower ranked soldiers indicated greater public sympathy towards young men with rough backgrounds, and far greater public interest in and understanding about the emotional legacies

of war, and towards PTSD. Military families came to feature much more in discussion of British wars, and soldiers were viewed increasingly as individuals, rather than representatives of the state or government. The idea expressed in the film *Tumbledown*, of military personnel as 'killers' seemed to have passed.

These shifts in attitude towards the armed services can be traced back to the Falklands, as bodies of soldiers killed during the land campaigns were repatriated to Britain for the first time, and as the tabloid press focused on the stories of families affected by the war (Parr, 2018). Those changes gathered pace during the 1990s but probably became particularly prominent during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the long campaign in Northern Ireland, for instance, families of servicemen often wanted troops to be withdrawn, but limited public knowledge, the security threat and the complexity of operations meant there was little sentimental public support for British forces (Dixon; Aubertin; McMahon, all in Dawson, Dover and Hopkins, 2017). After Iraq and Afghanistan, the public became increasingly compassionate towards British soldiers and the difficult positions they could find themselves in, but questioned government decisions sending them to war in the first place. Families of soldiers killed in Iraq openly criticized Prime Minister Tony Blair and threatened legal proceedings if Sir John Chilcot's enquiry into the Iraq war was further delayed. One father whose son was killed in Iraq stood against Blair in the 2005 General Election. In the context of the deployment to Helmand, the soldier has been remembered for his personality and professionalism, not for his service to Queen and country.

These changes, as Anthony King suggests, domesticate the soldier, making loss a private and familial matter. At the same time, public favour for the armed services has strengthened, as the dead have been honoured despite the cause (2010: 1–25). Consequently, support for the armed services has come to be associated with British patriotism in a new way. The public can express support and sympathy for British troops even if they do not like the government, the state, or agree with the campaigns. As Jenkings, Megoran, Woodward and Bos noted, the spontaneous public response to the repatriation ceremonies through Wootton Bassett of servicemen killed in Afghanistan and Iraq was used by the *Daily Mail* to shame the police, nation and government for showing insufficient respect for the troops (2012: 6). A pro-military t-shirt expresses it thus: 'if you can't stand behind our troops, feel free to stand in front of them'.

The changing cultural representations of the Falklands conflict over forty years, therefore, reveal these wider changes in the relations between army and society, a facet of the growing 'distance' between a small, professional armed service and a society increasingly removed from the experience of service or of armed violence. By tracing those changes, this article makes two further points about the relationship between Britons and the use of British military force. Firstly, Britain has become increasingly seen as a land power, rather than a naval power. There were fewer naval than army memoirs, and naval memoirs tended to be written by high placed commanders. Memoirs of low ranked naval ratings, or even marines,

seemed much less prevalent. This skew towards the army had a strange effect. In 1982 much of the news coverage focused on the dispatch and the return of the fleet. News reporters articulated respect for British naval hardware, and the feats of engineering that assembled it. By the 2000s, although more naval than army personnel had gone to the conflict, the Falklands was increasingly seen as a land operation. Accounts by paratroopers, who had fought the longest offensive battles on the islands, featured frequently. This shift probably reflected publishing's interest in special forces following the Gulf War, the visibility of that infantry during the Iraq and Afghanistan deployments, as well as the increased tendency, since the Falklands, to regard some sections of the infantry, including the Parachute Regiment and Royal Marines, as elite forces. It must also have reflected a diminishing interest in thinking about Britain as a maritime — and therefore imperial and trading — power, its influence built on the heavy industry of shipbuilding and extended through its control of the world's sea lanes. Rather, Britain was increasingly presented as a land power, its influence founded upon its heritage, not its hardware, its world-class training regimes, the force of its history, and the quality and spirit of its personnel.

Furthermore, earlier doubts about the proportionality or triumphalism of British policy towards the Falklands conflict receded, and the idea disappeared that the war had been necessary because British diplomacy failed to deter the Argentine invasion. Rather, as a study conducted by Matthew Jones in the mid-2010s showed, contemporaries saw the Falklands war as a moment of unity. The prosecution of the war showed a certainty of purpose about Britain's stance in world politics before a period of decline (2018). Lawrence Freedman suggested that the Falklands war might come to be seen not only as a war of the end of Empire and Cold War, but as the first post-Cold War conflict (2007: 16424–31). Stimulated by criticisms of government policy about the war in Iraq, the Falklands has perhaps been recast as a war of values: a conflict in which the use of force was not only necessary and politically legitimate, but also a correct and courageous choice.

In that way, the political divisions of the 1980s and the contingency of events have faded from public memory. The Falklands conflict — much like the period of May-June 1940, when British parliamentary tradition was understood to have enabled Britain to 'stand alone' against the Nazi offensive — has become regarded as an episode of judgement and popularity that subsequent British Prime Ministers might seek, but fail, to recapture. Despite the changes in Britain's political and military posture since the end of the Cold War, Britain's capability to deploy its military force not only in self defence but for the greater good continues to exercise a long pull in the British political, and perhaps public, imagination.

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Notes on contributor

Helen Parr is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at Keele University and author of *Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper* (Allen Lane: 2018). Correspondence to: Helen Parr, Keele University. Email: h.parr@keele.ac.uk.

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