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**COUNTERINSURGENCY AND THE ETHICAL LIFE OF MATERIAL
THINGS IN IRAQ'S ANBAR PROVINCE**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Kali J. Rubaii

June 2018

The Dissertation of Kali J. Rubaii is approved:

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Counterinsurgency and the Ethical Life of Material Things in Iraq's Anbar Province

Kali J. Rubaii

This dissertation examines how Counterterrorism, the suppression of the capacity for insurgency, transforms the environments in which people live and die in Iraq. These environments consist of social arrangements that link humans with one another and with nonhuman beings, material objects, and chemical substances. Focused on how families from Iraq's Anbar province face intersecting forms of dislocation from their homes and land, I document the effects of the Global War on Terror.

Through careful attention to daily modes of living, moving, and dying in and out of Anbar, I show how Counterterrorism changes the way people read and interact with their environments, and how it makes them feel. Their worlds become charged with new meaning as Counterterrorism operatives and farmers make and respond to material things around them, and as configurations of time and space afford or foreclose the possibility for certain modes of existence to go on or begin.

This dissertation is based on one year of ethnographic research in 2014-2015 among farming families from and in Anbar, along with visits to Counterterrorism training camps in Jordan, Denmark and Bosnia. Practicing what I call transhumant ethnography, I participated in coming and going from refugee communities to Anbari farmland, and I moved between Counterterrorism training camps and Iraqi communities. My research centered on the materiality of Counterterrorism: temporal

qualities of objects, molecular impacts of chemical traces, textures of landscapes, and dilation of attachments among material things. My ethical commitments to Anbari farmers meant that my fieldwork involved both participant observation and activism, spending time with people in different positions of power, and centering my own body as focal point of harm.

This dissertation defines what Counterterrorism is by examining what it does, something that has been missing from scholarship that “studies up” the logics and imaginaries of counterinsurgency elites. I offer a new study of militarism by exploring aspects of Counterterrorism that exceed violence centered around the boundaries of death and killing. Instead, I focus on how less-than-lethal modalities of control are transformative to a vast array of inter-subjective relations among people and landscapes.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnography of Counterterrorism in Iraq

“Hearts” means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. “Minds” means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. ...Over time, successful trusted networks grow like roots into the populace. They displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents.

-A-5, Counterinsurgency Field Manual

In the middle of a winter night in 2015, three *Asaish* agents (Kurdish secret police) trained by an American special ops agent quietly stalked up a hotel stairwell in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan. They knocked on three doors in the hotel, were greeted by sleepy and confused adults, and entered the hotel flats. They wore plain clothes and did not draw the handguns tucked into their belts. They rounded up sleepy children, and did sweeps for document and weapons. Audible through the walls of the building were the cries of one woman saying, “Believe me! My husband is dead! We do not support ISIS!” The rain pattered down on the roof, drowning out most other sounds, like the scuffling of bare feet as two women were marched downstairs, or the car door closing softly after they were loaded into the backseat of an unmarked vehicle. A child in one flat started to wail, but her sister shushed her fiercely. This was no time to make things eventful. Cooperation defined the modus operandi of Anbari families during this raid. The next morning, the rain stopped and sunlight glared against the hotel windows. Older men with plastic sandals came out to sit on the veranda flicking prayer beads and mumbling softly, with concern. The old men squinted into the sun, surveying the hotel courtyard. For once, the children were kept inside. Birds

celebrated their somber absence and bathed in the rain puddles. Two of the three families had disappeared, leaving no trace except a few dirty dishes in the sink.

This building, and every apartment, hotel room, and construction site in the small vacation town, housed displaced families from Anbar province: Kharma, Saqlawiya and Fallujah. They were fleeing a trifecta of military violence: bombing campaigns carried out by the Iraqi government, brutal policing by Al-Hashed (Shi'a militias hired by the Iraqi government to subdue popular uprisings in Sunni Anbar), and an influx of ISIS (*Daash*) fighters on their streets. Sandwiched between multiple entities scrambling for geopolitical control of Northern Iraq, these families crossed the internal regional border into Iraqi Kurdistan for temporary refuge. The men sometimes traveled back and forth illegally in order to maintain their orchards and farms. Some of them fought in tribal militias against both the Iraqi government and ISIS, but most did not fight at all.

The raid was a result of global Counterterrorism at its supposed best. Good intelligence meant the raid targeted households in which men were absent, instead of the whole building. Confrontation with suspected terrorists was based on a less than lethal model, in which no one was killed (but perhaps some could be tortured, injured, or deported against international law into the territory from which they had fled for their lives). The move was preemptive: it targeted potential terrorists before they could act as terrorist. That is, it targeted women and children in order to preemptively harm men imagined to be elsewhere fighting with ISIS. Silence made the town's ears

ring for a day. The raid sent a warning throughout the displaced community of Anbari families. It verified their status in the Global War on Terror.

Yet, while events like the raid are practiced and planned as scenarios in Counterterrorism training, this is not generally how things unfold. On a daily basis, Counterterrorism is a more subtle, less eventful, and more distributed mode of control. It often entails the slow erosion of social and geographic terrains. This registers in ways not often associated with Counterterrorism, like date palms shriveling up because of severed aqueducts, or neighbors unable to trust one another, or the feeling of disorientation one feels when waking to the silence of absent goats. In these ways too, Counterterrorism dislocates people, in an effort to undermine their will to resist occupation. This dissertation is about how Counterterrorism transforms the environments in which people live and die. These environments consist of social arrangements that link humans with one another and with nonhuman beings, material objects, and chemical substances. Focused on how farmers from Anbar province face intersecting forms of dislocation from their homes and land, this dissertation documents the effects of the Global War on Terror. Through careful attention to daily modes of living, moving, and dying in and out of Anbar, I show how Counterterrorism changes the way people interpret and interact with their environments, and how it makes them feel. By understanding what Counterterrorism does, we can better grasp what Counterterrorism is, something that has been missing from scholarship that approaches Counterterrorism by “studying up” the logics and imaginaries of the powerful.

Counterterrorism

Rather than approach Counterterrorism as characterized by the involvement of actors, a set of policies, or a cluster of methods, I propose thinking about it as a *modus operandi*. I define it as anything that intentionally suppresses the capacity for insurgency. Counterterrorism —a rebranding of counterinsurgency, sometimes also called “population centric warfare” — is the pacification of civilian populations, distinguished from war precisely because the target is not soldiers but rather the *potential* in each of us to become insurgents. As Stephen Graham writes about Iraq, there is no insurgency without occupation: very often, Counterterrorism comes first and insurgency responds, because targeted people become insurgent people (2006). In this way, anyone can become a target of Counterterrorism, because we all possess the potential to become insurgent.

In spite of constant technological innovation and re-theorization, the tactics for pacifying people are few, and not very creative. The modes of Counterterrorism featured in this dissertation involve the transformation of people’s surroundings to curtail popular resistance. When I interviewed Zac, an American special ops agent who led a raid on some of my neighbors, he used a metaphor: “If you want to protect sheep, sometimes you can’t find the wolves. So you change the environment, you burn down the forest. Then there is nowhere for the wolves to hide, and you can seek them out and kill them.”

He referenced a metaphor I heard frequently among Counterterrorism operatives about sheep, sheepdogs, and wolves. Counterterrorism is the work of

sheepdogs, who must seek out and kill wolves hiding in sheep's clothing. Dave Grossman, a Westpoint professor of Military Science and Psychology, quotes a Vietnam counterinsurgency expert in his essay on the role of counterterrorism in society: "If you have no capacity for violence then you are a healthy productive citizen, a sheep. If you have a capacity for violence and no empathy for your fellow citizens, then you have defined an aggressive sociopath, a wolf" (Grossman 2004). Sheepdogs regulate the boundaries between sheep and wolves with lethal force. With this worldview in play, a person or a group of people must lack the *capacity* for violence in order to deserve protection from sheepdogs: police, soldiers, prison guards, etc. Of course, as with any categorization of people, reality is fluid, and the categories only become real as they are imagined and acted upon. In Grossman's account wolves and sheepdogs, having the capacity for violence implies also having the will for it. Counterterrorism operationalizes this paradigmatic metaphor by policing the capacity for insurgency. Critical scholarship on Counterterrorism has analyzed the various logics and frameworks of Counterterrorism's elites (Masco 2014), explored its genealogy and the distribution of methods (Khalili 2013), and documented the paradigms evident in archives (Mamdani 2005). These contributions echo what I have come to know.

But my approach is not to analyze this worldview, *per se*, but to move back and forth between what Counterterrorism says it does and how it is experienced by those who live at the brunt of its imaginaries. Rather than ask, how have Anbari people been imagined as wolves through various modes of pacification? I ask, what

does it feel like to be pacified, to live out Counterterrorism as a daily mode? I take this approach in order to understand what Counterterrorism is when examined and theorized from below.

Anbari farmers are experts on Counterterrorism and terrorism in a unique way, because they are situated within the slippages between categories of enemies that have emerged through the chain of events that followed the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Sometime, they are insurgents fighting an oppressive regime. Sometimes they are civilians seeking protection from random marketplace bombings executed by religious fanatics. They are quick to remind me that there are real wolves; they are not all imaginary. For them, wolves and sheepdogs are both canines. Counterterrorism and terrorism are defined as the same thing: torture exacted at the population level. For them, Counterterrorism is a *modus operandi* that affects whole populations in the same way torture strategies may affect an individual, by distorting their world until they cannot make meaning out of anything. Their ideas/views on counterterrorism are what inspire this work.

As I work with their theorization of Counterterrorism, I find archival evidence that supports this claim by articulating how the manipulation of Anbari farmers' environment impacts daily life. Under George W. Bush, John Yoo, Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the United States and Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee, head of the Office of Legal Counsel of the United States Department of Justice, advised the Central Intelligence Agency, the United States Department of Defense, and the president on the use of enhanced interrogation techniques. Their 2002 cable

advising the CIA's Office of Technical Services, describes an enhanced tactic practiced upon detainees: "[t]he deliberate manipulation of the environment is intended to cause psychological disorientation, and reduced psychological wherewithal," "create dependency" as well as "an increased sense of learned helplessness."¹ This recently declassified excerpt from the Bybee Memo (also known as the "torture memo") helps contextualize some of the daily conditions produced in the name of a Global War on Terror. The memo is analytically useful because instead of focusing on the methods of torture, it focuses on the desired *outcome* of those methods, the psychological and cognitive modalities that torture tactics produce: disorientation, reduced wherewithal, dependency, and helplessness, to name just a few. While the memo generally describes instances of individual torture, considering torture at the population level allows the reader to imagine the personal, intimate, and affective ways that various military practices transform people, places, and worlds through subtle, sometimes invisible modes of harm.

The Ethics of Material Things

This dissertation traces what Anbari farmers face in navigating an environment made increasingly hostile to them by modes of environment-changing Counterterrorism. As this dissertation unfolds, so too does an Iraqi epistemology of responsibility based upon the forensic significance Anbari farmers find in the material artifacts of war. As a theory and a method, I follow their lead in approaching

¹ See [REDACTED] 69500 (070009Z APR 02).) (See sections "Abu Zabyaydah detainee review" in Volume III, and Volume I of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program report (2002).

Counterterrorism through its materiality. On one level, a materialist approach is a methodological vehicle for conceptualizing what Counterterrorism is by attending to what it does. On the other hand, it is also a theoretical approach to politics, by which I mean the stakes in living and dying. The temporal qualities of objects, the molecular impact of chemical traces, the texture of a landscape, or the dilation of attachments among material things, all contribute to a material politics. In his *Cultural Anthropology* article, “Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?”, Mario Blaser argues that “material semiotics enables a politics of worlding, that is, a political concern with the process through which a world is being brought into existence” (Blaser 2016). In other words, the emergence of worlds is not an ontological process, but an inter-subjective one that incorporates human, non-human, and “non-living” beings responding to one another in new ways. Materiality has to do with the knotting of multiple interests and ontologies physically, while worlding has to do with the particularities of that knotting. A material world is a real-time dynamic among things imbued with meaning by the nature of their arrangements to one another. This is how the landscape of Anbar can become a “warscape,” as antagonistic meaning is increasingly legible through material things, shaping the capacity of an environment to be livable to some and not to others. This dissertation speaks to how worlds can become charged with ethical meaning as Counterterrorism operatives and farmers make and respond to material things around them, and as configurations of time and space afford or foreclose the possibility for certain modes of existence to go on or begin.

Iraqi people are not unique in conceptualizing what Counterterrorism is by attending to what it does, or rather what worlds it makes at the intersection between historical events and their so-called aftermaths. While social relations and local reactions to Counterterrorism vary widely, Counterterrorism has qualities that are universal, global, and ubiquitous. What are the politics of narrating banal experience in relation to a global project? In tracing responsibilities for a formation like Counterterrorism, which is exported, distributed, and advertised globally, more and more people are making room for an emergent popular materialism that attempts to trace ethical burdens through material artifacts rather than human actors. To make sense of a multiplicity of human actors to whom ethical responsibilities may still be assigned, many turn to material evidence as forensic figures forged by complex political assemblages. In Egypt, protestors posted Facebook images of U.S.-made teargas canisters, while Black Lives Matter protestors posted similar images of Israeli-made canisters, highlighting both the global interconnectedness of state suppression and the material trails by which a forensic politics makes ethical claims². It is precisely the versatility of material things — their ability to move through and past the boundaries of culture, society, and nation, making meaning and worlds as they go— that renders them such an appealing locus for telling stories of harm.

Responsibility is diffused, like harm, by and through the material world, such that one might rightly make the claim that, “People don’t kill people: guns do.” Yet

² Signs require further signs to frame them, to guide interpretation with political thrust (Peirce 1867). For example, the gun is an underdetermined sign, open to forensic accounting by which its significance is honed and politicized.

materiality is not the ends, but rather the means of political analysis. Just as the gun's material qualities make it non-specific in its capacity to harm, its materiality also activates the potential to trace its specific historical, logistical, and financial convergences. Less-than-lethal Counterterrorism is a mode of social, political, and material control by which one may cause harm indirectly, partially, or over enduring time and expansive space. It does dirty work while appearing clean. Like markless torture, the harm that does *not* kill is the hardest to pin down, hardest to prove, hardest to even conceptualize. The less-than-lethal modalities of Counterterrorism are what this dissertation seeks to approach through material qualities of the warscape. Following the lead of Anbari interlocutors, I cut a new path in scholarship on war by approaching Counterterrorism not only as a social phenomenon, but also as a modality that can be captured or traced through materiality. It is through material things, that people find the strands for tracing responsibilities and ethical violations across geopolitical contexts.

Counterterrorism should never be wrested away from its broader framework, global militarism. Thus, this work brings together two concerns in cultural anthropology: with militarism (Beinin 2003; Gillem 2007; Gonzalez 2010; Graham 2002, 2004; Gregory 2004; Gusterson 2016; Khalil 2013; Lutz 2002; Mamdani 2005; Masco 2014; Price 2011; Samimian 2011, 2013; Vine 2015) and with the agency of material surroundings (Barad 2007, 2010; Basso 1996; Bennett 2010; Fullilove 2004; Geurts 2002; Gordillo 2014; Haraway 1991; Hirschkind 2009; Ingold 2011; Kean 1997; Latour 1996; Navaro 2012; Pierce 1868; Rose 2012). The anthropology of

militarism has recently explored the ways space and power are configured through militarism, from Khalili's genealogy of confinement practices to Gusterson's study of remote control drone warfare to the study of militarized life in urban centers and bases (Graham 2002, 2004; Lutz 2002; Vine 2015). Other scholars like Masco and Samimian have focused on military imaginaries. By bringing together scholarship on material things, which has provided rich insight on how the material world works (Barad 2007; Bennet 2010; Haraway 1991), and how humans and other species relate to material things (Navaro 2012; Tsing 2005, 2015), I build on a new study of militarism by grounding it as a one kind of material entanglement: an embedded antagonism among and between things.

This dissertation captures the atmospherics of everyday life on a warscape, attending to subtle, pervasive modes of what it feels like to exist a certain way (Berlant 2011; Stewart 1996; Rofel 1994; Seikaly 2016). I leverage my own personhood by exposing both my physical body and my political standing to the antagonistic entanglements of the warscape (Al-Mohammad 2011a; Hermez 2016) in order to understand more-than-discursive aspects of what it is to live out Counterterrorism. In the study of less-than-lethal Counterterrorism, I draw from an eclectic set of theoretical tools offered by scholars of temporality (Barad 2010; Eagleman 2005; Heidegger³ 1962), the senses (Brenneis and Feld 2008, Le Breton 2017), architecture (Petti and Weizman 2006, Weizman 2014a, Vigar 2009), ethics

³ I cite Heidegger's work with the important note that he was anti-Semitic and a Nazi. While I respect those who boycott his work, I also find it useful to leverage the theoretical insights of bigoted people to opposing political ends.

(Hatley 2000; Levinas⁴ 1985; Spinoza 1992), and more-than-human landscapes of war and capitalism (Voyles 2015; Tsing 2005; Palmer 2014; Lyons 2016). This dissertation not only explores entanglements between Anbari farmers and Counterterrorism operatives through material objects, but also how these entanglements shape the texture of Anbar province itself. By texture, I refer to militarism's influence on the very dustiness of leaves, tension felt traversing roadways, the flow of water, and shifting proximities between soil and people, between living and dying, and between violation and repair. This dissertation describes militarism's broad spectrum of influence, and offers ways of re-conceptualizing Counterterrorism by approaching it from below.

The Great Sorting Out

Immediately after U.S. and Coalition invasion in 2003, the social terrain of Iraq began sorting out into homogenous identity zones. Minority groups like Mandaeans and Palestinian refugees faced violence and joined the mass exodus of

⁴ Levinas' theory of "face" argues that, "the face is what one cannot kill" in the other, that "the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility' to the other that weaves across generations (Levinas 1985, 95). I cite Levinas' work with the important note that when he was asked by Shlomo Malka on French Radio shortly after the Sabra and Shatilla massacre in 1982 if Palestinians have face, he made an exception to his own theories by responding: "My definition of the Other is completely different. The other is the neighbour, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be.... But if your neighbour attacks another neighbour or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong" (Malka 1982).

millions of people from war conditions, mass killing and mass dispossession. The intellectual elite, particularly doctors, were targeted for assassination by militias that formed, some along sectarian lines (Dewachi 2017). As early as 2005, sections of the capital, Baghdad, were carved with U.S. commissioned T-walls segregating neighborhoods as Shi'a or Sunni zones (Gregory 2008). This architectural endeavor, carried out by U.S. ground troops, was presumably to reduce mass killing: it did the opposite by accelerating the process of territorializing by sect⁵ and materializing the doctrine of "divide and conquer" on the landscape. It got worse, and the zones got bigger. Over time, parts of Iraq's capital city were cleansed of a large portion of its Sunni population. Iraq could be imagined with increasing clarity as being made up of three major blocks, with almost no room for the presence of anyone who was not either Kurdish in Kurdistan, Shi'a in the south, or Sunni in the northwest.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Iraq's transitional government after U.S. invasion and in preparation for U.S. withdrawal, was headed by Paul Bremer. Its 2005 constitution introduced the word "sect," which was not the case before, codifying newly sectarian categories of citizenship. Furthermore, members of the CPA were brought in from once-exiled groups returning from places like London (Dodge 2008). This made people in Anbar and elsewhere feel they were still being ruled by foreign invaders with sectarian agendas. The U.S. introduced government issued ID cards, which made explicit sectarian categories. These cards were utilized

⁵ Some parts of Baghdad have avoided being sectarianized.

during the sieges of Fallujah, when the U.S. army walled off the city and implemented a pass system based on sectarian categories listed on these IDs.

Other American policies accelerated a sense of Sunni disenfranchisement. Bremer's decision to disband the Iraqi army in 2003 left 400,000 Iraqi men armed, unemployed, and without pensions: many retreated to Fallujah regardless of their sect (Sangheih 2007; Ismael and Fuller 2009). The rapid rise and expansion of sectarian militias eventually absorbed some of these soldiers.

Simultaneously, Iraq's national borders became porous. Sub-state actors, militias, and foreign political parties began to exert increasing influence. A weak decentralized state offered Iranian Shi'a factions access, while the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, attempted to curb Iran's influence by engaging in a proxy war through political and military sponsorship inside Iraq. One way scholars describe the crumbling of Iraq is to reference Bremer's policies as acts of state breaking, the overt enterprise to destroy a state's sovereign borders (Baker, Ismael, and Ismael 2010).

Meanwhile, the Maliki regime (2006-2014) used a number of tools to suppress dissent, exacerbating tensions. Just before the March 2010 Parliamentary election, Maliki banned 511 candidates, using De-Baathification as a legal justification (Shadid 2010). Maliki reinterpreted the constitution as well, rejecting the Erbil agreements he had signed in 2001 (Whitehouse Archives 2008). Politicians adopted sectarian rhetoric and "terrorism" narratives whenever faced with threats of decentralization. Anbari people, feeling the economic, social, and political pains of exclusion, joined a

campaign against what they perceived to be a foreign government with a Shi'a agenda. The Iraqi government responded with a U.S. backed counterinsurgency campaign against protestors, whom they labeled as "terrorists." Daily life in a Sunni province like Anbar meant running into Shi'a and Kurdish militias hired by the central Iraqi government, bearing lethal force. During the "Iraqi Spring" of early 2011 and the "Sunni Spring" of late 2012, the Iraqi government launched further military responses. Each of these measures generated an increasing sense of persecution among the large Sunni majority in Iraq, particularly in Anbar, which was the heart of resistance and bore the brunt of counterinsurgency measures. Not only were they targeted militarily, Paul Bremer's DeBaathification measures meant that many lost access to public services, pensions, and public sector jobs (Bassam 2009). Men and women with Sunni names faced discrimination when they traveled or sought employment. One result was the exodus of middle class Sunnis from Iraq (Sangheih 2007).

Among those left behind, community level inequalities rose. People turned to other institutions, especially tribal networks for support, for a safety net, amidst power outages, water shortages, and decaying infrastructure (MSF 2017, Adams 2017, UNDP 2014). By 2014, when I asked Anbari for an account of Iraq's future, they painted a vision of a country divided into Sunnistan, the Shiastan, and Kurdistan. Iraq was fragmenting slowly into three parts. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014 and early 2015, Anbari sheiks were negotiating with an Iraqi government that was bombing them and also sending Shi'a militias to police their towns. They made a

public statement that their own militias would fight off ISIS (a new and uncertain entity at the time), if only the government would meet their demands for political reform. By 2016, these same sheiks had agreed to join the Iraqi Army in a tentative alliance against ISIS. The infamous third siege on Fallujah, which left thousands starving and displaced, reveals the tentative, tense, and rapidly fluctuating nature of these armed alliances: the Iraqi government agreed that it would not allow the Shi'a militias it sponsored and relied on to battle ISIS into the city when the siege was broken. When the siege was broken, my contacts in Fallujah reported that the militias were entering the city and carrying out summary executions. I later received news from people in Anbar that the Shi'a militias were treating them slightly better than ISIS did, and that they were starting to value siding with the Shi'a militias for the time being. Between 2014 and 2016 Anbari sheiks were ambivalent about both ISIS and the Iraqi government and its *Al-Hashed* Shi'a militias, shifting alliances based on which group was treating them the worst.

Anbari people were also encountering ISIS, face to face. In 2014, the primary topic of conversation in every home among Anbari people in both Anbar and Kurdistan was, "What is ISIS? Who is ISIS? Where did ISIS come from?" For Anbari people these questions demanded answers, because when those outside of their community asked the same questions, they increasingly pointed to Anbar and the men who lived there. Anbari people are flagged as potential terrorists because of their regional affiliation alone: no country is receiving Anbari people's asylum applications. Iraqi security forces trained by U.S. Counterterrorism operatives view

Anbari men with the same suspicion. The urgent detective work of finding out who/what ISIS “really is” falls upon the accused. This investigative inquiry relied on personal encounters and fervent interpretations of possible meanings embedded therein, to make sense not only of ISIS, but also of the seemingly insensible ways that more and more groups perceived Anbari people as potential threats.

The Maliki regime⁶ also found the Global War on Terror to be a strategic asset in its own campaign to suppress popular dissent in Anbar. While claiming to be bombing terrorist cells, the Maliki regime purchased airpower from the U.S. to destroy hospitals and schools in Fallujah, crushing the local Sunni uprising in summer 2014. Sectarianism became an instrument for restructuring and reshaping territory and creating a new political order. But in fact, at the level of daily life, this is not how people experience geopolitics. People may predict a changed map of Iraq, but their sense of political fragmentation has more to do with their personal horizons of possibility. How have the people of Iraq, their living bodies, their land, and their resources, been cleaved and reconstituted by the Global War on Terror?

Modes and Figures

In Anbar province, the way farmers talk about Counterterrorism is often through or around particular objects that help to materialize what it feels like to interface with a diffuse and abstract set of forces shaping their environment of daily

⁶ Nouri al-Maliki became prime minister of Iraq in 2006. The Iraqi government continues to be called “the Maliki regime,” because Maliki continues to exert influence as the secretary general of the Islamic Dawa Party. He was vice president from 2014-2015.

living. Sometimes explicitly and sometimes more implicitly, they reference these objects and use them as figures to index ways the modes of Counterterrorism are material and mundane. By figure, I mean a character or thing that makes a story possible. Figures carry political weight and a density of meaning that exceed their definition. For example, the figure of the checkpoint speaks to broader patterns of reduced mobility, eroded trust across distance, and experiences of waiting or performing innocence. It crystalizes the sense that one is occupied by foreigners with the power to cut one off from family and friends.

Some of these figures are more solid than others, but each indexes a related mode of Counterterrorism described by Anbari farmers: preemption, divide and conquer, suspense, abstraction, and counter-resurgency. By mode, I mean *modus*, or way of being, acting, and being acted upon. These modes appear not only in doctrines and manuals, but also in the way Counterterrorism operatives I interviewed speak of their interactions with Iraqi people. For example, Zac's description of burning down the forest to find and eliminate wolves is something he later identified as "preemption." But there are other figures and modes that bolster and perpetuate the Global War on Terror.

1) Figure: wolves in sheep's clothing	Mode: preemption
2) Figure: sectarianism	Mode: divide and conquer
3) Figure: T-walls and checkpoints	Mode: suspense
4) Figure: cement construction sites	Mode: abstraction
5) Figure: dry dates	Mode: counter-resurgency

By anchoring each chapter to a figure, this dissertation offers detailed ethnographic insight on the ways Counterterrorism seeps into daily life. The arc of this dissertation responds to the paradigm of wolves and sheep by tracing what Anbari farmers face in navigating an environment made increasingly hostile to them by modes of environment-changing Counterterrorism.

Chapter One centers around the figure of a wolf in sheep's clothing in order to explore the mode of preemption. Preemption is the mode of predicting and preventing an enemy's actions before they act at all. The most infamous example of preemption is the Bush administration's "preemptive war" on Iraq in 2003 in order to stop Saddam Hussein from launching a potential attack with his potential cache of weapons of mass destruction. Based on interviews and visits with counterinsurgency operatives in Denmark, Bosnia, Jordan and Kurdistan, this chapter shows exactly how the mode of preemption is implemented by men who have spent the past decade or more in Iraq as special operatives, private security contractors, and trainers of Kurdish and Iraqi armies and police, as well as by various militias operating inside Iraq. The figure of the wolf in sheep's clothing forms from deeply material entanglements. As Counterterrorism operatives detect what they imagine to be insurgents posing as docile civilians, they read people's bodies and gestures to detect lies; they commission the erection of wall segments to enclose and stop movement within urban centers; and they make decisions about how to let certain bodies live. Their self-perception as participants in an international campaign to "herd sheep" sets the stage for the following chapters, all of which respond to the first chapter by

speaking to the experience of being perceived as the wolf in sheep's clothing these men are hunting.

How are sheep corralled and separated from wolves? Chapter Two articulates how the mode of “divide and conquer” plays out in Iraq as a campaign to divide Sunni, Shi’a, and minority populations from one another, sorting Iraq into three homogenous zones policed by U.S.-trained sectarian militias. Sectarianism is the figure around which Anbari people articulate this process, not simply an externality of war but as the intended project of eroding social trust networks that formerly resisted U.S. occupation collectively. This chapter highlights what one Anbari man called “the terrorist sandwich,” the deadly paralysis of being classified as a wolf by competing parties and the increasing necessity of being bounded to particular regions, places, and even buildings. Broadly, sectarianism works as a mode of confinement on the landscape.

How are wolves caught among sheep? Chapter Three is about suspense, a mode of control that inspires some Anbari people to tell me, “I don’t even mind dying, I just want to know who is trying to kill me and why.” This chapter, which centers on the figure of the checkpoint, highlights how gaps between enclosed spaces form moments and places for acute suspense. Stories of life-and-death encounters at checkpoints may be frightening, but they are still highly valued by Anbari people, in part because they offer a figure for an otherwise figureless mode of diffuse suspense that might best be defined as chaos.

How are sheep kept apart from the forest? Chapter Four describes the mode of abstraction, which sometimes looks like mass exodus. “Abstraction” is being removed from one’s environment and life trajectory, not only in the spatial way that displacement does, but also temporally. Abstraction can mean changes in the chemical composition of contaminated soil so that plants cannot grow, the walls of houses crumble, and bread fails to stick for the right amount of time to the sides of clay *tannour* ovens. The figure most commonly used to describe abstraction is cement, a reference to the construction sites where many Anbari families are squatting as internally displaced people in Iraqi Kurdistan. This chapter highlights how configurations of homes and houses are vectors of invasion and terror. From the perspective of women in particular, Counterterrorism works to transform homes and cultures in order to render every space a battlefield.

What are sheep made safe for? Finally, Chapter Five is about figure of dryness, which is elusive and takes the form of a dried out date palm, dried out soil, or war dust. The shift from a centralized agricultural economy under U.S. sanctions to a post-2003 decentralized agricultural economy has changed not only material qualities of the water and soil, but also multi-species and multi-generational relations among living things in Anbar. The figure of dryness makes visible the mode of counter-resurgency, dependency induced by layers of pacification that fundamentally transforms the physical environment in Anbar and make it nearly impossible for farmers to remain on the land as farmers, or to mount a second wave of resistance.

If, as the arc of these chapters demonstrates, Counterterrorism is less about the

imagined world of sheep and wolves, and more about the material limitations of Anbari people who are perceived as wolves, then understanding Counterterrorism also lends itself to finding the insurgent and resilient possibilities that lie in the relationships between farmer and seed, bread and clay, houses and culture. Reading Counterterrorism over Anbari shoulders, these chapters pay ethnographic attention to the materiality of Counterterrorism in Iraq. By attending to how Anbari people theorize the Global War on Terror, this work may support the efforts of other communities to recognize and confront the modes of their own pacification.

Complicity and Other Methodological Dilemmas

I am not the first anthropologist to work on militarism as a context that shapes people's lives in both blatant and subtle ways. As scholars from Sami Hermez (2016) to Marcia Inhorn (2008) have argued, anthropology and militarism often go hand in hand. Hugh Gusterson writes that especially in Central and Latin America, after two decades marked by widespread torture, death squad activity, and guerilla insurgency, "some anthropologists have sought (often at risk to themselves) to ensure that their writing speaks for the dead and bereaved and does not contribute to the culture of silence that often enabled the killing in the 1980s and 1990s" (Gusterson 2007, 161). But eyewitness accounts of terror and violence are complicated. The discipline of anthropology has a long historical relationship with colonialism and militarism, and war has shaped the very method of ethnography. There is aversion of funding agencies to support fieldwork in war zones; an excess of funding for area studies has supported military intelligence gathering; and political limits prevent "easy access" to

places deemed threats to American empire (Lutz 1999). Of course, there have been more egregious relationships between ethnographers themselves and the military: Ruth Benedict's 1946 World War II study of Japanese national character is a classic example of ethnographic work commissioned by the national security state. Luckily, Vietnam era anthropologists patently rejected Anthropology's role in the national security state, eventually declaring in the 1971 American Anthropological Association Principles of Professional Responsibility that such collaboration was unethical (Hill 1987).

But then in the early 2000's, the discipline began participating in the "War on Terror." After September 11th, 2001, U.S. national security experts decided, "that anthropology might be to the War on Terror what physics was to the Cold War" (Gusterson 2008; Packer 2006). A handful of anthropologists secured funding for military anthropology programs in the early years of U.S. occupation. Montgomery McFate (2005) advocated for the Human Terrain System, which mapped and exploited tribal networks in Iraq and Afghanistan, called anthropology a "discipline invented to support warfighting in the tribal zone" (McFate 2005, 43). A plethora of military institutes, colleges, and contractors began advertising for anthropologist consultants, making the U.S. government the second largest employer of anthropologists today, following Microsoft⁷. Many of these anthropologists work for the military. Counterterrorism has not only shaped the surroundings of Anbari farmers. It has shaped the very discipline in which I work.

⁷ See Wood's *Atlantic* article on this (March 2013).

While I follow the leadership of early critics (Gonzalez 2007; Gusterson and Price 2005; Price 2000, 2002), my complicity does not stop at the discipline of anthropology. I should explain my subject positioning for this research as two kinds. On the one hand, I am one of those diaspora scholars with an Iraqi heritage bearing an Iraqi name (Rubaii). Yet I was raised in California by my mother, who is not Iraqi. I have a blue American passport, not a green Iraqi one. I speak English as my first language, Arabic as my third. As time moves, I also learn things about myself that remind me of how hard people work to erase their immigrant status and hide their own heritage from themselves. But there is something more complicated that better encapsulates how I walked into Iraq on Arab-American feet in anthropological shoes equipped with undesirable, military cleats. This is no way to play soccer with little boys in the alleyways of Kharmah, Iraq: Here is a picture of my maternal uncle (center) during the First Gulf War, clipped and saved with pride by my grandmother. See what he is doing? He is getting ready to fly over Baghdad and bomb my paternal relatives in Baghdad.



Figure 1: "A Marine pilot and his ground crew looking at a map near a Harrier jet yesterday in Saudi Arabia," *New York Times* January 20, 1991

The Gulf War was a civil war in my family. Through what has become a quarter-century —and roughly my entire life— of direct U.S. violation of Iraq, I am somehow unjustly enriched from these bombings. As the U.S. pillaged Iraq's cultural heritage,

plundered its museums, its oil and its people, I benefited from the transfer of that wealth to the United States. People move back and forth, but more in one direction than the other. So, I visit as a foreigner with the full ethical burdens of one coming on the heels of U.S. invasion, *my* U.S. invasion. It was in the wake of a third wave of military violation that I arrived in Iraq as an American ethnographer and guest, rather than —imagine!— arriving in the U.S. as an Iraqi ethnographer and guest. These kinds of historical complicities have to be at the center of my work, because they highlight the many modes of militarism through which environments shape and make meaning.

Transhumant Ethnography

I conducted ethnographic research for my dissertation between February 2014 and August 2015, with a follow up trip to Iraq for one month in December 2015. I practiced an ethnographic method I call transhumant ethnography⁸. This method was partly a necessity. Instead of staying in one place for an extended period of time, visa restrictions, conditions of war, family obligations and the nature of my theoretical questions meant that I came and went from places and groups in a rhythmic pattern. Transhumant ethnography is a kind of back and forth/up and down, work that may be necessary in order to conduct any research that critiques power in the 21st century. Given the high degree of mobility, both forced and desired, among people worldwide, it seems almost impossible to stay in one place. Many of the anthropologists who

⁸ Transhumance is the practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle; going back and forth to cultivate land; cyclical migration.

trace commodity chains (Tsing) or study materiality (Navaro) do this kind of moving around.

In addition to moving back and forth across internal borders of Iraq with Anbari farmers, my ethnographic methods included being present and absent from Iraq altogether, departing from academic research to do activism, and spending time with some people first and then with their enemies later. I conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation in Iraqi Kurdistan, where I spent a total of nine months living in construction sites with displaced Anbari families. From there, I made several trips to Anbar province, never as far south as Fallujah. They were short, limited trips. I lived with, moved with, farmed with and loved a few families who ultimately took great risk (after becoming invested in the “American book”) to bring me to and from their homes in mainland Iraq. These were mostly in rural areas surrounding Kharma and Saqlwiya. I sometimes served as a useful instrument to them in crossing borders, as a decoy, when returning to Iraqi Kurdistan. The rest of the time I was a burden.

I spent three months in Jordan⁹, visiting counter-terrorism training facilities and meeting some of the special ops trainers and trainees over dinner or at bars. In Bosnia I participated fully in a two-week combat-medical training with special ops and private contractors who work in Iraq, and did rotations in Bosnia. I also spent hours in

⁹ My preliminary research was funded by the National Science Foundation, and my fieldwork was also funded by the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq, which did not allow work inside Iraq because of security concerns. Much of my time in Jordan was funded by these institutions, but my fieldwork in Iraq was self-funded through a nonprofit job I maintained throughout graduate school.

online communications from California with friends and families in Fallujah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Erbil. These hours are uncountable and not technically central to this project, but they preceded my fieldwork and continue into the present, shaping my social networks in Iraq, and throughout the diaspora of Iraqi refugees I first met and lived with in Jordan back in 2009.

My most informative method was the ‘moving interview,’ where interlocutors guided me through their material landscape, helping me to ‘read’ signs in the world around us. Commonly known as the ‘walking interview,’ moving interviews sometimes turned into car rides, wheelchair rides, and the sometimes longer, more treacherous journeys with Anbari farmers mentioned above. This movement was only possible because of my fortunate last name, which bears both Sunni and Shi’a affiliation, allowing me to pass checkpoints that might otherwise be impassable. The political inheritances of being both Iraqi and American, gave me the opportunity to conduct this unique research, even as it imposed ethical complexity.

Reparations First

As an American citizen, it was important to acknowledge and center the U.S. occupation in my ethnographic interactions. Taking very seriously the philosophy of reparations (*islah*), I offered my labor as reparations to Iraqis with whom I lived, worked, or conducted interviews. Reparations ethnography took many forms, directed by the requests of Anbari farmers: eating radioactive food grown on their land, coordinating emergency medical services, giving blood, tediously “washing” soil, staying behind when foreigners were evacuating unstable places, etc. This

reparations-first approach meant that ethnographic research was a secondary purpose of my presence. In the end, writing itself is something most of my interlocutors understand as a side project of the same reparations approach. Some have actively edited and critiqued the chapters in this dissertation, with the full understanding that writing their stories may gesture at justice but does nothing to change the material conditions of their daily lives.

Being There

Here is a private thing. It is part of a “G-chat” conversation with a friend in Fallujah during the third siege in 2016. My friends were eating garbage; and I was in the U.S. writing about it. It sums up why “distance ethnography” is impossible, or cruel, but also how the networks we form stretch across great expanses. What does it mean to “be there,” to be in, with, for, or of Anbar? And what does “being there” mean for the validity and value of ethnography in the 21st century? Two questions that call, ultimately, for transhuman answers.

S: We all eat garbage now.

K: So what are you eating?

S: Banana peels.

Some papers.

Wet moldy bread.

You do a siege. We are eating the garbage.

...Today is better than tomorrow. Tomorrow I will be alive, and slowly I will die.

I will die on my land and my house will be clean. No garbage!

K: A clean death?

S: It is a joke, Kali.

K: It is not funny, My Friend.

This is a friend with whom I have moved mountains — or rather, equipment, medication, supplies, and children. We have worked together for years. Yet we have

never met in person. So, this chat feels like a private thing, a scrap I should not include that closes the proximity between you and me, me and her, and between here and there. Iraq is a place from whence millions have fled. Sometimes rhetorically, sometimes not, Iraqis argue that it is inaccessible because there is no longer such a place as “Iraq.” Things move and change, and places become unreachable to some, inescapable to others. That is one of the main things Counterterrorism does: it refracts. It distorts distances and proximities. It forces odd and uneven intimacies, networks, puzzles, and stuckness-ess.

So how important is “being there” in ethnography? When is it appropriate to “be there”? And to whom do places become accessible or inaccessible —or perceived to be— especially when both physical and epistemic violence are in play? Physical presence and solidarity do not always coincide. Sometimes it is an imposition to show up in a place uninvited, with a big presence. And sometimes staying away seems like abandonment. Ethnographic transhumance, especially over the long haul, may be necessary to forging relationships that have scientific and moral value. Nowhere has this been more discussed than in discussions about the ethics and practicalities of fieldwork in what are called “war zones.”

Iraq has been treated as what some scholars consider an inaccessible field site. And yet, several Iraqi Anthropologists have conducted extensive fieldwork there since 2003, including Hayder AlMohammed of Keele University (2012), and myself. Many journalists and activists also risk their lives daily to be in Iraq with Iraqi people. So in many ways, Iraq is only inaccessible as a “field site” as it is imagined to be a

“field site,” rather than, say, a homeland, a site of activism, a space one finds mutual networks of support or a place one returns to die. As Marcia Inhorn wrote in 2008, maybe ethnographers should act more like journalists when it comes to taking risks: unembedded journalists like Emma Beals stood within fifty-feet of ISIS frontlines, amidst active firing between *Al-Hashed*, Iraqi forces, and ISIS. And Medyan Dairieh, reporting for VICE, went undercover as an ISIS recruit to learn about the inside world of ISIS women. Earlier, Dahr Jamail worked as one of the few unembedded journalists in Iraq in the early 2000s. Is Anthropology scared of studying war?

Being there, physically, is really important to ethnography. Doing fieldwork with Iraqi people is not the same as doing fieldwork in Iraq. And doing fieldwork with people who kill Iraqi people (the military) is not the same as doing ethnography of Iraq. But the underlying logic is that Iraq has been widely inaccessible as a place, and that those who want to engage the place have to do so remotely or by proxy. This is particularly problematic as ethnographic attention to Iraq is shaped more and more by the people who *have* been there: U.S. military veterans who, writing with varying degrees of expertise and intention, inevitably write from the perspective of people who have entered Iraqi territory in complete violation of the primary tenets of ethical ethnography, and therefore whose perspective is limited to the scope of the military interests that brought them there in the first place. In working with Anbari people, I ended up doing fieldwork in a “war zone,”¹⁰ a term I have come to doubt because it

¹⁰ As an anthropologist working in Iraq and Palestine, I was surprised by the reaction of colleagues classifying my ethnography in Iraq as “war zone fieldwork.” What caught me off-guard was that no one classified my years in Palestine as the fieldwork

misses the longer histories and deeper personal saturations people have with places they call home. The concept of “war zone ethnography” presumes that an ethnographer can look at a map and choose a place they want to be, in part based on criteria of what constitutes a zone of war. For many ethnographers, though, we do not choose field sites or topics. They choose us. Being Iraqi-American compounded these complexities.

Risk and Harm

The fear of war zone ethnography mostly derives from a fear of bodily harm. But if ethnographers working with chocolatiers are encouraged to eat chocolate, might ethnographers of harm consider an openness to be harmed? Of course setting limits is a personal matter, but approaching the body-as-field-site is a commitment to undo the mind-body separation at its core. Bodies can be field sites, and participant observation can mean making one’s own body vulnerable. This meant doing things like drinking dirty water and contracting cholera rather than treating my personal health as exceptional. While injury from a car bomb explosion is possible in Anbar province, toxic exposure is a certainty. Counterterrorism is not an event, or even a set of events, but instead a materially manifested mode of daily life. It sets conditions,

of war zones. It was during my qualifying exams that one of my committee members, familiar with life in occupied Palestine, articulated that the risk to my physical safety may be greatest living in an Area C village in occupied Palestine at the lip of the Jordan Valley, because of daily violence by the Palestinian Authority, Israeli army, and Israeli settlers. I had been living under military occupation for years already, but something about the occupation of Palestine is too slow to be considered war. This is part of my inquiry about figures. When does an event stretch out for so long that it becomes the defining feature of that place? Why are epochs of disruptive violence more visible than institutionalized regimes of perpetual violence?

like dirty water.

While it is indeed dangerous to leave a place like Iraqi Kurdistan and enter a place like Anbar province, people do it all the time. Fathers with children, pregnant women, orphaned teenage boys, militia fighters, old ladies and middle aged men all live year in and year out, moving through newly made borders as the “zones” of war shift across the land. As patches of violence come and go like clouds over their skies, Anbari farmers hopscotch their way to pockets of safety. Only with their invitation, I joined and documented their migrations, as Counterterrorism closed certain proximities and dilated others. It would be easy to do ethnography “there” and then return to my “real life,” and leave all physical and moral consequences behind. But good ethnography collapses distances and stretches familiarities. Transhumant ethnography brings responsibilities, networks, and material traces back and forth, explicitly and forever.

Being Absent

Coming and going for long periods of time, over the course of enduring decades, defines my work in Iraq. Being absent is an important methodological practice in transhumant ethnography, especially if one is to avoid imposing oneself, posing a risk and burden to others for being present, or if one is to maintain enduring relationships over a lifetime from different parts of the world.

My ethnographic fieldwork inside Iraq in 2014 and 2015 was the result of personal ties that formed over years and were generated by work collaborating with Iraqis on reparations projects — from a distance. My ethnographic work is carefully

cobbled from the scraps of this life. This is not to undermine the seriousness with which I conducted fieldwork, but simply to articulate the questions I asked myself before getting started on this project: Why do we do research in the first place? If it is not informed and propelled by the interests of those we work with on the ground, then why do it? Are my intentions as good as I think they are or want them to be? I am indebted to Raed Jarrar, who worked for the American Friends Service Committee when I was in high school. He challenged my mom and me to accurately assess our personal value in the world. He responded to our naïve request for his advice about how to be sensitive visitors in Iraqi refugee camps in Jordan: “If you want to go to Jordan and work with Iraqi refugees, make yourself useful first.” He handed us a case, a girl named Amani who needed an enormously expensive medical treatment regime not covered by U.N. resources. “Keep her alive for a year, or until she is resettled, and then maybe you can dare to kiss the feet of the Iraqi people and to apologize for the occupation.”

My mom and I did this, and then went on to Jordan to kiss feet. Amani was resettled to Michigan, with full medical coverage. What Raed was teaching us was that the desire to engage is sometimes arrogant —that we do not deserve to “be there,” and that Americans overvalue their worth and contributions. He also spoke to a more fundamental condition of human sociality: solidarity can come *before* personal interaction, because damage is so often done before personal interaction. It is for this reason that I think many scholars of Iraq are skeptical of over-eager researchers. I sometimes respond to inquiries about how to “get in” to Iraq by saying,

“I can’t help you ‘get in,’ but I have a case for you. Would you like to take responsibility for this person’s life?” I have never had any takers, and for obvious reasons: taking personal responsibility for a fraction of the destruction in Iraq is so exhausting that career-building upon the stories of other people’s suffering is likely to take a back seat. As it should. As Engseng Ho argues with reference to Hadrami society, absence does things in the world (2006). When my friends in Iraq are in trouble, sometimes the best place I can be for them is on the steps of my country’s capital. Sometimes the best place for me to be is talking to the people who harm them most directly. And only sometimes the best place for me is in their homes.

Talking Honestly to Enemies

Some of my absences from Anbari people were instances in which I spent time with people who, by nature of their work, were positioned as enemies of my interlocutors. I asked my Anbari interlocutors permission and sought their guidance on how and when to do this fieldwork. These men played mundane roles in on-the-ground killing of Iraqi civilians, in training militias, police and armies in the Middle East. Some of them ran or participated in scenario exercises in model cities to prepare police and soldiers for “population centric warfare.” They were from Western and Eastern Europe, the U.K., the U.S., and Jordan. The metaphor of sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs made it possible for these men to be friendly, self-actualized people who imagined themselves sheepdogs in a noble and global campaign to protect civilian flocks everywhere. They shared their worldview, pictures of their children, and jokes about the various ways they had killed or raped Iraqi people, with little distinction.

These are men with little or no power, they do not write, design, or orchestrate, nor do they represent the “average” military operative. What made them interesting was that they were actively engaged in a lifetime of harm in Iraq.

What are the ethics and methods for fieldwork that is not only multi-sited, but also multi-interest? As many ethnographers, especially those of law enforcement or prisons find, the story is incomplete without some engagement across interests.

“Studying up” does not quite define this work. I am critical of Counterterrorism: insurgent resistance to occupation is something I value and promote. Yet as I critiqued Counterterrorists for their position in relation to Iraqi people, they told me how they imagined my own relation to Iraqi people: they were not protecting me, a sheep, from the wolves of Anbar. They were hunting the wolves of Anbar so that I, a sheep, could graze on the empty land.

Finally, Writing

Charles Briggs said of the communicable that, we often risk reproducing that which we seek to alter (2005). At a dinner party, someone asked me to tell stories about Iraq and Palestine. I found myself not wanting to tell the stories that would please the party, stories with a narrative arc and details about an exotic place with redeeming characters overcoming hardship. How can I do justice to the place, the people, the story, without over-translating, without subsuming the truth to make something understandable? I think this is a classic aphasia of fieldwork. To give it an arc, a grammar, I feel that I violate the secrets of subalternity just by beginning.

So it is with the first real fear I have felt that I share with you in story form things that never came in story form, that never were stories, and that I am not convinced are ever meant to be stories. I mourn all the subtle things I trampled upon in order to build a path, in English no less. I am grateful to the many people who continuously call my attention to those trampled things and help me hold as much space open for them as possible, even if sometimes it just means poking holes in a shoebox so they can breathe from inside.



Figure 2: Map of Iraq, courtesy of the Global Education Project



Figure 3: Shaqlawa is where I met most displaced Anbari people. One route we traveled was through Kirkuk to rural areas outside of Karma, screenshot from Google Maps.



Figure 4: Saqlawia-Sulaymaiyah was one route Anbari interlocutors and I traveled, Screenshot from Google Maps

CHAPTER 1

Living Preemption

Figure: Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Mode: Preemption

According to the State, when victims refuse to be victims, they become terrorists and are dealt with as such... In the era of corporate globalization, poverty is a crime, and protesting against further impoverishment is terrorism. In the era of the War on Terror, poverty is being slyly conflated with terrorism.

-Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*

Insurgency: A welling up from below and within, popular resistance.

Preemption: Preparation and action to act in advance of a potential enemy; to shut down the potential in each person to become insurgent in the future.

Authoritarian Peace: when, as that future is realized, everyone notices what happened, too late.

Killable: the condition of one's death being calculated as morally, legally and politically acceptable.

Terrorists: armed civilian based popular resistance fighters who target non-military institutions, spaces, and bodies.

Less-than-Lethal: control other than lethal force, exercised by not reporting deaths, using non-killing measures of coercion, and policing who has access to exercising lethal force.

Counterterrorism: a war against the potential in all people to become insurgent.

Counterterrorists: professionals who operationalize the Global War on Terror by quelling dissent through armed coercion. (In this case, men who work inside Iraq. This excludes drone operators.)

Introduction: The Terms of the Game

I come in peace. I didn't bring artillery. But I'm pleading with you, with tears in my eyes: if you fuck with me, I will kill you all.

-James Mattis, retired Marine Corps general, Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran, Trump's Secretary of Defense. Statement to Iraqi tribal leaders upon U.S. invasion in 2003.

During the World Wars, it was discovered that a great number of bullets were wasted. Soldiers, shying away from killing other men, shot to injure or shot to miss. By the time of the Vietnam War, American soldiers were being trained differently, actively desensitized during military training to the act of killing. The ratio of shots to kills narrowed, and the U.S. lost. It was discovered, or rather remembered, that shooting to kill —especially when fighting a guerilla insurgency— resulted in Death, with a capital D. Death (with a capital D) is the kind of death that generates political and social will for further resistance. Death not only fuels insurgency, it is often less effective in battle than injury, illness, or other forms of disablement.

As Ellen, a U.S. marine-turned-peace activist told me on a walk in the Kurdish mountains, “It is better to injure a man, to shoot his shoulder or his thigh. This takes out three— one to fall, two to carry him off and save him. Injury is more damaging than death.” Her training in this perspective speaks to a broader return to the doctrines of less-than-lethal models of war, especially in the age of Counterterrorism (aka “small wars,” or “population centric wars”). Not only is her practical sense significant, so too is the political playbook of Counterterrorism, the Counterinsurgency Field Manual, which argues that, “hearts and minds are won by

the insurgency when deaths occur in our name” (2007). In other words, it is best to avoid making martyrs if you want to beat an insurgency.

In this vein, a great deal of policing and Counterterrorism now advertises itself as “less-than-lethal.” For example, teargas and rubber coated bullets are associated with less-than-lethal control, but so are preemptive wire-tapping and union busting. Yet work of killing did not stop in spite of a doctrinal shift toward less-than-lethal tactics. Soldiers, special ops, and military police worldwide are trained and equipped with increasingly lethal technology *and* aware that they should not kill (for strategic reasons). How do these contradictory commitments become entangled in the material world?

As the following quote by James Mattis, made to Iraqi tribal leaders on the eve of U.S. invasion in 2003, demonstrates, Counterterrorism presents itself as non-lethal, gentle, even emotionally supplicant, but always backed with the potential for violence if gentleness fails: “I come in peace. I didn’t bring artillery. But I’m pleading with you, with tears in my eyes: if you fuck with me, I will kill you all.”¹¹

The claim of those bearing lethal force is that they desire to foster loving care and life-sustaining support, under the condition that recipients of that care remain docile. This illustrates how, in Counterterrorism, protection and harm run together. One might plead tearfully even as he promises to “kill you all.” In other words, the

¹¹ Statement to Iraqi tribal leaders upon U.S. invasion in 2003 by James Mattis, retired Marine Corps general, Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran, and the Trump Administration’s Secretary of Defense (Ricks 2006).

less-lethal-paradigm of peace —that all shall live— is undergirded by the threat of mass violence as the consequence of a bad choice by recipients of that care to reject it. Looking past the mutual logics of protection and harm at work and in tension together, Counterterrorism is quite plainly defined as the colonial policing and killing of civilians. Without the tears and the pleading, Mattis’ claim to “come in peace” “without artillery” is simply a declaration of war against a civilian population, cowed into submission by the threat of both lethal and non-lethal forms of military coercion.

How does the doctrinal impulse to preserve and protect lives work together so intimately with the seemingly opposite impulse to eradicate and plunder? In practice, how is preemption — that is taking action to stop an enemy before they have a chance to act— tethered to the less-than-lethal (or less-lethal) mode of Counterterrorism? I answer these questions by showing how practitioners of Counterterrorism working in Iraq tend to employ both a “less-than-lethal” ethic of protection and a logic of maximum harm, simultaneously. These two operational frameworks are pulled together by the purse strings of preemption. Preemption, which I will describe in detail later, meddles with the order of “before” and “after” reconstituting the order of making meaning and acting upon it. Preemption elides the twin projects of violation and protection by retroactively justifying physical actions in the material world now with a subjective story about what terrible things would have been otherwise. In this way, preemptive killing can be rolled into a general understanding that actions taken by sanctified armed men are always in service of an underlying less-than-lethal order.

This chapter will feature Counterterrorists, mostly men who have made careers in Counterterrorism inside Iraq and serve as interlocutors of broader practices and policies exercised in the preemptive war since 2003. I call them “Counterterrorists” to mark the unmarked mirror of the “terrorist,” a figure often meant to represent the very Anbari people with whom I traveled and farmed, and to highlight their active role in propelling conditions of the lived world. They are almost invisible as actors on the military stage. They are not military generals or policy makers. They are also not military recruits conscripted into tours in the early 2000s to Afghanistan or Iraq, although many started their careers this way. Instead, Counterterrorists have made a lifetime profession out of Counterterrorism. However they arrived to this profession — whether by military recruitment or private hire — they now work as contractors with or for militaries and militias, sometimes as trainers and sometimes as advisors. They are not easily grouped by nationality: collaboration across national boundaries defines their work, which they claim is a global campaign against a global enemy. They are also not easily grouped by political position or personal origin story: some describe themselves as “a-political,” others as “conspiracy theorists,” and others as “conservative.” They serve in various sectors, fighting against an ever-morphing imagined enemy of state-and-corporate order. As a shorthand, I define Counterterrorists as people who work for hire by government and private institutions to quell dissent through armed coercion.

