

# 1 Years of a divided nation

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IN THE GULF the war roars through its second week: in England even the weather is 'quiet'. So are the streets, shops, airports, theatres, restaurants, travel agents. The quiet is unnatural. It seems to be coming from fear.

London taxi-drivers complain there are no people about and are driving for hours without a fare. Heath row airport reports a 21 per cent drop in passenger traffic; do nervous travellers feel better or worse to see the armed soldiers now sharing airport security with the Metropolitan Police? Gatwick's traffic is 17 per cent down on this time last year, though the airport is operating fairly normally, protests a PR girl. 'Well, very normally.'

Ordinary travellers nevertheless see these places as ghost airports: the British Airports Authority and Association of British Travel Agents admit that people are cancelling business flights and holding business flights and holidays 'almost overnight'.

Theatre and restaurant bookings have similarly bombed. *Miss Saigon*, which has been booked solid since it opened almost two years ago, is now advertising seats in the *Evening Standard*. 'Well, do you want to go to the theatre just now? Or go home and watch television?' a West End PR man challenged me, scorning the idea that all this might be due to recession. 'It's the war.'

The war being waged 6,000 miles away is beginning to affect all our lives. 'It's ridiculous, really,' murmured an unflappable woman colleague last week, 'but I was slightly scared when my daughter said she was going on a school visit to the KAF Museum at Hendon today. Soft targets, you know.'

Karen, her husband John and their children David (aged nine) and Daisy (six) share a cheerful home in South London. Last week, for the

first time in her life, Daisy wet her bed and woke up in tears. 'Daddy's dead, and you're dead, and I can't find David,' she sobbed to her mother. She had never described a dream before.

My own son (aged 11) shed tears well before the war began, when I was refusing the possibility, pushing the thought away. 'I don't want to die,' he said, as many children have. He too dreamt that the world was at war; he was at home, his father and I were dead. A friend's son, a little younger, told her the same dream.

Reports are coming in of children showing symptoms of anxiety and stress about the war like aggression, lack of concentration, nightmares and bedwetting. Dr Michael Fitzgerald, a Dublin child psychiatrist, listened to an 11-year-old afraid that poison gas released by Iraqi chemical weapons might blow in the direction of Ireland.

Schools are encouraging children to talk about their fears. A Leicester headmistress, Pat Clarke, said, 'Children are picking up fear from everywhere, but nothing is being explained to them.' Rory Nicol, professor of child psychiatry at Leicester University, is collaborating with social workers and educationists to help teachers to deal with children's present anxieties and possible future suffering after what may be a slaughterous land battle.

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Janet Watts looks at the domestic reaction to the war and finds a deep sense of disquiet and anxiety at all levels and among all generations.

and remember Hitler and appeasement; what their son and daughter (thirtysome thing) see is the hypocrisy of this war. They are appalled at their parents' attitudes; Jane feels hurt by theirs.

If you lived through Munich, it's your strongest memory. If this were 1938, my children would be on the wrong side. Yet she realises that as children they accompanied her on anti-Vietnam and anti-nuclear-testing marches: that they have taken their values from her, just as she has inherited those of her father, an MC who fought on the Somme and through World War Two.

Anna, in her twenties, told me that she and her boyfriend Joe both felt 'very depressed' when they woke up to the war 11 days ago: and then further upset by opinion polls claiming a gender divide in people's attitudes to the war. A *Daily Mirror* column on male enthusiasm and female dismay about the war spurred Joe to write an angry protest.

In this newspaper office, where chauvinism and machismo are not unknown, the young male reporters are tense. This has to be the biggest story of their lives. Yet the majority (one did a straw poll) oppose this war. They dislike its press coverage. They don't *altogether* want to be out there in it.

One observed a divide in attitude between the chiefs and Indians. 'From the NCOs down people are opposed to the war. But the officer class is gung-ho,' Andrew Neil of the *Sunday Times* was the first editor to seize his chance (before the war began) to have a War Room with maps and clocks showing the time in Baghdad; most newspapers now hold War Cabinets of (male) executives.

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'I feel fury when I see the cost of this war, and the Government's profligacy now it is half bent on it, after saying for a decade it had no more money for public education and health,' said Carole Wood, a (partly Jewish) writer. 'And I feel shame at our treatment of Iraqis and Palestinians here. It's the British dehumanising and patronising heroes' every day. 'Doesn't it make us all proud to be British?'

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not only "the enemy", but any fellow-nations without the luck to have been born in the West.'

'Gulf', says Collins Dictionary: 'Something that divides or separates, such as a lack of understanding. Something that engulfs, such as a whirlpool.' *Engulf*: to immerse, bury, or swallow up. 'To overwhelm.'

There can be no doubt that this war has generated deep divisions within individuals, families, communities, 'allies'. Yet there is a sense that to express dissent or even doubt is (in the *Star's* words) to 'BETRAY our brave boys and girls'. When Tony Banks MP and Aberdeen Waugh (unlikely bedfellows on an *Amy Questions* panel) expressed their horror about this war before it began, they predicted that if and when it happened they would have to shut up. Tony Banks was sacked from Labour's front bench last

week for sticking to his view. Our spiritual leaders, meanwhile, fight their own corners to present a united front: though the Church of England's bishops admit their disagreement about the justice of this war. The Archbishop of Canterbury resolved his dilemma by prying for 'peace with justice'. But most people have not noticed the fine distinction between a 'just war' and a 'just cause'. They just want peace. And it is hard to pray for peace in a war that (they now gather) is only just beginning and has no easily foreseeable end.

Karen's daughter Daisy is at a Church school, where the day traditionally ends with prayers. Last week, the children prayed for a world at war. Karen thinks this may be what caused Daisy's broken sleep, bedwetting and nightmares. She had to have those prayers not to have those

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each day, he and his friend sit in the back discussing mass destruction with nihilistic detachment. Sometimes they are talking about a Nintendo computer game; sometimes about the war.

People who remember the Blitz may find this deeply wrenching. Children dreaming of disaster, adults planning to get out of London, when nothing whatsoever has happened to them! Their progenitors endured the threat of invasion and the reality of bombardment night after night, and had fun scavenging for strappnel in the morning.

Jane and Ron, both sixtyish, find this war has split their family along generational lines. They look at Saddam