I decided to conduct ethnographic research among Counterterrorists for two reasons. First, Iraqis in Anbar were trying to make sense of what was happening to

them in order to strategize both daily life and organized resistance. They had questions I could answer by doing ethnography among those who may not orchestrate, but certainly undertake, the ongoing violation of daily life in Iraq. Second, my research on the materiality and lived experience of Counterterrorism in Iraq did not seem complete without incorporating some of the players who make Counterterrorism real. In this second endeavor, I could have conducted research among the Iraqi police, U.S. military personnel in Iraq, or private contractors in other sectors. Or I could have “studied up” among the political architects and military planners of U.S. influence in Iraq. Or I could have focused on non-American militaries intimately engaged in the region. My main criterion was that I work with people who were engaged enough in Counterterrorism to continue working in and advancing careers in it over the past decade or more. I found two locations where I actively sought out Counterterrorists who work in Iraq. I approached KASOTC (the King Abdulla Special Operations Training Center) in Jordan after finding its webpage. There, I happened to connect with someone who had worked in Iraq, Zane. He later connected me to many others, and served as an important gatekeeper into other training spaces. I also paid for and participated in two combat EMT training courses, one in Denmark and one in Bosnia. I initially signed up for the first course because I wanted to learn useful emergency medical skills applicable in the context of war. When I arrived, I realized the course was full of Counterterrorists. I had met one of them at KASOTC the year before. I signed up for a second combat EMT training in Bosnia specifically to continue my relationship with several Counterterrorists I had

met in the first training. I have since interviewed and worked with those I met in Jordan, Denmark, and Bosnia in other parts of the world, usually without intending to. As an Iraqi American woman ethnographer, I carried myself through these settings and relationships by letting my personhood and body act as an ethnographic field site to learn how Counterterrorists carry military doctrines into the real world.

This is not a chapter about Counterterrorist psychology or military culture. My intention is not to delve deeply into their world or humanize their perspective. I attend to the ways Counterterrorists operationalize the many doctrinal and methodological parables they learn in order to make Counterterrorism do things in the world. This chapter prefaces the following chapters in speaking to various modalities of Counterterrorism lived out by Iraqi targets of the so-called Global War on Terror. The first section introduces the figure of the wolf in sheep's clothing, a figure around which Counterterrorists operationalized less-than-lethal preemptive Counterterrorism. The second section addresses how Counterterrorists detect potential insurgents (wolves) among "sheep" when practicing Counterterrorism on the Iraqi population, using my own shifting subject position as an exploration. The third section describes how "life" is regarded in the context of less-than-lethal Counterterrorism. The fourth section defines preemptive peace and outlines the components of this paradigm as it is upheld by Counterterrorists.

As the chapter will show, Counterterrorists speak of and perform "less-than-lethal" control as less than visible control. Rather than center on whether or not their actions kill, they are concerned with whether or not they register as brutal. Like

markless torture (i.e. stress positions and other forms of violence that leave no marks on bodies), less-than-lethals modes of Counterterrorism work when they enable claims to plausible deniability. This not only includes non-killing practices like confinement, landscape transformation, and appeasement, but also underestimated death tolls, or adding the prefixes “smart” or “precision” before the word “bomb” in order to minimize the political valence of certain kinds of killing. Decentering death, the less-than-lethal paradigm is neither un-deadly, nor benevolent. For Counterterrorists, what makes their work less-than-lethal is that the relationship between violence and the signs people use to “see” violence is occluded. Preemption makes even killing look like an act of saving lives.

Less-than-lethal control presumes a widespread cultural value that killing is bad and that steps taken to avoid killing are more popular, and therefore more effective, than lethal force. In fact, the presumption that killing is worse than other modes of control is untrue for many with whom I lived and worked in Iraq. Some had faced torture and been deprived of the ability to die, while others articulated how a single-lifetime model of survival does not line up with their understanding of what being alive means. Many, however, were broader in their critique. Hameed, who took great risk to show me how his way of life was under threat by the Global War on Terror, put it this way: “Tell Bush and Obama, You can dominate my body, and I cannot stop you, but leave my heart and mind alone!” Speaking to the invasiveness of the less-than-lethal paradigm, which is operationalized in Iraq through “hearts and minds” in order to leave as many bodies living and breathing as possible, Hameed

opens a pointed critique of the modes by which his land, his livelihood, his children, his future, and his capacity for survival are hijacked. A critique of militarism must attend to these modes by noticing them as pivotal modalities of Counterterrorism instead of otherwise imagining them as war's unfortunate backdrop or aftermath. The underlying argument of the entire dissertation, opened by this chapter, is that the less-than-lethal paradigm produces realities on the ground that are worthy of their Iraqi nickname as "things worse than death."

**Part I Sheepdogs:
The Material and Sensory Culture of Counterterrorists**

A wolf resolved to disguise himself in order that he might prey upon a flock of sheep without fear of detection. So he clothed himself in a sheepskin and slipped among the sheep when they were out at pasture. He completely deceived the shepherd, and when the flock was penned for the night he was shut in with the rest. But that very night, as it happened, the shepherd, requiring a supply of mutton for the table, laid hands on the wolf in mistake for a sheep, and killed him with his knife on the spot.

—Aesop's Fables

Counterterrorists are stalked by an analogy. It howls in the night, and makes them wonder if they heard a predator or a woman mourning. It slinks like a guilty dog or a lame sheep amidst the pack. The analogy stalks them like a nocturnal eye. They imagine they can feel it watching them, or watching those they love. They feel its presence and perk their ears in the direction it might be. They are plagued with certainty of its existence, and with uncertainty of its location. It is disguised as your grandmother and will eat your young daughter. It is disguised as your flock. It huffs and puffs and blows your house down. It is the ever elusive wolf in sheep's clothing, central figure of the global war between good and evil, pivotal character in the

campaign to eradicate that evil which disguises itself in the flesh of the innocent. So stalked is Counterterrorism by this analogy that it appears sporadically in military blogs, books, and films, as well as in the daily language of Counterterrorism operatives I interviewed at training facilities around the world.

“How can we know the difference between wolves and sheep, or wolves and sheepdogs? We cannot be sure. We had to assume that each is hiding in another’s skin.” This is Zane’s very soft voice explaining to me how he conducts his work in Iraq as a Counterterrorist (aka, a sheepdog): Sheep are those who lack the capacity for violence and are docile to control. Wolves, on the other hand, are outsiders, uncontrollable and wild. They hide among sheep in order to harm them: they have the capacity for violence and prey upon sheep. Sheepdogs like Zane regulate the boundaries between sheep and wolves, backed by their own set of canine teeth used to protect sheep both from incursions of wolves, but also from straying too far into the forest. With this worldview in play, a person or a group of people must lack the *capacity* for violence in order to deserve protection from sheepdogs.

Counterterrorism operationalizes this paradigmatic metaphor. The figure of the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” (the terrorist posing as an innocent civilian) forms deeply material entanglements. In order to preempt any sheep who appear to be becoming wolves, Counterterrorists require an intentional over-reading of signs that are subtle, fleeting, imaginary, and/or underdetermined. As Counterterrorists detect what they imagine to be insurgents posing as docile civilians, they squint, searching

people's bodies and gestures to detect the wolves within. They perceive themselves as champions of an international campaign to "herd sheep."

For example, at a bar in Amman, Jordan, a group of special ops trainees from the United States were drinking and laughing loudly. A man across the room wearing formal attire scowled at them and looked over the edge of his coffee mug with a furrowed brow. He continued to watch the group with slow disdain. Mitch, one of the American Counterterrorists, squinted toward the man occasionally between jokes and uproarious laughter. The wrinkles in the corner of Mitch's eyes contracted and fanned out as he focused and refocused his vision through a tipsy haze. He leaned over to me and whispered that he thought the man had something against him. Throughout the evening Mitch referenced the man's staring, his furrowed brow, and his formal dress as signals of a backstory: the man was wearing formal clothes because he was an extremist and "had religious views of intolerance." The man was staring because he recognized the Counterterrorists from Iraq and was thinking "vengeful" thoughts. The man had a furrowed brow because that is a sign of premeditated murder: "like in that show, 'Lie to Me,' I can tell. I can tell that when they lower their face like that and look up from under their eyebrows. They are plotting something. I can tell."

Mitch's reference to the Fox Network series 'Lie to Me,' in which the lead character, Dr. Lightman, reads people's micro-expressions to reveal their hidden feelings¹², speaks to his presumed expert capacity to read signs at their most subtle

¹² In spite of being unreliable, Paul Eckman's micro-expressions techniques are also taught to police and TSA agents in the United States (Burns 2008) via the "Casual Conversation" method (Eckman International 2011).

level. When Mitch lunged for the man, grabbed him by the neck of his robe, and yelled in his face, “Tell me, who are you?!” in Arabic, he believed he was acting on sure signs of the man’s ill intent. His colleagues were less convinced, but after breaking Mitch away from the man, one of them looked up at me to explain, “sometimes sheepdogs turn into wolves, but it’s because we know too much. We know how things can go.” Referring to Mitch as a sheepdog turning into a wolf, his actions are justified as “knowing too much.” This kind of knowing is not only about over-reading signs in order to act preemptively. It also means remembering and working upon patterns of the past in order to build the world as it is now. When I asked the Counterterrorists if they thought they were overreacting, Mitch explained, “It’s not over-reaction. It’s pre-action. We know what’s coming. Our principle is speed.” Mitch must have been quoting James Mattis, one of the scholars and architects of the Global War on Terror, who stated in a well-publicized 2002 briefing of U.S. commanders, “Our overriding principle will be speed, speed, speed” (West 2003: 5). Quite the opposite of, “Do no harm,” preemption condemns failing to do harm soon enough.

Being the Lesser of Two Evils

Amman, Jordan.

King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center.

Counterterrorist: Zane.

KASOTC, the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center, is a large quarry converted into a secret-seeming training camp. You can hear guns in the

background, and if you listen closely you can hear the sound of a crying robot baby meant to hone the precision of soldiers who are boarding a fake aircraft in a fake city constructed by Boeing. This U.S. funded facility in Jordan offers Counterterrorism training to police and militaries around the world to “combat our global enemy.” The global enemy is everywhere, and always about to pounce. Zane was a contractor in Iraq before working here, and it was his job to walk me through the facility. He describes a worldview in which he is part of a noble, global crusade against evil and, more importantly, disorder. His work is to make sure that states, or rather arms of governments like police and military units, maintain a higher degree of lethal power than any others. He calls this, “keeping guns in the hands of the good guys.”

We sit down for a meeting with the director of the training facility. He questions my interests, is delighted to meet another anthropologist, and suggests that I might help with grant writing for the facility. The facility itself is already host to international competitions, conferences, and more. I am toured through the Green Program, which recycles bullets and has live fire training for the use of bullets that are biodegradable. The director offers me tea. We discuss my credentials. I pull out a letter from my advisor, granting permission for research. He does not trust me. He makes a joke about needing a DNA sample. He chuckles, and then his face drops, suddenly becoming serious: “I don’t need one. You drank the tea.” I point out that I never touched the tea, “I know you better than to drink your tea, my Friend.” I joke. He nods approval, but pushes his chair back from the table. He sends me away, and does not grant me access to two upcoming events, where I hope to meet more special

operations Counterterrorists who have and continue to work inside Iraq. It is all posturing, everywhere.

As I leave the facility, Zane walks me to the road to flag a taxi. “Kali, I want to tell you more —not here though— about Iraq. I would like to ask you on a date. Are you interested in me?” Zane is the “good cop” in this situation, and I feel uncertain about how to respond to his extension. I am very much interested in Zane, ethnographically. He is a gatekeeper who will eventually slip me passes to the Weapons Expo and to the Warrior Competition later in the year¹³. These two passes are pivotal to my ability to meet the American, Iraqi, Rwandan, Chinese, Indian and Jordanian special ops trainees I will spend time with throughout the rest of my fieldwork. I will eventually follow some of them to other training camps in Kurdistan, Bosnia, Denmark, and still others back home to California¹⁴.

On the one hand, Zane may be genuinely interested in talking to me about his time in Iraq, finding that one way to do so with a woman in Jordan is through the guise of romantic encounter. Or, he may be pursuing me. I feel I am treading on methodological and ethical grounds I did not prepare for. I have studied and prepared for the ethical entanglements of being Iraqi-American in Iraq, of how I want to

¹³ I found a small tracking chip in my nametag at the second event. Being stalked allowed me to stalk others. I decided to keep the chip on me throughout the event. Zane came to find me periodically, knowing where I was in a large campus of thousands of people at all times.

¹⁴ With the exception of KASOTC, I have disguised the names, locations, and people associated with these training camps, sometimes by referring to the wrong country or training center, concentrating multiple events into a single location, or combining interlocutors who played a minor role in single “characters” so that their features and quotes are scrambled and difficult to trace to real individuals.

leverage my body as a field site in zones of environmental contamination, and of how I want to approach joint decision making about my ethnographic practices and writing with Iraqi interlocutors. But I have in no way prepared myself for the gendered nature of ethnographic inquiry in the military world. Because I cannot tell what his motives are, I respond with a vague agreement to meet again.



KOSATC's Boeing Airplane for Scenario Drills, Photo by Kali Rubaii

Being, Preemptively

Zane and I meet for dinner on weekends. It becomes clear to me over time, although I am not sure how, that Zane has been asked to keep tabs on me and is pretending to be romantically interested in me in order to facilitate his assignment. It is awkward, but we act as if it is not. Each of us feels the other is pretending to be personally interested in the other, when in fact we are each just doing research. It

feels like our gaze upon one another is through false lenses. We see with real eyes, but reflected back to us is a false color. In many ways this defines the quality of all my future ethnographic research with Counterterrorists. Zane's willingness to engage with me is lubricated by a thin dishonesty that is sometimes a lie obscuring a truth, and sometimes a truth that is feigned as a lie in order to obscure its truthfulness. Nonetheless, I learn from him. Zane tells me how he is a good man, his job is a powerless one, and he longs to return to a time and place when he had pivotal role in the way things turned out, back when he worked in Iraq. We have a lot in common. Like me, he is a white passing Arab working among mostly American men. We both know every exit to each restaurant we visit, and we both ask the wait staff to place us with our backs to the wall, not the door. We are unwilling to leave our food or drinks out in the open without seeing that they are not tampered with. We do not always tell our families where in the Middle East we travel. We share the general paranoia of people who know Counterterrorism intimately, materially. It is pleasant to joke about these things together, but it is also a forced intimacy that is insincere underneath. While neither one of us is sure why each of us is tracking the other, we are both aware that the relationship we are forming is a bit silly. I am certainly not as useful a target as my profile may make me appear: daughter of an Iraqi immigrant, studying terrorism at a University of California campus, doing anthropology in Iraq... it all seems more useful to him than it probably is. And I am not interested in secret plans or any of the things Zane bothers to hide from me. I am interested in his training and implementation of worldview. How does Zane materialize the manuals, doctrines,

and policies of global Counterterrorism? Of less than lethal paradigms? Of preemption? In this sense, our relationship (whatever it is) does eventually yield useful ethnographic insight, even if the “we” that we are never feels real. We are performing in advance of our actual selves, and our performances get us somewhere.

But the filmy, unidentifiable social membranes we use to interact can be punctured. After dinner one evening, Zane and I walk along the sidewalk in Amman, down Rainbow Street. It is a popular western gathering place up on a hill, and the street is made of smooth cobblestone. I trip on the stone, and Zane catches my hand. His grip is warm, very strong. His touch sends a shiver through me: first touch. I can feel my heart pounding, but try to laugh lightly. The shiver is something between fear and the weighty feeling that history is taking place in the flesh. As I feel his hand wrap completely around my wrist, I am acutely aware of the inescapable truth of our relationship: Zane is a Counterterrorist, and my enemy. Zane carries a gun and I do not. Zane believes it is his duty to eradicate evil from bodies and minds like mine. Suddenly the “we” that we actually are comes into full focus: I am afraid of him, even and especially, when he tries to protect me.

Biological Propensities

One evening at dinner, I left my purse on a table and went to the washroom. Zane said, “Take your purse —even I could steal it!” For Zane, all moments are moments of impending threat and all people are dangerous. Of Amman, he says, “This city is full of Iraqis. If they knew what I did, they would kill me.” I tell Zane that I do not think my Iraqi friends would kill him. I also remind him that I am Iraqi

and do not feel an impulse to kill him. He disagrees: everyone can be motivated to kill, especially Iraqis, since they are preempted subjects. It is not an ethical question, but one of human biology. “When humans are cornered into a direction of the future — when they are preempted — they become dangerous.” For Zane and his colleague, the ability to die with meaning is an important ethical and political component of death. Living and the capacity to resist are naturally linked. Insurgency and life come together as a package.

Zane has to warn me even about himself, because as he puts it, “How can we know the difference between wolves and sheep, or wolves and sheepdogs? We cannot be sure. We had to assume that each is hiding in another’s skin.” Zane, an Arab man from the Middle East wearing a U.S. uniform, did exactly this for a decade. He worked closely with U.S. military units when they stormed civilian homes, bursting in to search for insurgency weapons caches. “We huffed and we puffed but you can’t blow the houses down. You have to dress up and come invited.” That is where Zane came in, the translator. Armed and uniformed, Zane was hired under the guise of providing the linguistic capacity for mutual understanding. “My real job, though, was to overhear. I did not speak Arabic. I just listened. They thought we were just a bunch of American guys and would speak amongst themselves. I would catch things they said and report back later.”

“So you are a spy,” I said casually over a bowl of bland lentil soup.

“No. I was a translator. I just only went one way with the information.”

“Sounds like a spy.”

Growing defensive, “I’m not a spy! I do not betray my own people.”

“Who are ‘your own people?’ Jordanians? Arabs? The military?”

“I defend any republic from terrorists. I watch out for that glimmer in people’s eyes that they are turning away from the protection of the government.”

Zane, in his defensiveness, was not reciting lines I had heard before from others. He went on to explain that I did not really understand because I was an innocent, beautiful, a sheep (in other words, without glimmer). He would “do anything to protect me” from people who were ready to kill me. He was a sheepdog, so he was aware of things I was not, aware of the fact that there really are people trying to kill me: “You are naïve if you think otherwise. It’s okay. You can stay naïve and have your liberal sensibilities. People like me make it possible for people like you to have that kind of morality where you believe in the good in everyone.”

In a preemptive worldview, potential threats, even if they turn out to be completely imaginary, are real enough to act upon and therefore morally justified. The ability to perceive threats in advance is a special ability trained into Counterterrorists, police officers, and soldiers. Conversely, civilians lack the capacity to perceive the big picture, and therefore cannot make accurate judgments about right and wrong, real and unreal. Their innocence — via their ignorance — is protected by sheepdogs like Zane not only because he is willing to kill off predatory wolves before civilians ever even find out about them, but also because he herds and contains civilians, protecting them from their own naiveté.

Channeling the language of Iraqi women farmers who describe the interchangeability of canine-types, I tell Zane that Counterterrorism and terrorism feel very similar to me. He explained how sheepdogs sometimes have to act very much like wolves, to protect sheep: “Yes, I have a gun, just like the terrorists have guns. But I only use my gun to protect order, to keep the streets safe for you. Out there, somewhere, there are people plotting to blow up a market. But they could be right here in the restaurant, eating with us.” Zane deflects the indistinguishability of *sheepdogs* and wolves by articulating the indistinguishability of *sheep* and wolves. This is where the “we” that makes up Zane and me is parted with a thick seam: while terrorists and civilians can be confused, and terrorists and Counterterrorists can be confused, these blurred lines enforce an absolute distinction between Counterterrorists and civilians. The imaginary wolf is a necessary scapegoat upon which Zane asserts canine dominion over civilian herds.

Zane is interested in anthropology as a way of better reading people in the restaurant. “Show me, what are signs of culture, and what are signs of psychology?” He is looking around the room at people, seeking to see beyond and through culture to find clues to possible threats. When Zane was in Basra he did extensive “cultural sensitivity” training with the U.S. army: “You know, like ‘Do’s and Don’ts’.” I ask Zane to explain this concept of “Do’s and Don’ts” to me better by asking, “Okay, so you are in a family’s house with a gun— is that a universal Don’t?” I am asking Zane if there is really anything culturally specific about the Global War on Terror. If,

as he describes it, resistance to being captured, cornered, and killed is a biological instinct, then why would cultural explanations be useful to him at all?

Zane explains that he is interested because, “If preemption is done right, there is no need to kill.” Zane quoted James Mattis, whom he had seen speak in person to his unit, almost verbatim. Preemptive non-killing requires a lot of cultural nuance, a sense of social networks, making sure to be polite. If the Palestinian mantra “existence is resistance” is so popular for surviving occupation, then existence itself must be divorced from resistance in order to effectively dismember insurgency by depriving a being of the capacity to kill or the right to be martyred (Fanon 1961). According to the U.S. Army’s *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, civilian death is the military's worst nightmare because it fuels new insurgent recruitment. “Using substantial force also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal (2007, 48). Thus for Zane, cultural sensitivity is not about killing or non-killing, but about taking measures to appear gentle and kind (even when killing).

At KASOTC, the director’s comfortable desire to recruit me, and the prevalent use of the word “culture” alongside “biology” made unmistakably apparent how anthropology, translation, and other forms of less-than-lethal pacification were tied to preemptive models of stopping popular resistance from taking place. Such work takes a careful attunement and a special sensitivity to danger that is yet-to-come. One time in Iraq, Zane was with a group of American soldiers who busted into houses at night to search for a weapons cache. They had confirmed that the head of

the household was an insurgent, but when they entered the home, eleven young boys were in the house as well. Zane had planned on facilitating an interrogation of the man on the spot, but the unit decided to search the house and leave. “We could not display brutality in front of so many little soldiers. They will become insurgents one day, so we have to be careful. We have to take action thinking of how they see us behaving. And how they will remember it later, too.” Zane identifies the children as “little soldiers,” as their potential wolf-selves, and is therefore concerned with their emotional experience.

Preemptive non-killing requires the very delicate “conversation of gestures” described by Herbert Mead. In a conversation of gestures, sign exchange is highly reflexive and tightly stacked temporally (Mead 1932). One person makes a gesture to another person that indicates to the latter what she is to do. The first person is conscious of how the gesture appears in his own experience. Gestures become significant when they arouse in the person making them the same responses they are supposed to arouse in the other person: the person’s consciousness of the content and flow of meaning depends on his taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures. The future-other reacting to the gesture is carved into the reaction of the gesture-maker’s to his own sign. In other words, reflexivity is embodied in anticipation of the other’s subjectivity, of making one’s self into an other. For Mead, time-travel in the mind of humans, the future that is present in the form of ideas, is essential to human subjectivity (Mead 1934). Material signs then are wrapped up in the “medley of the senses bleeding into each other’s zone of expectation” (Taussig

1993, 57). Reinhart Koselleck makes a distinction between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation (2004). These categories are meant to conceptualize the sinews that bind memory to anticipation (Hume 1777). Experience is “present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered (Koselleck 2004, 259).” Expectation, by contrast, is “future made present . . . [directed] to the not-yet. . . to that which is to be revealed (Koselleck 2004, 259).” Both of these terms, experience and expectation, are open to rival figurations. Expectations are both objects of political control and open to political revision (Bryant 2012; Coronil 2011; Ferguson 1999; Piot 2010; Rutherford 2012).

Zane has been insistent on one main point the entire time I have known him: “We are the good guys, Kali. We are fighting a joint enemy, a global enemy. It is like a disease hiding out in the population. We cannot eradicate it without the cooperation of people like you. You must acknowledge that, even though we have sharp teeth, we are your protectors.” His anticipation and preemption of others is about fulfilling the expectations built into “peace” and “order.” Civilian protection is predicated on their acceptance of authoritarian peace, but authoritarian peace is also predicated on general public opinion. That is why Zane is so invested in shaping the worldview of children in Iraq — or rather appealing to their future adult selves — more than he is invested in shaping the material world now. This is because, as Joe Masco argues, Counterterrorism is a war over a global future. Counterterrorism is implemented through potentials in people. For Zane, the potential of the boys to become insurgents is more compelling than the possibility that their father already is. Zane is trained to

think materially about signs and to read them as measures of a potential future. Joe Masco sums up the practice of Counterterrorism in this way: "...security experts are increasingly endowed with the power to imagine — and create — new forms of danger in order to engineer countermeasures to combat them (2014, 194).

In Zane's work in Iraq and at the KASOTK center, he is exposed to the crying sounds of real and robot babies, to real smells and to canisters designed to emulate the smell of burning human flesh. Not only are his senses tuned out or tune in to sensory cues; he is also bombarded with sensory messages about life and death. He is trained to hold fire, to patch wounds, to move swiftly and secretly in and out of buildings, planes, and corridors, to listen carefully to what people say, and to exercise respectful modes of interaction with women and children. He is trained in all of these ways, not because the lives of Iraqi civilians are sanctified, but because their Deaths and their own affective experience is the battlefield that is to be lost or won. Like Mattis, who emotively claims to arrive unarmed, Zane's Arabic language skills and his social sensitivity are always backed with lethal force. He is prepared at any moment to pick a sheep out of the crowd and tear him to pieces with his canine teeth, ever and always in the name of peace¹⁵.

Part II: A Sheep (Wolf) Among Sheepdogs

¹⁵ I gifted Zane a copy of *Animal Farm* at the end of our time together in Jordan. Not only did he read it, he wrote me a note about it: "The dogs are not the enemy. It is the pigs you are angry at. Even the dogs hate the pigs! But the sheep are also the problem, too. They will support anyone, just as the dogs will." I replied reminding him that there are no wolves in the story, and that the pigs have to invent stories about a pig-gone-rogue in order to justify to the dogs the necessity of violence. His reply: "Yes, security is always the excuse for a lifestyle. But you like that lifestyle, no?"

*“And the wolves will learn what we’ve shown before;
We love our sheep, we Dogs of War.”*

- Russ Vaughn

This section answers Zane’s original question about how one determines whether a civilian is a sheep or a wolf in hiding. This section is an experiment in centering myself amidst the shifting categories operationalized by Counterterrorists. In doing so, I let the ambiguity of my personhood out to play in both the games and real actions of Counterterrorists as they “read” “me” and those like me. The unfolding interactions reflect a highly racialized and gendered interface that may reveal and obscure components of Counterterrorism as it is materialized in body and in practice. Throughout this dissertation, I place my ethnographic self in the center of fraught physical, ethical, and geographic conditions to show how Counterterrorism itself reshapes material relations by playing with categories derived from analogies.

Doing this also highlights the complexities of practicing a multi-sited, multi-interest ethnography by being and becoming an instrument or site of harm. By offering my critique of their careers, I was able to engage Counterterrorists who spoke back to me in informative and clarifying ways. The more I held these men accountable for the material consequences of their worldview and their position in relation to Iraqi people, the more they held me accountable for my own hegemonic relationship with Iraqi people, even as a member of the Iraqi diaspora. After all, it was this hegemony they claimed to reinforce.

Protecting the Lady

Bosnia. Combat Medic Training Center: 1 Week.

Counterterrorist Trainers: “The Leader.” Trainer Casey. Trainer James.

Counterterrorist Trainees: Abel¹⁶. Russell. Jonah. Kali.

Day 3

There is something satisfying and fun about shooting a cardboard figure. It does not bleed, scream, or plead for its life. The cardboard figure does not try to kill you, take aim, or make eye contact. It does not offer a dappled shadow of doubt about its intentions as an enemy, or bystander, or someone in need of protection. It is simply there, propped upright with a clean outline and clean lines of a target on the cardboard torso ... and then it is suddenly and simply not there. Shooting it down is an act of elimination, not killing.

Elimination requires nuance in the act of pulling a trigger. There is no time for deep assessment, which means one must be carefully attuned. Something pops up in the field of vision. The finger twitches, the figure falls down. It is like clicking “I accept” on a warning page in order to use a software application or sitting in an eye exam, clicking a button every time you see a shimmer of light on the screen. If the figures painted on the cardboard signal innocence — baby cheeks to indicate a child, a cane to indicate the elderly, a scarf to indicate a woman— the physical twitch is to hold. Holding back sends forward-moving nerve impulses back upstream. It feels abrupt. Non-action is an action. If the paintings index non-innocence — a gun, a beard and skullcap for a man, rapid motion— the physical twitch is forward. It is physically easier to pull the trigger than to not pull it. It takes a lot of skill to take non-action.

¹⁶ I chose the pseudonym, Abel, since he referred to himself as a “keeper of the flock/herd.”

Either way the story is told, the finger moves quickly, rapidly assessing shortcut symbols to determine whether or not something should be eliminated from the field of vision. The cardboard figures pop up as obstacles that must go, in service of our goal of getting to point B from point A. There is no choice. If the consequence of elimination is killing, maybe afterwards there is time for a feeling of horror. I am not sure about real killing. But the act itself, the act of squeezing the trigger, is in no way thick with intention. Were it possible to eliminate without killing, everyone would accept this option. To fire the gun is not to take on the mentality of a killer. This is the kind of task anyone can do. It is easy. Were those figures real fleshy people, it would still be easy, for a second. The non-lethal act, the holding fire, is more work. There is a critical difference between learning how to hold and fire a gun in general, and learning to perceive a world *through* a gun. This is what scares me about myself, holding a fake gun in a training center. I am more accustomed to being on the other end of one.

The Counterterrorists are all here to learn more skills in order to receive even higher pay in the private security sector, or as private contractors training and brokering strategies to and with militias and governments in Iraq. They have been in Iraq since the very first 2003 battles, and had moved up in military rank until they jumped to the private sector where they made six and seven figures as Counterterrorism operatives of various kinds. They are from France, Belgium, the U.S., Canada, Denmark, and England. There is one Russian man as well, who is teased mercilessly by the others, because he is physically smaller than the rest, and

because he was not working directly in Iraq and did not know the scene in the same way.

In a mock city in the middle of a fireman's safety training facility, in the middle of the Bosnian countryside, we crouch. Or rather, the men crouch and I lift up a bullet proof vest made for an extra-large man and then slide my knees under it to get low, along the side of a burnt out brick building. It is freezing cold today. Our fingers are bare, wrapped around the triggers of mock guns. The trainers, young men who are gaining experience by performing the logistics and acting roles in this training facility, shoot at us with BBs. The men are getting visibly irritated with the trainers for shooting the little stinging pellets at their fingers. It is too much, they say. Russell huffs. "This is supposed to be a combat EMT training, not target practice for these young guys [trainers] who have never seen anything and still think war games are interesting." Abel agrees. We are "here to learn new skills, not just play stupid war drills that we know like the back of our hands!"

I am not getting hit at all. I am confident it is because I am a girl. It is not because I am a girl and these men are concerned about chivalry: these are certainly not "never hit a woman" kind of men. It is because, as Russel says, "they do not know what to do with a girl on the battlefield." Girl is a term of endearment, paternalism, and affection the men initially use to address me. By now it is day three in a weeklong training, the day before they find out who I "really am," and stop calling me a girl.

They presumed I was an American aid worker or perhaps a government worker. They asked me how I was making money in Iraq, assuming my interest in the region was linked to the corporate scramble for unprotected resources. I said I was interested in people. I was an anthropologist studying Counterterrorism. One Counterterrorist guessed by this description that I was a human trafficker. Another assumed I was smuggling art from the museums. He knew people who did this and offered to connect me with dealers in Europe. Another assumed I was a spy gathering intelligence to disrupt insurgency in Iraq and asked me how I deceived people into sharing their secrets. No matter my claims about myself, they were presumed to be covers for uncouth activities¹⁷, but they also considered me naive and innocent. Today, as cold BBs zinged past my knuckles and hit theirs, I was just an American with extremely divergent views from theirs, who needed to be convinced of how the world really worked. This was to my advantage as an ethnographer. I regarded these men as personally responsible for harming people I knew and loved in Iraq, and I took a confrontational approach to learning from them. It was an experiment in ethnographic practice.

My presumed naiveté was gendered: not only did I need to be convinced of how the world worked; I also needed to be convinced that these men were my protectors. Shielding me from BBs was their answer to an ongoing debate between the Leader and Trainers, and me. The Counterterrorists were not sure which way to side. The debate was really about the ability to see battlespaces in ordinary cities.

¹⁷ Given the history of anthropologists working as spies or military advisors, this is a reasonable assumption on their part. See David Price, *Weaponizing Anthropology*.

Since the training was meant to prepare us for battlefield emergency medical care, we were all vying to expose ourselves to the most realistic conditions possible. What could be imagined as “realistic,” however, was not a settled matter. Preemption as a mode of seeing and being shapes the way one acts in the world through the work of imagination. The Leader and Trainers were trying to teach me what I was unwilling to imagine: that an ordinary village or town was in fact not a village or town at all, but a battlefield disguised as a village or town. We disagreed fundamentally on which part of the scene was real, which was imaginary, and which material objects could be rendered “facts.”

I had argued vehemently to avoid carrying a gun during training, and to wear the clothes I would normally wear in a combat setting. A long skirt. A long scarf. The head of the program, a forty-something year old, incredibly skilled Bosnia emergency medic who had served three terms in Iraq, said he could “not conceive of anyone being in an Iraqi city without carrying a gun and wearing cargo pants.” I lost the battle for clothing, and was fitted with men’s pants and a large man’s bulletproof vest and helmet. To be “anyone in an Iraqi city” meant wearing military gear. Otherwise, I suppose, a person was no one. He was completely irritated with me, “This is a combat zone, not a normal day at the park.” “But it is a normal day at the park for me, for the people I live with, for those cardboard people you pop up that we shoot,” I argued. He shook his head, “no civilian clothes.”

The Counterterrorists, all with plenty of kills under their belts, were learning to resuscitate and evacuate people in order to increase their pay in the private

contractor market in Iraq. They were in support of getting the most realistic training possible, and sided with me on the matter of clothing.



Figure 5: “No civilian clothing!” photo by Abel

The matter of carrying a gun was a much more intense debate. I said that I wanted to learn EMT skills in the context of combat, not *as a combatant*. Realistically, I would not have a gun when I went back to Iraq. I would have two free hands. I would see the world with naked eyes, not a target viewfinder or goggles. The Leader really disliked me by now and insisted that if I wanted to stay in the training I had to carry a gun. He could make me carry it, but in spite of whispering into Trainer Casey’s ear, “Make her use that fucking gun!” he couldn’t make me use it. I carried it limply and dropped it often. The trainers, eager to please The Leader (their boss and mentor) were having a lot of fun in their roles as mock combatants. They were enjoying the

combat component of our training, playing out what they imagined to be a warlike experience. The Counterterrorists and I were more focused on the medic training. The more the trainers hit them with pellets, the more the Counterterrorists joined my side of the debate— we wanted realistic training, not to be [further] militarized.

The race to realism turned into a power trip. After two days, the Leader ordered the trainers to hit me and only me, with BBs. I am not a person wedded to nonviolence, but I saw the power of Gandhian tactics in this weeklong battle to get me to carry and fire a fake gun. By the time the trainers took aim at me, the Counterterrorists were so annoyed with their behavior that they worked hard to shield me, often with their own bodies. They ended their days with welts all over their exposed necks and legs, on my behalf. Was this somehow a more realistic imaginary exercise? It was plausible to them that an American girl might be in need of protection like this— realistically.

By Day Four, it would not be “realistic” to protect me, and we would all adapt to talking about scenarios as if I were Iraqi instead. Killable instead of vulnerable. These were clashes of particularity. I was hard to deal with because I was not one thing or another, and could not be integrated into the categories of people that made Counterterrorism an operable *modus operandi*. But I also believe that this would be the case of any Iraqi brought forward as an individual or colleague. The hunt for wolves in sheep’s clothing is about getting close to sniff out whether or not what one is and what one appears to be are congruent. To be particular in any way, to have intersecting qualities that appear to contradict one another, is to become incongruent

and therefore suspect to these self-described sheepdogs. Being a “girl” in their midst was somewhat problematic, but my refusal to carry a gun in some ways reinforced my difference from them and affirmed me as an unarmed civilian, a sheep. Being both an Iraqi and a woman betrayed the work we had been doing to reify our roles.

Day 1: Bearing Lethal Force

For our first drill, we departed from the urban center and headed for a bumpy, overturned field in the damp Bosnian fields, outside of the fire center. We were to practice a rescue and airlift. The ground was trench-like and rutted. We walked, vulnerable, along a road. Trainer Casey, who had never been in war, was stalking us, popping up right and left from trenches, and then retreating. Deep in the field, another trainer pretended to be injured and was screaming for help. He was ours to rescue. There was no way to reach this injured person without being shot one after the other by the sniper, Trainer Casey. Engaged in the exercise, I did what I have done in real life before: arm myself with weakness. I took off my bulletproof vest and left my gun. I stood up in full view, and walked with my hands up in a straight line to the mock victim. I started the steps I was taught to sustain the victim’s body, and prepared an evacuation plan. Abel later called this method, “The Lady way of doing things.” No one shot at me. Trainer Casey called a time-out, stood up from his post and said, “What the hell, Kali! You ruined the whole drill!” I told him that I succeeded in the drill. I had perplexed him enough to get him to put down his gun and come talk to me instead of shooting, and I got the victim stabilized for evacuation. He was annoyed, but paused and scratched his ear. He called over another trainer to help me

understand. “Hey James, if this bitch just started walking with no weapon and saying, ‘Don’t Shoot. I’m a medic!’ what would you do *in reality*?” Trainer James supported his colleague’s position and shrugged, “I’d shoot her. I’d definitely shoot her.”

“That is a war crime. We should talk about that later. But Casey, you didn’t shoot me. And neither did you, James. *In reality*, you didn’t shoot. *And* you had direct orders from the Leader to shoot me and only me.” The Counterterrorists had gathered around to be part of the discussion. I gave a little speech. “Look Guys, I have been in war too. I know you think I am naïve, but I was in Anbar when you were, Abel, and I was in Palestine while you were still in training right here, Casey. And I have come here, alive and uninjured. Don’t you think that means I might have a few methods of my own?” They did not think so.

We re-ran the drill. This time, the trainers shot me with BBs until the drill ended, demonstrating to me their main point, which was summed up by Abel later on, after my Iraqi-ness was revealed: “I liked your stunt that day. But you know Kali, we kill people like you all the time.” It was important for them to remind me that the possibilities in war zones are limited, and that being armed and being safe are congruent every time. “That is just the reality,” he added. The gun becomes equal to safety, forming a kind of affective cone, a scope that limits not only what things mean, but also how objects impinge on one another. What becomes naturalized is the positive loop between guns and bullets, between holding a gun and being alive, and between being innocent and being incapacitated.

In spite of this “reality,” Trainer Casey followed me around for the rest of the week, asking me practical questions about how a human being could walk through a group of armed people with no weapon and not get killed. To him it seemed like a total impossibility. So much so, in fact, that he told me he did not believe there was a single Iraqi male that was unarmed.

Day 2: The Protector is the Violator

Russel, the Russian, was constantly the victim of hazing activities. The Counterterrorists strapped him to a gurney during training one afternoon and left him tied there while we all went to lunch. I was disturbed by this and went back to let Russell out of the room while the others were eating. When I did, he told me he bred and trained attack dogs for the police. He didn’t mind being hazed, “Men like me use dogs instead of weapons. I know I am small.” We walked slowly down the hallway toward the door. Jonah, Russell’s roommate (we were all staying in bunk beds in an adapted house), stopped us on the way out. Apparently he had followed me back to the house. “I want to fuck. Which one of you will it be?” He laughed, but did not move out of the doorway.

Jonah was one of several men who talked about “Fuck’em and chuck’em,” the practice of raping small Iraqi children and then dumping them off of bridges to make their deaths look like suicide¹⁸. The night before, Jonah and one other Counterterrorist had interrupted my sleep by playing with the door nob to my room. There were no locks on the doors, and I was aware of my singularity as an oddity and an outsider.

¹⁸ This practice is a less-than-lethal practice because it registers deaths as sad results of sad situations, not as Deaths by a lethal arm of Counterterrorism.

Jonah barred the door to the house and walked slowly toward Russell and me. Russell took out a throwing knife from his boot, which startled me. I thought he was acting in self-defense or possibly to protect me, but instead he gave Jonah a friendly shoulder punch and said, “Let’s do her together.” He reached for his pants zipper, to show Jonah he meant it.

Russell’s response to a perceived threat was to create a new kind of danger. He was practicing the kind of mimesis that deflects harm by turning a shoulder and switching sides, recreating a human interaction not by reiterating his role in the same position, but by making a positional shift. Leaning into the very proposition of rape that threatened him, Russell was working to be included in the pool of Counterterrorists by juxtaposition to me. He, like the others, expressed the feeling of being compelled to “act ugly” and worked hard to convince me, as did Casey, that the way things are is the way they have to be. In order to be a sheepdog, Russell cannot be a sheep, nor can he be a wolf. He has to work the fine line between aggressive dominance and paternal protectiveness. Rejecting my rescue of him by turning against me helped him work this line.

Russell nodded with strong agreement when Abel explained how the world *really* worked: “We have to do the work no one else will. You are a sheep¹⁹, innocent. You believe that the world is good. But in order for you to believe that, I have to

¹⁹ While no one could tell me where they had learned this analogy of wolves, sheep, and sheepdogs, it appears frequently in army blogs like *Killology* or, Navyreads, which posts Aesop’s fables “in support of the Navy Professional Reading Program,” in the film *American Sniper*, and most prominently in the writing of LTC (RET) David Grossman, who wrote the book *On Killing*. It seems like language about sheepdogs appears in public discourse during the Vietnam War.

protect you from bad guys— sometimes by being a bad guy.” Our ideological differences were not so much about right and wrong as they were about what counted as reality. The dangerousness of this situation was not the game of posturing threats to me, but that Jonah really had committed acts of rape and killing in the past and carried this history with him as he returned over and over again to Iraq. At the heart of the “game” played between the real and the unrealized, between the acts and their underdetermined meanings, is plausible deniability. Plausible deniability is the ability to claim that one is not responsible for harm—by way of non-knowledge, indirect participation, or following orders. Counterterrorists accuse me of using plausible deniability to morally exempt myself when they claim that they are sustaining my “peaceful” lifestyle even as I know, or should know, that my consumptive lifestyle harms others by their hands. But in this accusation is their own plausible deniability as well: “I am working on your behalf, and at the bidding of a larger order. Therefore my actions are not attached to my mind or will.” Diffusing responsibility is not only a semantic campaign. It is the underlying moral framework of less-than-lethal violence.

The whole scene in Bosnia was one of exaggerated and contradictory claims, lies about who did what for a living, tension between killing and healing, and a general disaggregation between personal paradigms and actions that held up those paradigms, in part via contraction. Somehow constant teasing about rape fit tightly into a general practice of “protecting the lady” from cardboard bad guys and trainers alike, “sometimes by being a bad guy” in the flesh. I had to be coerced in order to be protected, or for my innocence to be confirmed. But, I also had to be docile in order

to confirm my *own* innocence. As a sheep, though, being attacked by wolves and being attacked by sheepdogs felt indistinguishable²⁰. Like Mattis, it is with loving “tears in their eyes” that these men have entered Iraq and killed Iraqi people in order to save them.

There is a catchphrase Anbari women used as a political theorem when analyzing conditions in Anbar: “the protector is also the violator,” or “the protector becomes the violator.” From below, terrorism and Counterterrorism are the same project in which the sheepdogs and wolves interchange, both with sharp teeth that corral and confine sheep. Their theorem articulates how the relationship between sheep and their various predators is a matter of degrees rather than kinds.

Counterterrorism is slightly worse than terrorism, not because it kills fewer people, but because it diminishes and hides its violations of the population within the structures of order. In Anbar, at the time of my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 when geopolitical control was undetermined, people made little distinction between state violence and militia violence. The government bombed Anbari hospitals, as did the U.S. occupier. Sub-state militias like ISIS (not funded by the Iraqi government) and *Al-Hashed*, (funded by the Iraqi government) were both brutal. So too, acts of terrorism that targeted market places and dismembered bodies on the highway were only minimally distinct from *prima facie* execution of Anbari men in the name of Counterterrorism, or bombings to the children’s wing of Fallujah Hospital under the same banner. The difference is not the act or the target, but the degree to which the

²⁰ The incident ended without physical assault.

injured and dead are categorized as sheep or as wolves upon death, and thus whether or not one's death is revoked from the body count²¹. As Anbari people told stories of military violation, they often referred to *Al-Hashed*, the U.S. military, ISIS, and the Iraqi military as one indistinguishable "they."

This indistinction between "terrorism" and "Counterterrorism" is also how Jonah can act as both protector and violator. He sees no contradiction between threatening to rape me and putting his own body between a bruising BB bullet and me. He, like Mattis, can approach the Iraqi people with both loving tears in his eyes and a threat to kill them all. Like any good sheepdog, his power and possession over his flock is predicated on his ability to brutalize them in the name of keeping them safe.

For Russell, whose behavior might seem the most peculiar, he is exercising his training in preemption. He possesses a Counterterrorist's incredible ability to imagine the possibility of horrible violations on an everyday landscape as a reality upon which to act. The efficacy of his training has been to blur realities and scenario fantasies until they become so blended that the possible world and the actual world are one in the same. This is what makes it possible for him to imagine and act as a purveyor of others' futures. "Hence," Samimian-Darash argues in her discussion of Israeli preparedness paradigms, "to prepare for the future, concrete risks must be created so as to develop the means to cope with them" (2011, 934). Rape and

²¹ I argue in the next chapter that order, even lethal order, is generally preferred among Anbari people, over chaos not because it is better but because it is more knowable.

protection, training and battle, elimination and killing, are all slippages that do real work by obfuscating the direct link between physical actions and their effects. One minute Russell can “play ally” with me. Another minute he can “play ally” with Jonah. Both are a kind of game. They are also a reality framed as a game, such that any harm to me can be considered an enactment rather than the real thing, even as it really happens.

Since preemptive Counterterrorism is a battle over potentialities, ends and means are always unmoored from one another: preemptive action is framed as stopping action rather than as making impingements on the world. In other words, a Counterterrorist would not articulate his actions as “creating concrete risks” but instead as “coping” with scenarios imagined to be inevitable. This creates a cognitive space for harming some but not others, at certain times, without abandoning the consistent feeling that one is doing good even as one is “acting ugly.” I write about these slippages between protection and harm, between elimination and killing, not to humanize the act of killing or rape —or to draw disproportionate attention to the cruelty of particular Counterterrorists and stereotype them all— but rather to articulate how landscapes, places, and bodies on those landscapes, are imagined and made real. Counterterrorists are making a world, and the paradigms they live by have real impacts upon those they imagine to be terrorists (and those they do not).

Day 2 Evening: Games that are Real

Abel is tipsy. He shows me photographs of his two-year-old daughter. He adores her, but he gets restless when he is at home. “I just can’t get out of Iraq. The

everyday society [in England] is killing me, it's like a fantasy, a fake world, and I know too much to relax when I'm back there." He never married his daughter's mother, but keeps them both in a brownstone in England. He has another house in the United States. On a Skype call with his baby daughter and her mother, Abel was enthusiastic in returning the phrase, "I love you." His eyes cracked with wrinkles as he smiled at the delayed, pixelated image of his daughter. Every year he tries to come home and leaves as soon as he can (after three weeks or fewer) to Iraq, where he rakes in \$2,000 a day as a private contractor. He and the others bemoan the dropping rate of the trade, which is on the decline in Iraq.

Abel has spent a full decade there, and knows Anbar intimately. He is a gregarious giant, freckled, 6'7" and surprisingly quick. He likes "big guns" and "big blasts," and in 2015, was training the Kurdish *Peshmerga* in using heavy artillery: "They are used to fighting from the mountains, as guerillas. They were called terrorists— now we have to teach them how to fight like a military instead." I met Abel originally at a training space just past the airport in Erbil, Kurdistan. He was directing a group of young *Peshmerga*, and was visibly irritated by them. "These young ones are just dilly dallying. They stop to pick flowers and smell them, they wander around, and they pee funny, too. They kneel to pee! Who does that? They have no discipline at all, and the older guys are no help because they never marched or used heavy artillery. They had only shotguns and the mountains."

Abel was successful in his work: Kurdistan, a government that hired him and several like him directly, managed to capture Kirkuk for some time and extract as

much oil as possible as quickly as possible in 2015. When I was there, oil trucks were moving quickly out of the area, supposedly selling some of the cheap oil directly to Israel. Abel, aware of this geopolitics, had negotiated with the Kurdish government, telling them if he was going to capture an oil city, he should be paid more than if it were just a normal city. He was offered stocks in an array of companies, and invested in two ways: “Long term investments in LaFarge cement, because that is always smart. And short term in oil. They have a lot of little oil company names, but it’s all one national export and there are prospectors for all the big companies too. And BP.” Abel, always a smart businessman, was in Bosnia to learn emergency life saving skills so that when he escorted high level government officials, he would be a more valuable asset, and raise his salary. “I’m rich. Everyone is plundering Iraq.”

Sober Abel does not express much emotion. Intoxicated Abel tells me about his passion for heavy artillery, and his time in the British military when he was fighting in Anbar province as a soldier, before he “got out and got rich.” Here is our conversation, that evening:

“These people, you know they are fighting being invaded. They are protecting their families, their tribes, and their land. Well, our fucking governments weren’t going to have that, so we were sent in to smash these people, and man we did. We smashed them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Kali, we were told to rape and pillage. We took shit from the houses and sold it. People were executing men right and left. We were told anyone we met was an

insurgent, and we were also told that this was ours to seize by any means. When they say that phrase, 'by any means,' it means, it means basically that no one is going to hold us accountable. I see these poor saps getting written up and going to prison from time to time. They are the fall guys. We all did this shit, and anyone who says we didn't wasn't there for long enough to see it, or they are lying. Lying Kali, that is the name of the game..."

"It's like this, okay? You are a civilian. We call you a sheep. You want a house, cheap gas, you want the little world you live in to be safe and you don't want to know what it takes to make that happen. We go and do the dirty work. We do the shit you don't want to know about so you can live your life without knowing, without really knowing the cost of it. It's fucking capitalism. These fucking corporate pricks sell you shit, and it's shit we stole right from over there. Literally just went in and took it. And you use that stuff, you live that life, you say, 'Thank you very much. Please don't tell me where it came from.' But I'll tell you where it came from if you ask me. And that is why I can't go home, because Jennifer [mother of daughter] doesn't ask me where her house comes from, but I know if I get too comfortable I'll tell her and she will want to kill herself. Everyone would want to kill themselves if they know the kind of terror we have to make to get the stuff you buy from there to here [Europe]. So, they lie. They say, 'There is a big bad wolf and it's huffing and puffing at your door.' It's a fuckin' lie Kali. They say that shit to make you believe you are defending. You aren't defending shit. You are the offense. What's-his-face, that guy [Matis] says, 'Be the hunter, not the hunted.' But tell those sheep they are the hunted,

so they feel comfortable with the raping and pillaging. That is how you sleep at night. You just say you were defending yourself. Cops do it all the time. But so do civilians. You say, I am defending, not aggressing. But fuck you, you know? I don't go to war on your behalf to defend you. I do it to pave the way for these mother fuckin' corporate pricks to make money. And you know that bombing, the fuckin' train bombing they said they interrupted, in London? That is obviously made up, it was right before elections and that is the work of guys like me. I recognized the play. It's all bullshit. They say I'm a Counterterrorism operative. Ha! I spread terror just by saying "Boo!" Everyone in Iraq knows me. I'm a killer and I can't go back. If I go back, I have to lie. If I stay here, with the sheepdogs, the wolves, whatever — it's all the same — I don't have to take all the blame. I can say, it's not just me — it's you too. The sheep are guilty. That's what I want it to say on my grave. 'The Sheep Are Guilty!'"

Abel is starting to sway as he talks, getting going on what was becoming an hours-long conversation. I hold back from telling him about my interest in reparations. Instead, I say: "I understand that. It is difficult for me to go home, too. Why did you pick heavy artillery as a specialty, if you feel like this fighting is for the wrong reasons?"

He becomes even more animated, and waves his enormous arms around with passion as he speaks. "Oh man, I dunno. I just love that shit. Big guns! It's real war, instead of this whole special, targeted, bla bla bla. Precision my ass! We got super creative in Anbar. We had like tons of stuff with us, and they said, you can't use it in

a way the media would notice. So we just improv-ed [sic] and it was awesome! We did something we call Israeli Lanterns. You put white phosphorous in the barrel of a gun, and instead of firing up, you just shoot it straight out. There was a guy on a motorcycle, like a moped. I think he had groceries or a kid or something on the back. Anyway, we stopped him at a checkpoint, and then when we moved him on, he sped off away from us, and we loaded up an Israeli lantern and just fired at him. Oh man! It was nuts. The explosion was awesome, and the moped kept going, and I could still see his feet, still on the pedals. No body, just the feet in those Iraqi sandals and the moped, going along for a second before it tipped over. That poor fucker... Never saw it coming. Never felt a thing, I bet.”

He leans back, miming the act of surprise as he watches, or rather remembers watching; the phosphorous hit the man on the moped. He slides his arm forward like a snake, as if his hand were the driverless moped, going along the road with only a pair of feet in sandals resting on the pedals. His hand tips and sputters down, as he describes the moped coming to a stop, bucking off the sandaled feet as it falls. For a brief moment Abel is not with me, but back in a moment. He recounts a situation in which he and his companions were compelled by White Phosphorous’ sheer force of presence to blow up a man on a moped. In the “fog of war,” personal agency, personal responsibility, and personal epistemology —that is, doing things, being morally responsible for things, and knowing about things— are all blurred together.

Holding back my desire to classify Abel as a psychopath —he is not, and in fact displayed the widest array of emotions and empathy of all the Counterterrorists I

met— I try to see the slippage between a cardboard figure being eliminated and a human being killed. The man on the moped fades in and out of being object, abject, and being. He need not be a wolf in sheep's clothing so long as his body is simply one material object easily erased from the landscape without it having to count as a kill. Were he to face a bullet, perhaps he would be rendered a wolf. But in relation to a substance like white phosphorous, he is simply collateral damage.

Preemption, acting as if one knows for certain what one can only speculate, requires real actions based upon imaginary scenarios. It also allows for an exchange of realities across time, such that Abel can blow up the man for no particular reason, and then either find reasons in the imagined possible future to justify his actions in the past, or simply dissolve the event into the backdrop of war. In the name of preemption, Abel can kill —and be absolved of responsibility for doing so— by making the retroactive semantic claim that he was acting preemptively. In order for preemption to be operationalized, cause is unidirectionally dissolved into effect. To do something is also to justify it by “knowing” what could have been.

It is not easy intellectual work to think with Abel. I have lots of questions and wonder about his patience in answering. But Abel, treating me as a kind of confessional at times and as an audience for his expertise at other times, is willing to go all night with me, as long as I drink with him. His voice is booming, and the other Counterterrorists are starting to peel slowly out of the kitchen where we are standing to nod off and sleep a few hours before our 6am training begins again. I imagine they will not mind our noise, but I have a dilemma. The ritual of drinking with

Counterterrorists is an important part of the ethnographic engagement in military communities. But, I do not drink. In the past, when I told Counterterrorists that I do not drink, they worried I was getting them drunk to divulge information without being equally vulnerable. I needed to find a form of vulnerability that would make up for my lack of drinking. I find myself methodologically pushed by the physical limitations of ethnographic intimacy, especially unwanted intimacy with perpetrators of violence. I decide to balance vulnerabilities with Abel by asking him to follow me across the house while we are talking so that I can use the restroom²². He paid no attention and seemed at ease with me, talking the entire time and absentmindedly turning the sink on for me to wash my hands. This decision formed a strange bodily intimacy that lasted throughout the training. Abel is someone who refuses to be touched, but he allowed me to wrap his arm in mock bandages when practicing drills later on. My willingness for him to keep talking in the doorway of the bathroom

²² Amidst the AAA's recent discussions of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the field, I find myself shy to describe ways I formed uncomfortable relationships with perpetrators of violence. They are as disturbing to me as I imagine they are to the readers. In some cases I "invited" uncomfortable intimacies. But, like this moment in the bathroom, they were not always as uncomfortable as might be expected. Megan Steffen's piece on Henrietta Schmerler and "inviting" ethnographic vulnerability is one of many recent examinations about gendered ways that scholars tend to read interactions between women ethnographers and male interlocutors (2017). Perpetrator studies are fraught with complex ethical and personal tradeoffs, and I almost always opted *into* disturbing power dynamics with gatekeepers, or tested the limits of my willingness to be vulnerable. I did this both in solidarity with other Iraqis who are subjected to vulnerabilities without escape, *and* as a methodological/theoretical approach to the materiality of personhood and the flexibility of modal relations between things and beings.

sufficed as a gesture of vulnerability, and our conversation went long into the night, as Abel drank beer and I drank coffee.

Abel told me his opinions about Iraq, from his ten years working there. “The whole thing is a cluster fuck. I was thinking, the best thing to do would to just use a big nuclear weapon and blow the whole thing up, just destroy every living thing, and then start all over. Because the history there is so deep, and the legacy of the Brits and the U.S., and the rest... I just think maybe getting all of it over with is easier.”

“But Abel, you can’t erase history just because you erase a whole civilization.”

“Yeah, I know, but you can erase memory, and no one would care about anything before the bomb. I just think all the time, the bigger the weapons, the bigger the explosion; the more people get cleared out of our fucking way. You know? I mean, like all these Arabs running around, it’s not like life is great for them anyway, and they are going to die and suffer anyway. They don’t know it, but we are coming, steamrolling through, and there is nothing they can do about it. Might as well stop the torture and just wipe ‘em out, I mean OUT, like entirely.”

“Even children?”

“Especially children. You have to stop the generations, change the shape of the society. You have to start over the whole place. But no, we are gonna drag it on and on and on. We are gonna let them have babies so we can kill them again in ten years. We just keep going back. Well, I keep going back. One time, one time I was hired by one of the Sunni militias, back in the day in Anbar. Was I near Ramadi? I don’t know. Who cares? I was fighting with these guys, really great guys. This guy, Mohammed—

they are all named Mohammad; I mean get a new name, right? I hate that. I can never tell them apart, so this Mohammad was like close. I mean, I wouldn't say we are friends, or I shouldn't say that, but we were fighting side by side for a while.

Anyway, five years later, I'm training one of the Hasheds [*Al-Hashed* is a cluster of Shi'a militias hired by the Iraqi government], one of those groups, whatever. We go into Ramadi, and we are like testing things out with the Arabs [Sunnis?] in there. Oh man, I'm in a little firefight with this group of guys, and I see this one guy using a strategy I use, I mean only I use it. And I'm like, that little fucker is stealing my moves, and I realize, 'Oh my God, this is someone I probably trained.' So I really want to get him, cause I'm thinking that it's like a game against myself. Anyway, he comes out in the middle of the road, guns going off past his head and everything, and he says, 'Stop, wait! I know that tall blonde guy. That's Abel!' I'm like, 'Hey Buddy' and we go out in the middle and hug each other. And our teams are so confused, should we keep fighting or stop or what? We were like, 'How is your wife?' 'How is your daughter?' Man, it was weird."

"So, did you go back to fighting?"

"Yeah, we were like, okay well we have to keep going. So, we went back to our spots and fought, but I couldn't hit 'em. I mean, I could, but I was thinking since he wasn't hitting me, I should be equal. It's not a paintball fight."

At odds with Abel's description of cavalier killing, induced by the joy of a new technology, Israeli lanterns, is his relative appreciation for his opponent. On the one hand, "It's not a paintball fight," but on the other hand it is, "a game against myself"

in which Abel is free to “test things out” and “improv.” Abel speaks soberly of “erasing memory,” spreading “terror just be saying, ‘Boo!’” and “steamrolling through.” But he also speaks of play.

Able’s flexibility helps to understand the nature of certain forms of military violation that propel Counterterrorism in Iraq. For example, in “protecting the lady” and reproducing gender actively in the war games, more comes out²³. The blur of lines between loving, respecting, and killing unmoors any obvious relations between life and death. Counterterrorists are not simply living in contradiction. They believe they see the world more realistically than others. War itself queers intimacies and alliances in important, sometimes even good ways. But the work of Counterterrorists is a hegemonic enterprise, establishing and enforcing sameness and difference, us and them, even if they do the work through the very blurring of these categories.

Counterterrorists manifest a world in which normative hierarchies are reinforced, not critiqued. This is made possible by instrumentalizing strange alliances and strange enemies. Abel’s encounter with his quasi-friend and former ally highlights this, as does the fact that I find myself in intimate contact with those I feel the least close. Just as non-killing is leveraged to control lethal force, so too are unconventional intimacies leveraged to police boundaries between groups. In the following section, I illustrate this complexity as my (girl) relationship with the Counterterrorists shifts to my (Iraqi) relationship with them, producing altogether new intimacies of harm.

²³ According to a 2009 interview I conducted with Center for Victims of Torture in Jordan, the rate of torture and rape is equally distributed among women, men *and* children in Iraq. Rape and torture are not hetero-normatively performed.

Day 3 Night Time: Finding a Wolf

On the third night, we were all talking in the kitchen as a large group. As I turned to the refrigerator, Abel stood up straight and stiff for a split second. I assumed it was one of his many paranoid physical responses to rapid motion. He leaned on the counter near the sink looking across at me near the fridge and started speaking slowly, as if he saw a snake on the floor and was calmly talking all of us through a dangerous situation.

“Kali, what’s your last name?”

I answered, “Rubaii. Why?”

“Oh. My. God.”

“What?”

“She’s... Guys, she is...” Then, after pointing and turning to his colleagues, he turned back to me, “You are Iraqi! I just saw your face from the side and realized. Oh my god. I didn’t mean all those things I said before.”

After that, things changed among the men. I stopped being a girl and was instead an Iraqi; the jokes about gang rape turned into jokes about killing. They regarded me with more caution, more intrigue, and even as they back-peddled on some of their statements about Iraq, they also spoke more openly. They had innumerable questions, all of which indicated to me that there was no room for a person to be complicated: once I was even the slightest bit Iraqi, I could not also be American, or even female. I had revealed myself as one who still wore the sheepish

body of an American girl, but who's overcoat was covering up something un-sheep-like. Whether or not a wolf was hidden beneath was theirs to determine.

Day 4: Realistically...

"If I were alone in a room with you, I'd definitely slit your throat." Jonah, as you might guess, made this claim out of the blue in the silence of the kitchen as I made coffee. He was testing his allyship by making the announcement in front of the others. I leaned in. "Ah, you had your chance. Too slow I guess." I winked at Jonah. I learned yesterday that he hates his job. In spite of his long history of special ops work in Iraq, he is now employed as a private security guard for a Saudi arms dealer. Sometimes he goes with the dealer and the dealer's pretty wife to dance clubs. "I have to keep people away from her, so he doesn't worry about men seducing her. It's degrading. If anyone looks at her, he gets angry." Jonah took the job because it makes him a lot of money. He is in this training because his new boss has offered him a raise if he can also be prepared to save his life in case of an assassination attempt or health problems. "So basically, I protect the lady, and wait for my boss to have a heart attack." I get the impression he misses war, not necessarily because he wants to kill but because his current job means he can never actually eliminate the possible threats he is meant to. They mostly come from within: the wife that may flirt or make eye contact or just be too pretty, and the boss who might have a heart attack.

I ask Abel, sincerely, if he would also kill me with no qualms. "Kali look, if I saw you in civilian clothes in a house I busted into, maybe not. But if I thought for a second you were a threat to me, I'd have no second thoughts. Bullet between the

eyes.” Abel makes a great leap, for his personality, by touching me. He firmly pushes his pointer and middle fingers against my forehead, shaping the rest of his hand like a gun. “Execution style, yeah!” said Trainer Casey, with a childlike whisper. Men who protected me from BBs yesterday are pointing imaginary guns at me today. The ethical impingements of categories on the material world are obvious: yesterday I was a lady; today it is all up for question. I wrote this in my field notes, and in spite of being contradictory, it makes perfect sense: “My body is either killable or savable, and sometimes one because of the other, but always definitively so.”

In the ambiguous space between the actual and the imaginary, training worlds are opportunities to play with and cope with categories. The Leader entered the room and announced that it was time to practice the full range of ABC (Airway, Breathing, Circulation) drills, with various scenarios. We were to set up in groups of three to practice them “as realistically as possible.” My partners were Abel and Russell, both of whom I still trusted the most among the group. We took turns being the victim. During one drill, when I was playing the injured victim, The Leader came to our group and squatted down to watch Abel and Russell at work. “Okay, so for this drill, the airway is collapsed. What do you do?” Abel does a mock tracheotomy with the tools we have. “Okay, and now there is internal bleeding and a bullet wound on the artery in the left thigh.” Russell pulls out a tourniquet and practices with swift skill the strategy of putting it on. To tighten it, he twists the small bar. A tourniquet is very painful, and if used, it generally means a person will have their leg amputated. Making a tourniquet too loose in the final exam would result in a failure — often

people failed to make them tight enough for fear of causing their patients pain in the field. This is a topic of grave concern among EMT trainers in this course, but there is no realistic way to fully tighten a tourniquet on someone who does not need one without injuring them. The tourniquet drill is a materially fine line between pretending to do and actually doing. Russell tightened the one around my leg quite hard, and it was very painful. The Leader yelled at him, “Tighter!” Russell made a final twist in the tightening bar, and then refused to go further. He moved to undo it quickly, as is expected in these drills to prevent injury or undue pain, but The Leader gave me a sly glance, which turned stern suddenly: “Wait! Waaaait.... Not yet.” “What the hell, man! Why?” Abel protested on my behalf.

“I said, realistic, guys. *Re-al-is-tic*.”

Switching from this meta-conversation into speaking as if the imagined scenario were real, The Leaders says, “She’s Iraqi. Test out your skill. No one is coming in a copter to pick this one up. Might as well get your practice in. Live training. She’s going to die anyway.”

Abel shrugs. In the drill, my pain is real, but in “reality” my pain is irrelevant.

We wait. In spite of my desire to reach down and open the tourniquet, I do not. I am learning something from this pain. Lying on the hardwood floor, I pause and look into the faces of the men above me. They are uncomfortable in so many different ways with my presence in their lives. It might be a little bit pleasurable for all of these men to torture an Iraqi (read terrorist). This might be the “acting ugly” that is perceived as necessary in order to subdue people like the Me they know today... and

secure the world order for the Me they thought they were protecting yesterday. Preemption, then, not as a paradigm or a doctrine or a kind of war, but as a material practice, is a snap distinction between the likelihood that someone sits on one side or the other of an internal threshold between innocent and insurgent. The Real is thus conjured into materiality by a scenario branch that runs like a nerve synapse in the mind's eye of a Counterterrorist. His hands pull triggers, resuscitate hearts, hold women down, and shield the bodies of comrades based not on who I am now, but on a real world in the present that is determined by who I am imagined to possibly be in the future. My leg is real, the tourniquet is real, but the act of placing the one on the other is not real— it is just practicing saving lives. This is how preemption works. It sutures together two planes of reality out of order, so that one can take real action in the physical world based on an event in the potential-future world. The material consequence is real, but the action itself can be held apart from the ethical arrangements implicated in the material result.

Scenarios: “Bad Guys are *Other* People”

In conditions of acute combat, which are relatively infrequent on a landscape, the “bad guy” is the person pointing a weapon at you. So while men like Jonah are relatively skilled at determining who is a combatant and who is not to eliminate threats in acute combat, they are evacuated from the ability to contextualize “good guys” and “bad guys” in broader, more mundane conditions of war that exceed

moments of combat²⁴. For example, Jonah accused me of what he called “undersimplification,” when I asked him how he decided who was a bad guy and who was a good guy. “Bad guys have guns!”

I said I agreed, and nodded at the gun he was holding.

“No, no. Bad guys are pointing guns at *you*.”

“You just pointed a gun at me, Jonah!”

“No, no. Bad guys are *other* people. You know what I mean, Kali! It’s simple. Why are you making it complicated? I’m not a bad guy. I’m the guy who will protect you.”

“From what? I mean, okay, so say we are just sitting here talking and maybe we have guns and maybe we don’t. But we aren’t in combat. How do you know then?”

“Don’t undersimplify it, Kali. Like jihadis. Like independent actors. You can’t really tell until people are in combat whose side they are on.”

In some ways I agree with Jonah. Acute combat is like a keyhole perspective, narrow but profound. Combat conditions say a lot about someone’s shortcuts in deciding who should live or die. But if Counterterrorists like Jonah, trained to act quickly, even preemptively in combat, are only trained in this way, how do they make sense of the long stretches of time between such moments? Jonah indicated to me throughout our week together that he often sought to generate conditions of acute combat in order to make determinations about who was his ally and who was not. His

²⁴ Incidentally, it is for this reason that special ops has teams of women, locals, and anthropologists who are meant to exercise “soft power” and do the “hearts and minds” work that requires a more nuanced negotiation of alliance (*The Counterinsurgency Field Manual* 2006: c-3).

suggestion to rape Russell or me was one of these moments, forcing a clear distinction between those with him, and those under him.

Other Counterterrorists were less extreme in the way they made their world in terms of imagined scenarios. Abel would describe a street scene or a home by telling me all the scenarios he imagined could happen at any moment. When I asked him to simply describe a place, his sentences always incorporated subjective indicators like “would” or “might” or “could.” He lived in a state of acute combat, much like Iraqi interlocutors who were so hammered by repeated military violations that they perpetually imagined pending disasters in order to be prepared for them when they, inevitably, came true. The difference between Abel and someone like me or an interlocutor from Iraq was that his scenarios always included options ours did not: he could eliminate threats and cut off entire arms of scenario branches by eliminating actors or bodies from the scene with lethal force. For Abel, even if a moment of acute combat were not taking place, he could conjure it in his mind. In acting upon that possible imaginary, he acts like a sleepwalker who both dreams he is driving and really is driving at the same time, but on completely different planes of existence, such that were he to run over someone, the moral transgression can be offset by the difference in his awareness of his actions. Abel can make the claim that what he does in reality and what he imagines he is doing are the same, but under two different ethical conditions.

Scenarios are infrastructures that help tune people to uncertain conditions. They require the elaboration of “multiple future worlds attendant on alternative

actions in the present.” (Cooper 2010, 170). Present action changes the future, and scenarios require that present actions change the future in a way that limits or contends with infinite potential (Briggs 2011; Lakoff 2008; Samimian-Darash 2013). Like prophecy, scenario logic is self-fulfilling. Joe Masco writes about preemption as a global paradigm that is an ongoing mentality of the Cold War, which is a struggle over the “global future”(2014). These men, when acting as Counterterrorists, are instruments trained and made by this global imaginary in order to combat imagined terrorists— and therefore produce those terrorists in reality in order to combat them more. They materialize the imaginary world by their actions. Whether in a training facility or on the streets of Mosul, they actively strategize surviving in —or making— a world that is always a battlefield. They see enemies everywhere, and they work to preempt the hidden potential in all people to become enemies in the future. My own role in relation to this small group of Counterterrorists speaks to this pursuit to eliminate potential, as I shift from being protected to being the enemy.

But unlike prophecy, scenarios control the route toward an end, without really predicting the end. So while self-fulfilling in some ways, they are not self fulfilling in the way of prophecy: it is often the character’s attempt to escape fate that derives that fate in the end, through unimagined routes. Oedipus runs away from his fate, and in so doing fulfills it. In scenarios, the end remains underdetermined, and the *means* to that end is controlled. So, in order to respond to model scenarios of climate change, for example, actions are taken in the present to avoid a particular future, without much determination about the realized result of those present interventions. As the

potential in populations to become insurgent is managed and hemmed in by Counterterrorism, so too are real future trajectories of daily life. The changes made in the future by actions taken now have rippling consequences that exceed the predictions of scenarios or escape scenario attention altogether. Especially for those who only see a battlefield when viewing a city, it is problematic to account for the many ways in which places, people and things, are integrated in webs of relations not directly related to combat scenarios. To preempt insurgency is also to preempt so many other kinds of becoming, so many other possibilities for daily life in places like Anbar. In this way, ordinary people are made abstract as they are physically, temporally and socially flattened, disfigured, and altered to accommodate the fears and paranoias of Counterterrorists and the regimes they work for.



Figure 6: "Small Arms" Combat EMT Training, photo by Kali Rubaii

Part II: Less than Lethal, More than Killing

Of pain you could wish only one thing: that it should stop. Nothing in the world was so bad as physical pain. In the face of pain there are no heroes.

—George Orwell, 1984

What counts as a life worth living? It becomes a clearer and clearer question the closer to the line one arrives. What is it like to love one, or to be one, at the threshold between bearable and unbearable, between unrelenting pain and the equally unrelenting urge to take one more breath? In the clarity of enduring, acute suffering, the right and ability to die becomes a most important thing. How many of us, at some time in our lives, set search engine settings to “incognito” and explore the helium method, the morphine method, the networks of drugs and devices, how to get them, how to do it within legal parameters, how to help someone we love end their life when they need to? Death and violence come up against each other, like a riptide. The capacity to die is like and unlike the capacity to kill. A less than lethal model of security limits access to both. In conditions of military control, the right and ability to die are suspended. The goal of torture is to increase unbearable suffering and decrease the ways out of that suffering. It is a physical and psychological funnel, channeling a being into total dependency on the one way out: the whim of the torturer.

The Right to Die

During our training, the Counterterrorists and I practiced giving each other IVs. I had planned to give IV sticks and receive them, but everything changed when the group learned my last name. I decided I was going to play squeamish and refuse

to be pricked with the needle by one of the Counterterrorists. I could call it “not feeling safe” but part of my ethnographic commitments in studying harm was being open to being harmed. Not feeling safe is precisely how I know I am doing the kind of ethnography I want to do. Something else was stopping me from taking this moment on as one of embodied, material engagement as an ethnographer. Receiving any kind of life-saving treatment, even just for practice, disturbed me far more than exercises in killing. It was part of a paradigm in which keeping people alive and causing them harm run together at odd angles, like blood flowing upward, or the fine line between electric shock to revive and electric shock to torture.

Abel is pacing from side to side, anxious and visibly upset by the pictures on the screen in our combat EMT class. A doctor is slashing a drugged pig’s arteries for military private contractors to repair quickly—training to be combat medics. The slashing makes Abel squirm, but what bothers me are the drugs that made the pig docile, that kept it alive, denied its heart the ability to stop. Seeing the less-than-lethal paradigm of Counterterrorism operationalized on the pigs, I think, “Finally the training will end and the pig will bleed to death, *inshallah*.” The vivisection of the pig is creepy and upsetting, but it sparks an honest conversation among the Counterterrorists about the limits of physical entanglement at the frayed ends of killing and “letting live.” Many of the trainees have attended these exercises in Greece, where there is a doctor willing to do the work. The goal is to keep the pig alive for as long as possible, in spite of continued major injuries to its body. Video

footage of the drills is nauseating. Most of the Counterterrorists talk constantly about ways they can justify what they participated in as they relive it now.

“They can’t feel anything, so it’s really like they are not alive,” commented Russell.

“Well, we don’t know that,” Abel responded, getting up and pacing from his chair a second time.

The doctor on the screen smiles as he makes one last gash to the inner thigh of a pig that has been kept alive for fourteen hours in spite of the doctor shooting it point blank in the chest with a handgun, having its carotid artery cut with a razor, and after having its hip bones broken and mis-aligned. The video shows Trainer Casey a year younger, moving quickly to repair the leg. He is embarrassed watching himself on video and mutters critical comments about his method. Finally, after he stabilizes the pig, the doctor declares him as the winner. The camera zooms out and pans along the line of opened, bleeding carcasses of seven pigs. The one last pig is still breathing on the respirator. The video never shows the doctor turn off the respirator, and I wonder how long the pig was left alive. Out of the blue, Casey says something he thinks might justify the discomfort we are all feeling in the silence after the footage: “You know, its like the Germans. You know, they made really great scientific discoveries with the Jews. In a situation where they are going to die anyway, some good can come out of the experimenting and things. This with the pigs is just like with the Jews.” I am so shocked and horrified by his comment on Nazi vivisection that I can barely finish writing down his words verbatim before Abel chimes in with an equally appalling comment:

“Yeah, it’s true, they’re going to die anyway. If you really want good hands-on training, go to the field hospitals in Iraq. Those people are all going to die anyway. We have to learn from them. If we can keep them alive for just one more day, it is a chance to learn, which is something good in a bad situation.”

While Casey invokes an anti-Semitism that equates Jews with pigs, Abel invokes the logic of torture — keep them alive to learn from them— even though “learning” in this case is about medical practice rather than military intelligence. Each claims to be advancing the good of humanity in doing so, in part by avoiding the claim to torture. Both men express interest in whether or not the pig can feel pain, and both men are preoccupied with the boundary of death. In doing so, they tacitly acknowledge the role of death in a less than lethal world as a final moment to be delayed, avoided, and anticipated all at once.

The Leader ended the conversation swiftly with a sobering statement that undermined any justification about redeeming knowledge production in times of mass violence. His statement made all the people in the room, including me, lower our eyes like we were taking a moment of silence to pray: “It is because of enhanced interrogation that we know so much about the fine line between living and dying.”

While most scholarship on the right to die— and on torture— feature individual beings, the sum of Counterterrorism practices exercised on people living in Anbar, Iraq, can also be defined as torture at the population level: thousands of Iraqi children have been physically maimed and dismembered (Child Victims of War 2018). Almost one in three Iraqi children have lost one or both parents, in addition to relatives and friends. Most have witnessed scenes of violence at a young age (API

2006). From the first to the second half of 2015, the number of grave violations to children quintupled (UNICEF 2016).

Suicide rates are very high. When Anbari farmers in rural Anbar talk about “things worse than death,” and point to preemptive architecture like T-walls, to wilting date palms, to sectarian segregation on their ID cards, and to the concentration and urbanization of their villages, they also pose the question I asked while watching the pig on its ventilator: what counts as a life worth living? This question is not for individual humans. It incorporates many different species, cultural traditions, and relations to other human beings.

The 1st Marine Division was sent to Anbar Province in the early 2000s, and Mattis insisted on familiarizing them with Iraqi culture and history. “This was based on a study of history and of counter-insurgency doctrine, and a recognition that this was going to be an ethically and morally bruising environment,” he later explained (Filkins 2017). As the people in the following chapters will articulate in their own right, the less than lethal model of control is control nonetheless entirely destructive, and no less devastating. Death as an event is not necessarily the worst thing that can happen to people, nor is death disempowering. In fact, the less than lethal model is not about saving lives or ending suffering. It is not even about suspending access to lethal force for armed uprising. It is about depriving death of its “capital D” power by containing the social power of lives to entangle across one another through boundaries of individual lifetimes and bodies.

Paradigms of killing and non-killing are related and mutually perpetuating through contradiction. The collapse between what is real and what is possible is part of the temporal restructuring that war does, and especially for Counterterrorists. Counterterrorists police the boundary between state lethal force and citizen lethal force. In order to keep lethal force where it belongs, they detach from the presumed locations between killing and violence: for Counterterrorists, the shot or the dead body are not necessarily the location of violence. Instead, violence of the death rests in the Pentagon, or in the American consumer's living room. Similarly, dying and being violated are not necessarily linked either, such that killing can be merciful and withholding death can be an act of cruelty.

These dislocations or re-pairings also reconfigure assignments of ethical responsibility for less-than-lethal harm in two ways: these interlocutors are clear on where "dirty work" lies in the scheme of responsibility. But also, their work and perspective demonstrates what Iraqis tell me all the time. If Iraqis say, there are experiences worse than death, then these Counterterrorists say something related: there are practices worse than killing. Practices that are worse than killing are ones these Counterterrorists find disturbing, in part because they capture a more central component of war than that of killing. Non-killing does not cease and does not preempt: it intentionally perpetuates. The temporality of responsibility expands like oil on water, touching and sticking to everything and making it impossible to cut a clean line between the wolf and the sheep. The longer the pigs live, the harder it becomes to make the claim that anyone is a threat to order except sheepdogs

themselves. Even a wolf becomes a sheep under vivisection or torture. A sheepdog cannot fully justify how this way of “saving lives” preempts anything. Less-than-lethal counterterrorism is, Abel puts it, “a whole lot *more* than killing.” It harms differently, excessively, and across a longer period of time.

Preemptive Peace

Neve Gordon, in *Human Right to Dominate*, argues that who is considered killable by liberal armies, especially in ex-colonies, is a matter of classification by proximity and kind, based increasingly on algorithms that inform remote killing. By broadening classifications of killability (thereby shrinking the class of people protected as civilians), the Global War on Terror leverages international law meant to protect lives to facilitate killing²⁵. If scholars of international law and Counterterrorism, including Lisa Hajjar and David Kennedy, have critiqued Counterterrorism on the premise that it shrinks the number of people who can exercise a “right to life,” I join these scholars in considering how Counterterrorism has similarly shrunk the category of people who have the right to lethal force— either to die or to kill— through armed uprising. Cashing in on the right to life is only attainable under the condition that one accept the legitimacy of lethal regimes like state militaries, and that one also surrenders their own capacity for armed uprising. Docility becomes a precondition for livability under regimes of authoritarian peace, one of which is the Global War on Terror. The figure of the suicide bomber, not discussed in my work, is of particular preoccupation to proponents of the Global War

²⁵ See Gordon and Perugini’s Chapter, *Human Right to Kill* (2015).

on Terror, in part because both the right to die and the right to kill are exercised in a single act (Abufarha 2009; Asad 2007; Mbembe 2003). Policing the capacity to kill and die²⁶ is at the heart of Counterterrorism, as much as is policing the right to live. Terror and death work in tandem to generate and reify power” (Mbembe 2003).

How is the policing of lethal force materialized? I approach Counterterrorism not as a logic, a set of doctrines, or a method, but as a set of sensory claims about what is and what is coming. Gordon’s description of how legal frameworks facilitate drone killing in terms of rights to life focuses on proximities and remote violence: attention to the materiality of Counterterrorism in the case of remote killing attends to joysticks, tracking SIM cards, listening to sound bites, and seeing Power Point webs of relations among people and institutions. These are the material ways in which a human being is sensed to be either a human shield, an enemy combatant, collateral damage, or any other category of killable, whose death might be justified either by the law of distinction between civilian and combatant, or by the law of proportionality in which the military goal is worth a certain proportion of civilian deaths (Gordon 2015).

There is also a material culture of counterinsurgency that continues in the flesh and on the ground. It deals less with formulas of killability, and more with formulas for predicting and imagining and other’s potential to enact lethal force upon

²⁶ The less-than-lethal paradigm of Counterterrorism is not straightforward in its claims to reduce the quantity of people who die, but also to prevent deaths of counting at all. In other words, when I refer to limits on the right to die, I do not only refer to examples of people being deprived of access to death, but also to examples of leaving deaths uncounted or politically flattened.

oneself or upon others. Training leaks into the terrain of Iraq, where bodies are read and rendered killable *because of possessing the capacity or will to exercise lethal force*, rather than because of possessing an inherent innocence or liveliness. While the law may speak in terms of the sanctity of life, its implementation centers on the sanctity of lethal force (Kennedy 2004). The Global War on Terror is a global war *over* terror, or rather, a struggle over who is allowed to bear lethal force and do coercive harm. Thus, Counterterrorism takes as its enemy the potential of ordinary civilians to get in the way of state and corporate projects to take up this sanctified power of/over Death (Mbembe 2003).

Mbembe argues that, “entire populations are the target of the sovereign” (2003, 30). I thus define preemptive Counterterrorism as a war against the potential in all people to become insurgent. This definition is a distillation and ethnographic grounding of Joseph Masco’s: “a recursive system of anticipatory preemption, which focuses experts in engaging potential existential dangers” (2014, 194). In other words, counter(terror) does not sort between groups of people, but between temporal registers of an internal dialectic in a “global” mind’s eye. The mind’s eye can rest when it has anticipated and nullified all unanticipated outcomes in all possible ways. Virilio, similarly, argues that military warfare has generated a state of war that “is no longer in its execution” but rather in constant “preparation” or a state of perpetual war. He calls this “Pure War.”

The Peace Paradigm

Immediately after returning from fieldwork in 2015, I stopped at a gas station in Half Moon Bay, California in 2015. A bumper sticker on the truck in front of me read, “If you can’t stand behind your troops, feel free to stand in front of them!” This is a signal of authoritarian peace.

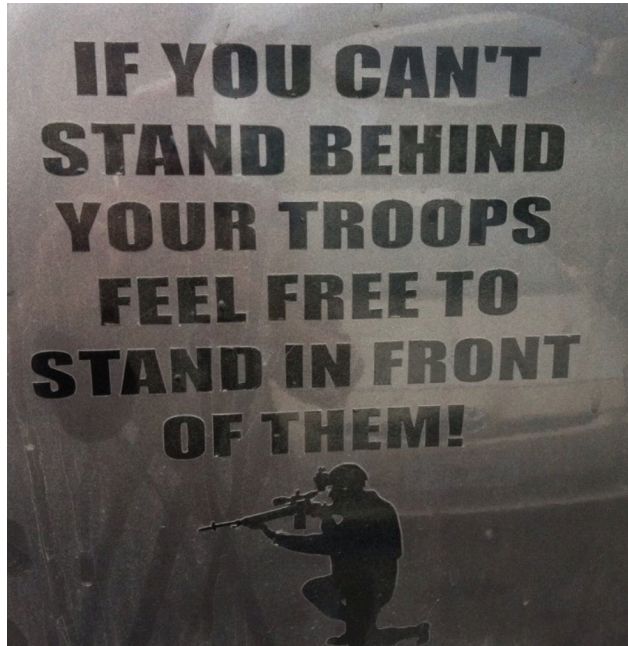


Figure 7: Sign in Half Moon Bay, CA, photo by Kali Rubaii

Authoritarian peace, or what Laura Nader, who writes about legal regimes of oppression calls “coercive harmony,” is when “stronger parties” invoke an ideology of harmony, compromise, and solidarity that hampers “weaker parties” from seeking political recourse (1996).

Both the sign in Half Moon Bay and Mattis’ quote (pleading with tears in his eyes for Iraqi cooperation, lest he kill them all) articulate how easily their addressees can be slipped into categories of “killable” simply by showing signs of disagreement or opposition. They project what Counterterrorists seem to see in all civilians: that

even the meekest claims might in fact signal nasty surprises. Authoritarian peace, therefore, is the precondition that to have rights, to live, and to speak are all predicated not only on being on the “right side” of the gun, but also upon accepting the legitimacy of the gun, and surrendering one’s own capacity for lethal uprising. Docility becomes a precondition for livability under regimes of authoritarian peace, one of which is the Global War on Terror.

Authoritarian peace can call itself less-than-lethal because it can frame every act of resistance, or even potential resistance, as an existential threat to all. Terrorists are threatening democracy, therefore they are not human, therefore their lives and bodies are not protected by that democracy: therefore they were not killed when they died but rather threw themselves up against lethal force suicidally. In Iraq, the logic of liberal democracy to self-justify its violence against civilian populations is overt. The United States was bringing democracy to Iraqi people, and if they failed to accept this unwanted gift, they were choosing to stand “in front of” instead of “behind” the troops. This peace paradigm centers on the notion of innocence: if one does not accept the rule of force, one must therefore be a threat to peace. It is not ironic, but rather exemplar, that Muntadhar al Zaidi, who threw a shoe at George Bush in 2008 served prison time for his actions. However, the perception of resistance as an existential threat to peace usually seeps daily, materially, and unnoticed into the attitudes, practices, and fantasies of ordinary people, such that they might point to their own choices about when and how to resist and find that they have adopted Counterterrorism as a kind of cultural norm. Tom Vigar, in a satirical vein, writes:

“The question for any powerful country should thus no longer be how we can actively [and geographically] neutralise a potential threat, since it can come from anywhere and is often aspatial. The question is how we can engineer a situation whereby it would be unacceptable for enemies to attack us and would result in immediate and prodigious counter attack. In other words: How can we maintain the Total War infrastructure during times of Peace?” (2009)²⁷.

Vigar is describing preemptive peace satirically, and imagining daily life may become geared toward the mitigation of potential war, or a total war preparedness that is preemptive and routine. When war becomes stabilized, it may be called a state of peace for those who benefit from structural stability. Thus, the term peace might always be read as “order” and interrogated with the question, “For whom?” Counterterrorists are able to rightly claim they do the dirty work of maintaining global order. If scholars address the “war machine” with attention to the automation of killing²⁸, then what I call the Peace Machine might be conceptualized as automated living, a mode of total war that subdues any potential violation to oppressive infrastructure or elite property before it can happen (Virilio and Lotringer 2008). It is the state of Total Peace by perpetual war and in spite of killing millions, it can maintain itself as less-than-lethal because it claims to save millions more through preemption.

Preemption

²⁸ *Nomadology: the war machine* by Deleuze and Guattari (1986); *Pure War* by Virilio and Lotringer (2008); *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* by Foley (2003); *Weaponizing Anthropology* by Price (2011).

An important component of this authoritarian peace is the modality of preemption, which classifies some beings as potential threats in advance of actually becoming threats. While remote killing relies heavily on algorithmic calculations of risk and reward to operationalize preemptive executions, Counterterrorists are tasked with exercising both lethal and less-than-lethal force on the ground. Their preemptive choices are facilitated and sometimes predicated on the presence of objects and material signs that indicate something about which class of killable a person might be in the storytelling of Counterterrorists to themselves and to others. For example Abel, read my gender and political attitudes as girlish and “naïve,” and then later assessed my face, name, and behavior as signs of a personhood that “is going to die anyway”. Furthermore, in addition to justifying hierarchies of personhood, the occlusion of deaths supports the less-than-lethal paradigm as a dominant one evident in the culture of Counterterrorism.

Not killing is often more violent and more dreadful than doing so, but additionally the claim to non-killing is often simply untrue. It not only kills individuals by pre-classifying them as collateral or enemy, it also kills systems and relations. Less-than-lethal modalities are not an improvement from the bottom-line that is death, but rather a degradation of the moral value assigned to kinds of lives. Farmers in Iraq speak often about “life” (*haya*). In remaining as true as possible to their framing, I define life not as an evenly distributed substance that either exists or does not exist in a single body at a moment in time, but instead as a politically agentive thrust that varies in degrees, changes over time, and depends upon networks

of others. (Some Counterterrorists may recognize this definition of *life* as their definition of *insurgent potential*.) In taking life as a form of political ecology that exists through and among bodies, rather than within bodies, I argue that the disruption of “networks of others” so central in Counterterrorism tactics —especially preemptive ones— are indeed both less-than-lethal and worse than death at the same time.

Preemptive non-killing is a mode of inventing and targeting potentiality in order to produce material realities that are hyper-lethal but manage to separate deaths from the rest of domination— that is, to “let live,” but only in certain ways.

Space and time are conscripted into the logic of preemptive peace by anticipating and responding to the potential futures beings in order to account for harm before it happens (Masco 2014; Samimian-Darash 2013). My critique of Counterterrorism’s less-than-lethal mode of preemption explores the forms and affects of domination that manipulate environments and relationships in order to prevent resistance before it can begin, and presumably before anyone needs to/can die.

To be trained as a practitioner of preemptive peace is to fight an enemy that has not yet made itself obvious as such. That is why Counterterrorism is primarily exercised upon civilian populations, even as it claims to protect them. It is also why less-than-lethal technology, when it appears in the news, is usually exercised as crowd control against protests, rather than in Counterterrorism campaigns. For example, stink bombs, advertised by their Israeli manufacturer as non-lethal, made the news in 2017 when the Indian government used them to shut down protests in

Kashmir. The stink bombs, which smell like sewage and decomposing bodies, are sprayed from a water cannon. The Indian government has tried many less-than-lethal weapons as crowd control to suppress popular uprising, including chili grenades, plastic shell tear smoke, stun grenades, color smoke, rubber bullets, dye-markers with skin irritants, and tear gas (Bose 2017). Law enforcement in the United States attempted to break up protests over the Dakota Access pipeline in 2016 using “less-lethal ammunition²⁹” (rebranded from less-than-lethal because of the deaths they have caused), including beanbag rounds and rubber-coated bullets. Crowd control and Counterterrorism are often conflated not only in the multi-purpose use of technology, but also in joint training programs between Counterterrorism and police. The FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) has been accused of investigating Standing Rock protestors, as well as Black Lives Matter activists (Levin 2017). The institutional conflation of Counterterrorism with civilian crowd control is not only a matter of technological overlap, but also one of overlapping legal and institutional domains, in the name of less-than-lethal control. For example, the U.S. Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, launched in the wake of September 11th, is a “joint collaborative effort by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners” (NSI

²⁹ According to the U.S. Department of Defense Non-Lethal Weapons Program FAQ, “reversibility is a ‘key attribute’ associated with all non-lethal weapons and refers to the ability to return the intended target to its original pre-engagement level of functionality. While non-lethal weapons are use-of-force weapons that may cause injury when used appropriately, the effects are intended to be reversible” (2018).

2010). Indeed, all of the Counterterrorism training centers I visited trained both police and military forces in Counterterrorism strategies.

The conflation of civilians with terrorists is not a slippage. Simply put, Counterterrorism is in practice and by any material measure, war against the civilian population. As Laurence Ralph argues, policing and Counterterrorism exported by the United States worldwide does not emerge from a British model of protecting cities, but rather an earlier model of militias searching for escaped slaves. Rather than seeing policing and counterinsurgency as things that should be held apart, their genealogy allows us to see them as working to perpetuate a social order that is globally anti-black and locally pro-capitalist (forthcoming)³⁰. Less than lethal preemption is so good at exercising war against civilians that it often appears to promote a placid authoritarian peace.

However, it is only within a specific cultural norm —that death is the worst possible outcome—, and a specific world order —of colonialism— that political beings may be made docile through the privilege of “life.” A less than lethal mode of Counterterrorism, or rather authoritarian peace, is built by more efficient and more invasive forms of domination that in fact deprive people of the ability or right to kill or die. Rather than pacify bodies through threat of death, the less than lethal mode seeks to invade hearts and minds.

³⁰ Ralph is principle investigator of the *Center in Transnational Policing*.

The Sheepdogs

Most humans truly are like sheep
Wanting nothing more than peace to keep

To graze, grow fat and raise their young,
Sweet taste of clover on the tongue.

Their lives serene upon Life's farm,
They sense no threat nor fear no harm.

On verdant meadows, they forage free
With naught to fear, with naught to flee.

They pay their sheepdogs little heed
For there is no threat; there is no need.

To the flock, sheepdog's are mysteries,
Roaming watchful round the peripheries.

These fang-toothed creatures bark, they roar
With the fetid reek of the carnivore,

Too like the wolf of legends told,
To be amongst our docile fold.

Who needs sheepdogs? What good are they?"
They have no use, not in this day.

Lock them away, out of our sight
We have no need of their fierce might.

But sudden in their midst a beast
Has come to kill, has come to feast

The wolves attack; they give no warning
Upon that calm September morning

They slash and kill with frenzied glee
Their passive helpless enemy

Who had no clue the wolves were there
Far roaming from their Eastern lair.

Then from the carnage, from the rout,
Comes the cry, "Turn the sheepdogs out!"

Thus is our nature but too our plight
To keep our dogs on leashes tight

And live a life of illusive bliss
Hearing not the beast, his growl, his hiss.

Until he has us by the throat,
We pay no heed; we take no note.

Not until he strikes us at our core
Will we unleash the Dogs of War

Only having felt the wolf pack's wrath
Do we loose the sheepdogs on its path.

And the wolves will learn what we've shown before;
We love our sheep, we Dogs of War.

By Russ Vaughn
2d Bn, 327th Parachute Infantry Regiment
101st Airborne Division
Vietnam 65-66

CHAPTER 2

Living Divide-and-Conquer in Anbar, Iraq

Figure: Sectarianism

Mode: Divide and Conquer

Divide and Conquer: also called divide-and-rule. A tactic of gaining and maintaining power by breaking up concentrations of power into smaller, weaker pieces, often employed in a colonial context by exploiting social cleavages in a given community.

Tripartheid: a three-way system of unequal legal rights distributed among three different groups of citizens.

Sectarianism: distinction by religious sect, social cleavage or shortcut for classification.

Territory: place of occurrence, place demarcated by governed borders.

Anbari: a person from Anbar province, most often a Sunni Arab.

Introduction

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

–Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

One rainy evening in 2014, I boarded a bus from Erbil, Kurdistan to Shaqlawa, a town where thousands of Anbari people sought refuge from bombing campaigns carried out by the Iraqi government. They were also escaping the influx of ISIS fighters on their streets. A smiling old man looked around the bus and asked where each person was from. We all started laughing as he joked³¹: “Where else in the world would you find a bus with Kurds, Turks, Arabs, and Yazidi people? Quickly look—see if there is drone overhead!” His joke was funny because it reflected the layered sentiments that indeed it was delightful to see many different kinds of people together; that we all feared the randomness of killing made possible by drone technology; and that the two feelings collided on this bus because diversity in Iraq is felt to be undesirable to military forces whose immanence we felt constantly.

As the bus moved, a Kurdish passenger started speaking with concern to the man beside him.

Man One: “Where are you coming from?”

Man Two: “From Fallujah.”

³¹ He spoke Arabic, the common language on the bus.

Man One: “Are you with ISIS?”

Man Two: “No.”

Man One: “You make me nervous, coming from Fallujah directly. All the people left in Fallujah are ISIS, or sympathizers.”

The tone of the bus shifted from cordial celebration to the realization that someone was from Fallujah³². Everyone grew quiet. Something about his being from Fallujah made us wonder, is this man fleeing ISIS, or is he an ISIS militant? Somehow it felt possible to geo-locate a propensity for terrorism. Fallujah, and Anbar province more broadly, had come to represent danger over a short period of time, such that in spite of the likelihood that this man was fleeing ISIS, he was considered already somehow a full subject of the group. How do places become containers for political meaning? More importantly, how do people from, of and in those places come to be attached to the way others narrate political phenomena? And finally, how does geolocating identities contribute to sewing distrust among diverse populations in order to pacify insurgent resistance?

Later, Man Two, a key interlocutor in my research, described the conversation on the bus as one of many in which he was discriminated against for being Sunni. While no one on the bus mentioned it, his Sunniness was implied in the slippage between place, terrorism, and sectarianism. In exploring how Anbar province and people from it became politically tagged with walls, ID cards, economic policies, and the use of proxy militias, I show how sectarianism becomes a social fact through the

³² Iraqi Kurdistan, allowed refugees in, but also feared ISIS infiltration.

repetition and performance of a merger between sect and place in the Global War on Terror. This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork with farming families from Anbar, near villages surrounding Fallujah, and among internally displaced families in Iraqi Kurdistan. Some of the research is from travel to and from their villages across regional borders at a time when roads were governed by competing militias³³.

Ultimately this piece highlights the active generation of meaning where it did not exist before, assigning new categories of personhood to new places. It thus intervenes in assumptions about what sectarianism means, and where it comes from by demonstrating its new mobilization to territorialize Iraqi social networks.

Despite political rhetoric espoused in support of the Global War on Terror, sectarianism is not an inherent social fact in Iraq. To be Sunni or Shi'a meant something different before 2003 than it does today. All subjects of Saddam Hussein's Baathist party suffered violence, including poor Shi'a tribes whose marshes were drained (Ahram 2015; Nakash 2003), Kurdish³⁴ separatists who were persecuted and gassed by the regime (Mearsheiner 2003; Van Bruinessen 1992), and even the Sunni majority that received political favor. But Saddam's Ba'ath party drafted its rhetoric in ethno-nationalist terms, pitting Arabs against '*Ajam* (Persians) and Kurds. Arabism, not Sunnism, was the defining feature of this rhetoric. Sectarianism, then, was not an all-encompassing lived reality, but rather a simmering possibility for the U.S. and neighboring regimes to exploit. Distinctive post 2003 discourse reflects the

³³ Shi'a militias, ISIS, Kurdish militias, the Kurdish military, and Iraqi police.

³⁴ Kurds are mostly Sunni.

emergence of sectarianism as an organizing category by which an inter-imperial³⁵ “sorting out” of Iraq is defined (Doyle 2014).

Deconstructing assumptions about ancient and ideological hatred is important (Appadurai 2002; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). Nevertheless, how do manufactured identities become so powerful in mobilizing populations for violence (Gusterson 2007)? I argue that sectarianism can become “internal to being” (Khan 2006)—even as it is manufactured from outside—through the forced repetition of imposed categories. The consequences are uneven, sometimes lethal. Indeed, religious friction and the tensions of difference are rarely called sectarianism until they manifest as violence. This is certainly the case in Iraq.

As exemplified by the story on the bus, people can be tagged to places, and places can be tagged to a sect. While the violence of sectarianism may make geopolitical struggle visible, sectarianism as it is “internal to being” should be understood as a social connection rather than a kind of social division (Khan 2006). For example, the passage of pilgrims across the Iran-Iraq border is an uneasy, even malevolent connection, also imbued with trust (Nakash 1995). This trust is also central to the many Shi’a and Sunni marriages in Iraq before the U.S. invasion. If sectarianism is an internalization of difference, then it cannot be oversimplified as inherently problematic. Yet, scholars have elaborated on how *spatial* organization of social difference can be predictive of violence (Graham 2004; Hayden 1996; Hayden 2000). Hayden argues that ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia was so brutal precisely

³⁵ An entity need not be an empire to be imperial.

because it took greater violence to disaggregate multiethnic communities than it would have were they already segregated. In other words, difference is identifiable during eruptions of violence, not because it is inherently divisive, but because it is intimately related to place making and social integration (Feldman 1991, Ahmed 2004).

What makes some kinds of violence “sectarian”? For example, during civil wars in the Balkans and the breakup of Yugoslavia, religious affiliation marked groups even though many did not identify as “practicing” (Kaufmann 2012). Clearly, so-called sectarian conflicts are related to factors other than sectarianism, including socioeconomic class. Similarly, Sunni-Shi’a violence in Pakistan, Sri Lanka or the Middle East is not always congruent with sect as an underlying instigator. Sect is not inherent to the landscape or social terrain of human relations in the Middle East, but rather negotiated uniquely in specific places and specific historical moments (Chatty 2010).

Sectarianism offers a lens through which to think about categories of violence (Feldman 1991). For example, conflict between Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland was not only a matter of Protestantism and Catholicism, and yet sectarian dynamics could be seen at the register of church involvement in the resistance, in the ethical framing used by Irish insurgents at different historical turns, and in the ways British counterinsurgency operatives interacted with clergy (Feldman 1991). During civil wars in the Balkans and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, religious affiliation marked group identities, despite the fact that many would not

have described themselves as “practicing”: Croats and Slovenes as Catholic, Macedonians as Eastern Orthodox, and Bosniaks and Albanians as Muslim (Kaufmann 2012). Sectarian violence among Buddhist sects in Japan is well documented (Ketelaar 1990), as well dissent between reform Jews and orthodox Jews in Israel, Europe, and the United States (Fishman 1995). In Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Middle East, Sunni- Shi’a sectarianism takes unique but also patterned forms (Chatty 2010; Khan 2006; Makdisi 2000; Nakash 1995; Salamandra 2013).

Religious friction is rarely called sectarianism until it manifests itself as violence — which is why we must further dissect the role of sectarianism as a rhetorical frame for violence. For example, in the past twenty years, over 4,000 people have died in sectarian fighting in Pakistan, and much of this violence is blamed on Al-Qaeda thought to be working with local sectarian groups to eradicate Shi’a people. Naveeda Khan (2006) argues that while the violence of sectarianism may be useful at the geopolitical level, sectarianism as part of daily living is a more subtle force that might be understood as a social connection rather than a kind of social division. The same can be said in the historical back-and-forth between Iran and Iraq as the two countries negotiated passage of pilgrims to cross-border shrines: connections that are uneasy, even malevolent, but also imbued with trust (Nakash 1995). In Iraq, and throughout the Middle East, sectarianism offers a frame for perceiving large political blocs as they form and congeal, mobilizing otherwise splintered reasons, voices, and resources. This is an emergent, changing political formulation of difference (Makdisi 2000).

Much research on Iraq since the 2003 U.S. invasion has focused on the implications of the Baathist regime's collapse (Baker et al 2010; Barakat 2005; Bensahel et al. 2008; Cole 2014) and the subsequent rise of inequality and violence (Al-Ali 2005; Al-Jawaheri 2008; Cardoso 2007), particularly in the form of militia violence (Al-Mohammad 2011). Regionally, sectarian rivalries have become the dominant frame through which geopolitical struggle is articulated: after 2003, Iraq, situated between Iran (read Shi'a) and the Gulf States (read Sunni), faced an influx of finances for politicians, military enterprises, and media channels, all moving through sectarian institutions. A focus on sectarianism conjures a sense that it dominates the Middle East as a longstanding disagreement rooted in the hearts of Muslim people (Mamdani 2005; Mitchell 1988; Said 1994). I bolster Tim Jacoby's intervention that reading too much "Islam" into analysis of geopolitics is blinding to what Sunnism has come to actually mean on the ground (2015, 2017). Fassihi and Al-Mohammad describe national social entanglements loosening in Iraq, but argue that other entanglements tightened as tribes, sectarian and nonsectarian groups, and gangs mobilized in the vacuum of power left after Saddam's regime (Al-Mohammad 2011; Fassihi 2009; Tatar 2005). Indeed, much of what is called "sectarian strife" in Iraq speaks to a failed transition to Iraqi self-determination after the U.S. invasion (Barakat 2005; Cardoso 2007; Ismael and Ismael 2005). In line with these scholars, I argue that what is called sectarian strife in Iraq fits the pattern of violent spatial reorganization evident in other places and historical moments. Spatial stratification serves as a pivotal mobilizing instrument in implementing manufactured legal and

political categories in Iraq, similarly to the partition in India, the Turkish-Cypriot exchange, or apartheid in South Africa. A deeper understanding of how difference is exploited before it becomes visible can inform our responses to carceral, legal and political border enforcement.

Part I: Making Tripartheid

It will always happen that, by exercising a little dexterity, the one will be able to divide the many, and weaken the force which was strong while it was united.

—Machiavelli, *The Discourses: III*

Political Makings

Much like the Rwandan genocide, which was a product of Belgian colonial divide-and-rule policies and structural adjustment rather than historical hatred (Gourevitch 1999), sectarian violence in Iraq is the result of U.S. divide-and-rule policies. Described in brief here, these policies were implemented after the U.S. and coalition forces deposed Saddam. They facilitated a rapid but incomplete segmentation of Iraq's population into three geographic parts: a Sunni west, a Shi'a south, and a Kurdish northeast. Many Mandaean, Yazidi, Shabaks, and Palestinian minorities fled Iraq or were killed. Those who remain continue to face persecution. As early as 2005, sections of the capital, Baghdad, were carved with U.S. commissioned T-walls segregating neighborhoods as Shi'a or Sunni zones (Gregory 2008). This architectural endeavor, carried out by U.S. ground troops, was presumably to reduce mass killing: it did the opposite by accelerating the process of territorializing by sect³⁶.

Before the U.S. invasion, Sunnism was a brand of Iraqi pan-Arabism, but not a fundamental political criterion in the daily lives of all Iraqi citizens. In 2003, this flexibility shifted when ethno-sectarian identities were made a fundamental political criterion by U.S. diplomat and head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Paul Bremer. The CPA was structured along distinct sectarian lines, with representation from the following categories: Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd, Turkman, and Assyrian. The

³⁶ Some parts of Baghdad avoided being sectarianized.

constitution drafted in 2005 introduces the word “sect” for the first time, codifying sectarian categories of citizenship.

People in Anbar also felt they were still being ruled by foreign invaders because many members of the CPA were from once-exiled groups and perceived to have sectarian agendas (Dodge 2008). Daily interactions further materialized these categories. The U.S. introduced government issued ID cards that made explicit sectarian categories through place names, surnames, and sometimes documentation of “religion.” These cards were utilized during the sieges of Fallujah, when the U.S. army walled off the city and implemented a pass system to segregate insurgents from compliant residents (Khalili 2013). Today, those with Sunni names like Omar often rely on black-market ID cards so they can pass through checkpoints and get jobs.

Bremer decided in May 2003 to disband the Iraqi army, leaving hundreds of thousands of men unemployed (Sangheih 2007). Initially, both Sunni and Shi’a soldiers retreated to Fallujah to build a resistance against the U.S. invasion, although many did not for fear of a repeat of the 1991 “Highway of Death” massacre (Ismael and Fuller 2009). Rapidly expanding sectarian militias ultimately absorbed some of these soldiers.

Not only was the army fired, so too were thousands of public sector employees (Bassam 2009). The government that once provided pensions, jobs, medical care, schooling, and infrastructure, evaporated (Taylor 2012). U.S. De-Baathification policies meant the middle class lost state patronage, prompting their mass exodus from Iraq (Sangheih *ibid*). Inequality among Iraq’s communities became

apparent (Bassam *ibid*). Ongoing water shortages and electricity outages, as well as high unemployment plagued Anbar (MSF 2017; Adams 2017; UNDP 2014). Dissent steams up from empty faucets.

Having disbanded the Iraqi army, the U.S. and later the Iraqi government relied heavily on Shi'a and Kurdish militias for military support subduing Iraqi insurgency (Ahram 2011). This exacerbated the sense in Anbar that a previously non-sectarian struggle against Western imperialism was becoming a sectarian battle against Shi'ism (Haddad 2014; Ismael and Fuller *ibid*).

Finally, under the new Iraqi government, popular uprisings including nonviolent demonstrations, especially in 2011 and 2012, were suppressed by heavy military coercion including bombing (Sowell 2014; Sly 2013). The Iraqi government carried out these military exercises in the name of Counterterrorism, citing Sunni terrorism in order to garner global political and military support.

Each of these measures generated an increasing sense of persecution among the Sunni majority in Iraq, and particularly in Anbar, which was the heart of resistance and bore the brunt of counterinsurgency measures. Launching the Global War on Terror in Iraq, the U.S. and coalition forces had systematically dismantled Iraq's existing political and economic structures, generated sectarian categories by which to implement new forms of rule, opened new vacuums of power, and relied on sectarian-affiliated militias to quell dissent when the former measures were met with resistance. As a result of these divide-and-rule tactics, the initial unified anti-imperial resistance in Fallujah was remade to fit the language of Counterterrorism, such that

those from or affiliated with Anbar province were framed as sectarian Sunni terrorists. Over the course of a decade, Iraq could be imagined with increasing clarity as a country with three major blocks, with Kurds in Kurdistan, Shi'ites in the south, and Sunnis in the northwest.

Anbar Province: Bad but Better

Anbar is what Laura Doyle calls a “strategic inter-imperial zone, again and again vied over for their resources and their geopolitical location” (2014, 163). Because of this, it is an illuminating example of the processes by which places materialize political meaning. Anbar province is squeezed between multiple and changing military forces that present temporary choices between allegiance and battle. Decisions about whether, when, and with whom to take up arms shifts rapidly over time. For example during my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015, the Iraqi government was bombing Anbari communities and sending *Al-Hashed*³⁷ (an Iraqi state-sponsored umbrella organization composed of many Shi'a militias) in to act as regional police. At the same time, ISIS threatened many of the smaller towns in the outskirts of Fallujah. Local sheiks, knowing the Iraqi government could not fight off ISIS without their cooperation, held their cooperation for ransom by refusing to fight ISIS until their own government ceased militarized responses to their demands for political inclusion. Community members also felt that even if ISIS took over Iraq, life might not be as bad as it was under the current regime.

³⁷ “Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi, People's Mobilization Forces” (PMF), also known as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)

This tact quickly reversed by 2016, when it became obvious that conditions under ISIS were slightly worse than they were under the Iraqi government's counterterrorism campaigns. In spite of having their demands go unmet, Anbari tribes formed a coerced alliance with the Iraqi military, and even the Shi'a militias to fight ISIS. Because of the tentative flexibility of these alliances, their one request was that the Iraqi government guarantee that once the Shi'a militias had beaten ISIS (with Anbari tribes), they would not turn and begin killing their temporary Anbari allies. Sadly, there were reports of *al-Hashed* carrying out sectarian summary executions of Anbari men in Fallujah. In less than two years Anbari communities were ambivalent about the many imperial actors on the land, including ISIS, the Iraqi government, and its *al-Hashed* Shi'a militias. Their alliances were based on which group was treating them slightly better than the others.

This regional ambivalence illustrates two main points. First, when people in inter-imperial zones build tentative alliances with governments and military forces, their motives cannot be interpreted beyond short-term survival. This argument pushes against the widely presumed ideological motives associated with sectarian militarism. Rather, the project of remaining in place on a piece of land amidst political tectonics may be over-read as sectarianism. Second, *Al-Hashed's* prima facie killing of Sunni men in Fallujah was striking, but not extraordinary. Anbar province has come to represent the land of enemies in local and international discourse, such that any

individual from Anbar province can be read as a sectarian terrorist simply by being from the province³⁸.

Through forced repetition of this category, people from Anbar have themselves come to articulate their suffering through the container of Sunniness³⁹. As they confront increasingly restricted social and physical mobility, Anbari people use this broad analytic to describe the subtle ways they are pinned down by regional affiliations. For example, the 2017 “bomb and ban” policy implemented by the Trump administration limits mobility for people from geopolitical hotspots, fixing enemy groups to enemy places. However before this, a longstanding de facto bomb-and-ban policy was already in place for people from Anbar province. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015, no country was receiving their asylum applications. The question “Where are you from?” could end any possibility for resettlement outside of the Middle East.

I met most of my interlocutors in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan, after mass bombing by the Iraqi government made it impossible for them (or for me) to stay in Anbar. When I asked why they chose this expensive, crowded vacation town of all places to seek refuge, they explained that they had visited Shaqlawa on vacation and knew about it from these summer trips. Had they known that the Kurdish government would

³⁸ While I focus on interpretations *within* Iraq, Anbar is also perceived as a “place of enemies” in international discourse. For example, Fallujah is associated with the place where three Blackwater contractors were murdered. It is this association of Fallujah as a hotspot of global terrorism that the Iraqi government capitalized upon to garner military support from the U.S. government during the Obama administration.

³⁹ I do not address it here, but ISIS itself also works as a formation through which territorial sovereignties and sectarian categories are articulated both inside of Iraq and in “the West.”

prevent movement between districts of Kurdistan within the year, they might have chosen a location with better job opportunities, larger rental options, and cheaper prices. Because Iraq has been rendered a de-facto three-state entity, the story of its territorial and social fragmentation makes different kinds of sense through different regional lenses⁴⁰. My research presents a selective story, meant to contextualize the scene within which meaning and power are negotiated by people from Anbar. Anbari people experienced sectarianism as an abstract concept that gradually became a permanent social cleavage.

Omar: the Line on the Table

Most Anbari people foresee an Iraq defined by what I call tripartheid, a three-way apartheid system in which Iraqi people can expect different sets of rights guaranteed in different territories, based on ethno-sectarian categories imposed upon them. Iraq is cracked jaggedly, slowly into threes. Omar, a young man from Anbar, explained the great “sorting out” of Iraq to me as a board game, like chess. Iraqi people are like pieces interacting through a hierarchy of functions that continue to place them in webs and configurations of power and tension. They are being asked to disaggregate from existing games, structures and rules, in order to homogenize themselves as pieces with attention to the black and white squares under their feet, which once meant very little to very few. The board is the same, but the game is changing.

⁴⁰ For example, the Kurdish story of tripartheid supports movement toward independence. See Kurdistan’s September 25th 2017 referendum (Chmaytelli 2017).

Omar leaned on a glass table in a hotel in Kurdistan, where he and his family shared a single room. His arms showed two streaks from two bullets that grazed him one day as he, sensing a checkpoint outside of Fallujah to be “false” (erected by a militia and neither legitimized by not accountable to the government), stepped on the gas pedal and drove straight through at ninety-five-miles-per-hour, nearly crashing the car. The bullets hammered the vehicle; two streaked through the open window, grazing his arm and embedding themselves in his hip. I watched the streaks while he talked, knowing that they pointed their sharp arrow shapes downward, as if to offer a caption for Omar’s awkward gait, or the way he sat grimacing at the glass table. The little scars jerked along his muscles as he drew an imaginary checkerboard on the table, his fingers leaving light streaks later smeared by his elbows. He explained that “sectarianism is an outsiders’ agenda” that shapes the board in squares of Sunni and Shi’a spaces. This then shapes the reality of life in Iraq, but “the biases of sectarianism ...are not in the pieces,” not felt intimately or wholly by the people stuck playing the game. “Our friends are all mixed. We do not feel this hatred people speak of... But also, we cannot reach our friends, so we do not see them. We cannot drive to Baghdad for a weekend.” He made a wall with the palm of his hand and placed it on the table, dragging it in a deep, long cut between one side of the table and the other. His hand, shaped that way, symbolizes both concrete blockades that prevent physical movement, as well as the geo-social structures that hinder even the imagined possibility of that movement.

It is in Omar's hand, shaped like a wall cutting through the glass table, that one can see how fragmentation is both a material and imaginary phenomenon, one around which sectarianism becomes binding over time⁴¹: "We start to say things like, 'The Shi'a are hurting us,' when we see the news [of Shi'a militias in Fallujah], and we forget about our friends, because we never thought of them as Shi'a. They are Iraqi! This is like a game from outside."

Everything leaves traces, and everything is evidence of something else. In some ways, sectarianism is simply the aggregate of these signs—the scars, the bullets, the awkward gait, the grimace, Omar's body, Omar's name, Omar's sweat streaks, all of which make up the texture of Omar's daily life. It is the embodied repetition of the category as he seeks to move, work, and commune, that internalizes the game and makes it "real" to him, such that, like the man on the bus, he can feel himself being, or becoming, Sunni. How did this "game from the outside" become materialized and fixed over time as a simultaneously productive and reactive frame for fragmentation and multiplicity, writ large?

However "game-like" sectarianism feels to people, the practice of living sectarianism bears intimate consequences. While it cannot be said that sectarianism was nonexistent in Iraq before 2003, people in rural communities in Anbar claim that they never defined themselves along these lines. Now, in the confusion of "who is trying to kill us and why" the question of "us" becomes simplified by a reshuffling of identities into a broad and sweeping Sunniness —not one that is pan-Arab and

⁴¹ See Deeb (2015) on everyday Islam.

connects people to Sunni rebellion in Syria (ISIS being the offshoot and result), but instead a local Sunniness that is distinctly Anbari. This Sunniness is tied to Anbar province through layers of personal experiences.

Part III: Places with Terrorists

*We will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are.
...but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do for themselves, nor can we take the
place of Arab partners in securing their region.*

—Barack Obama, 2014 Statement on ISIS

Sectarianism or Counterterrorism?

The Global War on Terror offers new language for popular resistance. In response to an unruly Anbar province, the Maliki regime, which took power in 2006, overtly threatened sectarian war and increasingly referred to Sunni protestors as “terrorists” in public media. The slippage in political discourse between region, sect and terrorism is key. The Maliki regime, accused of practicing outright sectarian killing, has always publicly argued that terrorism, not popular resistance, was the reason for cracking down on Anbar province⁴². Meanwhile protestors claim they are killed for being Sunni.

⁴² This slippage was not purely rhetorical: among the armed resistance groups in Anbar was The Islamic State in Iraq (*ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil Iraq*). This organization, which the reader knows as ISIS, is responsible for supporting the famous prison breaks of five hundred inmates from Abu Ghraib in July 2013 (Rosiny 2014). Armed resistance, whether by the Sunni military council in Anbar or by ISIS,

Government discourse denying sectarian discrimination—while promoting the perception that sectarian religious ideologies motivate Sunni uprising—is attractive to the United States⁴³, as well as the Iraqi government and other regional entities with varied interests and stakes in the region. In the name of Counterterrorism to “fight Islamic extremism,” the Iraqi government has received supplies from the U.S. government to bomb Anbar province since 2012. I received calls for help that year from friends at Fallujah Hospital. The Iraqi government shelled the hospital in the name of eradicating terrorism, but with the express purpose of shutting down Sunni popular resistance. One email read: “Please... call your government and tell them to stop sending weapons and aircraft to Maliki. He is killing us because we are Sunni. We are a hospital with children here. Why are they killing us?”⁴⁴ The explanation, “He is killing us because we are Sunni” coupled with the question, “Why are they killing us?” speaks to the ambivalence with which those bearing the brunt of Counterterrorism experience sectarianism as “internal to being,” but also as an insufficient explanation for violent repression.

Then, during my fieldwork in 2014, President Obama authorized *Operation Inherent Resolve*, launching airstrikes to stop ISIS’s advance on Kurdistan (van Veen

is not motivated by religious ideology, but instead by a struggle for political and economic footholds at a time of reconsolidating power in a weak state.

⁴³ The U.S. sold F16s to the Maliki regime in response (Hodge, Entous, Lando 2011).

⁴⁴ I did call government officials.

and Grinstead 2014). At the time, people in Anbar were being rapidly displaced by both the Iraqi government (and its partner Shi'a militias) *and* ISIS. They could not easily articulate this experience along simple sectarian lines. Only in its aftermath did it become possible to articulate this peak moment in Iraq's political fragmentation as "sectarian." Anbari people found themselves trapped between two or more armed factions on a landscape that had been rendered the battleground for geopolitical posturing. They describe a complex upheaval of *all* components of their lives ever since 2003, and they turned to the language of Sunniness to frame the vastness of their losses.

Social fragmentation, with sectarianism as one factor made prominent and new by the U.S. invasion and subsequent collapse of the public sector, was also amplified through social media. In fact it is through Facebook and YouTube that I often first learn about violence and hardship. YouTube was open to the Iraqi public in 2005, Facebook and twitter were opened to the public in 2006, and these media reinforced sectarian discourses. This ability to remote-sense what was happening in various parts of Iraq helped to cement geographic specificity to kinds of violence *as sectarian*. On Facebook in 2014, a video of a child shot in the heart shows a hole in his chest, and the heart can be seen still beating through the hole. The video comes with the caption, "Shi'a Iran is funding this genocide."

In another example, I learned about the death of an entire family I knew personally when I saw a series of photographs on Facebook: three women and a boy, stacked into a bathroom with blood dripping from their limbs. I learned of their

deaths through a mediated forum with captions explaining their cause of death in simplified sectarian terms. In fact, their uncle, with whom I met soon after learning the news, was unable to find out who had actually killed them or why, given how oversimplified the explanation on social media was. It took months to find out about their deaths, and even then, the information was mediated by government officials from the Maliki regime. From his reaction to the stories he was eventually told, I sensed that their uncle trusted the social media caption more than the official government report. Social media outlets helped to spread and homogenize simplified explanations for mass death and mass suffering, and tether them to sectarian-affiliated locations like “Shi’a Iran.” In Anbar, people expressed an increasingly strong sense of Sunni identity and Sunni victimhood. President Maliki contributed to this by relying on the fear many Iraqi Shi’a have of resigning to Sunni power, and has gone as far as to make mention of revenge for Saddam Hussein’s preference for Sunni employees and leaders. Angry Sunnis lament their loss of power regionally due to what they see as the rise of Iranian Shiism and its influence in the region. These are the fractured lenses through which all other issues in the region are viewed.

Even the past is a battleground where people recount clashing interpretations of historical events. Syndemic forces, from the dismantlement of national institutions, to the codification of sectarian categories, to the political and economic disenfranchisement of the middle class, to regional sectarian influences and authoritarian and counterinsurgency strategies by the Iraqi government, all produced a weakened Iraqi state. The result of these convergent forces is that categories and

subcategories, plotted out on the landscape, produce the feeling among individuals of a shrinking map, a sense of foreclosure. Thus, orientations to place and time are transformed by the kinds of personhood produced in war, especially those leveraged by divide-and-conquer policies. Perhaps overlooked in this process is the way that war ruptures continuities in passing along collective memories of what is and is not possible, acceptable, or desirable.

Regionalization translates into even more local formulations of daily life in “sectarianized” Anbar. I noticed a slippage between sectarianism and “outside interference” when rural Anbari people speak of their daily struggles with new social categories in Iraq. Anbar province is an in-the-way place. It has become the chessboard for “outside” geopolitical interests⁴⁵. As Omar articulates with his chessboard, the claim of being targeted because one is Sunni is too simple. People like Omar are not limping from bullet wounds for being Sunni, exactly. Because Anbar is the bridge and buffer between Baghdad and the Syrian border, there is some degree of geographic determinism shaping the sectarian framing of violence against Anbari people. By being in Anbar province at all, people like Omar are the targets of counterinsurgency measures by the Iraqi state, Sectarianism takes the form of a hitchhiker amidst complexity, fragmentation, and uncertainty. As a hitchhiker, the word “Sunni” can explain why someone was shot and killed trying to flee Anbar without actually getting at the underlying reason. As a hitchhiker, the word “Shi’a”

⁴⁵ The Badr Organization, for example, is a militia proxy of Iran (Alaaldin and Attia 2017)

can explain why there are armed militias walking the streets of Fallujah. These sectarian explanations are dragged along the boots and tires, down the dirt and paved roads, of the regional struggle for control. This hitchhiker is a figure that allows one to classify otherwise incomprehensible complexity brought upon the Anbari landscape, pocked as it is with risks, losses, and harms that in fact exceed sectarian explanation.

Encounters with ISIS (*Daash*)

Amidst overall losses since 2003, and ongoing, mostly violent interface with a government in Baghdad that used Shi'a militias to police the region, Anbari people were also negotiating the new presence of ISIS. Theories and stories were to abound about the ISIS and agenda of this group, all of which quickly departed from the topic of ISIS itself, to the unfolding reshuffling of agendas, identities, and meanings region-wide. Discussions about ISIS centered and contained other discussions about sectarianism in Iraq, and helped to solidify or negotiate inter-imperial forces. Anbari people risked being conflated with ISIS because Counterinsurgency practices and social contention meant that Anbari people, Anbar province, and ISIS each embodied spaces for sorting out sectarianism, uncertainty, and militarism. For example, a Kurdish *Asaish* (secret police) member told me that he watched Anbari families closely, especially those without male heads of household. "The women lie. They say, 'My husband is dead,' or 'My father is working in Erbil.' We find out that this is not true. We discover that they might have men fighting with ISIS who have sent the women here to be safe." Periodically, hotels in Shaqlawa, filled with Anbari families,

would be raided by the secret police, and it was rumored that some families who lacked male heads of household were even deported across the border back into mainland Iraq. Thus the urgent detective work of finding out who/what ISIS “really is” fell upon the accused. This investigative inquiry relied on personal encounters, and hyper-interpretation of symbols and signs, to make sense of the mystery that was sectarianism, read as “ISIS” in a particular historical moment.

None of it made any sense. For example, people wondered if ISIS might in fact be part of the Iraqi government, somehow. From their windows, whole families watched what was described in detail by the Conductor, whom you will hear from in greater detail later in the chapter:

“I became suspicious. When ISIS was in our town, the Iraqi army did not flee as they say in English media. I saw them on the street. ISIS would drive in with the black flags and the guns and trucks and chanting. And they would line up. And then, within the same minutes, as if coordinated, the Iraqi army would come too. They came with many supplies. They did not flee in fear. They came and unloaded all the supplies. Boxes of guns and other weapons, I think. Then they quickly left, and ISIS collected the things, and then terrorized the city. They are a brutal group, ISIS. Even I, who am against the U.S. government, wish they would return to stop them. So the Anbari people, some sided with ISIS, and some with the Iraqi government. Each governorate made a choice. Over time, the Iraqi Government agreed to change some discriminatory laws, and the tribal leaders said, ‘Okay, we will fight ISIS,’ and now you see that soon they will reclaim Ramadi, our [Anbari] capital, and soon they will reclaim places from ISIS ... Anyway, they [New Iraqi Government] are still killing Sunni people. I’m sorry⁴⁶, but we fear the Iranian agenda. We now fear to live under Shi’a rule.”

⁴⁶ In spite of a detailed explanation about my heritage, and many jokes about my partial Arabness, my “Iranian skin” often meant that people would insert apologies into their rabid critiques of Iran, as if subconsciously still believing I may be of Iranian origin.

I heard many first-hand accounts of this peculiar scene, and no one seemed to have a clear theory about what it meant, except that somehow the Iraqi government wanted ISIS to grow in size and strength in order to justify a sectarian war against Sunni people, via Anbar province. English media presented these scenes as moments in which the Iraqi army defected and ran away in fear. People reported other peculiarities, as well, when describing their encounters with ISIS. Najlaa, a woman from Ramadi, described watching ISIS enter her neighborhood, “With the black flags and all young men with guns out. We were terrified. They were shooting and very fierce. It was death in a truck.” Najlaa describes the fighters as foreign and professional:

“They had everything brand new. Shiny boots, like the blonde boots the Americans wear. They had new and shiny vehicles, trucks. They had really nice clothes. They set up checkpoints and posted signs and issued decrees after they took over the police station... very organized, very professional, and all the same, like a real army.”

She went on to describe and emphasize their foreignness:

“When we passed through the checkpoint, they were very upset I was not wearing enough layers to cover. I had many layers, Kali! The man said to me something in a strange accent of Arabic. I said I couldn’t understand. He said, ‘Do you speak French?’ He said in French, ‘You need to wear more cover. Don’t come this way again unless you have more cover.’ Do you see? He is a foreigner. Someone is hiring them from outside.”

Najlaa was not alone in her descriptions of ISIS fighters as “foreign.” Some described being stopped by Chechnyan fighters. Others said the fighters looked Iranian and were speaking Farsi. Still others felt that they were funded by Saudi Arabia because of their incredible wealth. Some felt that they must be backed by MI6 or the CIA,

because a few of them had British accents and spoke English. And finally, some felt that ISIS was too well organized to be Iraqi, spreading so quickly and with such systematicity across the region.

Speculations abounding, people were serious about answering the question, in part because it was necessary to identifying themselves as *not* ISIS. Additionally, while many made the argument that the Anbari tribes could fight off ISIS easily (often expressed with the common description of such a battle being over “in three days!”), most people felt a deep and fresh fear of the group itself, citing examples of Yazidi women being rounded up and enslaved, summary executions of “apostates,” and widely circulating media coverage of beheadings. They perceived ISIS as an enemy invader from outside, not entirely different from the Iraqi government. This new invader was at first not necessarily much worse than any other, but ISIS quickly became a source of great turmoil and hardship, one that required explanation in the broader context of Iraq’s fragmentation. I never met a person from Anbar who was willingly interested in joining ISIS, or any armed militia for that matter. However, I met many young men, who were considering taking up arms to defend their territory from whichever entity was the greatest threat. To understand how an Anbari person could be —or could be interpreted as— an ISIS fighter, requires an understanding of how terrorism and militia resistance is grafted on to the map of Iraq, with Anbar province as a geopolitical problem space in the rhetoric of national stability.

The Terrorist Sandwich

In Anbar, personal and community-level security means choosing allies from among perceived invaders, whether ISIS, the Iraqi government, or militias acting on behalf of a foreign entity. Concerns about things like food determine behaviors perceived from outside as “terrorist recruitment,” or invasive capture. For example, by the time Tabib, an orthopedic surgeon, met ISIS, he had already been recruited by a geographic sweep, and was treated as an ISIS member.



Figure 8: Photo taken by nurse in Mosul hospital, texted to Kali Rubaii

Here is a posting⁴⁷ placed in his operating room, where he was informed that the hospital staff are subjects of the Islamic State and that, “ten days after the publication of this announcement, if they have not reported to their positions, the State will confiscate all their property.”⁴⁸ Wanting to flee, Tabib considered getting to Baghdad where he could apply for a visa to leave the country. But the government would not

⁴⁷ For the translation of the entire bulletin, see endnote.

receive him: he was, after all, officially ISIS if he wanted to keep his job, his life, and his home. Furthermore, if his wife and children fled to Kurdistan, they would be questioned and deported for having a male family member still in Iraq, affiliated with ISIS. Because ISIS, the Iraqi government, and the Kurdish government all categorized Tabib as a disloyal enemy, he was forced to remain in place and embody a sandwiched subjectivity as a subject/non-subject of both the Islamic State and the Iraqi state: “If I go to Baghdad to get a visa to leave, I will be killed by *Al-Hashed* on the way for being ISIS. Or ISIS will kill me for siding with the government. I am in the middle of a terrorist sandwich! They are both terrorist groups, really. They call me the terrorist. I’m the doctor!”

Tabib is trapped in a geopolitical scramble through which sectarianism is invoked. Village after village, house after house, is faced with the choice between staying put by allying with one of many sectarian-affiliated militias, or risking their lives to flee and live in total dispossession.

The economic components of sectarianism help make sense of why sectarian violence appears so rapidly and so solidly on the Anbari landscape. Trapped in the “terrorist sandwich,” many Anbari men are unable to move freely for fear of being perceived as terrorist by one group or another, but also for fear of losing jobs. They thus live in a state of regional “house arrest,” unable to find employment in the same places they might find physical safety.

By 2015, almost all of the young men with whom I lived and worked reluctantly considered returning from Shaqlawa, Kurdistan to join a militia and make

a living for their families. Their alternative would be to receive several pounds of beans, flour, and oil from Kurdistan's Barzani foundation for up to four months, and to live indefinitely in refugee tents, construction sites, or expensive single hotel rooms. Such living conditions made some sense for a short time, but with no end in sight, more and more young men started returning to Anbar to join the many militias that can afford to feed and clothe them, or send money to their families.

For example, Sami was in his early twenties and worked at the same hotel in Shaqlawa that housed his family in a single room. How did he come to consider working as a gun-for-hire inside Iraq? In the late years of U.S. occupation and after, more and more people fled from urban centers to join relatives in rural villages. They relied more on local food sources, family networks, and tribal governance; and less on state institutions like hospitals, public employment, and (now-destroyed) highway systems. As the influx of people encroached on the rural communities, they built hastily constructed dwellings on relative's land. The rural rings outlying cities in Anbar became urbanized, and small construction jobs were common. Sami, a teenager by 2012 and the male head of his household since his father and brothers were killed by American snipers in Fallujah, dropped out of school to work on construction projects and support his mother and sister in his uncles' village. When I initially asked for an interview with him, his response reflected his rage and frustration with the American-made context in which he was forced to assume his role at such a young age:

“What can I tell you?! That I dropped out of school when I was only 12? That I can't read because Americans took my education?

That I will never marry because I cannot afford to feed even my own family? That I am responsible for my entire kin, for feeding and clothing my siblings, my mother? That I am making man decisions at the age of a child? That I watched all the men die? That the only way out of this is to become like them? That I fear for my life every time I move? That I have no future?”

Sami’s sentiment reflects the experiences of many of his male counterparts, responding to economic pressure. Just like Tabib, the doctor from Mosul, he is trapped in the terrorist sandwich, unemployable without a false Shi’a ID in Iraq’s public sector, the sole male survivor of his family, and unable to move freely within Kurdistan or Anbar province for fear of being perceived as a terrorist threat by one group or another. Over the years he grew up in Anbar province, he was constantly harassed by Shi’a militias, and describes their checkpoints as a “deadly game of guess who.” Sami, like so many other Sunni “men of fighting age,” found himself trapped by losses. Sami read at the third-grade level and his primary goal in life was to complete high school after he got his little sister through school first. He expressed gratitude that he had his hotel job, which guaranteed him housing and minimal income until the end of 2015. If work dried up, he expressed reluctant willingness to return to Anbar and sign up to fight in a militia. He saw this as a last resort to keep his family afloat financially, but also as a way out of the middle of the terrorist sandwich. He noted the irony of being perceived as a terrorist when in fact he was not, and highlighted the way in which forced repetition made the category real: “I lost my family. I lost my education. I lost my habitat. I lost my childhood. I lost my papers, and now... They say I am a fighter over and over. Maybe I will have to be.”

It is Sami's gradual openness to the inaccurate category of terrorist Sunni that also helps to answer the question, "Who is ISIS?" with a more eclectic interpretation of sectarianism — as a coalescence of regionally acute inter-imperial aggressions and negotiated local responses; as a scale-jump in the Iraqi government's consolidation of authoritarianism via international support in the name of global Counterterrorism; as a political imaginary made real; and as an historical shift in political meanings. While Sami has argued his entire life that he is not a Sunni terrorist in order to at first remain in, and then later to be outside of, Anbar province, and while he would never join ISIS, he may indeed be coerced into moving toward the category.

Immobilization

The story of Iraq's territorial and social fragmentation makes different kinds of sense through different regional lenses.⁴⁸ New sectarian frontiers coalesce around real geographical boundaries at such a rapid rate that the pragmatic negotiation of these boundaries, newly broken and newly made, are confusing and complex. A female head of household from Fallujah describing a similar situation in her own family, says of taking seriously sectarian categories: "We do it, and as we do it we wonder, how can this be?" While it cannot be said that sectarianism was nonexistent in Iraq before 2003, people in Anbar province claim that they never defined themselves along these lines.

⁴⁸ The Kurdish story of tripartheid is hopeful, because it supports movement toward independence. (See Kurdistan's September 25th 2017 referendum, Qiblawi, Elbagir, Balkiz 2017).

More importantly, geographies were not delineated in this way. Now, a reshuffling of identities sweeps “Sunniness” into places like Anbar, and sweeps people from Anbar out of places like Baghdad. A common fear among Anbari men is that of being killed at Shi’a-run checkpoints. The placement of that fear into particular “sectarian” objects was a matter of regional signs. During my fieldwork, I feared entering checkpoints run by the Iraqi military, ISIS, or *Al-Hashed*, not because of my last name, which could be interpreted as either Sunni or Shi’a, but because of the *region* listed on the car’s license plate, or the *city* listed on my ID card. These two items, license plate and ID card, revealed no explicitly sectarian detail, but instead geographic information “sectarianized” by discourse on zones presumed to be homogenous. A car with a license plate from Anbar signaled the potential that the driver and passengers were terrorists, or that they were sympathetic to the Sunni uprising, of which ISIS is an offshoot.



Figure 9: Anbari license plate and taped-over bullet holes, photo by Kali Rubaii

Here, a license plate reads “al-Anbar” in the bottom right-hand corner. It is patched after 20 bullets entered the car as it traveled from Anbar to Kurdistan. As we inspected a bullet to identify its manufacturer, the driver explained, “They saw ‘Anbar’ so they attacked us, because they hate Sunnis.” “They” refers to a Shi’a militia working for the government to simultaneously subdue Anbari resistance *and* displace ISIS. When I asked which entity the men were fleeing—ISIS or the government—they said: “Both!” Over time, I found myself acutely aware of the license plate on taxis and cars when I approached checkpoints, sensitive that the province name “Anbar” was equated with a threatening brand of Sunnism that challenged the state order of the Iraqi government in Baghdad.

Identification cards were the same. While some, like those issued in Kurdistan, list religion explicitly, most require a governorate and surname. Governorates may be associated with sectarian identities, but regionalized meanings overlap in ways more complex than simply along Sunni-Shi’a lines. For example, because Mosul is a medical capital, a Mosul ID card means that someone at a checkpoint may assume the holder is a doctor or knows one.

Zephyr, a cardiologist who works in Fallujah, was travelling alone in a car from Baghdad in 2014 to visit patients with heart defects in Anbar. On his drive, a checkpoint run by ISIS stopped him for help. A car bomb had injured one of the ISIS fighters, and the checkpoint operators demanded that he drive the injured fighter to a nearby hospital. They saw his Baghdad ID, and threatened to kill him for being allied

with the Iraqi government. He drove the injured man to the hospital and dropped him off. Zephyr said, “Good thing I did not have a Mosul ID, or they would have made me operate on him right at the checkpoint!” What he meant was that with a Mosul ID, he would be assumed to be a doctor, a fact he kept secret from the ISIS operatives at the time.

People find themselves negotiating these regional associations carefully, because such affiliations can generate life and death scenarios at checkpoints. Therefore, the assumption that people from Anbar are targeted for being Sunni is true, not necessarily because discrimination against Anbar is driven by a will to eliminate Sunni people per se, but because sectarian armed forces, sectarian rhetoric, and sectarian laws are the counterinsurgency instruments applied indiscriminately to the geographic territory of Anbar and those living there.

Insurgency and Militia Suppression

The Wikipedia entry in English for “Sectarianism in Iraq⁴⁹” reveals how sectarianism grafts on to global Counterterrorism discourse, particularly this line: “Since 2003, Shi’ite majority [is a] constant terrorist target by the Sunni minority that can’t accept multi-religious, plural and democratic state [sic].” This rhetoric is espoused by the Iraqi government to garner military support. It justified mass killing of people in Anbar as the eradication of terrorist threats. People from Anbar would describe it differently: the eradication of Sunni people⁵⁰. So, while one story is that

⁴⁹ This Wikipedia page has since been updated as of April 2018.

⁵⁰ Preemptive Counterterrorism targets “men of fighting age” as a practice of controlling populations, especially pluralities. In Iraq, the deployment of sectarian

Sunni Arabs in Anbar province are terrorists led by tribal leaders unwilling to relinquish supremacy, the other is that Sunni people in Anbar, facing economic and political discrimination, resist through insurgency as they did against the British in the 1920s, the Americans in the early 2000's, and now against what is perceived as another foreign invader—a Shi'a government led by al-Maliki and his predecessor, al-Abadi.

Anbari communities seeking full integration in the Iraqi state, watched the capital, Baghdad, cleansed of Sunni people. They were policed by Shi'a militias, and their demands for reform were met with military force. In the 2011 "Sunni spring," they held public demonstrations advocating for better treatment under a watchful international eye. In December 2012, following a raid on the home of Sunni Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, protests in Fallujah quickly spread to most Sunni areas and some Shi'a areas. Pro-Maliki protests also took place in the predominantly Shi'a south. I was in Jordan at the time, where an Anbari sheik handed me a ten-page document in English and Arabic signed by 121 Sunni tribal leaders. Aware of international attention, the sheiks highlighted that Anbari people held peaceful protests in 2012, and "exercised legitimate rights of expression." They listed seven demands for political reform, including the return of female prisoners arrested during

militias has become a practical logistical solution to policing dissenting communities. Militia deployment has induced an overwhelming popular sentiment that the violence wrought on Iraqi bodies and communities by sectarian militias is entirely motivated by sectarian interests. In fact, this may become truer and truer as the discourse used to justify or explain killing becomes increasingly simplified into sectarian terms.

nonviolent demonstrations. They also promised continued nonviolent dissent, as opposed to armed uprising, were the reforms made:

- 1) Release of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi women who were illegally arrested.
- 2) Annulment of the 4th article of the constitution on Terrorism, which is an instrument of oppression for political protest.
- 3) Ending of summary executions in Iraqi prisons
- 4) Annulment of De-Baathification law, which expelled civilian servants and is still used to eradicate political opponents of the regime, which subordinates Iraqi interests to Iranian interests.
- 5) Ending random raids
- 6) Issuance of general amnesty
- 7) Annulment of organized and discriminatory policy on sectarian and ethnic basis by the government since Iraq fell under American Occupation

Additionally, the statement warned that the government was attempting to conflate their resistance with the presence of ISIS, and called upon the international community to see sectarian killing for what it was: targeting Sunni people, under the guise of targeting terrorists. The document also justified establishment of an Anbari military council to protect the region from both an Iranian-backed Iraqi government *and* organizations like ISIS or Al-Qaeda.

The document and the political thrust behind it, failed to garner political incorporation. The Maliki regime responded with military aggression. In response, two of Iraq's nineteen governorates, the predominantly Sunni Saladin and Diyala, publicly declared their intention to secede (Sowell 2014). Both the government and Anbari sheiks justify military aggression in and upon Anbar province by tethering the Sunni uprising to sectarianism via a slippage between Sunniness, geographic location, and ISIS—for the benefit of a Western audience.

In fact Sunni resistance itself included a wide range of political orientations and goals, and popular resistance in Iraq was not only Sunni. For example, large public demonstrations against continued U.S. involvement in Iraq included support from the Shi'a cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr. The sweeping category of sectarianism only indexed a much more complex terrain of political dissent. While not unified, both Shi'a and Sunni groups were protesting the central government. Large public rallies against continued U.S. involvement in Iraq were regularly organized by Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Unsurprisingly, when the government sentenced Sunni vice-president, Tariq al-Hashimi, to death in absentia for terrorism, general discontent in Iraq centered more around Sunni districts, but not singularly. Prime Minister al-Maliki did make minor concessions to Sunnis (Sowell *ibid*), but he feared a play for regional succession from the Iraqi state by Sunni provinces. Anbari parliamentarian, Ahad Al-Alwani, who in 2013 was key in organizing the protests, responded that the goals were simply to decentralize power, not secede.

The politics of sectarianism are deadly. In 2015 the United Nations announced that fatalities as a result of this imbroglio had surpassed 1,000 per month for the first time since 2008 (Lewis 2013). Many of these deaths were the result of counterinsurgency campaigns by the Maliki government to stop Sunni protests. For example, in April 2013 over forty Sunni protestors were killed in Kirkuk. Adnan and Reese note that this event galvanized regional uprising in multiple regions (2014). Depending on whom one asks, they were killed either for being Sunni or for being terrorists. Neither is correct. Framing popular resistance as sectarian builds upon

orientalist fantasies of Counterterrorism that point to social difference and religious ideology as the cause of armed uprising, rather than attending to structural frameworks that produce conditions for mass harm.

In sum, as a result of U.S. divide-and-rule policies implemented in the early 2000's—including constitutional re-categorization of citizenship by sect, the production of walls and borders, production of ID cards to identify Iraqis by region, dismantlement of the Iraqi army, dissolution of state pensions and jobs, the deployment of Shi'a and Kurdish militias, and finally the use of language defining insurgent resistance to foreign rule as "terrorist" (and thus as ideologically driven by religious fervor)—Iraq has in fact become divided such that Anbar province is a place with meaning it did not have before, and its people carry this meaning with them even when they leave.

Part III: Living Sectarian Identities

We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact.

—Judith Butler

The ID Story: "There will be a box for Sunni and another for Shi'a"

Dr. Safia, my friend and to-be-hostess in Fallujah, was having trouble securing a visa for me, simply because it was too difficult to reach the visa office in Baghdad from Fallujah, given the spatial reorganization described above. Once a short drive, it became impossible to pass through checkpoints. People from Fallujah

were harassed, turned away, or killed on the way to Baghdad⁵¹. When things were finally arranged for my visa, I bought a flight. Jasmine, an Iraqi friend in Amman, arranged for her brother to take my photograph and purchase two Iraqi ID cards on my behalf. One Sunni. One Shi'a. Because my last name is Rubaii, which has a Sunni affiliation in Mosul and a Shi'a affiliation in Baghdad, my name did not need to be changed; just the region of my residence and my first name⁵². Her brother would be waiting for me just outside the airport in Baghdad and would drive me, along with my Iraqi IDs, to a safe location nearby to sleep. My friends from Anbar would send a trusted driver to collect me and make his way with me back to Fallujah. I was to hide my American passport into my *abaya* and only show Iraqi IDs. If I did not speak, I would not give away my American accent. The driver would choose at each checkpoint which ID card to show for me, depending on what kind of checkpoint we passed through.

Jasmine explained that, "Since Paul Bremer, we have two religions for one. In your ID card, you see? There will be a box for Sunni and another for Shi'a, even though they are the same religion." Jasmine, like so many others, did not believe in the "game" of sectarianism, and only played it to survive. She had friends of all religions and ethnicities during her lifetime in Iraq. In spite of her great pride for the diversity of Iraqi society, she had no hope of a unified Iraqi state ever again. No one

⁵¹ This is in fact how many people I met finally died, and why so many people eventually lost the opportunity to escape from Anbar as refugees who might fly to Jordan or Turkey from the Baghdad airport after securing visas in the capital city.

⁵² I should mention for the reader that my father is Iraqi and that I can pass as Arab in spite of my very light "Iranian" skin tone. My first name is not Arabic.

did. Her final words to me were: “Iraq is dead. Your IDs are ready.” She said this brusquely, and gently escorted me out of her apartment in Amman, Jordan, where she now lived as a “lucky” refugee who had enough money to pay fees for permanent residency. I was an even “luckier” Iraqi, so distant from the place called Iraq that I did not even know until visiting the country whether my family was Sunni or Shi’a. Because my family had left long before U.S. divide and rule policies were implemented, the significance of that distinction was meaningless to me until I tried to return to Iraq. Jazmine OR Jasmine? made it clear there was no Iraq for me to return to. Only brutally fragmented place awaited.

On the day of my flight in 2013, Fallujah was shelled and I was advised to turn around, having missed the window of calm between epochs of military assault on Fallujah. The driver would never make it out of the city, and I would never make it in. I returned to Amman and would not arrive in mainland Iraq again until 2014, slipping across the Kurdish border through Kirkuk by land with Anbari farmers seeking to visit their fields and make an attempt at harvesting their seasonal yield.

Insiders Out: “We do it, and as we do it we wonder, how can this be?”

The creation of meaningful categories along sectarian lines manifests itself slowly at first, but it completely transformed social relations over time. Many of my Iraqi hosts and friends were married couples from Sunni and Shi’a families. I remember a conversation with my friend, Ahmed, about this topic. A refugee from the 1990s, Ahmed fled Iraq separately from his then pregnant wife, Muna, who joined him in Jordan a few months later. They lived there for a decade, and resettled to

Germany a year after I met them in 2008. He fled Iraq after escaping imprisonment and a death sentence for seeking to rebel against Saddam Hussein with Kurdish scholars in Mosul. In 2004, when I interacted with Ahmed almost daily, he never mentioned being Sunni or Shi'a, with one exception. I described visiting Said Al Zainab mosque in Damascus one afternoon, and his response was: "The Shi'a have some different holidays. My wife is Sunni now, since we married. We talked about it and she decided I was right, so we go to a mosque without those holidays." For Ahmed, the question of belief and practice were not central to his political oppression, or to his sense of identification between Muna and himself. In hindsight, his general disinterest about the topic of being Sunni is noteworthy. Were Ahmed still inside Iraq, I imagine he would speak more emphatically about being Sunni in 2015 than he did in Amman, Jordan in 2008. In fact, rather than escaping Iraq separately from Muna because of logistics (he was coming from Mosul and she from Baghdad), he would have fled separately to avoid potentially deadly problems at checkpoints as a Shi'a and Sunni travelling in the same car.

How rapidly Iraq became a place where such a couple, or their children, could not travel together might be illustrated by the family I call The Muarikhuns. The Muarikhuns describe a partial braid, with frayed ends and missed loops, indexing the speed of social transition and the ways in which families adjust to, and utilize, sectarian categories to explain and frame their choices. I met The Muarikhuns through one of their sons, Racer, who was working hard at a hotel near my flat in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan. Shaqlawa was where many Anbari families had recently fled

after the Iraqi government started dropping bombs to crush Sunni resistance. He caught my attention because he was striking. His features made him seem like he might not be from Anbar at all, with a slight figure and very dark skin. I asked him about it, and he said it gave him a lot of trouble. He was often accused of being a foreign Sunni fighter by Shi'a checkpoint operators, because his dark skin made him look like he was from the Gulf, maybe Saudi Arabia. He brought me to meet his family, and we sat on the floor together in a damp, colorful room. The walls had a thick texture like they had been covered with many different layers of paint. I sat down near Muarikh, an elderly man about 60 years old, while the rest of the family trickled in.

Much to my surprise, Racer's siblings were giants! His brother, who had a newborn baby, was the biggest Iraqi I had ever seen, especially in contrast to Racer. The Giant and his wife, Amina, were joined by five other adult couples. Racer was the only still-living unmarried son in the family, a point his mother made after lifting my chin in her hand and commenting on how my light skin demonstrates the important "genetic diversity" of Iraqi people. The Muarikhuns had about ten grandchildren of all ages. Two little girls immediately started braiding my hair with sticky fingers. In addition to the visual diversity of the family— all skin tones, and clearly a wide range of body types— Muarikh explained that half of his children had Shi'a names and half had Sunni names. I could see how this family's multiplicity of appearances and names meant trouble for them now. In spite of many differences, somehow each family member looked exactly like the other. Their faces had a similar

shape, especially where their noses connected to their mouths. The shape of their brows was similar, as well. Muarikh's Wife came in with tea, and as she set each glass down, she told a rhythmic story about naming her children. As she handed each adult child a tea glass:

“The first one, I liked the name, so I gave it to him.”

“The second one, I liked the name, so I gave it to her.”

“The third one, I liked the name, so I gave it to him.”

“The fourth one, I liked the name, so I gave it to him.”

She went on and on around the room, and then started telling the story of how sectarianism knocked on her door: “When the Americans came to our door, they said, ‘Are you Sunni or Shi’a.’ I said, ‘What is that?’ I did not know what he was talking about. I said, ‘You are not from here, so maybe you are confused. I am not a politician, if that is what you mean.’”

Handing me tea and pretending to be a U.S. soldier, she gruffly asked: “Sunni or Shi’a?!”

“Muslim!” [The family laughed at my response.]

“Exactly. We are Muslim. We have a god. That is all. The rest is for politicians.”

The Giant, who I think was the oldest son, continues her story:

“I am named Omar [Sunni name]. But my brother is named Jafar [often perceived as a Shi’a name]. Can you believe it? We cannot go in the same car or to the same places.”

Muarikh adds: “Since 2003 there are many sectarian militias. They are fighting as a proxy for outside regimes. The Iranians, the Saudis, the Americans... they all want a

broken Iraq, but they train and pay militias to do it for sectarian reasons. Iraqi people do not care about this!”

His wife, mother of so many, continues her story about naming, and I become increasingly impressed by the family’s ability to tell a very smooth story with so many different narrators:

“When they [my children] try to name *their* children now, we cannot decide what to do. Should they have Sunni names or Shi’a names? Maybe we should be all one kind from now on, but then some of the babies will have different names from their fathers. Should the babies be in common with each other, or should they be divided in common with their mothers and fathers? We do not know how important, so we choose the most neutral names. This one [pointing to the newborn] is Rose. You see? In just ten years, we care about these names.”

It is evident from this conversation, that the word “Sunni” did mean something to Muarikh’s Wife when Americans knocked on her door, but it carried only a loose association with Saddam’s political regime and the Baath Party: “I am not a politician, if that is what you mean.” However, a rapid and growing awareness of the political implications dawns on this family in the course of a generation. In navigating the strategic realities required for movement through checkpoints, the family is coerced into embodying and putting sectarian claims into practice. The Muarikhuns describe the bombings by the Iraqi government in 2012 and 2013 as sectarian in nature. Fleeing what Muarikh calls “this Sunni- Shi’a nonsense,” the family had to embody and practice it themselves, by segregating their own family by sect.

Muarikh’s Wife explains:

“We took two cars to get here to Shaqlawa, naturally there are many of us. We took all the Sunni-named people and put them in one car,

and took all the Shi'a -named people, and the neutral ones, and put them in another car. This one [pointing to her son] has a Shi'a wife, so she had to ride separate from her husband and pretend to be someone else's wife!"

What is so striking about this intimate segregation is how an "outsiders' game" comes to represent the reality of life in Iraq so quickly. Max Weiss, in *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*, writes that "states become sectarian in unique ways through historical processes," emphasizing that sectarianism in Iraq is not the same sectarianism everywhere (2010, 16). Indeed, it is not quite true that sectarianism is an "outsiders game" that started in 2003. There was always persecution, and important episodes like the Iranian revolution or the Iraqi uprising of 1991, which brought about sectarian political and religious discourse. However, the distinctive difference in the way people talk about life before 2003 and life after 2003, reflects the emergence of sectarianism as an organizing category by which the great inter-imperial "sorting out" of Iraq can be defined. Under Saddam, the Baath party government drafted its rhetoric in ethno-national terms against Iran. Arabism, not Sunnism, was the defining feature of this rhetoric, and pitted Arabs against the Hajam (Persians) and Kurds.

The legacy of this framing is still evident in the way The Muarikhuns are treated by their Kurdish hosts: a Kurdish friend described the common sentiment among Kurds in Shaqlawa, used to hosting Arab visitors for vacation, and seeing them return home: "I worry they are here to stay, that we might be Arabized." She did not see The Muarikhuns as Sunnis like her, but as Arab others, carrying the legacy of Saddam's genocidal violence, which included attempts to "Arabize" Kurdistan by forcing population exchanges and settling Arabs into Kurdish regions (Kelly 2007;

Natali 2004). For The Muarikhuns, their physical features mean there is no possibility that they could be mistaken as Kurdish. Sunni- Shi'a Arab marriages are more difficult, because couples face new pragmatic challenges. But it is also unlikely that a member of The Muarikhuns, like Racer, will marry a Sunni woman who is also Kurdish: in other words, the sectarianism experienced by Anbari people is regionally anchored, and does not carry over into common ground among other Sunni communities who are not also Arab. In seeking refuge from the new category of sect that is steamrolling their family structure in Anbar (so called terrorists, Sunni religious ideology), they cross a border and face a more familiar "ethnicized" discourse that matches the discourse of Sunniness framed during Saddam era (Arab, as in *not* Persian, or Arab, as in *not* Kurdish). What happens rapidly, then, is not the onset of sectarianism as a category, but its quotidian application as it pivots from being about Arab-ness (opposed to all others) to a regionally tighter political parsing that intersects in Anbar. Because the old categories continue, the geographical boundaries of these categories remain (for example, at the border of Iraqi Kurdistan). Meanwhile new sectarian categories add new boundaries, like new borders around Anbar province, as depicted when Omar puts a slicing hand across Iraq to separate Anbar from the south. Thus, the social and physical spaces traversable by families like The Muarikhuns become smaller and smaller, as inter-imperial histories are layered atop one another (pan-Arabism being swept over by the Global War on Terror, creating subjects that are Sunni-as-in-Arab but also, newly, Sunni-as-in-terrorists/ISIS).

New sectarian frontiers coalesce around real geographical boundaries at such a rapid rate that the pragmatic negotiation of these boundaries, newly broken and newly made, are confusing, complex, and practiced with an almost comical sense of uncanniness. As The Muarikhuns tell the stories of their naming choices, driving choices, and other “Sunni- Shi’a nonsense,” they scoff and laugh, even as they despair. The performance of sectarianism comes into being during the processes of being enacted as a matter of enforced repetition⁵³. Why people play the game, instead of just ignoring the categories of sect, is answered by this forced repetition. A female head of household from Fallujah describing a similar situation in her own family, says: “We do it, and as we do it we wonder, how can this be?”

Diversity is a Problem

The Conductor, a regal man with a long face and straight back, is now in his 90’s. He insists that instead of coming inside, we sit out on a grassy little lawn and enjoy the beautiful fig vines and flowers. He is proud that his son, Hameed⁵⁴, has made an aesthetically beautiful place for the children to be outside. The Conductor introduces me personally to each plant in the yard, which is not an uncommon practice among rural people in Iraq. I notice that his perfectly white robes are stained green from the grass. I think about how my bottom will be stained green when I stand up and wonder what to do about it. We are all—about fifteen family members—

⁵³ Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity, argues that force repetition (re)produces social categories (1988).

⁵⁴ This is the same Hameed, the date farmer, who has spent many hours teaching me all the things he knows about farming in a post-war landscape. He also smuggled me to his date farm, across the Kurdish border. One of the youngest, he is proud to bring me to visit his father, the Conductor.

sitting in a rented front yard to hear the story of Iraq and the dawn of ISIS, as told by the Conductor and the Conductor's Wife. The intergenerational debates that stem from "the story of Iraq" reflect the overall impact of spatial "fragmentation," and the power of divide and rule policies in rapid transformation of political subjects and their aspirations.

The Conductor clears his throat after a sip of tea, and explains to me "how sectarianism became real" in Iraq, where he worked as a train conductor for the past half century. He starts with a reminder that, "you know, Fallujah was the center of rebellion against the British." His children and grandchildren listen with attention as he describes the incredible liberty with which he once traveled around the Middle East and the world. He describes Chicago, and the whipping wind, and how there is a sea like a Middle Eastern sea at the edge of the city. I tell him about the Big Bear statue and show him images on my phone. He laughs. He talks about San Francisco before it was a "steel city," when there were more wooden structures, and how it rolls like Amman in Jordan, with *jebels* (little hills). There is a trolley, and a prison, and the most beautiful bridge! I tell him that they built a net so people could not commit suicide from that bridge. He thinks that is a pity. There is no better place to commit suicide. There is no good transcontinental train in the U.S., though, which is strange, he thinks: "You can see from the beginning that unlike the British, Americans don't know how to occupy a place properly. When the British took Iraq, at least they built infrastructure. The Americans just destroyed even what the British made. Lunatics!"

Among many people over 60, he tells me things about the United States, one stop in his worldly adventures.

“When I visited France and Spain, they had good trains. I did not stop in England. I did not want to see London. I already know those smells and the architecture. But, you know, there are more beautiful places than Paris. In Asia they have the most elegant empires, the most beautiful temples to their gods...”

His grandchildren and great grandchildren do not seem capable of imagining his stories as a reality. They let their minds wander during his “fables” as if they were completely fabricated to entertain them. Far away lands with exotic seas and mysterious gods and temples; they all seem as made up as the idea that their great grandfather could ever travel so far, so freely. They know a drive from Fallujah to Baghdad was possible ten years ago, and deadly now. They know checkpoints, not trains. They know governorates, not continents.

They also know something their grandfather does not: tightened proximities expand space, making something quite close feel very far away. Space-time is not compressed, but rather dilated. Their world, which stretched from as far as Ramadi to their temporary rental in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan, shrinks in kilometers, but grows in its density of meanings. The closer in proximity to violence, the greater each kilometer becomes. They measure distances like astronomers, in terms of space-time, light-years, and lifetimes. Their world expands, unfurling into places that are lifetimes away.

Rose, the conductor’s granddaughter is 23 years old. She says: “Fallujah was three hours drive from here. With cars it is a quick ride. And we came here for

vacation every summer to cool off. It was not a whole lifetime away; it was just a summer away. Now Fallujah is twenty hours away, but maybe a whole lifetime. Maybe you will die before you ever reach my home again!" Her cousins nod in agreement.

The Conductor frowns. He is bothered by this idea, and starts to speak but stops himself and turns to his wife for help. She is a very pretty lady and has her hijab wrapped loosely to show off the front of her white hair. I can make out the shimmer of a shiny doodad decorating the top of her head like a crown. She is too old to serve tea and sits on the ground beside her husband, her eyes sparkling. In fact, all the women are too attentive to The Conductor's stories to notice that our teacups have emptied. I feel honored that after so many visits to the houses of The Conductor's sons, I am not treated as a formal guest. In the ground in front of our empty teacups are plates of fruit and small knives. Feeling un-guest-like, I reach for a pomegranate and begin to slice it along its seams the way a Kurdish farmer taught me. The Conductor's Wife⁵⁵ raises her eyebrow at my technique and breaks the Conductor's moment of uncertainty: "You are a Kurd?" She shows me a different way to cut the pomegranate, and then takes her stained, red fingers and paints my lips with the pomegranate juice. "You wear your hair like a Kurd and you have white skin like an Iranian, but your lips are stained with the food of the dead, now... You are an Arab."

⁵⁵ She preferred this name over any other, "because being a wife is not an insult. American women think being someone's wife makes them objects. Don't be stupid. Wives are powerful in our culture, even if they are not in yours."

Her reference to the story of Persephone and Hades caught my attention. She carried it farther to help her husband muddle through his concern about shrinking spaces:

“People think that the rhythm of life is about time, but it is also about space and distance. In the Greek stories, we cannot have seasons unless Persephone is abstracted and far from home for the winter. She misses her mother and she is suspended from life, living as if dead. We elders know a rhythm of life that is attached to moving to and from places. Death is when we cannot reach those places. We are in the winter of our lives [smiling at her husband]. The young ones have to learn to live in Hades year-round, and still make a garden there.”

She nods past this little garden, gesturing at how it is surrounded by grey waste from construction, concrete, piping and discarded weapons. “Now,” she says, “We must learn to live as concentrated people, people who live tightly in space.”

The Conductor continues his story about Iraq, picking up his wife’s cue, and describes the height, depth, and breadth of a rapidly changing Iraqi landscape (my emphasis added with italics to gesture at the spatialization of sectarianism).

“How did we end up in hell, but not dead? I will tell you. When the Americans came to Baghdad, they did terrible things there, but it was their headquarters, so they did not level the city. *They cleansed it with the help of militias. They built many walls.* The men fled to Fallujah to repeat what we did in 1920. We all met with the tribal leaders of Anbar, all Iraqi people, and we were unified. Anyone who could fight took up arms and built a stronghold from Fallujah. I was too old to join them, but of course some of my sons did. The Americans came with soldiers and tanks, all the power they could, but we were winning. *You cannot win a gun war against people native to the land. You must use the sky. So they did. They used the sky, and began to bomb with a lot of bombs, and from the ground too they used new weapons.* Peculiar gasses and white phosphorous, I saw that with my own eyes. *The American snipers were on the roofs and shooting even the dogs. They shot into homes without even knowing who was in them. They would not let us leave, and kept the city under siege.* We grew hungry. That was in 2004, a big battle. There was some

calm in between and we began to rebuild the city. People who fled to the outside, to their villages, came home. Then, in 2008 there was another big battle. *This time we left and went to my town, outside of Fallujah, to Kharma.*”

He speaks of a time when Fallujah was not marked by Sunniness, but by a collective anti-occupation resistance that unified Sunni and Shi’a in a common national cause against occupation. The younger children are no longer listening to the story. The littlest one, sitting in my lap, has started sketching two parallel rivers that converge and branch into a messy fan. I know what she is drawing. It is the Shatt-AlArab, birthplace of agriculture, the alluvial plane drained by Saddam to pacify the Marsh Arabs, re-flooded by the U.S. and the Iraqi Government in 2013, inadvertently flushing carcinogenic toxins dropped upstream in Fallujah down into southern water pipes. The story of Iraq, even if about fragmentation, is also about connections that exceed proximate boundaries.

“Somehow we became three states, and being Sunni is difficult. We did have some favor with Saddam. I will accept that. But we did nothing to harm other people. Saddam harmed us too. He imprisoned Sunni people. He raped everyone’s wives. He was a madman. He may have spoken in the name of the Baath party, and many of us swore loyalty to the party as a cursory oath, but Anbari people were never loyal to Saddam. We did not gas the Kurds. We did not drain the marshes and impoverish the Shi’a tribes of the south. But now the Kurds here say, ‘Ah you are from Fallujah. You are Daash [ISIS]. You are Saddam loyalist. You tried to kill us.’ It is strange how people remember old things to make sense of new things. Anyway, the Shi’a militias have come from Iran, and from the New Iraqi Government, which is loyal to Iran, and they are seeking to genocide us. You see the pictures,⁵⁶ yes? You see how they are shooting these children and ruling the streets.”

⁵⁶ Referencing recent images in the news showing children who had been shot in the genitals, with captions like “Sunni targeted by Iranian agenda.”

When the Iraqi government implemented laws banning Anbari men from public employment in 2010, it also made travel difficult with the family's Fallujah IDs.

“So, our [Anbari] sheiks negotiated with the government. They said, we will fight you. We need reform. We had protests, peaceful protests, and we also had civil war. The New Government whined to its sponsor, the United States. They called us terrorists. In the name of terrorist they procured weapons to bomb us, to shoot us like this. This is before ISIS. While we are fighting the government to our south, ISIS comes in from the north. We are trapped now between two enemies. What shall we do? The sheiks say, first we fight the government, then we can fight off ISIS. ISIS is nothing. We can beat them in three days if we want!”

By then, he explains, the Anbari were tired and had suffered many losses: “We lost four sons. You see only two sons here, but there were six. They tried but failed to decapitate our family name. Hameed and Youssef (Hameed's older brother) will carry the burden of the name. A Sunni name, of course.” He waves his hand dismissively at the idea of a Sunni name being a burden. Rose, the conductor's granddaughter, adds a foreshadow of the future for Anbar, predicated on the idea that homogeneity and regional sorting will protect people from violence:

“The U.S. destroyed all the infrastructure. All the ways of life. And they left it open for the vultures to pluck out the eyes of Anbar. We are the living dead. We are the people of Iraq, but we are farther from Iraq than ever before, and we are still in the borders of the nation! We are seeking refuge in the arms of the Kurds, who are also Iraqi, who also have been separated from the wealth of the civilizations we inherit together, as a unified people. We will never be unified again. It has become that diversity, which was our source of power, is now our demise⁵⁷. The sooner we are completely segregated: the sooner we will stop dying and killing.”

⁵⁷ The vocabulary of tolerance is new. People lived this diversity in a different way in the past, but arguably it was colonialism not Saddam or the U.S. that changed all this. See interview of Aron Rodrique, by Nancy Reynolds, for a brief introduction to

Rose is a proponent of tripartheid. The Conductor responds to her with sadness:

“This is not the right way. This is why I am sad to hear that my grandchildren can live with closed spaces alone, instead of integration. I know a worldly Iraq, a hub of life that for thousands of years was a center for trade, for even the Jewish scholars, for even the smallest and oldest tribes, the Yazidi, the Mandaean... This Iraq, this closed Iraq, started with the U.S. sanctions, and the first U.S. war. It started with the suffocation of children because of banned inhalers. It ended this way— how Iraq, which was whole and open, is closed and fractured. We are closed to life, but we are completely open to death. Anyone seeking death can enter. We are an open book for anyone seeking death. But for anyone seeking life together, like the fig and the grass growing together, we are closed. And the Anbari people are the last stand against this. We are the last to struggle against this. We give our sons to fight this.”

Disturbingly, diversity —that quality of Iraq celebrated among so many of its citizens— has come to be perceived as the problem rather than the solution to sectarian manifestations of divide-and-conquer policies. For Rose, territorialized sectarianism serves as a possible solution to reconfigured social stratification in Iraq. If policies introducing sect into the law, hiring sectarian militias, and dis-employing Sunnis make being among “others” dangerous, then Rose and many of her peers argue for regional segregation, even as it harms them. She embraces sectarian categories as the only route to survival.

As The Conductor tells his story, I watch his wife transform in front of me from a sparkling, regal lady to a woman who has lost her sons. I see someone who can dress in the memory of who she was, whose eyes glimmer, not with mischief, but

historical shifts in how people approach difference and diversity in Ottoman times (1996).

with tears that cling to the balls of her eyes with surface tension. As he exclaims with his last words, “We give our sons to fight this,” the surface tension breaks, and her cheeks, as dry as the Iraqi marshes, are flooded. The water runs into the grooves of her skin. I am reminded that while she chose to be called Wife in this story, most women’s titles here bear the prefix, “Um” meaning “Mother of,” and that being a wife is perhaps much easier than being an Um of the dead. “Ya, Allah.” She wipes the tears away with her palms, and as with the pomegranate juice, reaches across to me and very softly paints my lips with her salty tears. In perfect English, she says: “You are, what do they say, salt of the earth.”⁵⁸ The salty tears and sweet pomegranate juice mix on my lips, and I think of a common Palestinian phrase: “Yaum asal, yaum basal” meaning, “One day is a honey day, one day is an onion day.”

In a way, The Conductor’s Wife painting my lips with one thing, and then another, is an experiment in making sense of the senseless, as if simultaneously challenging me to taste the contradictions of onion and honey, or pomegranate and tears.... while at the same time testing my reaction, or how such contradictions look on me. This is what surviving sectarianism looks like: tears moving through old channels, mourned and filled over. In this newly fragmented Iraq, being a mother means living while your children are dead. Being a son means bearing the role of father to your siblings. Being a brother means hiding your sibling and driving in

⁵⁸ Matthew 5:13, “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.”

separate cars. The forced, repetitive performance of sectarianism as one moves across time and space, in segregated cars and under pseudonyms, means taking on social roles that were not yours to take on, filling the social vacuums left by the dead. It also means learning to embody new social roles, even as these roles are comically untrue. As in the case of The Muarikhuns, something as natural and delightful as nominal and physical diversity must be negotiated and performed in new ways. A family's many visible similarities are eclipsed, features of their visage perceptible only as distinct and unrelated. And here, with the Conductor's children, meanings are produced within new political constraints, and memories are reworked to accommodate the frameworks codified by laws and guns. How these families negotiate a brand new social cleavage, embody it, perform it, and resist it, is what sectarianism looks like at the level of daily negotiations. Taking seriously the uncertain ethical qualities of malevolence, as potential without intention, the ethical "rough ground" of Iraq is increasingly visible as one of navigable ambiguity. Al-Mohammed and Paluso argue that "rough ground" is a theoretical and ethnographic lens for seeing sectarianism in Iraq, and that it is important to understand the ethical uncertainty in post U.S. invasion Iraq as part of a landscape of material ambiguities made up of frayed but also newly made lines of care and concern. In Anbar, these lines of care are both frayed and newly made, braided into sectarianism only partially, with loose strands sticking out everywhere, reaching into the past and into the future. It is this rough ground upon which the malevolence of sectarianism appears in the daily lives of Iraqi families, through "continual adjustments of one's body in relation to the bodies and

lives of others, ...the complex weaving of intentionalities, bodies, and lives through the lives of others in the everyday...” (cf. Al-Mohammad 2012). In daily encounters and memories, territorialized social division is generously, malevolently negotiated⁵⁹. Continuing to be from and of Anbar province, while moving and interacting with those seen to be “from outside,” emboldens the previously leashed malevolence enmeshed in the “practical sense” of regional movement (Goffman 1971). New openings are made for new kinds of relationships, while others are closed⁶⁰, in the “vacillating inclination of life toward the lives of others” (Mohammad and Peluso 2012, citing Das [forthcoming]).

Embodied Contradictions: “When we Sunni die, Maliki sleeps happily.”

New generations see categories of identity grafted onto topography differently. Children were much less engaged in negotiating the big categories of Anbar, Sectarianism, or ISIS. I think this is in part because the new categories were clearer to them than to their parents, who remember another world. The only experimentation with this type of embodied meaning I experienced among children was during war games. Children would often point toy guns at me, which bothered

⁵⁹ Khan defines malevolence as something that “holds the possibility of harm” rather than actively intending ill will. She shows how sectarianism in Pakistan is made intimate to family politics by arguing that the uneasy love between a human and a *jinn* offers movement and voice, but also reveals a fear of becoming mad, or “other.” While her analysis of personal tensions assumes an embedded sense of sectarianism among her interlocutors, this personalization and embodiment of sectarian malevolence appears in Anbar province as well, where so many “others” remain malevolent because they are undefined and invasive.

⁶⁰ For example, there were very few instances in which people publicly mourned the loss of their Shi’a friends, or access to their Shi’a friends. However, people did talk about not being able to access places that are Shi’a now.

me immensely. I lived in a tiny apartment complex filled with families from Kharma and Saqlawiya, and would often watch the children act out their dramas in the ground-level square below. One time, I engaged their game and let myself be “shot.” They negotiated fiercely over what to do with my “dead” body. Some suggested I should be dragged or hung up as an infidel:

“What *kind* of infidel?” a little girl said with excitement.

“*All* of the kinds!” said her older brother, the ringleader.

His sidekick, a boy from Kharma said, “We don’t care about infidels. We care about invaders!”

“She can be both!!” the ringleader was getting more excited now.

“If she can be both, then she can be both of anything. She could be a goat-person and we could *eat* her!” screamed a little girl about the size of a cabbage patch doll, who ran out with a broken plastic bucket in which to cook me.

After some negotiation, it became unclear whether I was dead, or half-dead. Maybe I could fly around. Because I was “from here but not from here,” I was permitted to be a ghost that haunted Iraq, or maybe that flew back to the U.S. to haunt George Bush, Paul Bremer, and Barack Obama. I asked, in a spooky ghost voice, whom I should haunt in Iraq. The children started offering assignments:

“Go directly to Bush!”

“No, you should go directly to the castle where Maliki is sitting on his throne!”

After the ringleader calmed the frenzy, it was agreed that an American haunting Maliki would be good: He explained in a strategic, pedantic whisper, “Look, we *have*

to send her. When we Sunni die, Maliki sleeps happily. If an American dies, he would sleep badly.”

“So I am dead and I am going to haunt Maliki?” I asked in my ghost voice, as I looked up from the ground at all the little hands fluttering about in negotiation.

The sidekick answered authoritatively: “Yes, you should be *part*-dead and haunt Maliki, because Bush and Bremer and Obama won’t care about you. To them you are Iraqi.”

“Ooooh, I can’t *wait*!” a little girl screamed, shivered, and looked like she might wet her pants.

The children in the square understood that my body offered a useful contradiction between Iraqi and American, something to leverage for Sunni revenge, or Sunni survival. These children identify as Sunni in the game. They are being bombed or exiled because they are perceived to be Sunni, by some “other” which slips between Maliki (standing in for Shiism because he smiles over Sunni deaths) and American invaders. Mine was a contradiction that could be crystalized and strategized, encased with the performative excitement they needed for a game. Sectarianism was not a game in the same way it was described by older interlocutors, but a reality upon which other games could be firmly based. Unlike The Conductor’s wife, who initiated me into Arabness (“you are an Arab now,” as opposed to Iranian or Kurdish), when she painted my lips with the “food of the dead,” the children were playing out a drama filled with infidels and invaders, and were able to switch between the codes of Iraqiness and the codes of Sunniness seamlessly: in Iraq I am American,

in America I am Iraqi, and in both cases I am an infidel/invader allied with the U.S. and Maliki regime in a global effort to harm these Anbari children because they are Sunni (rather than Arab). These children live in a different world from their parents, and express little need to negotiate the question of sectarianism. Unlike their parents, there was nothing murky about life in Iraq: Shi'a were trying to kill them with American help. Simple. It was a matter altogether settled.

Their parents, watching the drama from balconies above, were disturbed that an adult woman would be willing to lie on the dirty ground, but said nothing about the game itself. Like their children, they were playing similar games with my body, testing the boundaries of how much contradiction and complexity can be handled at once. The Conductor's Wife, as well as Muarikh's Wife, each performed a dramatic encounter with me not uncommon in my interactions with Anbari families. The Muarikhuns enjoyed holding me at an imaginary checkpoint to declare whether I was Sunni or Shi'a before offering me tea to imbibe with them. The Conductor's Wife performed a profound illustration of her pain by painting my lips with pomegranates and tears. These were not unique instances. In other chapters of this dissertation, Hameed will ask me to eat a radioactive date with him, and others will find ways to dress me, or otherwise make me embody the malevolence of life in or from Anbar. Women will be upset that my menstrual cycles did not become irregular like theirs until late in my fieldwork. Some parents will offer their children for me to breastfeed. Some farmers will want me to take a drink from water flowing through their aqueducts, after telling me it is toxic.

It is difficult to articulate the tone with which these performative moments took place. They came from a place of malevolent generosity and trust (Khan), as if to say: “You say you want to understand and know. I will help you do that” (Khan 2006). I felt that these offers were made generously —and on rare occasions to threaten me— in order to make me really understand how Anbari bodies and personhood were territorialized daily. Their malevolent generosity was a move to deterritorialize experience by placing harm into, onto, or near my own body. As opposed to *otherness*, these acts were performed in the spirit of *otherhood*, an intimacy, reciprocity, and solidarity forged through difference. Otherhood works in direct defiance of divide and rule policies meant to unmoor rather than bond social relations. My fieldwork was an opportunity for many Anbari people to test the limits of otherhood by asking me to take risks. In making offers of hospitality that were imbued with the potential for grave harm, they were inviting me to trust them. On the ethical rough ground that is the Iraqi political landscape today, otherhood is what makes collaboration possible. Otherhood, then, is not about puncturing the barrier between lived experiences and the stories about them, but instead about testing the transferability of experiences’ grave and lasting consequences, and about sharing dissatisfaction in the relative failures of such a test.

Conclusion

The dis-integration of Iraq’s geography and sociality is the product of conflicting and coordinating interests. It becomes obvious that to say something like, “The goal of war in Iraq is oil,” is a deep oversimplification that flattens the

dynamism of Iraq itself, and ignores the number of imperial actors and their widely varied stakes (not covered here). So too is the claim that people in Anbar are being killed, or are killing, “because of sectarianism.” It can be expedient to say that people in Anbar suffer because they are Sunni. Yet, in spite of sometimes making this claim, most Anbari people do not refer to sectarianism so singularly. Instead, they lean on Sunni victimhood as a shorthand, a vast container for a murky political, economic and geographic soup full of explanations.

As Khan argues, “sectarianism gives voice” to anxieties and possibilities alike. People are in constant negotiation with the signs and constraints around them, finding uneasy allies right and left every day (2006, 235). Therefore, the varied interpretations of sectarianism are an experimental project of making sense of daily interactions with, across and through military-induced difference. When social difference manifests itself as a reorganization of spaces and regions on a map, population transfer is not only about the construction of homogenous regions. A view from within a single region, Anbar, shows how something like sectarianism gives voice to disrupted social integration along other lines, among generations, across distances and through employment. To decry sectarianism is also to mourn the loss of certain kinds of trust. The forced repetition of an oversimplified category becomes a reality, establishing a new set of social facts that accommodate global fears about things like terrorism, but also local matters like how many different people can fit onto a single bus.

Al-Mohammad and Peluso argue that “rough ground” is a theoretical and ethnographic lens for seeing sectarianism in Iraq, and that it is important to understand the ethical uncertainty in post U.S. invasion Iraq as part of a landscape of material ethical ambiguities made up of frayed lines and missed loops (ibid). It is this rough ground upon which the malevolence of sectarianism appears in the daily lives of Iraqi families. In daily encounters, sectarianism is generously, malevolently negotiated. New openings are made for new kinds of relationships, while others are closed, in the “shifting inclination of lives toward the lives of others”⁶¹. Through repetitive performances of sectarianism as people show IDs, pass through checkpoints, seek employment or dodge bombs, meanings are reworked to accommodate and respond to frameworks of sociality codified by laws and guns.

Equally important to understanding how new social cleavages induce mass violence is understanding how people negotiate those same cleavages, embody them, perform them, and resist them. Sectarianism, far from being “internal to being,” can be induced and conjured through just a handful of policies over just a handful of years. On the other hand, far from being entirely made up, sectarianism is real in a deep and binding way, enough to draw borders by. It is through the case of Iraq that

⁶¹ phrase by Veena Das, quoted by Mohammad and Peluso (2012).

one might begin to imagine answers to pressing questions about how phenomena like totalitarianism or apartheid can capture the reluctant consent of diverse populations. It does not begin with dictators or end with aggressive invaders. It creeps, instead, through small measures like increasing details on ID cards, or mass layoffs of government employees. Over time, and particularly across generations, the games of social stratification one is forced to play become the reality one lives out wholeheartedly. Until finally, the fantasies and horrors of what constitutes something like a “terrorist” are materialized through extreme forms of coercion: the sense of suspension and half-aliveness becomes embodied on the little island of a green yard surrounded by grey, industrial excess; through-ways are shortened and tightened when bullets are embedded in license plates that mark out regions previously open; uncertainty reveals itself in the faces and flesh of brothers like Racer and the Giant.

One finds herself on a bus with a “we” constituted of many “others.” Such diversity—like sectarianism—poses a question rife with possibility. Are we in this together?

This piece is dedicated to someone I will call “Man Two,” a taxi-driver who smuggled chemotherapy medication and surgical supplies in and out of two hospitals in Iraq at the height of ISIS occupation, and who was eventually shot and killed by a Shi’a militia when fleeing Anbar province on the way to secure an exit visa and a flight through Baghdad to Turkey. He is responsible for sustaining the lives of hundreds of patients by buying them time.

CHAPTER 3

Living Suspense in Iraq's Anbar Province

Figure: T-walls, Checkpoints

Actors: Wolves⁶²

Bunker: an enclave secure from a fragmented and threatening outside, often linked by corridors of safe passage to an archipelago of other bunkers.

Suspense: a state of anxious attention to being in the vicinity of things and moments, acute anticipation, conditions that require one to crane to interpret and act upon underdetermined signs.

Chaos: conditions that limit one's inability to make use of signs or generate actionable meaning, conditions of vast disorder, uncertainty and confusion.

Checkpoint: a manned gap, a moment and place for military appraisal, a hinge that affords direct interface.

Trust: confidence in the reliability of someone or something, a way of coping with the freedom of others.

Wolves: the category of enemy-other bearing the intent to harm the flock in the military analogy about wolves, sheep, and sheepdogs. "Man Two" described in Chapter 2 is often marked as a wolf. Wolves are often imaginary.

⁶² Note: I will use the shorthand of wolves, sheep, and sheepdogs to speak to categories of actors who may vary across cases but serve in one of these three distinct roles.

Introduction

Ten approved enhanced interrogation techniques: attention grasp, walling (in which the suspect could be pushed into a wall), a facial hold, a facial slap, cramped confinement, wall standing, sleep deprivation, insects placed in a confinement box (the suspect had a fear of insects) and the waterboard, which ...produces the perception of 'suffocation and incipient panic... and... cause psychological disorientation...

- *The Bybee Memo*, Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzales Counsel to the President.
Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C 2340-2340A

Suad fled from Anbar province just a few days before we met. She hosted me for several nights, where I stayed with her and her children in a small, windowless hotel room. She was overwhelmed by the restless and frustrated energy of the children, but she refused to let them out of the room. She got nervous when they approached the door, and when they started crying, she tried to shush them quickly, as if their noises attracted danger. Her cousin, Hulk, visited the hotel often, but slept most nights in a crowded house nearby with his extended family, The Muarikhuns. Hulk had asked me to stay with Suad for a few days and help with the children as she “unwound from the tension” of getting from her home in Anbar province to this hotel in Kurdistan. When he visited, he begged Suad to let the children out into the lobby to play and see the light: “Let them live! Just even for a short time they should enjoy the peace.” Her response was, “I already lost three of them. I won’t lose anymore. Who knows what is coming next.” Suad was referring to three separate, consecutive losses: one child died two years before from a severe congenital birth defect very rare in the world, polycephaly. Another child had been killed just the week before during an Iraqi government bombing campaign. A third child had been shot and killed at a

checkpoint days before, as she tried to flee across northern Iraq. After a week, Suad let me take the children downstairs to the lobby to soak in light through the glass doors.

After several weeks she was required to travel to Erbil, where her husband was hospitalized with injuries from the checkpoint shooting that killed her child. We travelled together (Hulk, Suad, the storm of squirmy children, and I) from Shaqlawa to Erbil. As we moved in what Suad called “the wrong direction,” in the direction of Anbar but only for a short distance, we approached a routine checkpoint. Before we arrived at the checkpoint itself, the oldest child, about four years old, started shaking and crying, visibly upset by what she saw out the window. Suad started having heart palpitations and feeling like she would faint when she saw it, too: a single T-wall, erected in the divider of the road, signaling an approaching stop ahead. A T-wall, or Bremer Wall, is a portable, 6-ton steel-reinforced concrete blast wall segment. Is there something about the T-wall and its qualities that make it a common figure of suspense in Iraq? Even a T-wall standing alone— not linked to a set of others to form a physical impasse— marks a place to stop, pause, or expect to find a man with a gun.



Figure 10: Stock photo of T-wall at Kurdish *Peshmerga* Checkpoint

Suad described the flashbacks the T-wall gave her, a return to the moment of acute suspense just before her child was shot and killed. Her car had been stopped at a checkpoint on the way out of Anbar province, a place in the road also framed with T-walls. Men wearing official uniforms asked for documents, but before the family could produce them, they noticed a long line of Sunni men shackled with their hands over their heads. “We knew immediately that this was a false checkpoint. This was a militia taking our men to be killed or worse,” Suad told me. Her husband, who was driving, floored the gas pedal and drove straight through while the checkpoint operators fired endless rounds into the back of the car. He was shot and injured, but managed to keep his foot on the pedal, while Suad, who did not know how to drive, steered from the passenger’s seat. By the time she had compressed her husband’s wounds to his face and neck, Suad turned to find one of the children’s bodies cold and blue in the back seat. A bullet had entered the back of his head and exited through his cheek.

Now, upon seeing the T-wall, the scene flooded back. She panicked and moved to protect her remaining children by covering their heads and ducking them down onto her lap. Her statement “Who knows what is coming next” makes the most sense right before a checkpoint. She faces off with a T-wall that serves as a focal point for her more diffuse experiences of tension and uncertainty in the hotel room, across the distance between the hotel and her husband’s hospital bed, and across the distance between refuge in Kurdistan and everything else at home in Anbar. It epitomizes the suspense we all felt in the car, not just anticipating the moment ahead at the checkpoint, but the bigger question of how life might continue to be possible with so many nasty, life-altering surprises likely ahead.

Suspense is a visceral, daily manifestation of the Global War on Terror. Outside of the holding cell, the impact of chaos, suspense, and eroded trust in Iraq achieves the same effects as that of torture at the population level through, “[t]he deliberate manipulation of the environment... intended to cause psychological disorientation, and reduced psychological wherewithal” (Bybee 2002). This chapter gets at the relationship between enclosure and concomitant uncertainty in the daily lives of Anbari people, moving through various forms of suspense to articulate how Counterterrorism is not only lived, but also theorized by people living out its application. The U.S. bunkering of Iraqi landscapes through the erection of T-walls and base-like enclaves has created conditions of widespread enclosure, making movement across space and life outside of bunkers rife with both spatially diffuse and temporally protracted suspense. Suspense, often articulated through the figures of T-

walls and checkpoints, indexes a broader condition of daily uncertainty and the erosion of trust across Iraq. At checkpoints, suspense often takes the form of life-and-death events, which generate moments of total clarity derived from binary possibilities between living and dying. But around and away from checkpoints, diffuse suspense —sometimes also called chaos, sometimes also called stress— is more difficult to articulate. Diffuse, protracted suspense is nonetheless critical to understanding what Counterterrorism is and what it does to those living its daily modes.

Section I: T-walls and the Archipelago of Bunkers

“The place your body inhabits is inscribed in your imagination, your unconscious, as a space of possible bliss. Or menace. What if you are forced to abandon your imaginary spatial markings? A torturer wants you, the victim, to regress, because he wants to demean his prey, to make you lose your identity as a subject. Suddenly you have no choice; running away is impossible. The rooms are too small or too big, the ceiling too low or too high. Violence exercised by and through space is spatial torture.”

—Tschumi Bernard, *Architecture and Disjunction*



Figure 11: T-walls eclipse a shorter brick wall around a police headquarters in Erbil, photo by Kali Rubaii

Certain landscapes create certain modes of suspense. How do Anbari people come to feel such suspense, traversing places they have always traversed? How are conditions created so that movement, even at home —even a move toward the doorway— becomes suspenseful?

The U.S. bunkering of Iraq since 2003 has created conditions of widespread enclosure in which movement across space is defined by passage through many checkpoints. T-walls are a central figure of this process. In this section, I argue that T-walls help us re-conceptualize walls, gaps, and bunkers. I ask the reader to focus on life in the gap to understand how the bunkering of Iraq produces suspense exactly where walls stop, and open spaces lend themselves to the violent sifting of bodies.

Bunkering Iraq

In the 2000s, the U.S. began a widespread practice of siege warfare in Iraq. This tactic came from strategies used in other wars. For example, Boer forces used siege tactics in the Second Boer War (Khalili 2010). During the 1950s, British forces used fortified villages in Malaya to separate the civilian population from communist insurgents. French forces during the Battle of Algiers cordoned off the Casbah and its residents in order to defeat the National Liberation Front (FLN). The model of “cordon and search” is meant to sift sheep from wolves, to cleanse spaces of civilian life and turn them into battlefields. Atypical in relation to other historical examples of sieges, these siege tactics are about construction: instead of attacking to break through fortified walls, they imposed the siege on the enemy by building walls. In order to use the method of a siege, they had to first produce conditions of siege-ability, to generate an environment that made sieges possible. This may be best defined as urbicide, one of many Counterterrorism strategies in which landscapes and environments are manipulated in order to suppress insurgency or grassroots resistance. Urbicide, as defined in Lambert’s short book, *Weaponized Architecture: The Impossibility of Innocence*, is a “military operation in architecture that either simply murders a civilian population by the means of architecture, or practically and symbolically destroys the organizational and cultural aspects of the city in a biopolitical attack on a population” (2013, 25)⁶³.

⁶³ One example of “murder via architecture” so obvious it is easy to miss is the practice of bombing in urban centers, which more often kills with collapsed walls and ceilings than with the blast of a bomb itself.

In Iraq, urbicide — called “attack design” by the Pentagon leading up the 2003 U.S. invasion — was accelerated with T-walls. At night U.S. forces walled in the borders of areas like Sadr City in Baghdad and the outskirts of Fallujah with T-walls, making rapid landscape change that was very difficult to undo because of the size, weight, and shape of T-walls. At the same time, U.S. military bases were bunkered from outside with the same technology. Quickly, Iraq became an archipelago of walled bunkers. From one view, cities and bases became almost indistinguishable kinds of places.

Bunker spaces across Iraq carve out enclaves for bases, government headquarters, and homogenized neighborhoods. These bunkers are often linked by corridors of safe passage, forming an archipelago. Mark Duffield defines the *bunker* in more-than military terms that suit the conditions being formed in Iraq: a secure space of private restoration from which international elites can safely strategize power without the need for negotiation or compromise in a fragmented and threatening lifeworld (2011). Inside the bunker is a bubble of non-suspense, of situated rest, like a corral where sheep may rest from risk, but also a cyst that disrupts the flow, habitat, and movement of wolves. A guarded shopping mall is one such space common in cities across the Middle East. Shopping malls require passage through a metal detector, a bag search, and other checkpoint activities before one enters. Inside, the wealthy can consume at ease, feeling at rest and secure as if on the inside of a fortress⁶⁴. Outside, are the wolves who occupy what has become the scraps

⁶⁴ In the U.S., a gated community might evoke a clearer picture of bunkered spaces.

of space.

Counterterrorism promotes the wolf-and-sheep metaphor to support the mode by which operatives perceive their relationship to the civilian populations they police, torture, and kill. Zane, a counterinsurgency operative featured in a previous chapter, describes it as do many others worldwide: “We are sheepdogs. We protect you, sheep, who are civilian people. Sometimes we have to bite. Some sheepdogs defect and become wolves. Our job is to detect wolves from the outside, and those hiding on the inside. We are the middle animal, taking care of the flock, keeping the flock together.” The analogy helps solidify the way in which sheepdogs are presented as a source of protection when in fact they are mostly a source of control. The bunker then is a place with a carefully policed entrance, like a barn with watchdogs, guard dogs or sheep dogs standing by. This is an architectural attempt to sift through and sort out civilians from insurgents, sheep from wolves. Wolves have been sorted out and may try to enter from the outside, the imagined chaotic wilderness.

Along with bombing, the formation of a bunkered landscape is one of many strategic objects and activities that work to “destroy the life-world of the enemy” (Duffield 2011, 4) such that “the will to fight could be broken and popular insurrection and calls for appeasement could be encouraged” (Duffield 2011, 759). In other words, Duffield argues that the bunker is a “classic military *response* to environmental terror”, conditions of terror by and through the social and material environment (2011, 764). I argue, alongside Eyal Weizman, that preemptive architecture and landscaping also *induce* environmental terror not only by blurring

war, nature, and economy, but also by generating conditions in which suspense can be manufactured and leveraged for political control (2007). For a space to fill with the sense of situated rest or ease, other spaces must be filled with anxiety. If the bunker is a refuge from an environment of suspenseful harm, then what of those-who-remain, who arrive at no refuge and instead pass through the inhospitable corridors between them? For those excluded from bunkers, it is at the lip of refuge where Counterterrorism manifests itself as —simply— terror.

Cement Sentinels Guarding Bunkers



Figure 12: Banksy-style painting inside the Green Zone, photo by Arianna Dini

In Iraq not only do T-walls have a functional role in rapidly constructing seemingly permanent and impassable boundaries, they also carry a symbolic weight, demarcating new kinds of insides and outsides, building a landscape marked with the permanent stamp of U.S. occupation in Iraq. T-walls, sometimes nicknamed “concrete soldiers,” replaced the many men and women from the U.S. and Europe who since returned home, leaving a vacuum filled by automated security, which in

the case of T-walls takes the form of infrastructure that enforces impasse without the need for thinking beings. They build up the never-aftermath of U.S. occupation, perpetually alert and ready. Like razor wire-topped fences, they capture human bodies like a sieve in their sheepdog teeth⁶⁵, and set conditions for mass confinement. As Reviel Netz writes about Nazism in *Barbed Wire*, “the goal... was to bring certain space under complete control.” War brings spatial contractions: the enemy “was not, to start with, limited to a single space. Hence... the operation of concentration had a major importance” (2004, 195). In Iraq, too, the project of urbicide was a project of sorting, confinement, and concentration, signified most readily by the T-wall. This landscape signals a much broader overarching social transition: a shift from trust in connection to trust in separation⁶⁶.

Like Bremer’s 100 orders, they seem relatively innocuous when individuated, but as links in a chain, T-walls are perhaps the most destructive object on the warscape. Aggregated and automated forms of population control normalize the landscape of war, making it feel as if the conditions of permanent peace are in fact made possible through perpetual potential for total war, through an “architecture of enmity” (Shapiro 1997, xi). T-walls thus serve as a transitional punctuation between war (the mass violation of life and life-producing relations) and counterinsurgency (the maintenance of new conditions set by the shock of war and reinforced by

⁶⁵ See Tyler Wall’s “Legal Terror and the Police Dog” on the desire to devour the other in narratives of order and progress, particularly in Abu Graib and U.S. prisons — and on the role of “teeth” in systemic violence (2014).

⁶⁶ See Weizman’s discussion of siege architecture and the Dogville effect in “Walking Through Walls” (2005).

undermining, preempting, and stopping insurgent resistance to those conditions). The gun transforms to a wall. The former is lethal, the latter is “less-than-lethal.” It appears as if offense has become defense: killing starts to look more like confinement and concentration. Bodies die only when they try to move, to overreach, to exceed newly set boundaries, or to make ingress into the safety of a bunker. Simultaneously, the bunker begins to appear more and more as if it were a refuge from the world it has produced. It hides itself as a mechanism of disrupting conviviality in Iraq. The bunker is felt by Anbari people to be run by outsiders that have created cyst-like inside-places across their land. In his chapter “Urban Warfare: Walking Through Walls,” Eyal Weizman, citing Agamben and Arendt, argues that, “the breaching of the physical, visual, and conceptual border / wall exposes new domains to political power, offering thus a physical diagram to the concept of the ‘state of exception’” (2007, 210). Indeed, while the U.S. appears to have evacuated Iraq, it has in fact formed material colonies of a new political order.



Figure 13: Photo inside a U.S. military base in Iraq, from Robert Hall (2013)

The Qualities of a T-wall

Because T-walls are small objects relative to their final product, they work like vertebrae. They are expensive, although the actual price of a single T-wall is difficult to find. They are almost impossible to move or destroy without heavy construction equipment, but because they are prefabricated, they are relatively quick and mobile for militaries and government with lifting equipment. They stack up, interlock, and make a flexible, curvaceous fortifications. T-walls, like vertebrae, allow us to deconstruct the idea of walls by pondering how they work as segments and what they actually build up when they work together. As one architect in Iraq told me, “T-walls are small, so we can still imagine how walls have six sides, not just two.” I like this thought because I am weary of discussion about walls as having

“sides” at all. I think this is a fundamental, strategic misunderstanding of what walls are and what they do. Walls are never actually barriers or edges. They do not act as the limit of a space, but instead form the spine of a place. They should be centered from where they hide in the margins of a scene. Walls, for all they are protested to do, rarely stop people from moving or crossing their lines. In fact, they often force intimacies between segregated people in new ways. For example, nannies in South Africa lived *in* the homes of their white employers because barriers produced conditions in which intimacy across groups was easier than within groups: apartheid did not physically separate black people from white people, but black people from their own family members (Dubow 1989; Hetherington 1993).

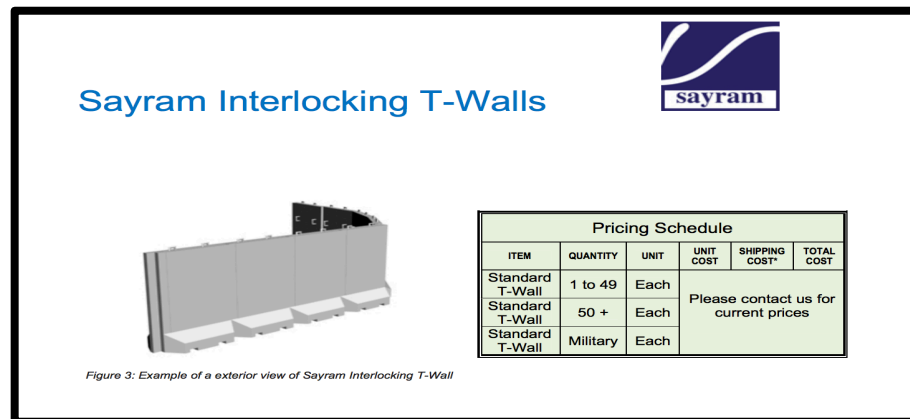


Figure 14: Sayram T-walls brochure for offices in Afghanistan and Turkey

As objects, they work differently than as edges: the gaps between walls produce the function of walls as aggressive objects. The checkpoint, an opening in the wall, does the real work and the real violence. Walls work intimately with checkpoints, in a coordinated complex of architectural violence. I propose that anytime we see “wall”

we should also think, “funnel.” The funnel is a technique, widely overlooked because of the distracting figure of the wall. The funnel is a treacherous gap between walls, sometimes taking the role of checkpoint, and sometimes simply a death trap. For example, the U.S.-Mexico border is comprised of fence and wall segments, with large gaps where there is no architectural barrier. If one examines the entire map and topography of wall placement, it is possible to see why. The wall/fence is not meant to stop the flow of people, but instead to funnel people into the deadliest desert passes (De Leon 2015). The deterrent is not the wall, but death. The supposedly less-than-lethal paradigm of peace simply occludes deaths by diffusing and naturalizing them as suicidal choices instead of the direct results of military violence. In *Land of Open Graves*, De Leon makes this point explicitly by drawing attention to the active and aggressive violence indexed by the material remains of those whose bodies did not survive passage through spaces seemingly open and un-walled (2015). Thus, when we consider the figure of walls, we must also attach to this figure the mode it indexes, the mode of funneling people and things through openings, through checkpoints. These openings in walls make the wall serve its purpose. A wall is an aggressive object exerting force in the world, not a passive topographic boundary, or a mediator of two “sides,” but a refraction of suspenseful social interface that happens in the gap.

The Gap Affords Semiotic Intimacies

T-walls were adapted from the Berlin Wall and developed by the Israelis for a “separation wall” surrounding West Bank communities in Palestine. Dany Tirza, the architect of Israel's separation wall, mimicked the bunkering of Europe during WWII

(T-walls as a geometric structure also appear in segments of the Berlin wall). For Tirza, the key operational concept of a wall is to communicate something, to argue for a line with two sides: “‘People have to know where the line is and if they cross the line they are breaking the law,’ he says. ‘People need to understand it’s not open to everyone.’ It’s a psychological thing” (Helman 2017). In other words, it’s a semiotic thing. The wall only stops people from crossing the line because it signals that one should stop. The “line drawing” capacity of a T-wall means that it is not uncommon to see a single T-wall in the road to signify a checkpoint in Iraq or Israeli occupied Palestine. It is physically possible to drive past, but people read the sign that it gives off as “stop.” T-walls can become a useful figure for resistance, then, because like any figure, they automate meaning. Anyone can use a T-wall to mark an inside into which an outsider shall not pass, or through which one may pass in the gap.

The U. S. Army website defines itself as a website "designed to help you participate in the various conversations regarding Army doctrine and practice," and publishes an array of articles that look like news media but act as a blog site. Toni Mussi, writing for this website describes T-walls as “the ‘cement sentinels’ that stand on guard 24/7 around our bases... T-walls have become a medium to display unit ‘esprit-de-corps’... So prevalent are T-walls, that miniature T-walls are routinely presented as going away gifts to remind all of the surroundings” (They are actually plastic key-chain sized replicas, or ceramic trophies; 2011).⁶⁷ The T-wall is certainly a

⁶⁷ Of note is that this discussion on T-walls is centered in army discussions, where landscape dominance is key: "The U.S. Army’s mission is to fight and win our Nation’s wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of

symbol of the American bunker in Iraq. In fact, at the Baghdad International Airport, there is a row of them painted with the state flag of each of the 50 states. Signatures from soldiers and private contractors are scrawled across them.

John Spencer, who was deployed as a U.S. infantry soldier in 2008, writes, “Concrete is as symbolic to [U.S.] deployments as the weapons they carried.” He adds that, “Concrete might not be sexy, but it is the most effective weapon on the modern battlefield” (2016).



Figure 15: Screenshot from Desert Memories military memorabilia website (bbrasch.com) for ordering miniature T-walls

military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders." (<http://www.army.mil/info/organization/>)

But as Tirza says, a wall is not really about the wall, but about “cross-border cooperation. It has to be part of a whole system” (2011). That whole system is a physical and social system of Counterterrorism, a network of barriers but also a set of gaps in which power is brokered and negotiated. In Iraq, T-walls were sometimes used to stop IED bombs and other insurgency explosive attacks. As John Spencer writes, “To be sure, concrete walls did not eliminate the IED threat. As with any protective obstacle, they should have been under direct observation, which was not always feasible” (2016). In other words, T-walls do not actually work as barriers. They are objects, and the gaps between, as well as the spaces around, require lethal policing in order to work. T-walls’ real function is to funnel people into narrow places. But also, very often T-walls are used *within* the gap between contiguous walls, to make the gap treacherous. Here is a computer-generated diagram (although what you see are jersey barriers, a precursor to T-walls). The small segments are objects “of the gap,” and help to facilitate a treachery in the gap that allows sheepdogs to man and filter wolves from sheep as they pass through a slow gauntlet.



Figure 16: The checkpoint funnel: walls and gaps⁶⁸

Direct Confrontation in the Gap

As a figure, T-walls enable the possibility for Anbari people to directly confront the bunkering of Iraq and the permanence of U.S. occupation. Some of my interlocutors from Ramadi talked about how they saw the walls going up across one of their most frequented roads in 2009. They decided to drive up with tractors and try to knock them down. American snipers shot at them so they left. The following week, two cranes resumed lifting one T-wall at time and placing them in a tight line, slowly closing off the road. The men from Ramadi found two high places nearby and shot at the crane operators, both American private contractors. The following day, new operators were brought in —this time, Iraqis. “They were trying to put up a human shield to keep building the wall,” said Jafar, who also ended up being the one who

⁶⁸ Image downloaded from an online forum called “Military Modeling” (2012). This image was produced in response to this public chat entry: “I’m planning a future build of an Iraqi checkpoint featuring an M2A2 Bradley, jersey barriers, etc. I’ve been trying to find decent reference photos showing the set-up and construction of such a checkpoint, but to no avail. Can any one shed some light for me please?”

finally shot at the leg of one of the crane operators. “We made like a battle over the wall. They were trying to find us and shoot back at us, using the Bremer walls to shield from us. They were building to cut off our path, our road. It was like a small war we made over this.” Eventually, in spite of this resistance, the U.S. military completed the wall and sealed off the road. The men lost access to the other side of the street as the wall transformed it into the newly made “inside” of a bunker space. Just as urgently, Jafar tells me, “We also lost the capacity for direct resistance. Now, what do we do— paint on the wall? Or shall we knock it down?”

Talking with T-walls: Less Direct Confrontation in the Gap

Manufacturing total segregation and totalitarian suppression of movement, the T-walls finally separated the American soldiers and the Anbari men, making future interface with one another indirect. While T-walls compress spaces and cut some parts off from others, they also stretch out the distances at which social interface between enemies takes place. Indirect, remote killing is part of how Counterterrorism works, by hiring out militias to do the direct interface; automating lethal governance via drones and remote sensing; and replacing soldiers with T-walls. The Lafarge manager’s claim in the previous chapter that concrete “cools things down” seems to be the case here as well.

Once T-walls became an integral part of the bunkered landscape in Iraq, they became a medium for contestation, rather than the thing being contested. Chris, who has worked in special ops units since 2004, described social interface with Anbari militias through T-walls. “When we were on the base, we had a map. The T-walls

were arranged in a maze, and everyday the base changed the route in. So, like, in a Humvee, I'd be there telling the driver, okay left, now right... and those fuckers, the Anbari tribes... I don't know how they did it, but one night they changed the T-walls around and we got stuck in our own maze! It happened more than once." In Chris's experience, "those fuckers" were like impish leprechauns who appeared at night, played tricks, and disappeared. T-walls were a thing around which both sides of a game could move pieces in gestures of threat that were not themselves actual threats. T-walls numb, dampen, and normalize the battlefield as if it were a game board, framing the game but not part of the game, not up for debate but rather the infrastructure upon which debates might be acted out. To the Iraqi men who moved them, the presence of T-walls can no longer be contested: rearranging them is the best they can do. So they come to serve an enunciatory function, one in which people with opposing interests collaborate, often unwillingly, in order to communicate dissent. It is in the funnel, the opening in the base, that contestation might be possible within limits. This is where, and how, the permanent mark of U.S. occupation is refuted, claimed, and hardened⁶⁹.

To some degree, there is a mutual agreement that T-walls harm Iraqis and protect Americans. As one Iraqi told me, "For us it's a sword, for them it's a shield." The wall segment is a common ground for communication and interface not because it is neutral but because it is the opposite. The T-wall means different things to

⁶⁹ Other forms of infrastructural segregation include freeway placement in "urban renewal" projects.

different people, but is also communicable across distinction *because* it is just one thing all the time: an object that is always militarized and always unfair.

Talking *on* T-walls: Non-Confrontation Where There is No Gap

Now, after a decade of T-walls in Iraq, they have leaked out into non-military spheres, militarizing already problematic governance forms. In front of a prison in Northern Iraq, a layer of T-walls is lined side by side, obscuring the prison behind it. While painting on the prison wall itself would be illegal, T-walls are so ugly that mural work is encouraged on walls used for civilian applications. In this case, artists were commissioned to paint a mural. They chose to depict a prison-break, a scene of prisoners prying open the bars. The T-wall here offers a medium for dissent; even as it deflects direct abolition of prisons, or even graffiti on the prison wall itself. As an object or center for nonverbal messaging, the T-walls require all involved to collude over the value of the wall itself. This might seem familiar to those who see graffiti on walls that segregate urban communities. The walls, which facilitate apartheid regimes all over the United States, are rarely demolished. They have become a *medium* for contested inequality. Their rooted bottoms and often wire-lined tops are not up for contestation. They are not imagined to have a horizontal end or edge or limit, either: just two ever-stretching sides against which meaning bounces off. Like Jafar, I find myself wondering if there is an enormous distinction between painting on the wall and knocking it down.



Figure 17: T-walls in Erbil with mural of pastoral scene, photo by Kali Rubaii

The U.S. occupation (starting with the Gulf War, ten years of sanctions, and the 2003 campaign) has manifested in a permanent bunkering of Iraq, the formation of siege-able communities, and indirect mediums for indirect resistance. When sniping T-wall construction failed, moving T-walls did something. When that failed, painting murals did something. But at each stage of semiotic resistance, we can see a gradual acceptance of walls as naturalized barriers upon which messages are painted, rather than objects that are messages themselves; and before that, as objects that are weapons. T-walls are collusive, contested objects that epitomize a long-term, imperial relationship between Iraq and the U.S.. Sadly, all kinds of practical concessions are made in service of what seems an unstoppable militarization of civilian life. Baruch Spinoza, in his book, *Ethics*, argues that there is a distinction between “sad passions,” power sapping relations bodies can have with other entities, and “joyful passions,”

harmonious and power inspiring relations (1992). Tschumi, framing this in architectural terms, defines “sad passions” as “sad architecture,” which is an arrangement of space that saps the life out of a person (1996). Where people are sorted between sheep and wolves in order to move around, the sad architecture of bunkers, walls, gaps, and T-wall “sentinels,” saps insurgency energy by inducing suspenseful encounter. This is not an architecture of joy (Lambert 2013)⁷⁰ but one that produces widespread suspense.

Bunkers as a Peace Place?

T-walls have so inundated Iraq through the bunkering of the landscape that there are many left over and discarded single T-walls lying around. One or two news articles about “creative repurposing” of T-walls demonstrated that in fact no one has found any alternative purpose for them (Meinhold 2011). Because they are made up of qualities designed to repel, they make for terrible planters or housing walls. Here, a computer-generated mockup of what modular housing in Iraq may look like, misses the irony that people in Iraq are not homeless because they lack housing or good building materials, but rather because of the bunkering, sectarianizing, and militarizing of their landscape by technologies like T-walls, in the first place.

⁷⁰ At the time of writing, April 2017, people in Mosul are reported to be eating grass and cats to survive a siege. It is in the gap, in the funnel between walls and their open spaces, that survival is possible, that power is brokered, that meals are delivered.



Figure 18: Image from Bridgette Meinhold's, "Leftover T-wall Barricades Could Provide Modular Housing For Iraqi Families"

When I asked Anbari families about this eco-friendly repurposing of war-waste (among other moves to “green” war), they were amused. One architecture professor, originally from Fallujah but teaching at Dohuk University in Kurdistan, shrugged her shoulders and said, “What is the repurposed function of a soldier? None. He stops being a soldier to become something else. So, what is the repurposed function of a T-wall since it can never stop being a soldier? None. There is no peacetime function for these things.” The irony of T-walls as peacetime security infrastructure is evidenced by broader sentiment that T-walls are fundamentally militarized and militarizing, and by the reaction of Anbari people to find adapting them comical or entertaining. Suad and her children find T-walls terrorizing.

Nonetheless, market drive for ongoing production, means that T-walls have been civilianized over time in Iraq. In the early 2000s, T-walls were produced for solely military purposes. By the time I was there in 2014, they also surrounded malls, government offices. As with any post-war economy, military excess is first sold to law enforcement, then to government institutions, and finally to the elite private sector. The militarization of police in the U.S., for example, is congruent with a reduction of profitability from the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as companies that once sold technology and training to the U.S. military turn first to domestic law enforcement, and later to the private security sector. This is how the procurement and deployment of drones, for example, moved from targeted assassination teams in the U.S. military to the city police forces in Oakland or Chicago, and eventually to the private sector, as proposed by the famous Amazon Prime ad which boasts that future package deliveries will be carried out by drone. This is a moment to consider the Peace Machine, a mode of total war that subdues any potential violation to oppressive infrastructure or elite property (Virilio and Lotringer 2008). As instruments of the peace machine, T-walls have become like a fact on the ground, a non-negotiable condition of space that funnels negotiations of power toward the gap. Overtime, enclosure generates a paradigm of peace predicated on separation, on the diminishment of mutual exposure in the gap to diminish the unpleasant feeling of suspense.

Land of Checkpoints

If the idea of bunkering spaces is to produce enclaves of “peace” or conditions of non-suspense inside shopping malls or behind blast-proof barriers, then suspense stands ready in the gap. Bunkering is as much about barriers as it is about funnels between them. It is a landscaping system that produces narrow passages in which terror and chaos become defining features of the mobility outside, or through, bunkers.



Figure 19: Suspense in the Gap, photo from *The Sandbox* blog (Bersen 2008)

In order to sustain life at home, at a distance or across many distances, many farmers I knew were forced into a transhumance they had not before known, travelling at great risk to and from places in order to keep “home” at home. By transhumance, I mean not only the practice of moving livestock from one place to another in a seasonal cycle, but also of moving *like* livestock, herded by conditions of need and threat. In order to maintain “life at home” by moving to and from it, Anbari farmers

found themselves exposed to decreasingly clear circumstances, moving across less governed borders, making transgressions across proliferating categories, and taking greater risks in unknown and unknowable conditions. Their interfaces with checkpoints were frequent but irregular, and because of their “wolf”⁷¹ as Anbari men, often life threatening. Checkpoints disrupted the continuity of lines of flight⁷², turning movement into dashed, rhythmic boosts across the landscape.

Checkpoints, after all, reinforced the segregation of Iraqi people, marked smaller and smaller territories into which people were concentrated, and exposed the erosion of trust across those territories. All are suspect to all. The checkpoint operator suspects the man travelling. The traveler suspects the checkpoint operator. Checkpoints highlighted the pervasiveness of various militias and police forces that (sometimes) governed parts of invisible, and ever shifting borders, as well as the complexity and confusion of interfaces with others: “The rate of change is very fast!” said one such friend, who told me how he never knew which kind of checkpoint he was approaching, so pocked was the landscape between the refugee camp in Domiz and his land in Anbar province that he encountered up to ten different groups managing many different types of checkpoints along the way. While Counterterrorism may shrink space and time or make new limits by rendering movement and connections sticky or stagnant; and while it may funnel violence into homes and into bodies; it also turns interiorities outward, leaving things too open, too

⁷¹ The “potential terrorists” is a figure I introduce in Chapter 1 as the “wolf in sheeps clothing,” and in Chapter 2 as “Man Two.”

⁷² Tim Ingold’s work on flight, while two-dimensional for the purposes of theorizing the “line,” is useful in imagining patterns of physical movement (2011).

loose, too fluid. Travel is marked by the treachery of gaps. Who can I trust? What can I trust them to do? Who trusts me?

Checkpoints are frequent across northern Iraq from Ramadi all the way to Erbil. They slow things down and hold things in place. They suspend the fluidity of travel, punctuating motion by holding open the possibility of passage only in certain ways and only sometimes. A trip that might have taken one hour once, now takes four with checkpoints. It is not easy to “get back” to a place one came from; nearby places begin to feel more and more remote. Sitting in Fallujah, the idea of “Baghdad” shifts in the mind’s eye: it is no longer a reachable place, but a memory of “once.” At the same time, it is also holds the possibility of being a refuge, a destination. Getting to such a place is a psychological game of scenario play because it becomes abstract. It becomes a container for *possible* meanings, never settled or realizable.

Section II: Chaos and the Erosion of Trust

“We know who you are. Who will you trust now?”

—U.S. commission billboard in Fallujah⁷³

Bunkering landscapes is concomitant (and often a response to) an environment of deep uncertainty, eroded trust, and an inability to read signs within a clear social context (sometimes called chaos). Life outside of a bunker is defined by diffuse and enduring suspense. Derek Gregory writes that at the onset of U.S. invasion, U.S. military strategy modeled an “object-ontology” in which places like Fallujah were

⁷³ Originally in Arabic, translated by the author. I do not have a photograph of this billboard.

reduced to “three-dimensional envelopes of buildings and physical infrastructures” (2010, 268). He cites a Pentagon study that referred to the failure of imagining such “envelopes” by articulating how urban spaces in Iraq were “‘hostile, highly cluttered environments’ like cities where insurgents were indistinguishable from the population at large, and called for the military to move to ‘intrusive, close-in, terrestrial means’ of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (Defense Science Board, 2004: 153-154, 163-164)” (2009; 2010, 268). In other words, there was a “rush to the intimate,” an attempt to close the gap between U.S. troops and local populations, centering the civilian population as the real battlefield (Gregory 2010). This doctrinal shift was formalized in the Counterinsurgency Field Manual (COIN), which marks the move from war-engagement to counterinsurgency, a war against the potential in all civilians to resist occupation, rather than a war against organized Iraqi army (Gregory 2010, 268; 2008; U. S. Army/Marine Corps 2007). But as Antonius Robbens writes of U.S. soldiers leaving bunkered bases, conditions of chaos meant that soldiers used increasingly mimetic responses to Duffield’s “environmental terrorism” (2010; 2011). Intimacy in this case did not mean more intimate personal encounter, per se. Instead, it means a shift from occupying spaces and places (“envelopes”), to occupying psychological states, to invading the mind and body by targeting the civilian population in an attempt to paralyze further insurgent recruitment. This paralysis is attempted by eroding the social fabric of a generally resistant Iraqi population, driving a wedge between insurgents and the rest of the population. For example, the U.S. military commissioned a billboard to be placed in Fallujah addressed to

insurgents. It read, “We know who you are. Who will you trust now?” Of course, while a shift from war to counterinsurgency did register in the stories of Anbari people, the conditions of suspense did not change much in intensity or kind. For them, the U.S. occupation of Iraq produced irreparable conditions of chaos, induced by many forms of harm in a progression from sniping to bombing, bombing to confinement, confinement to displacement, etc. As Josephine, an Iraqi doctor who fled Fallujah to her family’s village in 2011 said, the messaging campaign to “get into our heads has always been there.” “When they say things like, “We know who you are,’ how is that different than when they wrote, ‘U-S-A’ in smoke before they bombed us during the nineties? I remember as a girl they wrote messages in the sky and then killed us.” Josephine reminds me, as many Iraqi people do, that the mode of suspense is not new to them, and that the paradigm of “newness” or “innovation” prompted in Counterterrorism publicity is about branding and advertising to the American public and the weapons industry. It makes a good progress story, but the fact is that Josephine has endured several lifetimes worth of suspense already.

The Boys At Hotel Star

The regular experience of fear and suspense mark out daily life, giving it form, rhythm, and story-ability, making events out of otherwise continuous complexity. It is through stories about checkpoints (these are the *gaps* in the wall) and T-walls (these are aggressive war objects, not barriers) that I learned about all that surrounds them. The environment of terror, of chaos and complex sources of stress, is enduring. Sometimes it is subtle, rippling through rumor and imagination, into the

daily moves of people and their bodies. Some evenings in Shaqlawa Kurdistan, I shuffled up a winding hill toward the Shrine of Fertility, visited by men and couples who cannot conceive or bear healthy children. The shrine is a Christian holy site. I saw many Muslim men and couples visit the site, as well. Most of them were from Anbar. When the cover of evening was sufficient to jog politely up the hill from the town center where I lived, I chugged in a long skirt to the fertility shrine and stopped to walk when the path turned into gravel at the top. From the shrine, I could see the entire valley of Shaqlawa, the fields of half-built buildings that foreshadowed a suburban Mirawa village, and the under-construction road that lost itself in a tunnel. The light would grow soft behind me where the sharp mountains continued up and the valley would start to glow softly and light up with thousands of incandescent bulbs. From this vantage, I could see the incredible beauty of Shaqlawa, and why it was a vacation site for families from the rest of Iraq. This place was an oasis pressed against pretty mountains, even if those mountains were haunted by the remains of land mines from a recent past when Saddam was at war with the Kurds and Arab Iraqis were here in military uniform, not as refugees.

On my descent from the fertility shrine, I walked carefully in the dark through the gravel, then across little paths cutting through hilly fields at the base of the mountain. I cut behind a small cement factory and down to the road, which plunged through a quiet Christian neighborhood into the town center. This was my escape route, in the event that ISIS broke through Kurdish military lines and captured Erbil, thirty minutes away by car. Shaqlawa, known as a Christian village, would not be

treated well. The months in which ISIS seized Kirkuk were full of uncertainty, and media coverage in the U.S. was dramatic. The Kurdish government, seeking as much U.S. military support as possible, exaggerated the threat of ISIS to Erbil, its capital. The whole world was living in suspense, waiting for the next well-publicized ISIS beheading of foreign nationals in the news, and anticipating the possibility of a rapid turnover from one regime (in this area the Kurdish government with its *Asaish* and *Peshmerga*) to another, ISIS. The perception of this possibility was exaggerated, producing suspense that in turn exaggerated our performances of obedience, as well as our individual ways of seeing bunkers and corridors everywhere we moved. (We, meaning those who perceived themselves to be innocent civilian bystanders.) After a series of emails from UCSC Risk Services insisting that I meet a man with a black backpack and a red baseball cap in a shopping mall to be “extracted”⁷⁴, I did get into my mind that I should have a backpack packed and know the route to a nearby spring in the mountains, where I might hide out if ISIS entered Shaqlawa. The route was scenic, and the water at the source of the spring was sweet. Rumors that there were land mines still in the hills meant that very few people explored the mountains. From the many traces of small vineyards, footpaths, and dirt aqueducts feeding little rows of grassy crops, I suspected that locals of Shaqlawa were spreading this rumor to keep Arab tourists out of their spring-fed mountains. I trespassed lightly. The evacuation of visitors from the hillside because of the rumor of landmines is but one example of a

⁷⁴ This is possibly the most dangerous scenario I could think of in Iraq. Being in a shopping mall is not wise in a place where suicide bombing is a reality. But meeting a man with a black backpack in such a location seemed downright ridiculous.

general sense of paralysis felt by Anbari families— that to move and to stay in place are both dangerous choices. The suspense of anticipated violence is a powerful form of confinement that transforms the ways that people traverse landscapes or witness signs written into those landscapes.

On my way down the plunging hill one evening, an older man sitting on the porch of a hotel with his big belly and prayer beads loose in his open hand called me over. He had about ten teenage men behind him, and at first I thought I was going to be cat called. But the man with the belly said, “We hear you are looking for families from rural places around Fallujah. We are all from Fallujah. The boys will let you interview them.”

This began a long engagement of weekly visits with “The Boys” at Hotel Star⁷⁵. They told the story of preempted suspects, young men of fighting age from Anbar, who face brutal discrimination and grave danger. They are often the only remaining male heads of their households, struggling to complete their educations⁷⁶, and deeply engaged in helping me write “the American book.” They offered critical analysis of current events they saw in the news, gathered photographs and drew pictures for me, and helped me locate other families to interview. In a way, they were

⁷⁵ This section was heavily edited by The Boys. We have spent hours on it, with great difficulty. They cannot read above an elementary school level in Arabic, and I cannot translate my writing above that level either. So I have read this chapter out loud in sections on Skype and Google Hangout, and we have revised it together in conversation.

⁷⁶ Many young men and women I met during fieldwork asked me for books and reading lessons, aware of the falling rate of literacy in Iraq, once the highest in the region especially among women. While the battles of Fallujah are straightforward in their horror, it is the cascading chaos such battles unleashed that captures the attention and emotion of younger interlocutors.

my fixers among the displaced communities of people from Kharma and Saqlawiya. At a large glass table in the common room of this hotel, I learned countless details about Anbar from this cluster of eager minds. We talked about violence, perceptions of Arab men, and the chaos of the Iraqi government bombings and ISIS. In this section, I will work with the narrative of a single person, Sami (whom you met earlier), as he tells his story over time, in segments, and with the help of his friends at Hotel Star. I will fold analysis into the footnotes for the sake of flow.

“I am not afraid of death anymore”

Sami was seven-years-old when the second battle of Fallujah began. At the time, he was in the city and eventually joined many others fleeing to relatives in his mother’s village, located just outside of Saqlawiya. Sami excused himself and said he needed to look into the distance when he talked to me so he would not feel too emotional to tell his story. I noticed that he did not actually look into the distance but moved his eyes rapidly back and forth across the horizon of his view. When I asked about it, he said he learned about this coping when reading online about PTSD treatments for American soldiers. Most of The Boys causally mentioned self-medicating for trauma by searching for online resources afforded to American soldiers. One of The Boys joked that this was a Cain and Abel “brotherhood” they shared, a common trauma between aggressor and victim. According to Sami, rapid eye movement helps to keep a person present when they might otherwise get lost in a flashback. It seemed to work for him as he talked, but like his peers, he also relied on jokes to break the tension of the narrative when this first strategy failed. He describes

himself as “20 years too old” from the long-term wear of feeling perpetually “on” under conditions of war.

It would have been impossible for both cultural and psychological reasons for Sami to tell this story in linear, detailed form, but he was generous and gave me the time to ask questions and piece the story together into a composite of his unedited sentences. He did not tell the story in this order. I have edited out the questions and prompts that elicited these details to make his story as understandable as possible to those of us accustomed to chronology. I have also edited out most side comments from his peers, but the reader should know that person-centric narratives are rare among Anbari people, and perhaps all Middle Eastern communities. It would have never been appropriate for me to meet alone with any particular individual among The Boys, because it would raise suspicion about the authenticity, honesty, or reliability of an individual seeking to meet alone. The possible abuse of privacy — like seeking favors from outsiders at the expense of others — is one example of how trust could be eroded under conditions of fragmentation. But more importantly, no one felt it made any sense to give personal stories when the story of Anbar is a collective one. When I asked to hear people’s stories individually, I got shrugs and comments like, “The general picture is more accurate,” or “Why my story? It is not a special story. It is like the others.” Indeed, I was struck by the uniformity of people’s stories, not because people narrated their stories the same way, but because of the ubiquity of certain horrors that were thought to be “not worth mentioning.”

When I finished compiling Sami's story, which is indeed an exemplary personal narrative that can stand as a representative of countless others, he commented that the style was too personal for the collective story shared among his peers and family. He also felt, as I do, that telling the stories of Fallujah and the battles of Fallujah may have historical significance, but they understate the power of rhythmic disruption to his life, and somehow limit the reader's capacity to imagine the impossibility of the future by overstating the impossibilities of the past. He liked, however, that the story might traumatize the reader enough to give him or her "real empathy," by which he means a physical or visceral state of discomfort and exhaustion that parallels his own. His story as a whole is meant to contextualize various forms of suspense and their resulting effects —the exhausting, visceral project of craning for meaning in signs, making decisions and inferences about insufficient information in order to take action. Diffuse suspense, or chaos, is the condition of many signs coming from many places at once, while people like Sami are deprived of any contextual framing to interpret what they mean.

"They wanted revenge, the Americans. The Americans wanted revenge for the Blackwater men. They told us to leave the city and to abandon the people who were fighting to protect the city. It was really strange because they would not allow the men to leave." From the age of seven, Sami has understood that being a man makes him a target of suspicion and a candidate for preemptive harm against his body. He describes the self-awareness among men that to be separated from the women was a signal of something worse.

“My father tried to leave with us, but they stopped him, the Americans. Can you imagine, Kali, the Anbari men sending their women alone outside of the city? We went home and stayed together. I don’t remember that day myself. What I remember is the American snipers would play a game, they called it ‘the Family Game’ I think. I remember that after our building was bombed, we were all okay. The building was crumpled, but no one was hurt. We saw some fluid on the ground leaking and it smelled strange, not like gas, but then it seemed to change color and turn purple or blue when it waved up from the ground. We were afraid of the gas it made, so we started to run out into the street.” Here is one moment when a sign is underdetermined, where Sami cannot be sure of what the fluid is, why it changed color, and what these signs mean. To some degree, the uncertainty of meaning feels to Sami like conducted chaos, as if he is always falling into traps. It is unclear to everyone how they should respond. But, as it turns out, running into the street was as dangerous as staying put.

“A sniper shot my sister and I saw the hole in her belly grow red, you know growing round and round and round, bigger. I am her big brother. She was a good girl. My father ran out to get her. She was screaming. But when he ran out to get her, the sniper shot him in the leg and he fell. He tried to crawl toward her, and they shot his hand. There was blood all over and I never heard my father scream before. He was so gentle and quiet. My sister was getting quiet, but my father kept reaching for her. They shot him in the neck and he stopped screaming. Blood gurgled out and he turned to face us.” The conditions of suspense and chaos coalesce into an event, a moment in

which the signs of death are overt. As Sami speaks, I notice his detailed descriptions of the signs themselves over or in place of their meaning: his sister's belly is red, and the blood makes a mark that is round and growing. He does not say, "She was bleeding to death." I take the fact that he describes the sign itself, rather than what the sign means (bleeding or dying), to index his hyper-vigilance. In this case, the *actionable* meaning of the sign is reduced. What can he do? The growing circle of blood is in fact *not* a signal to rush over and stop the bleeding as it should be (bleeding/dying commands intervention). He cannot react to the sign the way his father did, because it will only get more people killed. Instead, the sign of a growing round circle on his sister's body stands alone, without the impingements that such a clear signal should make. Sami is living in a state of suspension, of paralytic uncertainty. Meaning is disaggregated from doing.

As Sami speaks, he leans toward me, his forehead wrinkled in the crisis of the past. Like his forehead, the order of events open and contract like an accordion. "My sister was still alive and she was whimpering. I know that the pain in her abdomen was great. We understood they did not want us to save her, and that they would kill us. We talked to her. You know Dora the Explorer? We talked about that cartoon to her. We were trapped and slept the night there. In the morning, my sister was dead, and my father was dead. We stayed inside the part of our house where we could still light the stove and my mother made some warm food and we had tea and were quiet

all night⁷⁷. We heard the noises of war all night. Big low sounds, and short shot sounds, but it was still in our area. There were many bodies in the streets. They, the Americans, rested too. In the morning we heard a shot and my neighbor screaming. Someone else was trying to collect the body, the arms and the parts, of her husband. I think they shot her too.” The story of suspense extends through an entire night and to an entire neighborhood, diffusing. The story stretches from a double-death event between two generations (father and daughter) to a neighborhood-wide, overnight condition that incorporates resting U.S. soldiers, the neighbor... The story starts to bleed into a scene of other stories, becoming a chronotope that tells us “This is war,” and eventually “This is Fallujah.”

“Oh, Fallujah! Dogs were running in the street and sometimes they would try to eat the bodies. A dog tried to drag my sister by the arm, and we threw rocks and pieces of concrete at it. My father’s eyes were open, and his mouth. My mother wanted to go and close his eyes. My older brothers would not let her go and she was crying. We were trapped there. I think another day went by, but I am not sure. I remember that the sun was low, and my two brothers were whispering together at the end of the opened wall in the building. They decided to drag in the bodies and try to wash them, so we could pray. My two brothers decided to go at one time. They thought that if there is just one sniper, at least one of them could get the bodies back. The Americans did this all over, the family game. They would try to kill one family person, and then wait and kill one at a time until none were left.”

⁷⁷ Here the home is still a partial bunker, a semi-safe enclave protected from the very near “outside” which is an environment of terror.

This is a kind of suspense through which there is no passage. There is no way to win the Family Game, except to die. The game is set up for failure, making suspense unending. Never being able to bury the dead protracts various modes of anticipation and despair over time. Throughout his story, Sami moves from Americans to *Al-Hashed* (Shi'a militias) and will later talk about ISIS, as if these actors are an interchangeable "they" that make Counterterrorism play out as a battlefield in which Sami is always a target. The "they" is a common bloc that, like the weather, creates the semiotic field Sami seeks to interpret and survive. The Family Game is predicated on the inability of people to suspend their actions when it comes to affection for or the dignity of their loved ones. It targets "family" loyalty in a way that is consistent with the trend in Counterterrorism to blur the ethical, legal, and strategic gaps between combat and refuge. Surrounded by American snipers who were told that no one left in the city is an innocent civilian, Sami's family lives out this logic from below.

"My oldest brother stepped out and they shot him in the head right away. He never made any sound. He just fell in slow motion and died before he even touched the bodies. My second brother, Hameed, was my best friend. He got to my sister and turned to bring her body to us. He stopped to close my father's eyes and they shot his ankle, the Americans did that while a son was closing his father's eyes. Not even trying to wash his body, just to close the eyes. He fell but he got back into the house. My mother washed my sister's body. My very little sister, she was small, was crying and my mother was trying to get her to be quiet." The safety of the partial bunker is

disrupted. It is not clear that they are safe to make noise even in the semi-shelter of their home. The mode of suspense registers as the need to keep quiet, to honor the setting by silencing utterances and sounds that signal life and activity. In other words, as Sami describes later, his mother was asking his sister “to play dead,” because the best “way to stop being shot was to be dead.” For those who were not dead, things much worse than death appeared on the horizon of enduring possibility.

“My brother’s ankle was really hurting. My mother heated up those things, what are they, tongs? For cooking with hot oil? She made them sterile. She tried to pull out the bullet. It was a special bullet I think. It had shattered in many parts, but she got most of it and treated the wound. We laughed that we should keep alcohol in our house! We could tell our neighbors, it’s for war! It’s for medicine!”⁷⁸ There was a lot of activity [the next day] and we crouched low in the back of the place. We saw more gas, and bombs, and heard a lot of noise. I remember hearing the sound in my sleep. I still hear it sometimes, but this is not the worst thing that would come. That is why we say, ‘Today is better than tomorrow.’ We think we are sad, and then we become more sad⁷⁹.

“My brother could not move, and we could not escape. The freedom fighters [Anbari tribal militias] were active in the city center somewhere. Our street seemed

⁷⁸ It is considered inappropriate for a Muslim family to keep alcohol in their home, but Sami, who describes himself as “not very pious,” made this joke among friends who laughed that in wartime they could justify keeping vodka or alcohol right out in the kitchen for sterilizing instruments, and perhaps for a bit of drinking too.

⁷⁹ Young people all across Iraq live pessoptimistically. See Emile Habiby’s novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (2001). See also, Maher Jarrar on deterritorialization and pessoptimism (2002).

quiet, but now we dared not go out and try to leave because of my brother. All that was left now were us. My mother, my baby sister, me, and my big brother, Hameed —the best one for me. I don't remember how time passed because it is war, and war makes time like an egg yolk in the pan, it changes the color and texture. So, I don't know what happened in that yolk sack, but it was a sack full of real agony. It was worse than death, it was a very long time." Sami described the temporal murk that Feldman speaks of when writing about gratuitous violence: "The body, altered by violence, reenacts other altered bodies dispersed in time and space; it also reenacts political discourse and even the movement of history itself" (1991, 7)... "The body's material deformation has become commensurate with the deformation, instrumentation, and "acceleration" of historical time" (Koselleck 1985; 1991, 9). Sami eventually describes this period of time — that of his brother's worse-than-death condition— as his strongest memory of Fallujah, full of smells, sounds, and emotive intensities. The place is marked with an historical acceleration, in which he becomes the head of his household.

In general, I found that Anbari people, when recounting experiences of extreme violence, captured in hyper-detail memories of sense-based noticing. For example, when a young woman from Anbar told me, "'If a car hits a ball [and pops it loudly], it's a bomb. We all have this association with sound," she is speaking to the way her senses have been trained to respond to smells, sounds, and movement by reading them as signs of war. As anthropologists critical of the category "trauma" have articulated (Bennett 2005; Douglass 2003; Fassin and Rechtman 2009), it is too

simplistic (and colonial-problematic) to describe this response to the sound of a ball popping as trauma. Rather, this collective, logical reaction highlights how hyper-readings and hyper-reactions to sensory stimulation are linked to moments of acute suspense. They are also linked to protracted moments of diffuse suspense, when signs might at any time come out of nowhere or from anywhere and mean anything.

This acute noticing is something that has captured the attention of David Eagleman. David Eagleman's experiments about memory inquire if time really does slow down during moments of acute suspense (Eagleman et al 2005). Through experiments with flashing light and sound, Eagleman's lab determined that when someone is falling, time does not slow down but rather the mind takes extra memory slices to make extra meaning out of signs in order to react to them effectively. Acute noticing, and drawing extra meaning out of underdetermined signs, is how memory and suspense are linked to temporal flow. For example, imagine time is experienced in, say, 10 memory slices per second ordinarily. In a moment of suspense, a person takes a lot more memory slices, say 25. Time will then be felt to slow down, as if things are moving at 2.5 times the rate it usually moves ($10 \times 2.5 = 25$)⁸⁰.

This also explains some of the phenomena in my previous research with refugees recounting narratives to UHCR officials in Jordan in 2009 (Rubaii 2012). They were almost never able to tell a linear story about where and when they moved to Jordan, often generating suspicion in the interviewer. Their stories did not make sense because their *reality* did not make sense, and they took so many memory slices

⁸⁰ Note, these numbers are just made up to explain the concept, and do not reflect the actual number of cuts memory makes per second.

that time became warped. When Sami describes the scrambling of time and the suspension of wartime epochs as a yolk, he is speaking to this more-than-event temporality in which an experience or set of experiences can be clustered off as a “yolk,” discrete but still not eventful per-se. Yolks meet the register of acute, but also protracted suspense.

Inducing suspense is meant to exhaust and break down the enemy. In this way, Counterterrorism works very much like torture, brought outside of singular confinement to population-level logics of confinement and harm. The production of deep anticipation, or psychological uncertainty, is central to policies of military control. Sami’s description of protracted and exhausting suspense is not unlike the time-warping of sleep deprivation, removal of light, perpetual light, and other forms of rhythmic disorientation in torture (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2002).

“Hameed started getting little drops on his forehead and my mother said, ‘That is because his temperature is very high.’ She said it was an infection from his ankle, or maybe some poison in/on the bullet, because we don’t know how that bullet is. She pulled up his pants and I saw streaks on his skin coming from inside. We did not know what it was.

“My mother said his brain would cook if we did not lower his temperature. She taught me to make a fan out of some papers, and we made a fan for his face. That was my job. I fanned his face, and sometimes he looked at me and said nice things, and most of the time he was not there. He started to hallucinate and see things and shout very loud. We tried to make him be quiet, because he was scaring our sister and

we did not know when soldiers would come back. My sister was really very quiet the whole time, watching. We were all waiting, and we could not go anywhere or do anything⁸¹. Hameed was in a lot of pain, and he would fall out of consciousness. When he did that, his head rolled back on his neck like this, with his mouth open. I never saw before he had a bad tooth in the back. His breath was very strange, like sickness. Later, when my mother opened his bandage to see the ankle, his ankle looked green and open, and I could see some of the bone. It had some black parts that my mother said were very bad.

In the daytime everything smelled very bad. I remember we drank water that smelled very bad, but it was worse in the daytime with the sun. The bodies of the dead were all around us, but at some separation from us. My father's body and my brother were swelling up in the abdomen and dogs were fighting over the pieces. I remember that the smell of death is very hard to wash. But the sickness smell, the flesh that is rotting and living at one time... it is in the middle of living and dead... it smells much worse." What some call half-life, or partial living, is one of the things Iraqis have described to me as "worse than death." Being alive without the possibility of enduring survival is a condition perceived among Anbari people as part and parcel of genocidal intent by the U.S., and later by *Al-Hashed* (Shi'a militias). This includes the inability to reproduce offspring, whether crops or children, and the high rate of

⁸¹ Note, I am writing about suspense as one of many modes that make up "Counterterrorism." Suspense produces kinds of confinement and should disorient the reader from a clear perspective about what displacement and confinement look like. Scholarship on waiting and discipline address this more thoroughly (Goffman 1971; Maister 1984; Turner 1988).

birth defects in Fallujah— children born without the possibility of enduring life. It is part of the “let live” paradigm of Counterterrorism (Puar 2017; Kilcullen 2010).

“I don’t know if it was fear or fatigue or hunger or dehydration, but I always remember that the sickness smell made me wretch. I had to run out to vomit and my mother stopped me and grabbed me and I did it on the floor right there. I had forgotten about the snipers and would have run out into the street to die! But now we had vomit and urine, and we had all made an accident in our clothes at the beginning.” Acute suspense is a physical experience. It makes sweat, it changes the regulation of the heart, and it induces what counterinsurgency operatives call a “combat crap,” the physical response of defecating in one’s pants in response to terror. Counterinsurgency operatives I worked with in Denmark and Bosnia repeated the mantra that the “combat crap” is not about fear, but rather a natural physical reaction to life-and-death situations. What is interesting about this is that Sami mentioned it during the battle of Fallujah he lived through, but he never mentioned it again. I asked him and The Boys at Hotel Star about this. They seemed to think their bodies had normalized acute stress of this kind. For example, Batman, one of The Boys, mentioned “the first time” he was hunted down by a drone. He was in a car and urinated involuntarily. By “the second or third time” he no longer reacted this way, no longer had the neurological reaction to impending death that he probably should. As he told me this, he seemed disturbed by his own realization of this fact, and with a furrowed brow turned to his friends and asked them with total sincerity, “Are we accepting this now? Are we accepting that we are hunted?” Their subsequent

discussion resulted in a set of rules for engaging drones, one of which is to not accept the hunt: Batman said if it happened again, he would not run, but in fact find a way to “make eye contact” with the drone, to try and close the spiritual and ethical distance between the operator in the office building in Atlanta or Houston and the man, standing, looking up into the prosthetic eye of the drone⁸². This idea is a resistance to the less-than-lethal paradigm of Counterterrorism, which generates distances and time-lags between cause and effect of death. In other words, not shitting your pants is a sign of the exhaustive function of long term suspenseful living, but it does not have to mean resignation. Not fearing death grants these men special powers. Like the superheroes they have named themselves after, living through and under the constant threat of death, being hunted as monsters, has changed the ethical dimensions of daily life. They now live a post-hope life in the interstitial spaces between bunkers, or in the ruins of destroyed bunkers. Batman concluded the discussion with a joke: “Well, if there is no safe place to shit— why not your pants!”

Back at the glass table, surrounded by his friends who came in and out of the room as they ran errands, Sami continued to describe what happened in Fallujah. “... My mother said she could not stand the smell of Fallujah anymore, that the smell of death would never be washed away from the streets. She wanted to run to her family village. We heard once a mosque speaker announce the hospital was bombed, so we had no hope to bring my brother there. My mother had a plastic envelope, a folder like this way [making an accordion motion with his hands to depict a multi-folder

⁸² see Gusterson’s 2016 *Drone: Remote Control Warfare* for deeper context on how this might affect a drone operator in such an office building .

binder]. We put all the documents in it. ID. Certification of birth. Money. All the important documents. My brother was moaning a lot. Hameed, he was not the fighter-type, not angry, but his fever made him angry sometimes, and sometimes not. I wanted to help him die. Even as a small boy I knew he should die, and that all these days it was taking for him to die was a kind of torture, not inside a jail, but still a torture. I did not have the words for this feeling then, but now I have these words, to say this was the American torture system. We were all kept this way, waiting for death but not ready for it, sitting in the smell of the dead and the really bad smell of living people. We thought we feared death, and then tomorrow came. You see that?"

Later, Sami referenced this moment as one reason he did not experience "rational" fear at checkpoints. "We thought we feared death, and then tomorrow came. You see that?" What he was asking me to see was how there are a lot of things worse than death, so the deadliness of the checkpoints that threaten his life are much better than the chaos that could deprive him of death or protract human suffering. He is proving a point I had not been convinced of before, that checkpoints are "good" in part *because* they are deadly — or rather, life-or-deathly. I will discuss this in more detail in the section on acute suspense, and how acute suspense offers a relief to diffuse suspense: for now, Sami is living diffuse suspense, where sources of anticipation come from all directions, not just the roadblock ahead: his brother's sick body, his father and brother and sister's dead bodies, the dogs, the snipers, the sounds of war from the mosque warning of the hospital's closure to the screams of a

neighbor. And the suspense lasts a long time, it starts with these days and weeks, and never really ends.

“Hameed, he died. It was very sad, a very painful way to die in the heat and shivering. I wanted to kill him. Maybe you should not say that in the book, because they will say, ‘See, even the Anbari are wanting to kill their own brothers!’ But it was not like that. I wanted to kill him because I loved him. But finally, he did not wake up.”

Between the time when they gathered documents to prepare to flee, and the time they fled, Sami moved into a timeframe that was “non-event,” or the stretch of time between these moments. He used words like “sometimes” and “all these days,” which gave me the impression a lot of time passed between the decision to leave and the departure itself. I think they were waiting for Hameed to die, and I never learned from Sami how long this took or what happened during that time outside of their house.

“My mother said it was time to go. We went out in the street. I felt there was always a sight on my back, that any second I would fall like my oldest brother with a bullet in my head. I imagined the scenario a lot. But we were okay. We did not run, because there were many things all over the ground, pieces of the city and we stepped over some human bodies too. My mother said to stay away from the power lines because they were open electric maybe. We got to a place in the city where we could go out through the main bridge.”

Sami remembers hearing British and Australian accents, and seeing tanks with crosses hanging on the mirrors. He began to suspect this was a holy war, instead of an ordinary imperial occupation like the ones his grandfather told of the British, and his ancestors told of the Ottoman Turks.

Escape to the Villages: A Lifetime of Suspense

Sami, his mother and his toddler sister left Fallujah and made it back to his uncle's [mother's brother's] house outside of Saqlawiya. They lived there for years, and Sami continued school a year behind his grade level, with his cousins in Saqlawiya. War followed them. Over the years into the twenty-teens, more and more people fled urban centers to join relatives in rural villages, relying increasingly on local food sources, family networks, and tribal governance — and less and less on state institutions like hospitals and now-destroyed highway systems. The national electric grid was not repaired for years. As people encroached on the rural communities surrounding Saqlawiya, they built hastily constructed, cheap dwellings on relative's land: the rural rings outlying cities in Anbar became sub-urbanized⁸³. Construction jobs were common during this time. Sami, a teenager by 2012, dropped

⁸³ The contemporary iteration of Counterterrorism as a predominantly urban concern often results in the urbanization of rural spaces. Just as walls had to be built in order to use siege tactics, so too cities needed to be built to employ urban warfare tactics. Thus, the imagined prototype of the battlefield as an urban space (Graham 2012), meant that urban spaces were increasingly produced inadvertently by those displaced from larger cities building out rings of suburban sprawl. At its simplest, urban warfare makes urban spaces in order to make warfare. The resulting bunkering of previously open spaces makes the confusion between refuge and bunker real (Duffield 2011). So, while people were building what felt like shelter and protection, they ended up producing conditions that were later leveraged for more war.

out of school to work on construction projects and support his mother and sister. He was the male head of his household.

Pressure —economic, political and social— eroded certain networks of trust, and solidified others. Sami's family became more reliant on tribal leadership to secure a regular water supply, and to secure safe passage along local roads. A neighbor seemed interested in encroaching on their plot of land or overusing common space and depriving his family of water. The local sheik stepped in to mediate, winning Sami over as a leader. His trust in governing bodies eroded, Sami says of the Iraqi state: "I cannot trust the government to provide for all of us, the citizens. We are non-citizens⁸⁴ of Iraq now, so we cannot trust their interests in entering our town, even if they say it is to provide. The Americans did the same, came with candy for us children, and then they massacred us."

The tribe, a fraught category of its own, rose as a mobilizing social institution through which Sami realizes political possibility. Sami continued, "With Maliki, we did not gain our independence from the occupation. They brought in people from outside, people we did not know, not Iraqi people at all. These people they made into the government. They are very bad. Who is left in power that is good? And they are owned by outside, by Iran. And now they are trying to kill us." He perceived himself and "his people" under perpetual siege from outside.

His best friend, Diminus, adds: "We lived this for a long time, many years. And we continued to resist. We had Anbari tribal militias, and we fought the

⁸⁴ By non-citizens, I think he means "no longer" citizens, rather than anti-citizens, which might imply being outlaws or wolves.

government this way. And then the sheiks said, let us try to nonviolent protest like the ‘Occupy People.’ There were thousands of people there every day in Fallujah, on the highway; we came into the city to do it. Men and women and children, sitting with no weapons, just with signs demanding our rights. The sheiks had a list of demands on behalf of the Sunni people, for fair treatment.” Sami continued:

“It lasted for a long time, months! Maliki came, clever idea, and took all the women only. Arrested all the women and kept them for a long time. The protests changed, and we were asking the government to give back the women⁸⁵. They did not give back the women, so the men decided to fight with weapons again. It did not work, this protest way. Same thing. We never know what will come. Ordinary day in the protest and one of those ordinary days, they took all our women. You cannot expect it unless you are keeping your mind to imagine all the possibilities of the enemy. You will go mad if you do this. So, you have to stop imagining the future at all, because the future is too much chaos, you cannot know anything, you cannot even dream about anything, because there are so many possibilities and no way to imagine the one possibility that comes to you.

“The Shi’a militias harassed us all the time. They policed our streets like they were kings and we were animals. We feared them more than the Americans. Even this we lived with. But then, for revenge, the government, Maliki started to drop bombs

⁸⁵ The strategy of changing the goal of a protest from one thing to another, and thus lowering the stakes of protest incrementally, is part of counterinsurgency tactical logic. The same process is taking place right now, as Israel’s ban on BDS activists has shifted political discourse to the rights of BDS activists instead of the ongoing BDS movement to attack the infrastructure of Israeli occupation and amplify focus on the rights of Palestinians.

everywhere. On hospitals. On schools. No more snipers, now we had big bombs that are everywhere. We never know if our house is going to be hit next⁸⁶. Many people died. Many people were being killed. It was real chaos. Even in the war in Fallujah, we could say, okay, our house is a safe place to hide. It is broken, but we can keep my brother there sick and moaning and we could wash my sister's body. Now, the house is a bomb too. We never know is it safer outside, sleeping outside, or in the house? We slept some nights in the fields like animals where my uncle still had some crops growing. Then, it got too close to us, and all of Saqlawiya saw bombs. They said on the news we were terrorists, and we were Al Qaeda, and we were ISIS. They said this to get American support, Maliki will say anything to get American support to kill us. It is a sectarian thing.

“I took my mother and my sister and we had to go, go, go. Every time we stood up, something fell. We crawled on our hands and knees to stay low. We went like that, through the almond trees. The bombing was too much. Children died. We left everything behind. I had only this shirt, these clothes on me. We even had to go under, through the aqueduct, wading up to our chests in the water, to get out. I knew to head east, toward Mosul. I knew there were hospitals there, maybe even some support. I did not think the government would bomb Mosul— it is not a rebel city like Fallujah. Anbar is like ‘land of enemies’ so we had to go out. We had a split second to decide. People ran like gazelles, back and forth. This is how people get separated. My uncle took his kids and his wives, and they went the other way. I turned and I saw

⁸⁶ Bombing is a technology that produces chaos on the ground and order from the sky.

their shoulders moving up and down, shuffling with some things they grabbed from the house. They followed the small [dry] aqueduct we had in the orchard. They made it to another village [name indistinguishable], and later it was seized by ISIS for a long time. They had very limited internet, and the phone service was small.” (When I met Sami, they were still trapped in the bottom floor of another relative’s house⁸⁷.)

⁸⁷ I was surprised how little Sami seemed to worry about them, but it was not uncommon for people to express almost no overt concern for relatives they were unable to access. I knew that, as Nancy-Scheper Hughes argues in *Death Without Weeping*, care and love are not expressed the same way everywhere, especially contexts of perpetual loss. I was not prepared for what Sami said when I asked about it, though. I said, “You don’t act worried about them.” He was explicit: “I cannot do anything. Sometimes you have to wait to feel things until you know what they mean. You haven’t heard from Dr. Safia lately, have you?” Sami jolted me. He made me realize I was doing the same “death without weeping” thing I saw in him. In irregular contact with Dr. Safia in Fallujah, I had reached out to her various times when Fallujah was bombed to see if she was okay. My inquiries always felt insensitive: of course she is not okay. Her brother was dying of brain cancer. She was living under siege. What I was really saying by reaching out to her, was “Are you still alive?” Such inquiries are not uncommon: this email, entitled “are you alive!” was sent to me the other day by a Kurdish friend:

Amjad, me, Amjad (5) are you alive ! - Great to hear from you...i wish you guys 1:05 pm

Nevertheless, sometimes such an inquiry seemed to lack sensitivity to the daily suspense Dr. Safia lived *already*, beyond event. It was not as if violent deaths happened only when international news documented bombings: life-and-death suspense was daily. When Safia did not respond to my inquiries, I knew that communication was limited and that she was either alive or not alive. I waited to feel any anxiety about her. This does not mean I did not care or love, but that my care and love did not take the shape of worry because such an orientation to the possible future was not applicable in that context. When I finally did hear from her, a strong emotion of relief rushed over me and I cried. She had escaped to her family’s village, squatted with several other families indoors for weeks while ISIS ruled the streets. She eventually made it to Baghdad. Only upon hearing of this experience did my compounded emotions of worry, concern, hope, dread, and love compress into an expressive outpouring. Before that moment, while I was waiting to hear from her, I responded just as Sami did about his uncle’s family: matter-of-factly. Diffuse suspense is too exhausting for the expenditure of worry that may be unjustified and is certainly unhelpful.

“We went for a long time east, but when we got to Mosul, it was not for long. Maybe a month? We stayed in a hotel or a small room, a place rented out for families. We ran out of money quickly. We did not have many of friends there or any family. We did not rest. We were everyday finding food at the mosque, I was searching for work. The tension was very high.

“Then, Kali, militias came in. ISIS. They were killing right and left. We were on one street, sitting in the salon [front living room in hotels] and we heard people coming in with wide eyes, “They are coming, they are coming, run for your lives!” They were killing all the men right and left. I felt my heart sink low into my guts like I swallowed it. But I only felt it for a minute. You know in the movies, when the drum beats and it is warning that war is coming, and the hero has a moment where everything zooms in? It was like that. But only for a second. Things happened very fast. We ran again. This was a very close time. I saw the trucks with the black flag turn around the corner. They were facing away from us and if they turned their head, they would have seen us. We did not try to hide. We just ran straight out. My sister tripped and I dragged her by the wrist. We rolled down into the big sewage trough under the street.

“There were many people running. We were like many ants in a flood. They shot at people. Some of the bodies fell and floated with red holes in their backs. Most of us got away. But when things were calm I expected I would look up and see them waiting on the bank or at the end for us. We were running for nothing, to no end. In the end, my sister was barefoot. My mother was very tired. I had worn all the soles

off my shoes, also. We found some shoes for me in the piles of trash that build up in the sewage troughs. I carried my sister on my back. We walked into the night, all night, and along the roads away from the city. Cities are bad. I know this now. I like Shaqlawa because it is small. Even still, I prefer the country. I prefer to be in Mirawa. There is less killing in the country.

“Along the road, when the sun was rising, a car pulled up and they said in Moslawi accents, quickly get in. We climbed in, and the people in the car were fleeing ISIS also. We trusted them. We had no choice but to trust them⁸⁸. We made it to the Kurdish border, Kurdish controlled territory⁸⁹. The Moslawi people dropped us off in Erbil. They asked us for money for the trip. We had no money. They were angry. We promised to repay them if they gave us their phone number. They said they did not trust us⁹⁰. I promised them. When they left, we were standing feeling like, What do we do now? We were dirty, covered in sewage water, covered in sweat and weather, and we were here where people were eating ice cream and dressing normally⁹¹. The Kurdish people have many reasons to resent Arabs. We were afraid

⁸⁸ Here trust is a willful act, a decision, as opposed to a feeling.

⁸⁹ Sami arrived in a perfect window, just before Kurdistan locked down internal borders to Anbari refugees.

⁹⁰ Being mistrusted also further erodes trust in others.

⁹¹ While I had not yet met Sami, I was staying in a very cheap hotel in Erbil at the exact time he arrived. It was a week when thousands of people were fleeing from Anbar and Mosul across the borders into Kurdistan. Overnight, hotel prices quadrupled and there were no available rooms. Families shared small spaces, Kurdish families extended power lines from their homes to tents in their yards. In places like Dohuk, Yazidi families simply squatted under highway overpasses or even slept on highway dividers. Traffic was dense with cars full of families, most of them bearing Anbari license plates. Their felt suspense emanated out and shaped a political moment across Kurdistan. The arrival of people themselves marked a new historical

they would be angry at us, but instead, they had heard in the news about ISIS, and about what was happening to Yazidi, Kurds, Arabs in Sinjar. They wanted to welcome us and help us. Someone approached us in the parking lot where we had been dropped. I stood up tall, expecting I would have to defend my mother and sister from him. He was an old Kurdish *Peshmerga*, and he said he would take us to friends if we had any. We thought of the friends we knew who had left for Kurdistan months before. We did not have a phone with a Korek sim card [phone that works in Kurdish territory], so he gave us his phone. We called them. They said, ‘Come to Shaqlawa. It is very expensive, but very fine in Shaqlawa.’ So, here I am. I am very happy I have found a job here at the hotel.”

I resist psychologizing my empathy for Sami: Sami is not *reliving* the “family game” or his subsequent exodus from his land as he tells this story. He continues to live it. Telling me what happened is part of his duty to his family to refuse their

moment and a hyper awareness of our proximity to the horrors from whence they had fled. One evening, a friend and I were walking the covered sidewalks near the old citadel in Erbil. We were eating ice cream and feeling very strange about doing so. All around us, we felt Kurdistan contract with two collective feelings at once: first, a jovial and empathic welcome to refugees fleeing inward, the desire to share with them the feeling that they had entered a safe zone, a bunker in which they too could eat ice cream. Second, a sense of pending eventfulness as Daash came closer and closer to Kurdish borders. Large tanks from the interior of Kurdistan moved eastward toward the Iraq border, parading through the city almost daily. It was a common scene on the sidewalks to see a dazed refugee standing in shock, while a Kurdish man or woman smiled, handed them a water bottle, or offered them ice cream. This political moment was short-lived. Subtle resentment from the burden of a large refugee population and longstanding mistrust between Arabs and Kurds simmered as the long hot months stretched on. Suspenseful anticipation, coupled with Kurdish nationalism, waned. It was eclipsed by the unromantic timeline of enduring war that stretched further than the capacity to contain it as an event or a story. Anticipation became, simply, draining. The presence of refugees brought war out into public view into what Sara Ahmed calls “intensification” (2004).

erasure, even when he tells me he cannot make meaning out of it. At one moment of discouragement in speaking to me and telling his story, he said, “This is senseless. Why are we even doing this?” “We don’t have to. We can stop recording your story,” I responded. “Yes we do have to. I want people to suffer when they read this as I suffer when I tell it. If you suffer, you have the truth of Iraqi people.”

The Boys Analyze Chaos and the Erosion of Trust

Much of Sami’s story depicts scenes of chaos. Chaos, which I define as the inability to make use of signs, unravels actionable meaning. Taussig’s “epistemic murk” helps, as he describes how “uncertainty fed the great machinery of the arbitrariness of power —that great steaming morass of chaos that lies on the underside of order and without which order cannot exist” (1984, 4). In other words, for some to have a bunker, the rest have chaos.

Chaos. According to Sami’s mother, whom I met in the private kitchen area of Hotel Star, “Chaos feels like floating, like dizziness.” The suspense itself reaches broadly across every aspect of semiotic reasoning among Iraqi people. Suspense exceeds the confines of any bunker space, however minimally fortified against environmental terror. The bunker is opened up, the skull is cracked open without force, invaded with paranoia and perpetual anticipation. Sami’s mother says: “We are innocent people, but we are living everyday as if we are guilty. We are taken from our homes. It is not arresting, it is kidnapping. Even to this day I think of the roof, we fear that they will come from above and steal our loved ones.” Suspense reconfigures those spaces of seeming safety, of bunkered up peace, as potential ingresses for future

violation. She cannot trust her own roof to do what roofs are supposed to do. Any night it could betray her.

Her sentiments are felt en masse and form a public rationale.

Ethnographically, it is difficult to capture the obviousness of chaos, the way it makes skin feel like a fever with undecided temperature, or how it gives a body the feeling of wanting to cling desperately to anything that might hold it down. The smells of chaos are not like the smells of precarity, of cigarette butts and coffee cups on the floor in Qalandia checkpoint, the globally infamous checkpoint that separates Palestinians in the West Bank from Jerusalem. Chaos is the smell of things that signal no meaning at all, the sound of a place with no birds. In Iraq, people would sometimes show me photographs of smoke, and speculate in small groups about what it meant. Chaos, I think, is when *the signs and the meanings of signs* are illegible and un-interpretable. It is especially stressful because rather than acute suspense, which has an aftermath of immediate relief, protracted suspense diffuses across planes, making uncertain the meanings of the past, the meanings of the future, and certainly the density of the present. A high-density present is exhausting.

The embodiment of protracted, enduring suspense shows. Over Sami's lifetime, it becomes simply part of daily life, with moments of acute, dense, eventful episodes of total destruction and longer pauses in which he scrambles for financial and physical stability. He moves and brings suspense with him, as war follows him from place to place, spreading out across Iraq. As time passes, he becomes closed off from a set of possible futures for himself and others. It wears and erodes and drains

not only his trust in the goodwill of strangers, but also his trust in his own senses, his own ability to read signs. His body is, like a T-wall, rigid with perpetual alert. The wear of this enduring suspense is evidenced in his body. He suffers from chronic muscle tension, insomnia, and as you may recall from the beginning of this section, he relies heavily on self-help PTSD coping methods he finds on the internet. Others show manifestations of protracted suspense differently.

My friend Hameed pointed to his head and said, “You see, I have no hair anymore.” Others pointed to the sudden onset of diabetes as a symptom of metabolic reaction to protracted stress. Others compared their experience living daily life in Anbar province to their experiences with more direct counterinsurgency practices used against them in the past. For example, a Kurdish aid worker related the suspense endured by Anbari people as similar to that endured by her father living under Saddam’s regime: “My father told me early, maybe I was five or six, about the atrocities of Saddam. Maybe I think it was too young, but maybe he was thinking each day, ‘I will die today. I must tell her so she knows before I die.’” The constant anticipation of near-death transforms social fabric, self-actualization, and the strategies for going on, day by day, nonetheless.

For Sami and his peers, there are degrees and kinds of chaos —or diffuse suspense— and they can be theorized as counterinsurgency strategies, just as Sami theorizes his brother’s slow death as a U.S. torture tactics made public. For them, chaos is not only a byproduct of war, but also an intentional paralytic, exacting forms of confinement beyond the architectural Counterterrorism visible in bunker spaces.

As Sami told his story over the months I met with him, it became clear that there are two important distinctions between the American invasion and the subsequent counterinsurgency practices he experienced after 2010. The first distinction is that war or occupation (kinetic invasion from an outside force, the destruction of infrastructure, buildings, and people, uniformed people speaking a foreign language and shooting at people) is not the same as counterinsurgency. While war dismantles, counterinsurgency maintains or reassembles new kinds of order in the aftermath of war. This is where checkpoints feature as a figure of repair, protecting Sami from the chaos he left behind, generating the semblance of a refuge-bunker space in Kurdistan, even as he is not fully welcome in it (see next section on the desirability of acute suspense).

The second distinction is that during war, chaos is acceptable because it makes some sense. It makes sense that Sami did not know what the gasses evaporating near his house were or what type of bullet was used on his brother's ankle. In fact, what is most disturbing about his story are moments of orderly, systematicity: like the systematicity with which a sniper killed off his family, or the ubiquity of a known practice that it goes by a name, in this case the "Family Game." Such order amidst the chaos of war is something that divides and separates Sami from those trying to kill him. It gives him some degree of certainty about where he sits in relation to others and how to read the world around him as a warscape.

But as he described the aftermath of lost family, infrastructure and possibility, his speaking reflected a sense of deep uncertainty that was paralyzing. For example,

during the first battle of Fallujah, not knowing what the gasses were was a sign upon which Sami and his family took action... to flee away from the gasses. “But in counterinsurgency time, the real chaos happens,” Sami says of post-2010 life. Real chaos is an inability to make any meaning of the signs. Sami, like so many other Sunni men of fighting age, found himself trapped between signs, unable to make any move at all. Sami suspected that chaos is part of extractive imperial processes, a means to further wrest autonomy from people and turn them into cheap laborers and cheap consumers:

“Let me explain to you what real chaos means. I lost my family. I lost my education. I lost my habitat. I lost my childhood. I lost my papers. I should be writing the book about rural Anbar in English. Now I lost this ability, and because I lost this ability, you can come and have something to write about, you can take the ability I lost. It is extraction for profit.⁹²”

[Me speaking]: “It is difficult for me to show Americans how this is true. They can see the before and after, but they do not see how chaos is an instrument for taking resource from you and putting resource in my hands, Iraqi to American. Can you tell me how you see it? How did you go from post-war counterinsurgency to “real chaos”?”

“Okay look. I was the man of my house, but with no house. Even then, I had to stop school and work. This is logical. You understand? It is a logical thinking to do this, because I was building shelter for people with no house. I was building a new habitat. This sometimes happens in war. And when the war ends, we should go back and rebuild our home. They call this in the United Nations, *Right to Return*.”

⁹² Sami and I talked often about “brain drain” and the theft of intellectualism from Iraq.

Diminus, who is always with Sami, added his analysis to this discussion, filling in more of the regional history:

“The Palestinians, after 1948 and 1967, should have the right to return to their home after these wars, but no, they came to many places. There were many in Iraq. When they do not have the right of return you have to keep them displaced, to keep them separated from their resources, their habitat, keep them apart from each other, so you have to have some *counterinsurgency*, something to suppress people trying to restore the life. It is not the same as war. It is to maintain the new way, with the new power. It is trying to stop revenge, trying to stop people from going home. You have it in America too, I think, with black people. You had militias helping the police; they were ones with the white hoods. And the police too. They worked together? It is the same with us. The Shi’a militias are like that clan, and the police are the police. They are here to suppress us from having our rights. Same in your country on the other side — the battle for Mexican land the Americans did — now they do not want refugees, long time refugees from that war, to come back in, so they are building a wall, *sah*?⁹³”

Sami continues:

“So what do you do? Maybe you create some very strong disorder to confuse the people. That is real chaos. I had this chaos. Every time I went to a checkpoint, I could not tell whether I must be Sunni or Shi’a to get to the other side alive. And we could not even tell even if a checkpoint is real or a false one from an outside militia. Maybe sometimes we decide to press the gas pedal and go straight through fast, because it is not real. Sometimes I showed the Sunni ID and sometimes I showed the Shi’a ID. You have that too, so you know. But the checkpoint is a good place, because even that is not real chaos...

⁹³*Sah* means “okay” or “right” or “yeah.”

“Real chaos is when you have everyday life happening, maybe you are buying bread. You are walking down the road and you think, just a small amount in your mind you think, I might get killed today. There is no close reason to expect it, but every ordinary day someone gets killed off from my group, from my tribe of people, so maybe today it is my turn. **Ordinary days make a chaos in my mind, because I cannot tell if the things that look like an ordinary day are actually omens of death.** I am in my own place, my own region, doing logical things, but I am feeling ghareeb, like you should feel [because you are away from your homeland]. I feel I am a stranger⁹⁴. The real occupation is invisible. It starts after the fighting, after they supposedly left.”

I emphasize the line above —“Ordinary days make a chaos in my mind, because I cannot tell if the things that look like an ordinary day are actually omens of death” — because it speaks to what Sami calls “real chaos” and what I call diffuse suspense. This kind of suspense is felt as part of the everyday, the inability to distinguish between what should be ordinary and what should be read as a warning of the extraordinary —and the compression of the two. It is not exactly perpetual on-ness that exhausts Sami, but the sense that he maybe should be “on” even when he is not. The effect of suspense is not only the result of ongoing density (and expanding and contracting densities) of the signs around him, and but also his responsiveness to that expansion and contraction. Unlike a T-wall, which automates its responses to suspense by remaining ever-ready, Sami is an intelligent being. As the value of signs

⁹⁴ “Ghareeb” means feeling as if one is a stranger, sometimes used to describe homesickness or the feeling of estrangement.

and their meaning shift, either suddenly or never culminating into an event, he suffers this flexibility. He strains, craning to perceive things that will help him decide what to do, where to be, and how to go on. What is under attack, really, is Sami's executive function⁹⁵. This overwhelm of signs has broader implications, as Sami's reactions to suspense also generate suspense in those around him. This is evident in the overall erosion of social networks and trust in Iraq. Suspense wears a person down, it closes a person off, and it holds a person still. Networks disaggregate. Walls come between.

Suad, whom you remember from the beginning of this chapter, explained to me why she never lets her children go outside to play in these terms: "When we leave the house, we do not know if we will be fine or die, who will kill us, or why they want to kill us. Better to stay still." In other words, no one needs to lock her in—chaos means she will self-select for confinement. When Suad goes on to compare herself to Palestinian mothers, she says, "That mother, she will not let her children go outside either, but it is because she knows exactly who is trying to kill her, and why. Her children can be martyrs, mine can be accidents." In other words, even death is not meaningful amidst chaos and protracted suspense. To be martyred is to have a meaningful death, but when chaos is the guiding principle of daily life, actionable

⁹⁵ See literature on Executive Function Disorder, theorized alongside Attention Deficit Disorder, as difficulty managing and organizing, information, emotion, memory, and actions. See also laboratory studies on acute stress and its influence on executive function ((Decety and Jackson 2004; Durig 1996; Fahie and Symons 2003; Lackoff 2000; Plieger et al. 2016; Raio and Phelps 2015; Roiland et al. 2015; Rucklidge and Tannock 2002; Russell 1997; Sheilds et al. 2016; Starcke et al. 2016; Yamakawa et al. 2016). Torture tactics that produce conditions of isolation, uncertainty, and disorientation are designed to induce this kind of stress, making it difficult for detainees to make decisions independent of their interrogators.

meaning is harder to come by. This was not the first case in which I heard Anbari women express Palestine Envy, an expression of the luxury of a “five star occupation” in which “they know who is trying to kill them and why” (Suad). This expression was not a race to the bottom or a competition for global sympathy, but rather a rhetorical way of explaining to me that conditions of diffuse suspense—suspense from all directions— are paralytic. Suspense conjures new kinds of impossibilities that limit even the scope of meaningful deaths. “This is not unintentional,” says Suad. “Remember the billboards?” Suad articulates to me how the U.S. campaign to win hearts and minds was actually a campaign to break hearts and minds. “They [The U.S.] started this. We can trust and love no one. We are terrorized.” In fact, what Suad describes might be best articulated as a life that is *counter-terrorized*. Terror can come from anywhere. But counter-terror is the unique result of U.S. led global Counterterrorism. It is an emotional, intellectual, and social harm derived from the very apparatus of counter-terrorism: bunkers that produce what we might call *suspense corridors*, T-walls that induce flashbacks, the security state that produces psychological paralysis as one mechanism of population control. What keeps Suad inside is not just terror. It is counter-terror. It is, in addition to her own fear, the weight of being perceived as a *source* of fear as well, as someone the world thinks should be killed because she is a wolf⁹⁶. Sami’s mother’s comment, “We

⁹⁶ *The Times of Israel* published an article with the headline “Islamic State Fighters ‘Dress as Women’ to Flee Fallujah” in June 2016. The article headline highlights that while “men of fighting age” are main targets of Counterterrorism, women from places like Fallujah do not escape the hunt to strip wolves of sheep’s clothes, or to discover that people fleeing violence are in fact secretly the enemy.

are innocent people but we are living everyday as if we are guilty” touches on precisely the kind of suspense that being counter-terrorized induces.

Compounding the individual experience of being counter-terrorized are more diffuse modes of uncertainty that forge new notions of how trust works. What does Suad mean when she says, “We can trust and love no one”? Conditions of displacement across the archipelago of disrupted and overturned bunkers means that family networks, tribal networks, and activist networks are made up of absences and distances defined by working around conditions of distrust, or the leveraging of distrust as a mechanism of generating suspense at a different register. For example Khalid, whose wife, Randa, was in prison for being one of the nonviolent protestors in Fallujah, had to trust many things at once: “I had to assume the prison guards were going to violate her, and I had to pray, and speak to her in my mind, imagining a conversation where I convinced her to turn me in. When you cannot speak with your love, and you know she is faithful and loyal to you, you cannot convince her to change. You want her to betray you because you love her. You love her because you know she will not betray you.” For Khalid, a deep trust in someone to act predictably, even if it is the opposite of what he wants, is part of what makes ethical living in war possible. Similarly, Khalid can trust his enemies to act within some kind of predictable frame as well. Their predictability, even as killers or torturers, helps Khalid to make meaning across the distances between him and “his love,” whom he respects because he can trust her not to cooperate even with his wishes. Aware of the

complex geopolitical posturing that shapes everyday life in Iraq, Khalid is not the only one who must trust in predictable behavior by remote anticipation.

In October 2014 when ISIS beheaded British aid worker, Alan Henning, the Boys and I were all watching the news at Hotel Star together. I mentioned that I am always bothered by how, in situations like this, captives just sit there without resistance and allow themselves to be executed. Sami said, “But, Kali, the only person he [the aid worker] can trust is him [executioner].” Indeed, no one really knew how the U.S. would respond, or how the media would respond, or even how the aid worker’s own family would respond. Only one thing was certain, the executioner could be trusted to kill him⁹⁷.

A few days after we watched the execution, one of The Boys approached me with a flier that had been sent around online by ISIS’s media team. It was a bounty of \$20,000 cash to any person who turned over a live American. It occurred to me that I had only known these young men a few months, and that \$20,000 would solve a lot of problems for each of them. For just a moment, trust was an act more than a feeling. I knew it could crumble: distrust begets distrust, and to entrust oneself to others is the only way to also be entrusted with the lives of others. The person who showed me the bounty took some social risk by approaching me alone —he said he was worried about the others, whom he lived with and knew well, but still could never fully trust. I was surprised that he felt caution. His distrust gave me a paranoid feeling, not only about my trust in The Boys, but also about my own gut instincts. The conditions of

suspense build all kinds of pressures that incentivize harm as a means for survival, but they also erode a person's sense of trust in the underlying predictability of people to be good to one another, and of one's own ability to rely on executive mental function to calculate risk and make judgments. In fact, this is what the bounty was meant to accomplish, as a counterinsurgency strategy used by ISIS on the people they were attempting to conquer. It intimidated the Boys, sewing seeds of distrust in an already fragile network of people surviving together. As Al-Mohamed, writing about a moment of fear when someone showing up at his door in Basra turned out to just be a family friend, moments of distrust are usually ill founded on the terrain of Iraq's "rough ground" (2012). If anything, people usually forge deeper bonds of love and care for strangers in spite of, and to spite, conditions of incentivized malice. This is not the trust Sami refers to when he talks of the reliability of the executioner, trust in another to *do* harm, predictably. In both cases, however, there is a general lack of betrayal— the enemy does not betray expectations, and neither does the ally.

It is the erosion of trust that perpetuates not only a state of lived suspense, but also an acceptance and appreciation for that which is most trustworthy: acute lethal moments often made possible by openings like checkpoints. Sami's life story captures the conditions under which he can say he no longer experiences fear and therefore approaches checkpoints very differently than he might have years before. Additionally, his story, which approaches the role of diffuse and protracted suspense, may start to get at the question of why The Boys universally celebrated checkpoints in spite of their deadly or near deadly experiences. Diffuse suspense is simply far

worse and far more exhausting than acute suspense, which intensifies into something that can be pointed to, recognized, and known.

Section III: Checkpoints and Moments of Acute Suspense

Last night; I rinsed my mind with geniality; And dyed my heart with departure; I left my fingers and took my bag.

—Omar al-Jaffal, *My Soul*⁹⁸

Suspense at the Checkpoint

In the back seat of a shared taxi, many legs touch. Many bodies press together. The heat blossoms out like a wet rose, petals of clothing sticking flat on the hips and thighs, which, like a flower press, iron the cloth flat between overweight forms. People doze, talk to the driver, mumble. The strange woman in the back pretends to sleep, while the driver's eyelids lick their lips over the balls of his eyes in the rearview mirror. The man next to her, rigid with respectful discomfort, starts to relax his body against hers, settling in for the long ride. This is Othman. This is a trip through battled-for Kirkuk to Suleymania, across an important border between mainland Iraq into Kurdistan. This is August. Heat rises up from the road making clear waves. It is not even the hot part of Iraq. The men in the taxi mention this.

The woman's shoes are held together with tape, and dusty from walking the rows of an orchard the day before. The man next to her tries to relieve his sciatic nerve by shifting his legs. His shoe rubs against hers. It is new leather, dusty with soil

⁹⁸ Omar al-Jaffal, an Iraqi poet, wrote "My Soul" when ISIS took over Mosul in 2014. Translated from Arabic to English (Langendorf 2017).

from his land outside of Saqlawiya. The dust is the same. It is the first clue that they have come a long way together. Time passes and so does the landscape. The grassy plain blurs past. The radio emits a static-y, upbeat melody. The petals wilt further, flattened between the thighs.

Then, an hour later, the conversation of gesture begins. Some things happen before something happens: Othman's body starts to sweat hot and fast. It seeps into the clothes of the woman, and by the time it reaches her skin, it is cool. He is looking ahead, as the car stacks up into a long line of cars with Anbar license plates packed with families, all seeking refuge. Their eyes and faces are unanimously forward, toward Suleyman. They have no plans to go back. If they were deer their ears would be pricked and swiveled forward, tails twitching at flies or anything distracting from the object-event ahead.

Upon seeing the arched overhang through which four lanes of traffic pass both directions, inching slowly one by one, Othman relinquishes that sudden sweat. It is a bit like water breaking before labor, a kind of warning that something is about to transform into an event. His body, which was relaxed against the woman's, grows rigid. His spine curves upright. He swallows like someone who is anxious to find a cigarette. His eyes, which were slanted sleepily, grow wider and more eager, slowly opening. His lips pout forward and his jaw softens down. His nostrils widen softly, and he lowers his chin... so that his face takes the shape of innocence. But he is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Othman wipes his palm on the thigh of his pants. He does not carry prayer beads, but his fingers flick in that same bead-sorting motion over a wrinkle in his pant seam. Time, instead of passing like the landscape before, begins to bulge, fatten and spill over. It builds pressure. The pressure becomes unbearable. He impatiently wipes beads of sweat from his forehead, “Ya Allah,” he makes that forward gallop motion a whole body that can go nowhere makes, like a stomp. He asks to open a window: the driver rolls it down impassively.

The car creeps slowly forward, until the front half is shaded by the overhang of the checkpoint. Shade is sweet. The four bodies in the back seat long for it, seeing the shape of relief-breathing that the bodies in the front seat are making. On either side, cement block buildings for interviewing people or processing paperwork make a funnel shape, sifting the cars inward through the chute. T-walls stand at attention around these buildings, buffering them from any potential blast that a car-bomb might make. They have no eyes, but turn perpetual backs to the cars. Each side claims to protect them from an outside. Like the door into Narnia, one could circle around T-walls and arrive nowhere. But passing through them, one is welcomed to an inside.

The driver mutters for the passengers to hand up their documents. The men reach into their pockets, peeling the sweaty cloth apart, and pull out passbooks. The conversation of gesture thickens and deepens as the woman opens her purse and passes her document forward. Her strangeness is verified. “She is not Iranian after all,” the driver jokes. The men in the car chuckle nervously as the driver shows them the blue and gold American passport. The feeling that an outsider is in the car, putting

everyone in a state of suspicion, is only slightly relieved by the identity shift. She makes them nervous.

But as he holds up the passport, two things slip out. Pressed flowers flutter down onto the console of the car. They are translucent purple and paper-thin. The driver reaches to replace them into the passport, sniffs the petals and asks where the flowers are from: “Kurdistan.” So, the outsider has been inside before. This trip across the border between battled-for Kirkuk, not yet captured by the Kurdish *Peshmerga*, is not her first. She is not so much a stranger. The mood lightens.

The second thing to fall out of the passport is a hand written note from a Kurdish friend. It happens to be Othman’s only way in. He has a wife and children on the other side of this border. He left with the woman, crossing outside of Kurdish controlled territory to reach Anbar. An Anbari man “of fighting age,” he knew it would be illegal to return across this border. Othman and the woman are both reciting silent prayers that the handwritten document will be enough.

Finally the car lunges forward and stops. The back seat has no time to enjoy the relief of the shade. All are at attention, but not quite: the passengers are like models, poised in a position of relaxation, comfort, and ease for the artist to paint, but beneath, their muscles twitch with tension. Tension is easy to disguise for an instant, but it burns, aches, and shakes the body to disguise it for too long.

The driver rolls down his window and exchanges friendly conversation with the guard. The driver smiles and nods his head sideways with deference as he speaks. The guard is leaning now, with both arms relaxed on the window frame of the taxi,

his hands gesturing gently from the wrist with the stack of passports casually packed in a block in his hand. His hips are out; his ankles are crossed as he stands. He feels handsome and generous doing his work. The posture makes him seem like a reasonable man. He has a small stick of wheat in the corner of his mouth to play with. He is friendly, quick witted, and young.

His eyes scan the passengers in the car from under a straight, downward brow. The strange woman in the back is the anomaly. Everyone in the car is burdened by it, but after the flowers fell, the car formed a subtle solidarity around her. They collectively tense their bodies as the guard scans her face: “Amreeka?”

“Yes.”

“Aid worker?” he says in Kurdish.

“Spas!” She says “Thank you” in Kurdish with an eager smile, as if satisfied that she understood and responded in a foreign tongue.

The guard’s eyes wrinkle with humor at her ignorance. He turns to the driver, “How cute. Is she an aid worker?”

The driver says yes. He begins to act as an authority about her. He overstates his knowledge. He pulls out the note from her passport and shows the guard— “she is an aid worker, she is escorting this refugee.”

This is an excellent situation for Othman, who has become only a prop in the performance of the woman. He is no one, except as part of her story. Her anomalous presence is a distraction from him. And even better, the driver is doing all the advocacy. Neither of them speaks for themselves.

For women especially, ignorance is perceived as synonymous with innocence. Performing ignorance is a central component of performing innocence, of reducing suspicion. The importance of performing ignorance is so integral to gendered survival in passing through spaces of extreme power differentiation that the woman hardly notices she is doing it. The men do it, and notice it more, as they “feminize” their behavior by speaking and gesturing as women often do in ordinary conversations — apologizing before uttering sentences; shrinking the size of their bodies; lowering their gaze and chins; smiling and laughing for no reason; and softening, lowering, and shifting to a sideways angle that reduces the squareness of their stance and shoulders⁹⁹.

Some of the rules of checkpoint performance overlap with the rules of torture. It is better to know nothing about anything, than to know a little bit about something. Knowing a little means you might know more. Things can get worse very quickly. It is better not to know “aid worker” in Kurdish, because that might open up space for the next question, with words she really does not know. Suspicion forms. How can you know a little, and not the rest? After all, one always imagines the enemy as a mastermind, and fantasizes that she knows more about the present, plots a better future, and eludes the state only because of this knowing superpower and not because of the insufficiencies of the state itself.

But even more effective is to rest in the constant repair work that conversations, even conversations of gesture, require. Better to perform the eagerness

⁹⁹ see Goffman on “body gloss” (1971, 128-129).

of knowing and sharing knowledge, but to perform it wrong. To think you know, and know wrong —to misunderstand “aid worker” as something else— is to cutely, adorably, answer incorrectly: “Thank you.”

This ignorance is complemented by the fact that the same word, “aid worker,” unlocks the gateway to Narnia when they are written with authoritatively sloppy scrawl on the note in her passport. To be even less of a person —and therefore less of a threat— it is better still to perform for the guard his total knowledge and total authority, and to cede knowledge, authority and voice to the words written by and uttered by men. The guard, reading with difficulty the English words in the passport, sounds out:

“Ca-lee-voor-ne-a. This is your name,” all in English.

“Yes, you are right!” she responds, acting impressed.

Now the performance is dangerous in other ways. The checkpoint can quickly become a whirlpool of entertainment and curiosity, the woman as the object. The longer the passage, the more treacherous the performance. Failure is possible in every gesture. The woman cannot touch her hair. Cannot lean forward. Cannot perform too much interest, engagement, or openness. An ignorant woman can perform innocence too far, and perform her way right out of the authority she needs to push past the checkpoint, to hold the guard accountable for her safe and swift passage through. This innocent woman is still an outsider, exempted from some of the social norms of care and governance that the guard endows to himself. She now requires a male advocate to make the accountability possible.

The driver: “She is very tired. Don’t make her get out of the car to be inspected. She was falling asleep the whole ride. She works very hard.” He tells the guard to sniff the flowers in her passport. “See, she loves beautiful Kurdistan!” This is proof of something, a gesture of long-term care, detail, and delicate appreciation for the land. It is a sign of respect, but also of a common ground —a common soil— that is not only life sustaining, but beautiful. The guard pauses for a moment, considering the degree to which insider status should be granted to this woman. The pause is long for the back seat.

Feeling beautiful himself, the guard dips his head to the side in a “giving in” motion, and finally succumbs to a mimetic narcissism. His own beauty and authority are laid out side by side, reflected back at him in the authority of note and the beauty of the flowers. He gazes at this “mirror” in the passport book, and then folds it shut. “Welcome home to Kurdistan, Lady.” She nods once and smiles. He lifts himself from leaning on the car, signaling that the car is released. The backsides of his forearms are marked with deep grooves from the glass of the driver’s side window. He waves them on.

Othman’s entire body collapses into real rest, pressing against her shoulder and leg. The bodies in the car, depending on the degree of tension and risk they carried approaching the checkpoint, release with a strange combination of exuberance and exhaustion. Like a spring unleashing coiled tension, the muscles leap out with energy, but also unravel and collapse, completely spent. Othman and the woman do not exchange any conspiratorial “we made it through” glances, but her leg, which is

pressed against his, gives a quick pulse. It is a private gesture of collusion and thrill. What was pending and dreaded is past. It has become, in retrospect, an event. One of a series of events filled so tightly with tension, that the chest aches for a day or two afterwards. The heart recalibrates to a rhythm in which it does not need to trip itself in preparation not only for threats and harm, but also for utter disappointment and failure — which is what was at stake only minutes before. Ahead is Suleymania, and Othman's family. It is the family he left for a few days as he went back to his land, crossing into mainland Iraq illegally to see how things were in Saqlawiya. They are not good enough to return his kids home. It is not time yet. The house was ruined, the orchard was surviving, and the guns were only increasing in density as militias patrolled the streets of the town itself. So, Othman has returned not to collect his family, but to stay on as a registered internally displaced person in Kurdistan.

Back in my hotel room, I fill the bottom two inches of the shower with water. Having been the woman in the car, I peel off the large, cloth petals —the skirt, the hijab, the cotton long sleeve shirt— one by one I float them in the water. Oil and dirt radiate out from them in rings. I plunge them under the surface, and immediately a strong smell escapes the cloth as it disappears under water. It is the smell of Othman's fear. It is a fleeting smell. I scrub it out with bar soap. Unlike death, which sticks and clings to everything and is impossible to wash out of clothing, the smell of fear is light. It is acute and mobile. It is ready to come and go.

Wolves Getting Through

One day The Boys at Hotel Star became animated and engaged while talking to each other. When I came into the room, they were tripping over each other's stories. The excitement of this conversation caught my attention, because so many of our conversations were calm, depressing, and grey. This was a red-hot discussion about checkpoints. One of the boys stood up in the middle and shouted, "Stop, Everybody! Kali, I have an idea. You need to have a chapter about checkpoint stories. Write this all down!" These young men clung to checkpoints as a chronotope, a loophole through which they derive meaning and form to survive chaos.

They spoke from the perspective of people who are the main target of any checkpoint they encounter, rather than from the perspective of the rest of us, who pass through them as sheepish excesses to a project of direct interface between wolves and sheepdogs. Among the sheep and sheep dogs, there is a presumed common goal of catching "bad guys": those who appear as people pretending to be the same, when in fact they are different. Sheep and sheep dogs both fear wolves in sheep's clothing. Checkpoints make a routine by which social accountabilities are broken and/or reinforced, a place to perform sheepishness and make demonstrable efforts to prove one is not a wolf. But what if you are?

As de-facto wolves because they are from Anbar province, The Boys at Hotel Star had a lot to say about how to pass through moments and spaces of acute suspense. For example:

"Kali, we have the best story for you! Diminus reminded us how we used to get through the checkpoints with a trick. We had so many guns, and when they stopped us because the metal detector went off, it would be bad. But we knew that laundry detergent always tricked

the alarm. The chemicals made it go off. So they would check people's cars, and find no guns, only detergent. Of course, we decided we could hide guns in the car and then make sure it had a lot of detergent in it. When the alarm went off, and the guards came to inspect the car, they saw the detergent and said, 'Oh again!?' This is how we passed through with the guns. No trouble at all, because everyone knew the checkpoints were catching something wrong by accident."

Because checkpoints are always places where Anbari men are misperceived, misperception is the easiest way for them to pass. Being accurately perceived as Anbari men means being misperceived as possible terrorists. Being accurately perceived as Anbari men with guns means being accurately perceived as resisters to the Iraqi state and misperceived as terrorists. In other words, there are two routes to being flagged as wolves: being Anbari men with guns, and being Anbari men without guns. But being perceived as Anbari men who deserve protection, takes some trickery. They have to find ways to perform innocence, because "innocent civilian" is the category of people worthy of protected life, whereas insurgent civilians are killable. This precondition of innocence reaches many registers, whether in colloquial conversations in the U.S., public discourse in Europe about refugees, and in military policy (De Waal 1998; Duffield 2001; Fox 1995; Haskell 1985; Laqueur 1989; Redfield 2005, 2006; Viktorin 2008). This is why organizations like the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and the UNHCR speak back to the prerequisite of innocence by listing policies about neutrality and indiscriminate service. Public trust in the will or agenda of individual people requires performance of innocence, sometimes as performances of ignorance, sometimes as demonstrations of a-political refugee status (Malkki 1995), sometimes as performances of secular values (Ellison

1999; Englund 2000; Hyland 2011), sometimes as feminized or child-like behavior (Agamben 1998; Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2006). The performance of sheepishness is not a singular act. It is a kind of commons, one that reinforces categories of human interface with the state, or with authority, or with one another.

Hulk, Suad's cousin and one of the oldest young men I met at Hotel Star¹⁰⁰, told me about how he was interrogated and nearly killed at checkpoints run by ISIS, Shi'a militias, and the Kurdish police. He referred to the checkpoint operators as "always against me," because of his ominous height and distinctly Sunni name. To my absolutely shock, Hulk concluded his stories about being profiled, discriminated against, and threatened at checkpoints by pursing his lips and making the symbol of deliciousness with his hands to his mouth: "There is nothing more beautiful than a well-run checkpoint!"

I said, confused: "But the checkpoints seem to be hurting you, because they risk your life." Hulk explained that the checkpoint itself is a good thing, even if it gets the wrong people, because it offers a point at which chaos is checked: "We need it for some kind of order, otherwise..." Hulk scrambles his hands around his head to indicate dizziness and madness. In spite of, or perhaps because of the lethal nature of checkpoints, he viewed them as essential. While they were sites of uncertainty, they were known as such¹⁰¹. The Boys concurred with Hulk. They preferred unjust order to

¹⁰⁰ Hulk also appears in another chapter on sectarianism. There, he and his brother Racer, have brought me to meet his entire extended family, living outside of Hotel Star.

¹⁰¹ If I could sum up his argument, I would say that checkpoints provide a known unknown. This is preferable only to an unknown unknown, which is so prevalent it

unjust disorder precisely because the former is demonstrative of trust-able categories of violation while the latter is not. There is no justice either way.

False Checkpoints

Checkpoints in Iraq are sometimes graded as “good” or “bad” by people who pass through them regularly. Along with the temporal efficiency of a checkpoint, a checkpoint’s quality might be graded by how trust is managed. Gambetta (1988) describes trust as coping with the freedom of others, and its breakdown as the inability to cope with the freedom of others.... If a checkpoint fails to cope with the freedom of people moving through it, it is too restrictive, and does not allow for elbowroom. It is as if the valve of a blood vessel, which pushes blood in one direction and holds open the passage, collapses and closes off circulation. It fails to hold open enough the vein or artery through which lifeblood flows to and from parts of Iraq. This is the kind of checkpoint people fear because it means that too often one is seen as an “other” who is not innocent and thus not worthy of protection. On the other hand, most people in Iraq view themselves as the good kind of wolf, someone who is suspected of being bad but is in fact good. These are wolves who may even do illegal things but are not harmful toward people (like men from Anbar — who, even if they are smuggling guns, in no way relate to the terrorists who blow up civilians or execute people on the spot). A checkpoint for wolves —people who are preemptively

makes known unknowns appealing.

suspect whether or not they are a threat to the apparatus— is a very dangerous object-place-threshold, through which one performs sheepishness in order to pass. People, wolves and sheep alike, may rate a checkpoint as “bad” because it copes too well with the freedom of others, and may as well not exist. Checkpoints work as a trust meter in Iraq. Can the checkpoint be trusted to work as it should, and not just be a gauntlet space for sectarian summary executions? Can the people passing through and operating the checkpoint all generate an enunciatory community¹⁰², speaking enough of the same terms and articulating enough of a common interest in public security that they can make the checkpoint work, even by evading it? A trusted checkpoint is a good one, generating acute suspense in a pattern that one can read and maneuvered.

However, the ubiquity of *untrusted* checkpoints increases with the erosion of public trust in Iraq in a far more complex way. These are places with less predictable structure and less certain rules of engagement, like the checkpoint where Suad’s child was killed. So far, the stories you have read of checkpoints from The Boys at Hotel Star all presume the checkpoint itself is indeed operated by “sheepdogs” or representatives of the state— even if the state is acting poorly. Even if the state discriminates, kills, harasses, the expectation of what will and will not take place at a checkpoint is certain when the actors operating the checkpoint are who they say they are. But what happens when the wolves are operating the checkpoint, and they are

¹⁰² See Kim Fortun on enunciatory communities (temporary collaboration of people with vastly different interests, often opposing, who speak in a chorus on a particular issue, forming a community simply through common enunciation, and then dissolving; 2001).

wearing the clothing of sheepdogs, as in the case of Suad's passage through what appeared to be a checkpoint, but was in fact something else?

Shi'a militias, hired out by the Iraqi government to serve as proxies of state rule, are not entirely state-controlled actors. People in Anbar waffle between which group they fear more: *Al-Hashed* or ISIS (which *Al-Hashed* has been hired to fight against). Both actors operate in the daily lives of people in Anbar. The trouble is that a checkpoint is not really different from a roadside robbery. What distinguishes it, and makes it "trustworthy" is a set of signs that indicate, "This is a checkpoint" rather than, "This is a gang." One form of suspense is to decide whether or not to drive straight through a checkpoint as fast as possible, guessing it is "false," or to stop and perform sheepishness. Are the men with guns wearing recognizable uniforms? Do they look like police or military? Are they acting calm or vengeful? Do they seem local or from far away? *Al-Hashed* serves a shady role. Sometimes Shi'a militias operate on behalf of the government, and sometimes they do not. A Frontline segment recently released in 2017, featured the case of the "missing men and boys from Saqlawiya" who were stopped at checkpoints run by *Al-Hashed*, some killed and some tortured on their way to a refugee camp near Fallujah. Thousands of men and boys from Anbar have disappeared or died at *Al-Hashed* (Shi'a militias) run checkpoints in Iraq. Like bombings, car accidents, cancers, and other forms of untimely wartime death, checkpoints add to the suspense of daily living. Here, an image from the Frontline segment, speaks to the many forms of chaos and suspense: a woman says of her male family members, "I just want them to tell me if they are alive

or dead.” Here we see how death itself is an acute event that can even feel like a relief from the unknown unknowns of diffuse suspense.



Figure 20: Screenshot from *Frontline* segment on the missing men and boys of Saqlawiya

The conditions of chaos in Iraq make even the distinctive qualities of a checkpoint confusing, and yet at the same time, they continue to work as spaces for enunciating acute versions of otherwise diffuse suspense. For example, Wolverine, who selected his own pseudonym, was walking down his street with his friend in the outskirts of Fallujah with a pack of cigarettes and a bag of groceries to bring home to his mom for dinner. Light was slowly fading, and he noticed that two blocks before his house, a small roadblock was set up: just a single T-wall and three men with guns. He could tell by looking that they were Al-Hashed, Shi’a militias hired by the Iraqi government to police the streets. This is one sign he can read and make sense of. They seemed “legitimate,” in other words, they appeared as if they were going to

make the checkpoint work within the rules of normal checkpoints, screening Wolverine and his friend to determine their sheepishness and allowing them to pass with a proper performance of docility. The signs of their uniforms, their casual behavior and the T-wall, which marked a kind of structure, all generated legible acute suspense. Fear with a direction. Wolverine told his friend they should just act normally. He told me that, “Sometimes it is hard to tell if they are acting in their professional role, or if they are using their position to take out sectarian feelings on us. When you start talking with them, you know.” One of the soldiers grabbed the pack of cigarettes from Wolverine’s friend, took out a cigarette, and asked Wolverine for a light. Wolverine obliged him. The soldier drew on the cigarette with his lips, and said it was suspicious to see men of their age out together at this time of evening. Maybe two young men out at this time were up to no good. And then suddenly, without any warning, he seized Wolverine’s hand, extinguishing the cigarette on his wrist¹⁰³. “It was a bad situation, and we knew what was happening. What could we do? We could not have turned and run the other way — that would make us dead for sure. So we had to approach and try to pass, and it was either one thing or the other. We surrendered to our fate.” Wolverine negotiated. He told them his house was right over there. He was just getting groceries for his mother. She was expecting him. You know how mothers can be.

“Okay you can go, but we keep your friend,” said the ringleader of the three soldiers.

“She is expecting him too.”

¹⁰³ Note how the checkpoint shifts easily into the registry of torture, with similar rules of engagement.

“What, your mother is a whore? She is expecting some company?”

Another guard, getting agitated, said, “We can protect your whore mother from herself.” He drew a handgun from his waist and cocked the lever with that distinct, heart-stopping sound: Click.

It is the sound of a new plateau, a new level of suspense. Everyone stops moving. All things fall silent. Everyone knows that the slightest move can make that trigger flinch.

Guns do that. They make the kinetic relationship between movement and death exponential. A finger can contract at the first knuckle with a slight squeeze and there is no going back. An infinite number of things can make a finger do that. An itch. An emotion. The flash of a sign. Lethal force sits in a small chamber, a cluster of potentials aggregating until they become over-determined. When the signs all come together, they mean life, or they mean death. Simple. Clear.

Wolverine: “It felt like things could not go back after the click. He was pointing the gun right at my friend’s chest, and was moving closer, so that the circle of the gun was pushing into his chest...

“Thank God there was a sound on their radio, something really urgent in the city, and they had to go quickly and leave us. They said, ‘Go on to your whore mother. We have other problems.’ And they left us. We felt so alive, Kali! We waited until they got in their car and drove off, and we shouted, Woop! Woop!

Alhamdulillah (Thank God). We came home with the food and we were laughing and happy, we were singing in the night. It was a good evening. My mother asked us why

we were so happy. We did not tell her anything. She was smiling to see us feeling alive.”

This is one of many life-and-death stories told by The Boys at Hotel Star. Many of them ended in death, rather than passage. When Wolverine talks about how, “It was a bad situation, and we knew what was happening” he is speaking of acute suspense. The certainty of life and death stands out at a checkpoint from the otherwise overall feeling of perpetual uncertainty over uncertain fates: Diminus, one of the young men at the hotel, explains how, “at the checkpoint you kind of know how you are going to die, and that it is a fifty percent certainty.” The suspense of the checkpoint punctuates other more inundating forms of suspense. It offers an uncertainty that is binary and clarifying: “Either you will pass or not pass, either you will die today or you will not die today” (Sami, a friend added this description about checkpoints.). And after the clarity of near-death, it is also a relief. Passing through a checkpoint is life affirming in a way that other forms of daily survival are not. When the performance of passing succeeds, it affords an opportunity for just a split second of feeling relief. This relief is otherwise unavailable in the daily epistemic murk of “real chaos,” or what I call diffuse suspense. Wolverine’s checkpoint story is the story of “a good evening” in which he felt “so alive” and his “mother was smiling.” It is a good experience in his memory. He recounts the story smiling and with some pleasure.

This story is joyful not only because it is life affirming temporally, but also because it helps regroup a slipping-away proximity to a home-place (now completely

unreachable for Wolverine from Hotel Star). Passing through a checkpoint is physically orienting— there is an inside to get to (maybe)... or it is at least a stage toward a destination. The chronotope of the road, even if it stops and has eddies, is still directional. Rather than an inundation, a clutter of meaningless signs coming from all directions, it marks passage to and from points on a map and in the mind. For wolves, preempted suspects like Wolverine, the suspense of checkpoints is acute and puts immense pressure on a high-intensity reading and making of signs. It is a conversation of gestures, which may be misperceived in useful and significant ways. These acute moments are ruptures that allow for the movement of an otherwise stagnant feeling of impossibility written into the everyday experience of chaos, which is a different kind of suspense.

Along with disrupting spatial and rhythmic continuities, checkpoints disrupt disruption. The checkpoint as disruption is a meaningful marker and measure of time-space that avails itself to people who experience “chaos” as a main mode of living out Counterterrorism daily. Thus it is with contradictory and simultaneous sentiments that the checkpoint, along with its companion, the T-wall, rises as a figure by which chaos is checked, and either verified or confronted. The checkpoint, like the executioner, is trusted to either kill or let-live. It liberates as it compresses and confines. It is beloved because it can be trusted to consistently fail its victim-beneficiaries, to shorten the length of harm by accelerating it.

Conclusion

Seeing a T-wall or checkpoint triggers acute suspense, but it can also relieve the feeling of “real chaos” experienced everywhere else by puncturing it. Thus, the figure of checkpoints offers a form to articulate modes of suspense induced by Counterterrorism. Sami’s friends listened intently as he described what seemed like the uncanny, the feeling of being a stranger in one’s own world, a target always-maybe at his back. They chimed in, articulating in a chorus how that version of “real chaos,” the feeling of a strange normalcy pregnant with potential, is nowhere to be found at a checkpoint. Checkpoints offer the *privilege* of acute suspense. Instead of wondering if a gun is trained on you, you can know that certainly it is. What a relief.

Randa, whose husband was hoping she would turn him in to avoid torture, was one of the few women I met who was open about her experiences in a detainment center in Iraq. She described acute suspense as a relief in this way: “When you are being abused, you are waiting for him to hit you. You can tell he is going to hit you, and you are flinching every time he moves. You think, ‘Just hit me already! Get it over with!’ and when he finally does, it feels like such a relief to finally know *when* he was going hit you.” In other words, the moment of realized, acute suspense offers a tell-able, eventful experience with a beginning, middle, and end. Perhaps checkpoints do the same thing as the torturer hitting Randa. Both make a mark, finally¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁴ Randa was happy to hear that Human Rights Watch had published a 105-page report entitled “No One is Safe” in February 2014 documenting the abuse of women imprisoned in Iraq. For her protection I am not willing to document the date or

Checkpoints are like thumbtacks that hold down otherwise blowing sheets of paper, wisps of messages that threaten to fly away. Can I trust that you say what you mean? Can I trust that you are you? These are questions one can ask at a checkpoint. The answers are “No” and “No,” and yet the world continues to work collaboratively in spite of this. How is that possible? It has to do with how suspense recalibrates the meaning of trust, and therefore of conviviality. Trust becomes an enunciatory function, one in which people with opposing interests collaborate often unwillingly to make something work. The checkpoint, for example, works because even those who are victim to it collaborate with the common project of making it work, sometimes to evade it. This is just one figure of the mode of living woven into the interstitial spaces surrounding bunkers. This is the kind of trust forged among people opened up to vulnerabilities and exploitable weaknesses, people with no refuge except in the arms of their killers.

Living pessoptimistically, this is not altogether problematic (Habiby 2001). Trust in the other’s intent to harm can get a lot of good work done, just as trust in a checkpoint that “is always against” wolves can make the checkpoint work for wolves. If Feldman, writing about Northern Ireland, is right that “the capacity to symbolize and encode a given reality [is] the basis of political resistance” (1991, 165), then chaos is a strategic instrument for suppressing resistance. Suspense that goes on and on and on is a social paralytic. It induces a desire among people for order of any kind,

location of her imprisonment, but for details on the kinds of state violence faced by Iraqi women, see this report: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/02/06/no-one-safe/abuse-women-iraqs-criminal-justice-system>.

order they might have resisted previously but are willing to accept now. It is a less-than-lethal mode of pacification through counter-terror.

Some Anbari men, who once held off U.S. forces with guns, told me they would like the U.S. to reoccupy Iraq, because the U.S. had the capacity to instill order. Of U.S.-Iraqi relations, Hulk tells me: “You know Tom and Jerry? They are friends.” I say: “They are friends that are hitting each other.” He responds: “Yes, these are our friends, the friends we have.” For The Boys at Hotel Star, and all who navigate the daily suspense of life between bunkered spaces, sometimes our enemies are the friends we have. To make things work, we entrust to our enemies our very lives and the meanings derived from our deaths. Diminus, adding to Hulk’s comment, reminds me that, “Our enemies are not the worst possible allies. Remember what the prophet said, ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend.’” This is written into less-than-lethal counterterrorism doctrine:

“Hearts” means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. “Minds” means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. ...Over time, successful trusted networks grow like roots into the populace. They displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents (They Counterinsurgency Field Manual 2006, A-5).

In response, these young men have repurposed doom into a post-optimistic and deeply pragmatic reframing of suspense. Not only is the immediate future uncertain, so is the long game. To live in this way is to operate within a post-hope world, a world in which one does not require hope or faith or necessarily human goodness to navigate “ethical rough ground” (Al-Mohamed and Peluso 2012). Any act of repair is

also an act of survival, rebellion, or suicide. Any act of harm can be leveraged as a propellant of love, evasion, or mobility.



Figure 21: Women and Children Waiting, photo by Ivor Prickett

Even this single image of the landscape outside of Mosul, just after the Iraqi Army's 2017 victory against ISIS, reveals such conditions of uncertainty as acute. The men are gone. There is nowhere to go and nowhere to be. There is nowhere to even sit and wait. Time could go on like this forever, or something could happen. Bombs. A new government. A refugee camp could crop up on the horizon. The suspense— not acute, but diffuse— rests on the face of the boy in the front, wearing red. He looks into the journalist's camera with overt uncertainty. His feet point somewhere. His body twists and points another way. He holds prayer beads in his hand, not for hope, but for

holding open the flow of living bodies through time, like the valve of a vein. His is a body in motion with nowhere to go.

This boy — like Sami — will look into the horizon and see that even the future cannot be trusted to unfold. He might as well say the catch phrase so common in Iraq: “Today is better than tomorrow.” It is call for fearlessness, for approaching a checkpoint or facing down a gun with not even one’s own life to lose. It is a post-hope sensibility, one in which coping with invasive harm from all sides is felt as diffuse suspensefulness.

Checkpoints and other moments of acute suspense offer a story, an event, a figure of what it feels like to face death as a mode of daily life. Out of these figures emerges the story of a global millennial generation. By the time I met him, Sami had clear amber eyes that showed the exhaustion and intelligence of an adult. He was among so many young men and women who shared the common experience of assuming leadership roles in their families. They live in the absence of social and institutional structures that would make adult life possible in the way they had imagined, so while the burdens of adulthood came too soon, the victories of adulthood never came. They live in mild, almost gleeful dread, rather than warm anticipation of the future. In their opinion, since today is better than tomorrow, there is both nothing to lose and everything to give. They have been dispossessed of the Iraq their parents told them about: they grew up hearing they were heirs of seven civilizations. They have reached an impasse in the scope of possibilities the future can

offer them, inheriting an Iraq such as it is. They are heirs of debt, not riches, of protracted life-long suspense, not a bright future with a deep past.

This is a generation that lacks their parents' bunkers, that is less physically fit, less infrastructurally supported, less financially sound, and less hopeful than the generation before. This is a generation that embraces precarity, will never own or build houses, will partner and bear children much later, support aging and ill parents much earlier, suffer chronic illness much sooner, and make no gestures to a future. They will not save, will not have access to retirement options, will not invest, will not plan, and will not operate within a framework of longevity or hope.

Millennial precarity is part and parcel of a Cold War global bunkering movement. Bunkering produced suburbs fueled by mass extraction and mass consumption. It formed enclaves of rest inaccessible to most of the weary. The enclaves contracted with each war. The gaps dilated, flushed more sheep and wolves through lethal sieves. Surviving in the gaps, in suspense-corridors made windy and cold by the anxious weather of bunker walls, is to live a life of perpetual checkpoint passage, of knotting and unknotting high-intensity "near misses" with high stakes performance. It necessitates that one work with enemies as if they are friends, or that one derives of hostile environments —and even of terror— the superhuman strength to either go on or give up with intention.

This chapter is dedicated to Diminus, whose solidarity with Palestine was quiet, consistent and well-studied, and who eagerly poured over my Facebook pictures of

Israeli checkpoints to craft a theory of checkpoints as an instrument of suspense. He and Sami were the only Boys remaining at Hotel Star by the time I returned for a visit in late 2015. The owner had decided to rent rooms to college students, and ousted the refugee families. Most returned to Anbar.

Some, like Suad, simply disappeared.

CHAPTER 4

Living in Abstraction [Outside of] Iraq's Anbar Province

Mode: Abstraction

Figure: Cement/ Construction Sites

Abstraction: as in art, as in a subject without context or real world meaning, as in the receding of a thing until only its form remains, as in becoming simply theoretical.

Siege: a military operation in which enemy forces surround a town or building, cutting off essential supplies, with the aim of compelling the surrender of those inside; a prolonged period of misfortune.

Arrhythmia: irregular, abnormal rhythm of the center, eventually causing lack of circulation or flow to the extremities or edges.

Parenthetical Field: a zone of time-space with a known foreclosure, a blister in the fabric of a projected timeline.

Foreclosure: the ruling out of possibility, the process of taking possession of a property as a result of the mortgagor's failure to sustain payments.

Introduction

It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into the actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.

—Brian Massumi, “Autonomy of Affect”

In 1992 Edward Said returned to his family’s “beautiful old house” in Palestine for the first time. To return for the first time is to arrive somewhere one was meant to have been before, but has not. It picks up the long-left thread of a parallel possible trajectory of life that did not happen. Said describes in an interview that when he returned to the building, he did not experience the direct uncanny story written about in Kanafani’s iconic story, “Returning to Haifa,” where he knocked on a front door and met the family that had replaced his own. Instead, he found that it wasn’t a house at all, but an office (2000). Said went inside the place that was once his house, but it was neither his own nor was it a house anymore. It had completely transformed into a different kind of building (Hamzah 2014). The house, as an abstract and dreamy aspiration of the past, only existed in memory, and in theory. Said experienced a misplaced or failed uncanny —not familiar and strange at the same time— but simply strange (Sprinkler 1992). Not only was Said displaced from home, but home itself was displaced from the material world altogether. So greatly had home been withdrawn —from a memory of a house to a location on a hand-drawn map to an office building that was in its same place— that it did not fit the

form of a house at all¹⁰⁵. In Said's case, as in the case of Anbari farmers, abstraction is not a simple concept. Abstraction (*altadjrid*) in Arabic translates more or less to its English equivalent: non-representational shapes that do not act as signs of something, the quality of dealing with conceptual instead of the empirical, or the removal or separation of something from its context.

Abstraction is a concept taken up by many of these Anbari farmers to articulate forms and kinds of displacement that are not always straightforward, and not always actionable. Many of the Anbari people who have theorized Counterterrorism in this dissertation are people I met in the Kurdish region of Iraq, where they were staying temporarily in hotel rooms and construction sites, waiting out military violence at home. It was unclear whether they would ever return. Some travelled back to Anbar province in the meantime, often returning to places so transformed they were unrecognizable. Elsa, a young woman who lives in a partially constructed house far from home and for an uncertain amount of time, describes her life as a displaced person this way: "We are abstracted. Everything is abstract, like we are not really in life, we are just the *shape* of a life. There is no reason to wake up. There are no animals, either, and no green plants. And this material [concrete] does not adjust like our homes in Anbar to the weather." Her new neighbor, Ma Jowad, lives in a construction site up the road. She defines abstraction in terms of failure: the failure of things to come together, the failure of material things like clay to react to

¹⁰⁵ Yael Navaro-Yashin's, *The Make Believe Space*, covers this concept, and also makes the intervention that home is not a desirable place for many, and perhaps most, people (2012).

her skilled labor in ways she expects them to. More complex than displacement, abstraction is also a temporal status in the material world, when processes like personal life trajectories are cut short and rerouted. In fact, as Karlton describes it, abstraction “plucks” him “out of line.” Abstraction is the state in which one must continue to exist in spite of the fact that there simply is no place to be, or one must plan to return home even if there is no longer such a place to return to. Abstraction (altadjrid) is the withholding of time and place from its flow and connectivity.

It is easy to mistake abstraction for an immaterial phenomenon that takes places solely in the emotional worlds of dispossessed and displaced people. In fact, among Iraqi interlocutors who used the phrase or referenced abstraction as an experience, abstraction is a materially intense process produced directly even if diffusely through the Global War on Terror. These farmers, displaced to neighboring communities and travelling back and forth to land they can barely sustain, are stringent in articulating the materiality of abstraction. In its various forms, abstraction is a hollowed-out mode of being, tied directly to a military enterprise that removes people from integrated relationships with their environment. But their abstraction ripples to others, like Kaswan, a Kurdish farmer who is also displaced by the rapid growth of an industry loosely attached to war. In each form, abstraction means that the work people do to stay in place ironically abstracts them further from it.

This chapter follows the figure of cement construction sites, from quarry to house, giving material form to abstraction as a mode of less-than-lethal confinement. The concrete industry allows for a material object by which to imagine the subtlety

and diffusion of the Global War on Terror as it pervades daily modes of being, senses of possibility, and arrangements of people, places, and relationships. The two primary locations featured in this chapter are Mirawa, a sloping field speckled with private homes under construction, and Cement Valley, the source of cement by which these houses are built.

Throughout this chapter I will highlight several versions of abstraction.

Arrhythmia is a temporal disruption to the rhythms and textures of a landscape such that it becomes unfamiliar, unresponsive, or out of synch with the movements and touch of its people. For the Jowad family, the seepage of cement byproducts into forms of daily living produce arrhythmias congruent with displacement from war. For Rania and Elsa, who find displacement from home and life in a partially constructed concrete building to be a mixed experience of liberation and oppression, *parenthesis* is a pause in the middle of a trajectory that is opened and held apart from an ongoing flow. Parenthetical places and parenthetical time make up blisters in spacetime. They are simultaneously too liberating and too confining at once, because parenthetical living means that the parenthesis must close in order for the world to go on, and yet the world going on forecloses the possibility of survival. Finally, *arrogance* is a third kind of abstraction visible through Kaswan's perspective as a Kurdish farmer living at the foot of a new cement factory. Arrogance is the kind of separation from actions and their consequences, the *modus operandi* of an indifferent capitalist enterprise as it transforms a local ecology. I explore instances in which one toxic war-related industry, Cement, seeps into daily life and signifies temporal dilations and spatial

abstractions that open up and loosen people's relationships with their land, even as they struggle to stay attached.

Remembering that Counterterrorism (or counterinsurgency) is the work of suppressing insurgent resistance to occupation, I attend to one of its primary modalities: separating and isolating people from "multipliers of force." In military terms, a "multiplier of force" is a factor that dramatically increases the ability of a military to accomplish something. For example, if a certain technology enables an army to accomplish five times what it would without the technology, the multiplier is five. Counterterrorism seeks to reduce insurgent access to multipliers of force by limiting food sovereignty, reducing access to high or hidden parts of a landscape, disrupting social networks, displacing and concentrating people into camps or prisons, generating economic dependency on occupying bases or settlements, and disrupting plans, certainty, and hope.

Concrete is a go-to material for contemporary confinement, and therefore a less-than-lethal paradigm by which confinement might thrive as a regime of control. Historian Reviel Netz offers a beautiful history of barbed wire, showing how it moved from the western frontier confining cattle, and eventually became the tool of choice for confining human beings. His book takes us to Auschwitz, where he reminds us that the quality of barbed wire, the quality of a thing designed to inflict pain on flesh, matters (2004). Concrete walls, on the other hand, have a different set of qualities fitting to a different kind of confinement. Laleh Khalili describes a paradigm shift in the logics of counterinsurgency (that is, the containment of popular

dissent) between the 20th and 21st centuries. She calls this *liberal counterinsurgency*, which increasingly approaches counterinsurgency as “armed social work” (Khalili 2013; Kilcullen 2010). In this shift to the less-than-lethal turn in coercive modalities, the line between civil governance and violent occupation is blurred, just as the line between refugee camp and prison camp is blurred. It is no surprise that barbed wire no longer fits the form of liberal counterinsurgency and its confinement practices. Something designed to inflict pain on flesh is not sufficiently blurry for the late liberal project of “armed social work.” Concrete enters the scene as both an instrument of military confinement and deterrance *and* as a function of statehood, home making, and shelter.

Concrete does not inflict pain like barbed wire. As recent CIA files on torture¹⁰⁶ reveal, it does other things to the body. For example, Gul Rahman froze to death on a cold concrete slab during enhanced interrogation when he fell asleep (Siems 2017). Relatedly, a 2015 complaint against the Obama administration Homeland Security (including Secretary Jeh Johnson), filed on behalf of several detainees housed in the Tucson Sector, contends that conditions at U.S. Customs and Border Protection facilities are inhumane. “Inhumane conditions” include the use of cold temperatures as a punitive measure against detainees. Detainees nicknamed their concrete cells “*hieleras*” (meaning “iceboxes” in Spanish) because of what the complaint identifies as “painful and punitively low temperatures.” Court documents

¹⁰⁶ Rebranded “enhanced interrogation.” Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Declassification Revisions Dec 3, 2014.

describe how, “the concrete benches and floors served as a heat-sink, thereby exacerbating the discomfort level of the detainees. The heat-reflective, emergency Mylar blankets issued to the detainees, do not effectively serve as a barrier to the radiant cooling of the concrete” (Declaration of Robert W. Powitz 2016, 19). For such subjects of Counterterrorism, rest and death come together. The house and the prison are interrelated. Less-than-lethal counterinsurgency blurs the violation of people with salvation from that violation. Concrete, a substance at the center of this project, achieves “dual use” by militaries as a substance with chemical composition that can serve any number of purposes, and thereby obscure so many forms of harm.

According to Kaswan, who has watched a cement factory mine rock from the hills that hem in his valley, concrete itself is an abstraction. Cement is the product of chemically and mechanically altered stone. The manufacturing process compresses stone into a fine powder, which, when mixed with water, acts like a glue. That is cement. When cement binds to rock and sand, and dries hard, it is concrete. Concrete, while appearing to be an object, is in fact a slow chemical reaction, one that hardens and cracks over time. There is no such thing as “finished” concrete. It comes with its own rhythms, slowly drying out and aging. It is one of the most short-lived construction materials in the world, but it is also quick to produce, and quick to permanently transform environments. Very often we mistake concrete as a barrier. A prophylactic between the rain and the topsoil. A prophylactic between peoples. Often this is its military application: to divide space into two halves, like concrete T-walls erected by the U.S. military under Paul Bremer’s supervision to segregate Sunni and

Shi'a neighborhoods. Claiming to prevent sectarian killing, walling in fact perpetuated it. Concrete is instrumental in producing homogeneity of human categories, and of species, via segregation. Concrete is conducive not only to homogeneity, but also to hyper-individuation. The families in Mirawa, who once lived in neighborhoods with thriving social networks amidst mudbrick homes, now live in isolation from one another. As Elsa describes life in abstraction, "One unit is one unit, without interlocking." I think of a hole cut in the sidewalk for a tree to stand, singularly.

At the same time, concrete structures are also objects, and confinement is not their only function. Eyal Weizman argues that the wall is an object, a statement that marks, not the boundary, but the spine of the occupation (2007). In the 2000s Anbar province saw more homes built from cheap concrete blocks than ever before. They were built in haste to accommodate the many people fleeing from Fallujah city into smaller towns to escape American battles in 2004 and 2008. In 2014, many of these homes were bombed and destroyed by the Maliki regime using U.S.-sold F16s to do the job. The cement industry does not mind this destruction: it bolsters that industry's per capita consumption goals by increasing demand. Many of these residents now live in half-built construction sites in Kurdistan, and ironically work as contract laborers in cement factories. Tom Jowad, a teacher-turned-concrete mixer, sees the links between militarism, displacement, and the way that the industry builds a permanent peace predicated on his dispossession: "We see the bases, and those are there to stay. And we see that there is no future for us." The permanence that arrives from the

quarry to military bases does not carry over into villages the same way, where cheap, rapid, repetitive construction is paired with demolition by bomb or by bulldozer. Cement technology signals a permanent displacement, a frenetic modernity that does not really leave a place for the villagers themselves.

This is where Counterterrorism has found itself an excellent substance for social control. What passes as shelter also passes as a prison. It forecloses possibilities: there is no use imagining who or what lives on the other side or listening for their sounds, not is it easy to traverse the sensorial boundaries of cement to commune with what is underneath a paved floor. For those living in a perpetual state of displacement, both the capacity and will to resist are limited to the materials available. It becomes difficult to imagine a world without cement and concrete. Concrete helps facilitate what Khalili describes as insurgency's "psychological surrender," holding a population in abeyance, rather than forcing obedience with barbed wire and guns (2013). As described by Hilal, Petti and Weizman, the "surface of the suburb ...[is] inscribed extensively with the signs of the petty bourgeois lifestyle that maintains it: an excess of roads and parking lots, private gardens, fences, sidewalks and tropical plants. The first ten centimeters of the urban ground surface embody most of its operational logic and also its ideology" (2009a; 2009b), facilitated by corporate opportunism and ongoing protection from imagined outside enemies like the U.S. or the Maliki regime. An Iraqi manager at a La Farge distribution center places concrete at the heart of peace-by-capitalism: "Concrete is an old idea, but a new application. The rural people have mud brick homes, but our goal

is to reach the global average of one ton per capita consumption. If they are involved in the global market this way, the sectarian fighting will die down and cool off.” I cannot help but retort: “In other words, peace is like cooling off with an ice cream break?”

This La Farge manager speaks of concrete in Counterterrorist terms. In his view, transforming the material landscape of Iraq has both economic and military implications. What he is building in rural Anbar is a condition of *sieg-ability*, an imagined global connectedness that is dependent upon the whims of a global market. To him, a good consumer is an obedient citizen. But for those in Anbar worried about things like siege-ability — vulnerability to being cut off from the capacity to survive and resist violation— concrete feels like an invasive species. By invasive species, I do not mean a foreign thing that enters into an ecosystem. Rather it is a thing, foreign or not, that diminishes the quantity and diversity of life forms: an “excessiveness and repetition of the same that threatens diversity, coexistence, and survival of others” (Menozzi citing Lunny 2014). Along with radiation, plastics, and genetically modified crops, many Anbari farmers, particularly women, perceive concrete as having that invasive quality of reducing their capacity to grow their own food, integrate with neighbors, build their own dwellings and appliances, and defend themselves from military domination. Invasiveness is not a matter of foreignness, but instead about the fact that concrete’s introduction to rural Anbar constantly gestures back to the modes it produces in Counterterrorism. Concrete vexes my interlocutors as a figure of Counterterrorism because it “abstracts” them in different ways, from

different things, for different reasons. I will start by sharing the story of Ma Jowad's efforts to build *tannour* bread ovens, then I will zoom out and show you "parenthetical fields," which are both actual fields of partially constructed houses as well as dimensional fields of abstracted living, described by Elsa, Hameed, and Karlton. Finally, I will describe the process of how such fields are made by the cement and concrete industry in Iraq, producing certain foreclosures of livability, decried and refuted by Hassan and Kaswan. Military occupation and ongoing Counterterrorism generate a plethora of time regimes, disruptions from 'normal' life rhythms, and suspensions from places and possible futures. Here I explore the texture of abstraction in the daily lives of families from and in Anbar province: What does abstraction feel like? What does the experience of abstraction do to the material and ethical arrangements of daily life in Iraq?

Part I: Arrhythmia

Yes, there was an element of abstraction and unreality in misfortune. But when an abstraction starts to kill you, you have to get to work on it.

—Albert Camus, *The Plague*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ 1947, 69.



Figure 22: The Jowad's "house" near completion in 2015, photo by Kali Rubaii

Especially before it becomes solid concrete, cement's "greyness" bleeds and seeps. The mud outside construction sites oozes with dark sludge. The water near the factories runs cloudy. The dust in quarry air is textured. So stubbornly is cement infused with greyness that it has perturbed chemical engineers and architects for decades. In spite of recent strides to create colorful concrete, most of the world knows concrete as grey dust in large bags and as rough grey cinder blocks. To millions of Iraqi people who have fled episodes of military violence, and to refugees across the region, this cold, grey substance is integrally linked to the story of their displacement.

Mirawa is a grassy valley, dotted with partially constructed buildings. In each grey house-shape, whole families find shelter from rain and sun. They are from Saqlawiya, Fallujah, Kharma, and other parts of Anbar province. In general, they

know very little about each other, but a few of them were neighbors back at home. There is little trust among the families here, and there is little trust *of* them: they are carefully watched by the *Asaish* (Kurdish secret police) for signs of terrorist ties or activities. One construction site houses Ma Jowad, her daughters, in-laws, and grandchildren. It is an unusual household, since Ma is the head of her household. Her husband disappeared during the Iran-Iraq war. Her five daughters married five men who joined Ma's matriarchy, and in spite of problems with infertility and birth defects, their family is teeming with children. Partly because my presence as a single woman does not disrupt a particular patriarchy, and partly because of Ma's very outgoing personality, I am invited to stay with the Jowads. The Jowads not only teach me about life in Mirawa, Ma also introduces me to abstraction by thrusting me into innumerable circumstances in which abstraction made itself plain.

Ma Jowad, big in all ways, with wide, flat palms that she waves for expression, has the kind of whimsical eyes that wrinkle and twinkle with mischief. She gives me a wink sometimes, or sticks out her tongue as a gesture of play or sexual innuendo. She is a charismatic, dominant, maternal character. She is loud, and can teach me things without language, so when I fail to understand something, she just grabs my wrists roughly, and moves my hands until I learn. All work with Ma Jowad is handwork. She shows me in slow, exaggerated motions, raising her eyebrows to exaggerate further, what it is she wants me to learn. "Like thiiiiis," she motions.

She guides me out to a sunny spot in the muddy road, slanting down the hill from the sopping wet construction site where she and her large family take shelter. She plops herself down on the ground, squatting and then rolling into a sit, with her legs out wide and her feet arched, heels out. She has bare feet that are lean and elegant in contrast to her fat ankles and her wide everything-else. Between her legs sits a large clay mound with a hole in the top. It is a *tannour* oven, the kind of cone shaped clay oven for cooking flat bread. She is trying again. This is her third attempt at a new method for making *tannours*. The first two have failed. As she describes why, she reveals an emerging ecology thick with ethical compounds at the nexus of displacement and geopolitical violence.

Ma Jowad is cheerful, even as she sits here on the ground, with wet earth seeping into her only *abaya*. I imagine what we look like together from the viewfinder of a small drone that glides over us. Two women sitting in the mud near a grey mound, one with a black *abaya*, the other with braids. We belong to the proximity of a construction site. We are surrounded in all ways by the color grey. Children climb to the top and tumble down a pile of cement dust partially covered with a tarp. It makes them cough. It is bad for building castles: it is better for making powder bombs for playing war. It is also the thing that will seal them out of their dwelling: their fathers and uncles guarantee this foreclosure with their hands, as they turn the dust into cement, and the cement into concrete blocks that stack up to complete the future home of wealthy Kurds. Women beat a rug on the top floor of the building and fight off baby snakes that hatch and nest in the unsealed walls. We

sometimes sleep below where it is warm. We sometimes withstand the weather on the roof for fear of snakebites. The teakettle heats up on concrete cinder blocks. During my time living in this building, I learned that it is haunted by a *jinn* who viciously attacks the women, causing miscarriages. The dwelling is hostile to us.

Since their potato farm was destroyed during the military battle between ISIS and the Iraqi government, the Jowad's land and seeds were destroyed. This was the initial shock, but not the real core of their displacement: ongoing changes to their home in their absence protracts their precarious stay in Kurdistan. They cannot imagine returning to their village, of which their family makes up half the population, or buying seeds from Syngenta or Siemens. They know their land has been seized by someone else. As Ma's third son-in-law said: "Never, never, never can we go back there. It is ruined, the soil is ruined. It is drowned, it is depleted. We cannot live on the land anymore." Even if the landscape is restored, the homescape cannot be. Too much has changed. Nor can the Jowads imagine with much traction the possibility of carrying on in Kurdistan.

Mirawa is dotted with so many construction sites, each full of families that arrived here in a hurry from Anbar, fleeing bombing by the Iraqi government, and later fleeing ISIS. They either bypassed the refugee camps to avoid living in filthy, densely packed tents, or they arrived before the camps were erected¹⁰⁸. Each family

¹⁰⁸ Life in the camps, particularly in Kirkuk where I spent the most time, is also parenthetical to Arab Anbari. However, in the Yazidi camp in Domiz, Kurdistan, life was in no way parenthetical. The camp was being planned and developed into a town by the Kurdish government, expecting to fully integrate the Yazidi refugees there into permanent residents living in a grid-shaped refugee town. Already, only one year into

labors on the construction sites in order to live there, and some even pay rent. As they work, they slowly build the homes to completion, which means they will have to move out and let the owners move in. This is one layer of displacement that Ma calls “unethical,” because it is work that “abstracts” rather than roots her family. Her daughter describes it as “the opposite of farming.”

Ma Jowad takes my hands maternally and dives them into muddy water in a small pot. She holds them between hers, as if in a sticky prayer, forces a loud clap between my palms, and then takes my patty-cake hands and has me rub the whole body of the *tannour* outside in a smooth, sweeping circle. This is salt water. It stings the cuts on my hands. “If you don’t salt the clay enough, the bread will stick too much. If you do it too much, it will not stick enough.”

How much do you put in the water? “Not a lot, and not a little.” I think I understand this to mean that I should not need to heat the water to make all the salt dissolve. I stop to lick the side of the oven, to see how salty it tastes, but she gives me a “tsk” sound and nods her head straight up, meaning “No.” She offers me a better way to understand: she takes me by the chin, dips her two front fingers into the water, and then plunges them into my mouth. They are very, very salty, but not enough to make me thirsty. So that is what, “Not a lot and not a little means.” I say I understand.

the Yazidi exodus, tents were lined in blocks, trenches were being built for plumbing, and brick and tin storefronts were being slowly erected. A clinic, water tower, and holy shrine were also established, and roads to and from these were paved with recycled cement. A grid of posts becoming soon-to-be installed electrical wiring loomed tall over the camp. Residents here saw a clear, even if staircase-shaped, trajectory for the future in which life as it was would flow forward without close or end. Their future was immanent, rather than simply on permanent pause.

Ma touches my chin, which is now coated in a little goatee of clay from her hands, and taps my nose with her forefinger, covered in clay and salt water. It dries and crusts tightly over the skin on my face, making a pinching feeling when I smile. She works along the sides of the tannour, reaching her right arm down to the shoulder inside the opening. Her white teeth flash as she laughs: “like delivering a baby.”

“Long before” —a preposition she uses to indicate life before 2003, as opposed to “before” which indicates life before her displacement from Anbar to Kurdistan in 2015— “I used to sell *tannours*, and people would come buy them from the side of the road. Now the knowledge is being lost. I think I am the only one who knows how to make them in all of Iraq.” The young women in the family are not particularly interested in learning how to make them, partly because people often buy lightweight metal bread ovens for sale in the market, but also because Ma Jowad herself has been unable to successfully make a *tannour* out of the clay available to her, now that the homescape she knows is unhinged.

The First Attempt: Dirt



Figure 23: Dirt *Tannour* (before it crumbled), photo by Kali Rubaii

First Ma tried to make a *tannour* oven out of wet dirt from the roads, but it lacked any clay components. It was too dry and crumbly to stay standing, even though she stacked some bricks around it for support. The remains of this first *tannour* still sit on the side of the dirt road to the construction site where the Jowads are living. By now, it is a defeated-looking mound, hunched over its central hole, concave at its crest. This *tannour* failed because of Ma's own desperation: "I rushed it, and I did not think it through. I knew it would not work, and I was only working in frenzy. This is haram." According to Ma, the *tannour* was doomed from the start because of her own lapse in good judgment. Something in her felt an urgency that exceeded reason and self-control, "like you, Kali, always tripping because you move

before you finish thinking.” I protested this point, arguing that walking around in rubber sandals that were two sizes too small on a bumpy mud road was a good reason to trip. “Tsk tsk!” Ma reminded me that surviving displacement is about learning to walk with elegance under precisely such conditions. The ethical quandary of the first attempt was something Ma understood as related to her own disposition to the circumstance. It was a matter of self-discipline. Had she thought it through, she would have considered that “urgency was not as important as finding real clay somewhere.” The panic of being *ghareeb*, foreign to a place or feeling as stranger, can make people do crazy things. As an example, the Jowads reminded me that the construction site was owned by a wealthy landlord, who decided to charge them rent in addition to extorting their labor. “But,” Ma’s son-in-law said, “This is not what we should teach our children. Whether we are *ghareeb* or not, they are learning how to behave.” Ma was careful to model self-discipline and artisanal care in crafting her second *tannour*. She was also open to being as creative as possible. The second attempt did not fail because of self-discipline, or human behavior under austerity. Instead it failed because of another layer to displacement: Ma’s relationship with the material walls of the next oven reflected what she felt was a faulty mutual attunement that reflected the moral integration at stake in the construction site.

The Second Attempt: Cement

A few months after her first attempt, Ma Jowad mixed up some of the cement piled on the ground at the construction site, dusty and thick. She added in some rocks and straw to give it structure, and shaped it into a *tannour*, salting it and patting it in a

circle as she was doing with the clay. It dried and stayed standing, which was exciting. It meant that even without clay, there was hope of eating fresh bread from a *tannour* oven. Ma was happy at first, thinking that cement, the thing that made up her shelter here in Mirawa, might also give her a kind of refuge for cooking. She was tired of buying bread from the market, which was far away from the shelter, and therefore always stale, or otherwise encrusted with delays and bad textures. Her granddaughter complains that, “old bread is chewy, and gets stiff. It is unpleasant to eat and tears without any softness.” It is more difficult to bend around food, or to carry that food up to the mouth. It is a subtle difference, enough to induce the feeling of being a refugee, to disrupt the smooth mechanics of familiar life, rich with qualities like warmth, softness, pinkness, and ease.

But, when Ma Jowad made bread in the cement *tannour*, it did not behave as it was supposed to. She made rounds of bread dough, and slapped them onto the upper side of the *tannour*, letting the fire and coals from the ground heat the dough, which is supposed to bubble slightly and eventually peel off. To get *tannour* bread right, a person has to snatch her hand in to catch the bread before it falls into the flames, quickly, without burning the back of her hand. If her grip is too loose and tentative, the bread falls. If her grip is too strong, the hands burn or the bread tears. It is a pattern of trained readiness, speed, and temperature tolerance. But this timing is also determined by the chemical relationships among the fire, the clay, and the bread dough. When things go wrong, when arrhythmia seeps into the fire, the clay, and the dough, even someone as practiced as Ma might find herself as clumsy as a foreigner

like me: reaching into the *tannour* and dropping the bread into the fire with a squeal from the heat on the back of her hand.

Ma describes what went wrong in the timing of the cement oven like a game of call and response, a rhythm between two beings: “the timing of the pink clay and the timing of the bread are matched up, they are twinned over the centuries. The bread knows exactly when to peel away from the clay right before it burns, when it is soft.” With the cement *tannour*, the bread burned onto the side of the oven and would not come unstuck. She explains that with the cement *tannour*, the chemical relationships were in arrhythmia with the bread. “Cement is sticky!” Ma exclaims, and shows me how much she salted it by sucking in her cheeks and puckering her lips to show me how the water would have tasted were I to sample it. “Even with the salt, it is never ready to let go [of the bread].” Ma could not read meaning in the texture of the cement to know how much salt it needed, or how much water, or how much time resting.

She complains, along with her daughters, that the bread is also part of the problem. Her daughter, Fabiana tells me that, “Long ago [before 2003] the wheat was good, not too sticky not too dry. It made good bread and the children were fine. But now, we have children with allergies and many problems. The trouble with the bread is the gluten.” She describes something many women tell me in Anbar province, that new strains of wheat introduced since the opening of Iraqi agricultural markets, have a higher level of gluten and make the bread sticky, which in turn makes it more difficult to time the rhythm of heating, cooking, and peeling from the walls of the

tannour. The exact moment when the “readiness” of the bread dough and the “readiness” of the *tannour* wall (usually pink clay) must coincide.

The dough’s “readiness” is shaped in spiritual and chemical ways by rapid changes in Iraq’s import-export policies, in the soil quality, and in gluten levels. Perhaps it is also shaped in the way people who harvested the wheat have changed in social, economic, and political standing, as well as in relation to the land upon which they stand to cut the stalks. Meanwhile, the clay’s “readiness” is also shaped by the saturation of heavy metals from millions of ordnances left on the ground, by bombing, population transfer, industrial waste from oil and cement production. Each material thing carries with it the potential for concrescence with other things —the particular convergence of frequencies, rhythms, and qualities that make possible the occurrence of a phenomenon— that make possible the readiness of the hands.

This is how culturally specific practice comes into being, through material and temporal arrangements that coincide and coalesce. When cement molecules’ “readiness” fails to coincide with the bread dough’s “readiness” to let go, the Jowad family confronts the sudden uncanny feeling of abstraction (*altadjrid*): of being displaced or alienated without actually moving, of context being taken away. Being abstracted and being out-of-time are related. Ma experiences failed concrescence, the failure of things to come together, the failure of the landscape to react as a homescape.

Abstraction, in this sense, might be defined as the inability to impinge or be impinged upon, as removal from influence that is timely. Ma cannot make her usual

impingements upon the material world, nor does the material world make its usual impingements upon her. Her knowledge about salt is not useful with cement, or rather her ability to know what to do is limited by the material artifact surrounding her, to make meaning out of “too much” or “too little,” or even qualia like stickiness. Her hands are unable to conjure sufficient molecular reactivity, whether they salt the *tannour* and prime it with coincidental readiness, or embody such readiness in the art of snatching bread quickly from the oven. “There is a way of doing things you learn in your nerves,” Ma’s pregnant daughter, Fabiana explains, “But when the muscle memory [directly translated as nerve memories] is not useful, you are just sitting there, feeling *ghareeb*¹⁰⁹ [homesick, as if a stranger, uncanny]. At some point, you stop trying to keep your way of life, and you just say, okay, I’ll stop and have a new way of living because there is no pink clay anymore.” She describes an arrhythmia; a rupture to timing that radiates ruptures outward to a “way of life.”

While Ma might have eventually found a way to adapt the cement *tannour*, it was not suited for fire. The *tannour* she made crumbled, unable to withstand the constant heat. Ma stuck out her tongue, “Probably best. The chemicals we would have eaten with that bread are not good. We already breathe the dust.” The cement oven, crumbled with marks of black soot, stoops next to the dirt *tannour*, as if watching with resignation Ma’s third attempt with “grey clay.” Ma has high hopes for this oven, because in spite of its dirtiness, she knows how to work with clay, and so does bread. The rhythm of cooking may be restored yet, but some things are forever

¹⁰⁹ *Ghareeb* is an Arabic term that means strange, the feeling of being a stranger.

changed. This new “grey clay,” which is surrounded and infused with cement dust, oil and soot, signals to her a state of social and semiotic abstraction. The “warmth of things” had changed, but Ma hopes her ability to conjure a response from “pink clay” is replicable.

The Third Attempt

For her third *tannour*, Ma sent her son-in-laws walking across the valley of Mirawa a few weeks ago to collect clay from the mountainside, which is steeper on the other side of a small river, but still very close to the cement batching plant where they work. It is not good clay, which would look warm and pink like clay in art classes. Instead, it is grey and slick, with rocks and oily grey streaks running through it from the small cement factory uphill. It is the same factory that sometimes employs some of the men, if they are lucky. It is the same factory that leaks waste into the stream, which is also their water supply. The men come home with their hands encrusted in dried cement; the children vomit when the water comes out grey with sediment. Ma has washed the clay as best she could, and pulled away parts that looked too black or too dirty. The grey clay is already cracking as it dries, and she points this out as evidence of “abstraction”— the displacement of local materiality and knowledge from right under Ma’s own hands. As her hands and the clay move over each other, sense each other, and build the oven, her feel for what works and what fails is disrupted.

The relationship between cement or grey clay, gluten-thick bread dough, and Ma Jowad’s hands is itself too sticky, filled with an unwanted traction that pulls a

longstanding practice of bread-making out of its rhythm and abstracts people from their land (*ard*), or rather from any land. It is possible, though, that Ma can still find a way to conjure lively participation of the bread and clay, to elicit a mutual response that produces a rhythm she can work with. Even though Ma has found clay, the change in color from pink to grey indexes the environmental degradation of Iraq, and the ethical implications of this degradation. This new “grey clay,” which is surrounded and infused with cement dust, oil and soot, signals toxicity in the clay. Toxicity seeps and harms. Aware that cement dust is carcinogenic, and that the cement *tannour* was probably unhealthy, Ma carefully removes parts of the grey clay that are intolerable. She picks through clay and dirt, trying to make something edible out of something that has been made toxic by sitting downstream from a concrete factory leeching oil, soot, and cement dust. The scope of possibility for repair of bodies and lifeways —or bread that does not make children sick— is limited by the ecological and environmental degradation of the materials with which Ma constructs a kitchen to feed her family of almost forty.

Ma’s desire to replicate the routine of bread making is an ethical concern: “It is not right to feed the children bread from the metal ovens.” Rather than a matter of health, she describes how eating from clay ovens tastes better, but also helps children feel and understand the land. Eating from pink clay teaches children about the potentials infused in the land (*ard*). Ma explains how “biting little pieces of clay in your food” is part of staving off “ghareeb.” It builds ethical, biological, and material ecosystems of mutual knowing and mutual timing.

Pink clay is in contrast with grey clay, which provides a different kind of knowing, still made possible by ingestion and physical contact with lively matter. Ma thinks that the grey clay makes the children have diarrhea. This clay is a dangerous stranger that disrupts former modes of relationality. It is through clay that they are able to learn a new ecosystem, one infused with the coincidental readiness to cause biological harm, as if poised like a viper. She explains that if you cook bread in a salted mud *tannour* oven, made by hand, it tastes so different from bread cooked in a machine. “It means something,” Ma insists. The mud and grass binding for structure, the time drying in the sun, the sweat of its maker, the skill of muscle memory are all important components of cooked food. The intergenerational memory that both the mud and the maker share is part of what makes a person or a thing belong to a place. The mud and the maker remember each other, recognize each other, bend toward each other across millennia. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. We bite the dust when we tear at the bread. Biting dust, after all, is the ultimate humility (as opposed to the arrogance you will read about in the final section of this chapter).

Humility (*tawadae*) is an important component of multispecies livability. It gets a person close to the dirt —through taste, texture, temperature— to sense with acuity the subtleties of possible malevolence or harm otherwise invisible. There are “right ways” to eat and make bread, which gesture at the long-term livability of a place: there are important distinctions between ingesting and metabolizing deadly matter, lively matter, or innocuous matter. What grey clay and cement blocks do when they fail to make “healthy” or morally suitable bread is to highlight the

thingness of a thing, which becomes apparent when it fails to work as a tool or as expected. The question, “what is this thing?” is opened by the failure not only of its functioning as a tool, but also of its new liveliness that disrupts and refuses former rhythm (Heidegger 1962).

There are “right ways” to eat and make bread, which gesture at the long-term livability of a place. Metabolizing deadly matter is distinct from metabolizing lively or innocuous matter, and yet the distinction is less important than contact itself. Whether their world is malevolent or benevolent, Ma Jowad insists that her children and grandchildren handle, touch, eat, taste, and know that world. She insists not despite but *because* it has so rapidly transformed from a green farm to a grey construction site. “We have to be humble,” I hear her tell her little three-year-old granddaughter, dragging her by the elbow to come learn about making a *tannour*.

Being stuck being bad

Frustrated that the materials available to her will all make her grandchildren sick, Ma tells me, “We are stuck being bad!” The statement catches my attention because it highlights two kinds of “stuckness”: the kind that is materially afforded by concrete and makes it difficult for people to move when they are displaced, and the kind that leaves them morally trapped. The other side of ethical materialism is that the matter itself is enlivened to stubborn refusal, to stickiness, by more-than-accidental¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ While I do not unpack the question of intention in this book, underlying the very structure of my writing is the idea that what is often discussed as an externality of war is in fact an integral component. I use the adjective “more-than-accidental” as a conceptual way of speaking to that which is neither directly intended, nor simply an

molecular transformation. Not only are the Jowads stuck in the cement sludge of the construction site, they are also stuck in a bad relationship. Ma points out that the clay is black and grey not because of just any cement production, but because of “77 Group,” where her son-in-laws sometimes find work. In order to survive their displacement, they must actively participate in it both by building themselves out of their temporary house, but also by building the T-walls that displace them from Anbar province altogether. “77 Group” contracted directly with Paul Bremer and the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to build hundreds of thousands of T-walls, blast proof steel-reinforced concrete wall segments used to rapidly erect military barriers across Iraq’s landscape. Ma remembers T-walls as the objects responsible for making sieges around Fallujah possible in the early 2000’s, the beginning of the Jowad’s eroding grasp on their land and livelihood. The Jowads loathe the “77 Group” batching plant, even though it is also the sole source of income for men in the family. Tom Jowad explains that, “It is humiliating to stand in line and beg for work we rarely get, but it is *demoralizing* to work for *that* company.”

When the Kurdish government cracked down on migration within Kurdistan, families like the Jowads found themselves stuck in whatever district they were in, with only special permission granted for intra-Kurdistan travel. I asked people how they felt about this, especially after some families tried to go visit relatives in other parts of Kurdistan. The Jowads surprised me with their approval of their confinement. While not being able to move was part of their stuckness —immobility or mobility externality. Between these two poles is a spectrum of behaviors and phenomena that are more than just accidents.

without sufficient repetition— they were afraid of being pursued, not personally but as a group, across the regional borders that parsed northern Iraq. Most of these families were fleeing the Iraqi government bombings and/or ISIS takeover of their town or village. They were willing to be inconvenienced and even harmed in order to uphold the process of demarcating and screening spaces with checkpoints and pass systems in order to limit the movement of possible terrorists in their midst.

But being stuck also means being slowly drained of the capacity to ethically survive in Shaqlawa. The alternative is to return to more intimate exposures to militias and terrorists, and even sometimes recruitment by them. Families who lived in hotel flats or single hotel rooms continued to depart daily to return to Anbar— although they know they will not be allowed re-entry into Kurdistan— because they could not afford the very high prices of rentals in Shaqlawa, a well-known tourist destination. The Jowads and others living in Mirawa were considered the lucky ones, neither paying exorbitant amounts to live in town in Shaqlawa, nor crouching in a crowded refugee camp. The Jowad men describe their sense of complicity in the displacement of other Iraqis: “We are not in a camp, but we are building someone else’s empire,” says Tom Jowad.

You know what I think? I think America would like to get all the people out of Iraq. The people are in the way of the wealth of Iraq. But tell Obama that Iraq’s greatest wealth is the people. It's almost like you find you're in the desert, right, and you find a beautiful stone, Iraq, and you're brushing away all the sand (the people), and you take the stone and realize it is just a rock, and everything you have been brushing away is gold, the people. But you are just brushing it out of the way. You missed the treasure. They even took sand and rocks from here to build there. My cousin worked at the airport. He was killed recently by Al Qaeda, but he witnessed that the airplanes were

being loaded with rock and sand. They value the sand over the people? We are the gold of Iraq, but we are blown away like dust.

Cement and concrete lubricates, horribly, material interactions between people and their places. The men pick crusted cement from under their nails instead of dirt. The women complain that it makes them rough lovers and that their hands are always scratchy, not with callouses from the “good work,” but from sticky grey work. The teakettle heats up on cinder blocks. The bread peels off poorly from the third *tannour*. The mud runs with grey and black veins. The water from the hose tastes chalky. When Fabiana says, “What are we feeding our children!?” she speaks about the future skills and cultural habits passed on to their children, as well as the health consequences of consuming grey things. With hand signals to show land evaporating into dust, implying that the land (*ard*) of the family’s village had been evaporated into cement dust instead, she said: “We feed them cement, right and left. They will be factory workers. They will inherit only dust.” Things as they are must end — ongoingness is not an option — but the world after such an ending in unimaginable, impossible seeming.

Part II: Parenthetical Fields

After awhile he could not imagine anything beyond the walls except the yard outside, the lavatory and the dining hall— or even the walls, really. They were abstractions beyond reach of his understanding, not in themselves confinement but symbols of confinement.

—N. Stott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*¹¹¹

¹¹¹ 1968, 93.

The Parenthesis

Mirawa, where the Jowads are staying — is about to be a new suburb. It is a valley, a field of partial houses with hollow sockets for windows-to-be and gaping jaws for doors-to-be. There is a paved highway road from Shaqlawa out to other cities in Kurdistan. From this highway, one can take a dirt turnout to reach Mirawa, passing an apartment complex under construction, and heading up a slight hill to some established homes that look odd popping out of a field of grey, partially constructed buildings. Between Shaqlawa, which is a densely packed town nested at the base of mountains, and the future-suburb of Mirawa, the landscape slopes into a valley that drains a small creek in the winter. The valley is eerie, dotted with several widely spaced, partially constructed two-story homes, all at the same stage of incomplete: they signify future dwellings only because the cement blocks are stacked with some distinct shapes that look like a house, surrounded by cement piles and cement blocks that are either yet-to-be used or soon-to-be-discarded.

This valley field is but one of many in the area that evokes a sense of temporal ambivalence or flexibility. On days when the rain or sunlight make the colors of the valley deepen from chalky yellow into green, a photograph of the valley evokes a sense of rapid, pending transformation. Something is coming, and nothing will ever be the same when it does. Most of these houses are to be vacation dwellings, which in itself evokes a kind of parenthetical time all on its own. These dwellings will stand empty most of the time, waiting even when they are complete, for people to spend a season away from their “real” lives, an elective parenthesis out of daily routine. For

now, they are little grey parentheses, half-built scenes lined up in a field. They are material sites of exception, exceptions to the flow of ongoingness and excesses to the trajectory. For Kurds whose families live here, it is a happy parenthesis, a home away from home. For the construction companies invested in this growth, it is also happy, a field marked by a winter pause to wait out the rain. But if I were to imagine a village that had seen the plague and was now a ghost town, this would be it. I am friends with the ghosts who fill and rely upon their temporariness. The valley looks like a field of abandonment, as if someone invested money in a construction project, and then halfway through lost interest or funding. On especially dreary days the whole valley looks haunted. These parenthetical dwellings are not empty even though they appear to be from afar. To live parenthetically is to be connected to, dependent upon, but not important to, the direction of things; to only exist inside someone else's world; and to anticipate the pending closure of the scene in which one's existence is made possible.

The men living in these buildings have been hired to build the houses, slowly working their families out of a shelter: each brick they lay is one step closer to the completion of the house, which means they will have to leave. Their hands are encrusted with cement that has dried on the inside seams of their fingers, cracking where the fingers web. Tom Jowad and many like him rely on the open parenthesis of temporary and incomplete construction in order to house their families. Yet, the conditions of parenthetical living are that the parenthesis must close in order for the world to go on. As Tom Jowad often says, "We dig our own graves in order to live." To guarantee the present is to actively foreclose the future. For the Jowads to have a

dwelling now, they put up their future in the building as collateral, erasing the possibility of ongoing presence in the dwelling, in order to occupy the dwelling now. It is a kind of home-debt that eats away time from the future, backwards.

Tom Jowad describes how he has become a character in the story of his employer-host, rather than a main character in his own: “The only evidence of me being here will exist *because* I am gone. If I stay, I am invisible. But if my hands work, and I build this home, I erase myself by drawing myself. You know that famous drawing of the two hands drawing each other? I have an eraser in my hand, not a pencil.” Tom knows that his time in the shelter of his construction site is temporary, as is the food ration each family receives for four months from the Barzani Foundation. This moment in time will end, and soon.

Parenthetical fields are ubiquitous. In Kirkuk, recently shelled by fighting between ISIS and the Kurdish *Peshmerga*, neighborhoods of abandoned construction sites and partially destroyed homes were common meeting places. I attended several home-visits with doctors, spent the night with families, and became accustomed to dwellings that were carved out of these house-forms. I never lost the feeling of parenthesis. The feeling of parenthesis did not come from the materiality of the dwellings themselves. After all, many buildings in the world with cinder block walls and a roof are considered complete. Rather, what signaled parenthetical time was a pervasive anticipation of pending construction, as well as the understanding that integration with the surrounding environment was impossible for the women and negatively transformative for the men. Temporariness defined the very condition of

being there in the first place. The conditions of parenthetical living are both material and temporal, giving one the sense of being outside of time and space, of visiting the three-dimensional world as a guest who may leave no trace. In fact, as in time-travel films, to leave a trace or make a material impingement may be impossible even if one tries: to manipulate clay with one's hands may not conjure the desired *tannour* oven. Or, to impinge upon the world may change the course of things in such a way that one might be deleted from the script of one's own story for having done so: to build a dwelling to completion is to realize the moment when the real owner can move in. Parenthetical living is to pass time without tapping into the flow or pulse of time, and to occupy space (a body, a life, a building) without significance.

Living Outside of My Life

While failing to find material traction with the world around them is part of the abstraction these displaced people face, parenthetical time is not isolated to the physical world. Abstraction is also temporal. Elsa, whom you will meet later, tells me what it is like to live in the abstract: "There is a sense, also, that in your own life, this period might close at any moment and you could get back to your real life." In other words, the life that Elsa is living here and now is temporary, filled with protracted waiting that must end or close in order to make sense in the grammar of her real life. The risk, of course, is that this parenthetical moment might never close. At the same time, if a parenthesis does close, it is unclear what might actually happen. As a chronotope, parenthetical time opens moments of anticipation-heavy every-day time within a story of transformative change. Bakhtin argues that without movement, it is

difficult to notice the chronotope, since time-space is made visible by movement (1981). The road serves as an easy metaphor for the “path of life,” where “space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial: space is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate... the concreteness of this chronotope of the road permits *everyday life* to be realized within it” (Bakhtin 1981, 120). In a parenthetical field, space is emptied of grounded meaning: the relationship between a physical place and the fate of a person living in that place become completely disaggregated, making it impossible for “everyday life to be realized within.” There is no traction, no direction, and no motion by which to make a parenthetical field into a moving road.

Hameed, an Anbari date farmer living in Shaqlawa, explained how displacement from Anbar was meant to be a closed parenthesis that fit into the ordinary seasons of expected life trajectories. He was familiar with some wartime transhumance, meaning he was accustomed to retreating from bombings and sieges and then returning to his land. He explained that this coming and going took “small bites” out of his crop yield, but never completely devoured it:

“We have been displaced before. Each time there is a big battle in our town we have to leave, and eventually we come home. This situation was bearable in the summer, when the children were out of school. We fled, we found refuge, we established something of a life, and waited until we could return to our real lives. This is a vacation town, but this is not just a very bad summer vacation! This situation changes the whole plan for our children’s lives.”

Hameed is one of many families from outside of Fallujah, who once came to Shaqlawa for summer vacations. They view this town as an elective parenthesis— the

vacation spot— from daily life, a hiatus even from periodic war events at home. As a location, it is distinctly *not* home. Now, though, Hameed is joined by thousands of Anbari families living in Shaqlawa and other small towns in Kurdistan as an internally displaced person. Rather than being an elective pause outside of life with an expected and desirable closure that delivers them back to their own lives, this trip to Shawlaw is a “very bad vacation” that “changes the whole plan for our children’s lives. It is time away from home that lasts too long, is at the wrong time, and has permanent costs. For example, Anbari children are unable to pass exit exams or attend their next grade level of classes. Falling behind in school because of repeated disruptions is an upsetting lag for their parents, who want to support a long-term arc in their future in spite of immediate disruptions in the present. The school year holds time in an envelope sealed at each end by the two events of school registration and final exams. Registration and exams present an acute, looping deadline to seal each end of the envelope, to parenthesize the temporal setting of a school year, and in the case of older students graduating from high school, of a life trajectory. In this way, the missed deadline (due to absence from home) is much like the adventure-time story Bakhtin analyzes. But it also carries components of the less mobile, less spatially abstract metamorphosis stories. Protracted parenthetical time— while not an event— had the capacity to transform the “entire life-long destiny of a man” (1981, 114) rather than leave him an unchanged hero of his own life story. Rather than a crisis event, parenthetical abstraction includes protracted non-movement and protracted non-action in which “an individual becomes other than what he was” but

not definitively so (1981, 114-115). In the parenthetical field, it is never clear if these changes are truly metamorphic, or just temporary detours in an overall life trajectory of the unchanged hero.

Justine, a woman who had recently become the head of her household when her husband was killed at a checkpoint, was counting on her son, Karlton, to get a job commensurate with his level of education in order to support the rest of the family as soon as he passed his final exams and received his high school diploma. “My son is due to take his exams but he cannot. They do not have exams for him here, and he cannot go back to his district to take them. And my young daughter is in the third grade, or she should be. They say all the Arabic-language schools are filled and there is no space for her in the Kurdish schools.”

While I was visiting, Karlton came home exhausted from a day of loading wet cement into trucks at the cement batching plant in Mirawa. Having completed all but his final week of high school, Karlton describes his daily routine working with concrete: “I am living outside of my life. I am plucked out of the line, and moved somewhere outside.” Karlton felt an urgency to close this parenthesis as quickly as possible and jump outside of it, back into his life “line.” He was considering making the dangerous trip back to Anbar in hopes that his yearly exams would take place as planned in his district. If he waited until the following year, he worried that he would forget everything he had learned and fail the exams, but he also knew that by returning to Anbar he would threaten his entire family’s safety as well as his own: it was well known that the *Asaish* (Kurdish secret police) targeted families from Anbar

province if their male heads of household were absent. Their assumption was that women and children living as refugees may have male relatives fighting for ISIS across the regional border. If Karlton were to return to Anbar, his mother and sister risked being deported or at least harassed for being ISIS sympathizers. Furthermore, he would have trouble getting back across the border to rejoin them in Kurdistan if his exams were even completed. Karlton was nevertheless considering taking these extreme risks in order to re-establish continuity in the arc of his life, and to secure a higher paying job. In the meantime, he was living what he called, “a parallel life,” a life of someone other than the self he was before, or the self he planned to be. Not only was Karlton living in parenthetical time, he was also an active builder of Mirawa’s parenthetical fields, one link in a long chain of workers in the concrete and cement industry that erected these dwellings, completed them, and later demolished them. Living the shape of daily life when it has no traction with the longer-term trajectory of a lifetime is like living in the shape of a home, but not in fact feeling at home.

The Dwelling That is Not a House

How does abstraction manifest itself in the partially constructed dwelling? How is emplacement in time and space withheld or transformed among the displaced? The Jowads have many neighbors also living parenthetically in the ungrounded, subjunctive mode. They reside in partially constructed buildings that are not-yet-meant to be lived in. Asher, their neighbor down the street, graciously hosted me for lunch. We had met many times to talk about seeds and farming in Shaqlawa. I was

careful to approach their dwelling appropriately, as if I were in a rural Anbari village with more conservative attitudes than in Kurdistan. I asked a friend to join me as a translator so I would not be a single woman approaching their home. My friend spoke Arabic and Kurdish, which was a good thing because as we slid down the muddy embankment to the construction site, a man stopped us to ask questions in Kurdish. He was *Asaish*, Kurdish secret police, and wanted to know why we were poking around here. Responding in Kurdish to gain immediate trust and legitimacy, the translator said I was an aid worker and spent some time in casual conversation until we were given permission to carry on. We decided we did not want to attract undue attention to Asher, given the real nature of my research on counterinsurgency and the intense mistrust of Anbari men inside of Kurdistan, so we walked along the street, pretended he was not home, and left. We returned on a different day. Asher thanked me for dressing conservatively (I did not wear hijab in most Kurdish areas but did so when visiting conservative communities.)¹¹², and opened a plastic sheet normally that served as a makeshift door flap to the opening of the building.

On this day, the rain and wind were intense. It was loud inside. Cement blocks are airy and hollow, so wind and sound push through the cracks. Without any insulation, a constant exchange of heat meant the building felt like an icebox. The building seemed to inhale cold air as the heat from bodies rose and evacuated through the second floor, which serves as a partial roof. The staircase shaft was open to the

¹¹² To illustrate the parenthetical, this is a parenthetical phrase. It is also temporally parenthetical— it is about the ongoing past tense, outside of the trajectory of the story I am telling. It is also parenthetical in significance, important but not essential to the story.

sky, drawing heat from the small heart of the house and sending the warmth up to the sky like a funnel. The structure, which appeared house-like from a distance, was in fact only a house in abstract form. I could feel the building breathe like a lung, and when I mentioned this, Asher suggested we stop to listen and feel. We found that we can both mark a rhythm in the exchange of air, and say at the same time, “now!” and “now!,” gesturing with our hands the downbeat of hot air shifting and flowing out. The idea that the building was breathing gave me chills and made me uncomfortable. Asher laughed and assured me that the house is not actually alive, but we agreed it was certainly not inanimate either.

The front room was sparse, with a couch and a clean floor matt. Behind a tarp in the back, a completely dark, very smoky room was better insulated with rugs and sheets pinned up on the walls. Asher sent me back there to meet his wife and children while he chatted with the translator. I opened the tarp flap and ducked my head in. Two young women jumped and quickly hid cigarettes as I entered. I got the impression that Asher ruled his house rigidly and was verbally abusive to his wives and children. I waved my hand and said, “I am alone.” Seeing that the man of the house was not with me, they continued smoking and offered me a cigarette.

Elsa¹¹³ was Asher’s daughter by his first wife. He also had a teenage son, about 13, who lounged miserably against a large bag of beans in the back corner looking at his phone. Asher’s first wife, who was in her late forties, had gone to stay with relatives in Suleymanlia. His second wife, Rania, was in her late twenties and

¹¹³ Elsa selected her own pseudonym after the “Born Free” lioness.

held her first-born, a beautiful 6-month-old girl: “No birth defects!” she said proudly. This is Rania’s first time in Mirawa, but Elsa has a fond childhood memory of when her family packed up and took a long bus ride during the hot summer to cool off in the springs. She was young then, but Asher always told her that if he were able to make enough money, they would come back and rent a house for a few weeks of vacation. Now they were trapped in one of those future-vacation-houses. At least it’s warm,” she said.

Elsa was the kind of daughter you might call a “back-talker.” She always had a sarcastic comment ready to fling back in defiance. She pointed with a spiteful glee to her split lower lip, and rolled her eyes to the curtain, gesturing toward Asher. “This is from when he said our mother was the older, uglier one, so he sent her away. I said, ‘She left because you could not provide a real home for her to live in.’ That got under his skin, as a man.” Elsa talked back to me, as well, and to the walls. She laid a vicious irony over the sometimes funny, sometimes tragic distinction between “who you think you are and who you are actually living as.” She had a scoff or snort ready for almost any statement of fact, and a quick response to unwind it: I said, “I don’t smoke.” She gestured around at the thick grey smoke visible in the air I was breathing, and said, “Yes you do.” If I were to say, You are alive. Elsa would say, Not really. If I were to say, This is a house. Elsa would say, No it’s not. If I were to say, Asher is your father. Elsa would say, -If he is even a man. The talking back that Elsa did was a refusal to accept the conditions of her daily living, or to negotiate them at all. In the introduction of *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant describes how “the

ordinary becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what is has meant to “have a life” that adjustment seems like an accomplishment” (2011, 3). Elsa talks back to Berlant, too: An accomplishment? No it’s not.

There was nothing to do. It was difficult to talk in the thick smoke, difficult to see, and difficult to breathe. The baby sat still and did little to entertain us. It was too cold to go anywhere else within the building, and the room we were in was used for cooking, sleeping, and waiting out each day in the grey, dim light of the stove. We found ourselves confined by temperature to the room, concentrated as close as possible to the heat, which itself was unpleasant and smoky. “There are no windows,” I noted, trying to find something to talk about among this sullen crew. Elsa took this as an opportunity to explain the state of dwelling: “We cannot go out at all. Where will we go in the mud, without transportation, without money, and we are all women and a boy? Here, have a cigarette, it really helps the time pass with less anxiety.” The three of them described how cigarettes and their shared smart phone (a phone with a screen was not common among the families so poor they lived in a construction site) were their outlets for passing time. They invited me to become Facebook friends. We found my profile together on the phone, and I noticed a long cue of friend requests they had made, reaching out into the virtual, finding connection through the smoke, the screen, any window outward.

It was Elsa who drew my attention to the idea of a parenthesis, as she pointed with an ironically flippant wrist to the bag of beans her brother leaned on. It was a

bag distributed by the Barzani Foundation as part of an emergency relief package for all registered displaced families. The bag itself was wrapped in a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) tent tarp showing two hands making the shape of an A-line roof over the figure of a person. They were shaped like parenthesis or brackets and indicated precisely the predicament of displacement— the hands made a house-like image, but were not meant to depict a house or home. They were explicitly impermanent. That is what the UNHCR does —provide temporary measures to protect refugees. The organization does not provide what it calls “durable solutions.” Durability, or even duration, is not on the table. Instead, the dwelling was purely situational, dependent upon a temporary circumstance and its predicted end in order to exist at all. Here I use Berlant’s definition of “situation” as a state in which something that might become significant is unfolding, animating and animated by a feeling of suspension: things may become an event, but until they do, it is impossible to make meaning or formulate an ethic of action¹¹⁴ (2011). This building is parenthetical, like the hands of “refuge”: house-like, but only for a little while.

The hands were meant to seem benevolent, but they also look in the logo like they might at any time crush the small stick figure. Malevolent generosity indeed filtered into Asher’s family’s sense of how the entire concept of a supposed aftermath or post war landscape reverberates with the echoes of more direct dispossessions.

Elsa, again:

¹¹⁴ This dilation of meaning is made possible by other converse contractions of meaning (foreclosures) in a very different valley: Cement Valley. I will describe this in the final section of this chapter.

“The family my father arranged with thinks they are doing us a favor. They feel generous. Really they are charging us rent, \$300 a month, to live in a building that has no electricity, no water, no plumbing. Just bricks stacked up. And we have to buy rugs to fill the windows, and crouch here like prisoners. Will they let us stay here when construction comes again? No. They will move things as they planned, making some salary from us in the off-months as an extra advantage.”

I asked Elsa, among many other interlocutors in a similar position, what I should call these dwellings. Many said I should call them houses, or partial houses. Others, Elsa among them, called them construction sites. This is not because families like Asher’s or the Jowads lived in luxury at home in Anbar province— most of the families I worked with closely had been living in sealed mud homes with minimal plumbing. Their mud brick houses had been integrated into the landscape in a rhythmic and spatial arrangement that allowed for a sense of reciprocity, and responsiveness between the hands and the clay, the temperature and the walls, movement and the passage of time. Without that integration, the construction sites were simply situational.

Elsa and Rania took turns cooking and holding the baby. Both were annoyed with the smoke, and worried about the baby being raised in the smoky air. They complained about the cold limiting their mobility even inside the house. Rania, after sitting quietly with my question for some time, said, “No, this is not a house. A house is clean. And a house is warm in the winter, and cool in the summer, enough to do all the things you need to do.” She explained how back in her mud house, she never had to “just wait an entire season doing nothing, not moving or working or being outside.”

To describe what it was like to live in this construction site, she said: “This is more like a checkpoint or a mall. We are stuck in it, we are sealed off from life.”

Seeking ethnographic tidbits, her comment on the dwelling being like a checkpoint sparked my interest, but I am reluctant to over-read for my own attempt at defining various material eddies of temporality or to find “checkpoint time” everywhere. I think Rania was trying to say something else: that the figure of house or home is not enough to make it so, and that part of being abstracted is about one’s revised relations with things. Rania lives a repetitive, productive, moving interaction with the material world that feels like “just waiting around” in a space of impasse or uncertainty. The dwelling may seem more like a checkpoint or a mall because that is simply where Rania and Elsa see concrete structures most often. She bumps up against the inflexibility of material things to bend and adjust to one another, like walls to temperature. Elsa speaks to a broader trend among displaced Anbari farmers to become increasingly “abstracted” or alienated not only from the soil itself, but also from sources of livelihood. In alignment with the trends laid out by Naomi Klein (2008) about market shifts in response to shock (in this case war and displacement) and by Mindy Fullilove (2004) about the experience of “root shock,” Rania will become part of a generation of aid-dependent or low-wage seasonal workers who make frequent purchases of cheap, chemically saturated goods at newly constructed shopping malls, living in cheaply constructed homes. From the center of a parenthesis, it is unclear whether or not it is desirable for the parenthesis to close on Rania. The end of Rania’s abstraction might be much worse than its continuation if it

closes onto this new world and fails to deliver her to the original refrain of her life trajectory.

In the meantime, she describes a daily life emptied of routine, meaning and purpose, which she secretively fills by smoking cigarettes. She is both “stuck” and “sealed off” from everything around her, for better or worse. She is living the shape of daily life, but not daily life itself, in a structure that is the shape of a house, but is in fact a construction site that builds someone else’s future and economic stability at the expense of her own. Her time here, but also her spatial relationship with the world, is parenthetical: she is part of, sealed off from, and dependent upon —but not essential to— the ongoing texture of an historical and geographical landscape.

Elsa, in her sarcastic way, concludes that, the shape of the house is an empty signal, just like the presence of Anbari men on the landscape (also emptied): “They are not essential to the land. They do not cultivate; they feel impotent; they abuse the women; they trap us here, because they are suspended from the sky like a noose, like they are still kicking but soon they will die because their hands are clasped together. They say they are protecting us, but when they clench their fists, to survive, we are all crushed.” She gestures like a mime as she describes this, showing first a man’s hands holding a bowl shape, protecting and holding up the family, which is symbolized by three cigarette butts. Then, her hands are moved behind her back and she pantomimes a violent hanging. She turns her back and shows me how the hands try to stay open, holding a space for the three cigarette butts, but in the struggle to breathe, her hands

clasp and clench together, and the butts are crushed. When she is finished, she tears the butts into dust, and sprinkles them on the floor.

To Elsa, who is bored, restless, and bitter, the dwelling is a material manifestation of how the ordinary “familiar” (“home” as a forum for gender-based violence and confinement) becomes increasingly malevolent over time, like a noose. Her “cruel optimistic attachments” to home and to men are tightened and made more cruel by conditions that also constrain and distort the optimistic endeavors of men themselves. In other words, she argues that there is no refuge in this house-shaped structure. Being cut off from neighborhoods and social networks has rendered Elsa and Rania as political prisoners of men, who are themselves political prisoners of Counterterrorism strategies that confine Anbari men from regional movement, food sovereignty, or other conditions of livability previously accessible to them.

Elsa, however, views this squeeze as full of potential for a radical break from her anticipated life trajectory. She is excited that there are several NGO nonprofits in Shaqlawa, a few minutes down the road from Mirawa valley by car, that are opening workshops for women to learn sewing and take on small loans to generate family income. But Asher echoes the concerns of many Anbari families (men and women) that this is a way of driving a wedge between women and men in order to undermine the integrity of Anbari culture, and turn Anbari people into poor consumers of cheap market goods.

Disruptions (and a sense of pending disruptions) turn the interiority of a house outward. Eyal Weizman highlights how “moving through walls is pitched by the

military as its ‘humane’ answer to the wanton destruction of traditional urban warfare, and as an ‘elegant’ alternative to Jenin-style urban destruction, this is because the damage it causes is often concealed within the interiors of homes. The unexpected penetration of war into the private domain of the home has been experienced by civilians in Palestine, just like in Iraq, as the most profound form of trauma and humiliation” (2005). This is but one of many ways “home” is centered as a targeted space for counterinsurgency (Graham 2008; Delgado-Gaitan 1992; Boothby 2008; Boyden 2001; Kanaaneh 2002; Layne 1994). But the disruption of home highlights its pre-existing and prevailing violence, as well. The house can always serve as a funnel to violation, a conduit through which psychological and social harm violate and warp one’s dreams, aspirations, and sense of possibility.

This registers at the level of personal horror and suspense among many Anbari people with whom I lived or travelled. One of the children I met at Hotel Star in Shaqlawa continued to have repeated nightmares of blood dripping through the ceiling of the hotel bedroom, after having witnessed her older brother being machine-gunned to death by a militia in her house in Fallujah. Pieces of his body had stuck to the wall and peeled off slowly, dropping to the floor after the militia had gone. For this child, like so many others who witness or live out violence, the house is a violable zone, a conduit through which killing is funneled into her dreams. Her mother, Cassandra, tells me how she thinks the girl’s nightmares actually come from losing her house altogether a few months later. She shows me a crumpled printed photograph.

Kali: "What is this?"

Cassandra: My house. We are displaced.

Kali: Mud brick. It's beautiful.

Cassandra: The attack of the neighbor's house was first. See the flattened one next to my house?

Kali: Is this why you left, from bombing?

Cassandra: Yes. My daughter was in the house. We were talking and then someone says "an airplane is coming". Already before this there was a shortage: we were not eating something, we were just drinking hot water. And the airplane came and they shot the mosque and the kids were killed and some were injured. We could not see anyone because of the dust. The sound was very loud and my ears were going like a bell. In the dust I saw it coming: that we are like it, extracted out of the ground forever.

Kali: Who was injured?

Cassandra: Kids. People next door. And even my daughter. I wrapped her hand with a towel, and she was bleeding and I took her to the hospital.

Cassandra (pressing the photograph onto my thigh): This is my house. Not the image. I mean the piece of paper. My daughter remembers a house with blood dripping so she can remember a house, not to remember the blood. Iraq is gone, and it looks like a glass of water when you spill it.

Kali: It's over.

Cassandra: Yes, it's over; you cannot collect it. You cannot un-spill the glass.

Bombed out houses-that-once-were are not exactly the same as soon-to-be-houses in Mirawa. And yet, the partiality of the structures does similar work to unmoor people. When my very dear friend Othman (whom you met in a previous chapter) brought me to his village in Anbar to join him in harvesting dates, we approached his empty house with tense caution. His hands were shaking and he was saying his final prayers

in case he was killed. I did not know the words of the prayer, so I just told my mother I loved her silently in my head. We were not afraid of the house: we were prey animals anticipating attack. The feeling was much closer to acute dread. He and I had both heard stories and lost contact with people who returned to their houses without realizing the structure had been wired with explosives, transforming the building from a house into a large bomb. When they opened their doors or turned on their ovens, the houses exploded. As we approached, Othman's house felt like it could be a trap, something that maintained the disguise of a house in order to lure us in, but could in fact be our grave instead¹¹⁵. Othman opened the door slowly. It did not explode. He disappeared into the house to inspect it, test the stove, etc. He was gone for what felt like years while I waited outside at a distance. When he came out to tell me it was okay, he looked disheartened. I stepped in to see why: the ceiling in the back half of the house had caved in and remnants of a bomb were embedded in the floor. Our concerns shifted from acute disruption, like explosion, to diffuse concern about toxicity and shelter. Othman was concerned with repairing the roof enough for a makeshift, two-day shelter. I was concerned about the health impacts of sleeping near a detonated bomb. We ended up staying with neighbors for a night and not repairing the house at all. His time at home was temporary, since we were only here for the dates.

¹¹⁵ Voyles' *Wastelanding* describes "hot houses" in which native people's were living among radioactive and cancer-causing materials (2015). Her analysis prevents any easy conflation of home/house with refuge, especially in the context of compounded displacement and dispossession.

The house is a particularly complex opening for violation, harm, and military struggle. It becomes a central battle space in the Global War on Terror, perhaps most easily imagined when Iraqis remember the early 2000s, when U.S. soldiers would burst into houses to “discover” insurgents. This practice diminished in the later years of U.S. occupation because the practice increased public enmity toward the U.S. and grew insurgent support. Nevertheless, Counterterrorism continues to center houses as a feature of the imagined warscape in military training centers and in military strategy. It is not unusual to do so. As Timothy Mitchell shows in *Colonizing Egypt*, British colonial officials sought to transform Egyptian culture and make docile colonial subjects by penetrating the home and accessing/educating women (1988). This did not necessarily entail physically entering homes, but also disrupting familial relations to and within “home”—including traditional forms of familial dominance. In Anbar, this cultural incursion takes shape as women who traditionally never leave the home are encouraged by NGOs to exit their homes and find work when their men cannot. For Elsa and her peers, women’s liberation is a grim prospect, predicated on the destruction of Anbari traditions. What Elsa describes as the castration of Anbari men opens a vacuum of power that women can fill and benefit from. If men are left jobless, then women can (by economic necessity) fill the job market differently. While programs like KIVA microloans or U.N. funded sewing machine workshops present this opening as an opportunity, they often simply extend debt and low wages into new sectors. Women enter the labor market by means of economic exploitation

that may feel slightly better than the exploitation they otherwise experience when they contribute unpaid and unmarked labor as wives and mothers¹¹⁶.

Asher expresses skepticism about these “liberation projects,” arguing that, “If they want to fix our poverty, they should give men jobs. They will not employ men because they think we are terrorists.” Asher’s concerns reflect the fact that the Global War on Terror makes an explicit orientalist claim to be saving Muslim women from Muslim men (Spivak 1998). As Mahmood and Hirschkind so eloquently articulated in their article, “Feminism, Taliban and the politics of counter-insurgency,” the primary source of death, dismemberment, and social harm to women in Afghanistan is U.S. military intervention, not Afghani men. In fact, not only does U.S. intervention harm women’s bodies and social lives, it also produces kinds of parenthetical constraints upon their social and physical mobility (2002). Asher is similarly concerned that claims leveled against Anbari men, in the name of liberating Anbari women, simply justify aid projects that undermine Anbari people as a whole by Westernizing their culture. But Asher is also seeking to maintain gendered dominance over Elsa and Rania, leveraging his political critique of the saving-brown-women-from-brown-men complex as an excuse to control and harm the women in his family. Violation of the home by drawing women out of it is something Asher can see as a violation because for him, as for some early scholars (Bachelard 1969), home is an idyllic, even romantic symbol of the normal. For his children and wives, as for many critical scholars, such a normal is malevolent, violent, and oppressive (Berland 2011; Trnka

¹¹⁶ Importantly, most women I met wielded significant financial control, even if they did not have personal earning power.

2011). Thus, counterterrorism's incursion into homes is a violation of a domestic social system that also reflects the violence of that system: the forms of systemic violence Elsa confronts are compounded even as they are ruptured.

Elsa grinds the butt of her cigarette into a fine dust to hide the evidence from her father. She blows on the pile of dust and it disperses into the soot from the fire and the dust from the concrete cinder blocks. It blends in with the other shades of grey and disappears. I see what Ma Jowad means about greyness being a sign of toxicity and ethical ambivalence, of the betwixt and between, of the partiality embodied in an unwelcome, temporary stay. It is also indicative of the less-than-lethal methods by which Ma's Anbari family is managed as a potential terrorist threat stuck or confined in Mirawa in a state of undying potentiality that changes her political capacity from a food sovereign village leader to a dependent refugee whose son-in-laws are literally building their own precarity. Part of being detached and abstracted from social, spatial, and temporal integration comes from being stuck in the parenthesis, neither able nor even desirous of its closure. After all, if the common Iraqi motto is true that "today is better than tomorrow," the closure of parenthesis is as alarming as it is a relief. For life to go on or go back to normal, it is also likely to go terribly.

Part III: An Industry of Ecological Arrogance

Imperial formations thrive on deferred autonomy, meted out to particular populations incrementally, promised to those in whose lives they intervene. They create new subjects that must be relocated to be productive and exploitable, dispossessed to be modern, disciplined to be independent, converted to be human, stripped of old cultural bearings to be citizens, coerced to be free.

—Ann Stoler and Carole McGranahan, *Imperial Formations*

Many Anbari interlocutors featured in this chapter became workers in the concrete industry when they found themselves displaced and stuck in Kurdistan. Most of them are living in partially constructed dwellings on the condition that they will build themselves out of their shelter by completing construction. Concrete, as both a material artifact and as an industry more broadly, is integral to their “stuckness” and their abstraction. How does cement loosen up people’s ties to the land, and how is cement part of making Anbari people into certain kinds of subjects? Much like Stoler and McGranahan description of how imperial formations thrive, my interlocutors are being dispossessed into modernity, relocated and stripped of their cultural bearings in order to be rendered non-terrorist subjects.

The cement blocks that make up these visages of the delayed-future and fill Mirawa Valley with pockets of concreting time travel from the brick-making factories and wet-cement dispensaries along a network of roads. One road leads down to Suleymania, and it is lined with billboards advertising construction companies like “Empire World.” Beyond Suleymania the road stretches into Cement Valley, where factories process crushed rock and churn out bags of cement powder for foundations and cinder blocks. This road is a geographically logical assembly line, an umbilical cord that connects the new and growing Mirawa to the placental richness of Cement Valley. Mirawa thickens, a valley pregnant with pending growth, while Cement Valley thins and withers. One valley draws fuel and material from the other in unidirectional extraction upwards from the earth and away toward Mirawa. Both are

haunted with the uncertainty, ambiguity, and abstraction of those who dwell there.

While parenthetical fields can dilate temporal uncertainty, making daily life feel long and strange and slow, their production can also contract time and space, speeding it up, tightening it in a third form of abstraction: arrogance. How does concrete concreate into new scaffolding for new rhythms, often quicker, denser, and more monotonous than before? Lay it on its side, and you have a barrier between above and below. Horizontal motion is accelerated: wheels move. Vertical motion is deferred: rain does not seep in or down, but flows along gutters to “elsewhere.” Stand it up, and it becomes an object that performs the functions of barriers, statements, and dwellings: horizontal motion is chilled. It produces what Hassan, an Anbari man who hates his job batching wet cement, defines as “arrogance.” Arrogance is a separation from or disregard for the reciprocal relations of a given landscape or community, including reciprocity between those in the present with those in the future. As a form of abstraction, arrogance is not always intended or desired by those who perpetuate it. Rather, the state of living abstraction can evacuate anyone intending or not from close connections with their land. As this section will show, arrogance also touches local Kurds in northern Iraq, displaced alongside Anbari farmers by arrogant industries.

Bazian Headquarters

It was summertime when I went on a wild goose chase for the headquarters of Bazian Cement Company. Wandering through a maze of buildings and back alleys, I had a lot of trouble finding the headquarters of this local corporation. The address was no good. I arrived in the wrong place, asked for directions on the street, walked a

few miles along uneven, badly kept sidewalks, got lost, and found myself sweltering in the noon heat, with the sun bouncing off the pavement of Suleymania below me and on all sides of me. I sweated on the treeless, shadeless sidewalk, while the concrete slabs around me soaked in the sun and radiated visible heat waves in a mirage at my feet. Finally, more out of desperation and dizziness than actually guessing the correct address, I stepped into an unmarked doorway, rang a buzzer, and asked for Hedi,¹¹⁷ the director of the Bazian headquarters in Iraq. I was let in and found myself on a tiny metal elevator. It was hot, and I fantasized that I could get stuck in the elevator shaft and die from heat-induced panic. When this did not happen, I arrived in a hallway, and then... air conditioning blasted as I pushed the heavy wooden door to an unmarked office. Waiting on a couch in the waiting room, I drank two of the plastic waters handed out in Kurdistan —they are shaped like yogurt containers, with a foil top that peels back— and dipped my fingers in the water to wet and cool my face. I felt the thick feeling of city-heat, which is more glaring, bright and frustrating than rural heat. Heat in a city makes me feel like a panicked animal seeking escape from a box or structure in which I am slowly cooked to total dehydration¹¹⁸. The oasis of a wealthy office comforted me, and I was grateful for the long wait to cool off and prepare my interview notes.

I was surprised to speak with the boss himself. An assistant escorted me back to his office, where I started an official interview. I violated my own fieldwork

¹¹⁷ *Hedi* means “calm” in Kurdish.

¹¹⁸ Both concrete and asphalt are the primary contributors to the “urban heat island” effect.

etiquette, which is to be explicit about my position and to leverage this as a point of honest engagement when interviewing people I determined to be powerful, have opposing political interests or be unlikely to otherwise speak with me. It was foolish to violate this code by being indirect about my aims. In my overheated state, I had deemed concrete “Public Enemy Number One” of multispecies planetary survival and of cultural vitality in Iraq. So enthralled in my own angst, I did not notice that I liked this man. Halfway through my third general question, he leaned back comfortably in his chair with a grandfatherly smile, and said, “I suspect you are trying to get at something more than this. Tell me what you are after, my friend. I have nothing to do all afternoon.” I retreated to my ethnographic code. I explained that I suspected concrete was changing the rhythm of life and the shape of landscapes; that “post-war” reconstruction was integral to dispossessing people of their land by poisoning ecologies and turning refugees into consumer-laborers; and that he was personally responsible for overseeing the logistics of such a process here. He chuckled. “I completely agree. You want me to tell you how it works? I have been working in the concrete industry for forty years.”

He described how he had managed one of the national cement factories in northern Iraq in his twenties and thirties. From there, he moved up as regional manager, where he eventually brokered partnerships to produce hybrid business enterprises all over Iraq. Here is how it works, according to him. International corporations like Lafarge and Manaseer bought all three national cement facilities immediately after Bremer’s 100 Orders (conditions of U.S. military withdrawal)

privatized and deregulated the industry in 2004. Production at these facilities is still minimal, but the corporations are even willing to let the factories sit unused until turmoil passes because in the meantime, new private factories are being erected all over Iraq. The multinationals prefer to have local private partners that are smaller, newer and more willing take on the work and risk of local management, with infusions of expertise and funding from abroad. Bazian Cement Company (BCC) is one such regional company. Bazian Cement is currently building a factory by investing capital into the construction of the factory itself, though it is sixty-percent owned by Lafarge.



Figure 24: Hybrid Ownership by BBC and La Farge, photo by Kali Rubaii

This process is not unique to Iraq. The concrete industry is moving toward privatization worldwide, along with construction and security industries, each of

which claims to bring calm, peace and stability to regions formerly ravaged by chaos. Another example of Lafarge investing in “peace” is that of the Israeli national cement company, Nesher, which operates the third largest factory in the world and has explicit national mandates. It was recently purchased in part by Lafarge, with subsequent controversy (Coren 2011). In an immediate sense, daily life is hardly impacted by transfers in ownership. Cement is harvested locally, homogenized chemically, and transported along assembly lines generally invisible to the lay public, even as they are ubiquitous. The way it works in Iraq, and anywhere else, is that while formerly nationalized cement factories are bought up by multinational giants, these corporations then partner with local, smaller companies to facilitate actual production. But in spite of generating no immediate material changes, the long-term political implications of privatization have an enormous impact on Iraqi people.

Privatization of formerly public industries generates a different kind of abstraction, written explicitly into policies of U.S. occupation and Bremer’s 100 Orders. Orders 49 incentivized an influx of corporate involvement in Iraq by dropping the tax rate on corporations from forty percent to a flat rate of fifteen percent and capping the income tax rate at fifteen percent (Juhasz 2004). Order 12 (enacted in June 2003 and renewed in 2004) suspended “all tariffs, customs duties, import taxes, licensing fees and similar surcharges for goods entering or leaving Iraq, and all other trade restrictions that may apply to such goods” (Juhasz 2004). This led to an immediate and dramatic inflow of cheap consumer products, which wiped out all local providers of the same products. Order 39 privatized Iraq’s 200 state-owned

enterprises, allowed for full foreign ownership of formerly Iraqi businesses, “national treatment” of foreign firms, unrestricted, tax-free remittance of all profits, and forty-year ownership licenses to foreign companies (Juhasz 2004). Such a policy allows foreign corporations operating inside Iraq to send all of their profits home without reinvesting in the Iraqi economy, without employing Iraqis, and without providing any public services or enforcing worker’s rights. Corporations can also withdraw their investments at any time, producing a broad sense of pending economic insecurity. Additionally, Order 17 granted foreign contractors and private security firms full immunity from Iraqi legal regulations. In the event of injury, death, or environmental damage there is no legal recourse inside Iraq’s legal system (Juhasz 2004). Charges would have to be brought to U.S. courts under U.S. law. In sum, corporations have no conditions for responsibility to local communities in Iraq. In fact, the “localness” of people is in the way of industrial extraction, which is why they make bad employees compared to those shipped in from China.

In spite of this, concrete companies claim to be investing in peace. When I met with a Lafarge regional manager, a man from France dressed in a full three-piece suite in the middle of the dusty, humid factory in Cement Valley, he said, “Concrete cools things down. It doesn’t heat them up. That is its innate quality. It makes people more still, more calm. This is a good thing, no? Concrete is part of the peace process. We bring calm to the region.”¹¹⁹

The corporate goal for Iraq is to raise concrete consumption to one ton per

¹¹⁹ Concrete is a large greenhouse gas-emitting industry. If anything, in the long run it heats things up (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2002, 20).

capita, as it is in places like the U.S. This consumption rate is quite high and requires the production of strip malls, suburbs, and generally urbanized or at least sub-urbanized lifestyles for every Iraqi in the country. When the Lafarge manager says, “People will need to put down their guns and live peacefully— when they do we will be there,” he reframes his work as noble. Hedi makes no such attempt: “we are turning all people into workers and consumers. The aim here is for people to be living like Americans, which to me is the worst nightmare. See you can’t get that high concrete consumption with just urbanization. You need people to drive long distances, have their own yards, go to malls, have big houses, have walled areas, have paved spaces... it is not about urban living, it is about making a lot of flat suburbs.” While this description represents a continued trend in the already urbanized Iraq, with megacities (city-states, really) like Baghdad and Fallujah rivaled by rapidly growing cities like Ramadi, it also represents sudden and total transformation of the rural landscape in Iraq to increasingly suburban flat-lands. When Hedi says, “The concrete industry is as invested in cultural change as it is in landscaping,” I ask him to elaborate.

Hedi describes how when he started hiring workers back in the 1970s, they all ate with their hands, as many people still do. “But they started working with foreign employers too, so they would eat lunch in the halls with British or French managers, and then when they went home to their families, they realized they preferred to have tables, and chairs, and to eat with forks. So, in this way the concrete industry started changing culture right away.” These subtle changes were refracted more broadly in

the landscape. In fact, it was not as simple as workers changing their sitting and eating habits after becoming employees. The presence of the factory produced conditions under which their livelihoods became dependent upon factory employment: upward mobility dependent upon their ability to perform modernity within the international corporate communities. When a concrete factory is built, it destroys ecological interdependence for miles around. People clamor for employment in the factory, lest they are forced to leave the area and move into a big city for other forms of work. Hedi was a self-reflective critic of his own industry, and offered an analysis of how these changes were accelerated by military enterprise: “the relationship between war and cement is important to follow. We have development when there are opportunities. The toppling of the regime in Iraq presented many new opportunities, most of them harmful in the end to people because it opened up Iraq to international markets, which are not invested in the particular quality of life for the local people. You will see this when you go to the factory.” Both Hedi’s self reflective insights about his own industry, and the humored light in his eyes reminded me so much of my dissertation committee member, Don, that I felt at ease accepting his offer to send me with a car and driver out to the Bazian factory. “It is under construction, but I’ll insist that Atef [the factory manager] let you in to take pictures. Look for signs about the future of the valley.” Grateful to escape the city heat, compounded by the refracted light bouncing between the paved ground, concrete sidewalks, and concrete walls, I sat as a passenger on the weaving drive to Cement Valley.

Cement Valley: Bazian Factory

“In 90 years this whole place will be flat.” Atef scanned the voluptuous rolling hills of Cement Valley. Squinting, he swept his hand across the horizon, miming as if cutting the hills off at the base. He showed me the elaborate plans for the factory, which would be completed within the year.



Figure 25: Atef drives me around the factory site, photo by Kali Rubaii

My question, “What will the future look like?” prompted him to step outside of his portable office, fit both of us with white hardhats, and lead me on a walking tour of the under-construction Bazian cement factory. He showed me the equipment, shipped from China. The sheer scale of each object was difficult to capture on camera, including two large cranes, huge basins and siloes, large-scale tubing, landscaping

equipment, and more. Not only were these materials brought from China; so were the construction workers. Living quarters for these imported workers were guarded with a locking gate, a fence, and a guard tower. I asked how a worker might leave the construction site if he wanted to go to town, but Atef gave me no answer. Instead, he tells me that he would have hired local labor, except that they were too unruly. They complained too much, and one of them even came to the gate one night, drunkly threatened him, and accused him of ruining his land. Atef argues, “This is not the case, though. We have a green facility, and we filtrate all the dust and all the waste. This factory produces no waste.” He showed me the blueprints for “green processing,” but he did not seem to think that in the meantime construction of the factory itself, which was ongoing, had any impact on the quality of the river water nearby or on the air. I expressed skepticism that there could be mass production without any waste, since I knew that part of Cement Valley’s appeal for cement factories was the direction of the river, which flowed away from the hills and made it easy for each factory to express waste downstream. Cement factories are often built near rivers for both waste dispersal and for water use, which is intensive in the process of cement production. I asked how it could be possible not to contaminate the water. His response: “It doesn’t matter. This place has an expiration date. It will not exist for long, it will become flat very soon.” In Atef’s view, concerns about the quality of the land and water were parenthetical concerns that had no bearing on the ultimate future. Caring for a valley that will not exist soon is pointless. For Atef, the consequences of his immediate actions were insignificant because the place and

people around him are short-lived. His ethical orientation to the present by drawing on the anticipated future reflects the same logic of preemption common among the counter-terrorists described in Chapter 1. For example, Abel talked about how it is morally acceptable to experiment on Iraqi bodies in field hospitals because, “they are going to die anyway.” Similarly, Atef offered himself a premise for moral exception to plunder and violate. A twist on the less-than-lethal paradigm, a sense of impending doom, or a mode of foreclosure generated a space for both moral and legal exemption. These factories, generally unregulated, were racing to extract and process as much stone as possible to compete with one another and meet a demand for cement that will, for a short time, double the supply (read high profit). Additionally, Atef was hoping to, “accomplish as much as we can before we have problems with politics and social groups.” The factory, which is still under construction, is already starting small-time processing and production.

Atef tells me how he put an end to local dissent about the factory by reneging on his promise to employ local Kurds who lived there. They had initially accepted the factory’s presence without much outcry because they were promised employment in the factory, especially during construction of the facility itself. Atef’s initial hires for construction were local Kurdish men. But when they started complaining about the environmental impact of the factory construction on their air and water, Atef fired them and opted to ship in laborers from China, who are, “less likely to complain, since they are not connected to the land.” In the future, he expects to hire refugees from Anbar for the same reason: “Refugees are industrious workers. They are not

attached to sentimental feelings and they are grateful for the job we create to support them. It is a justice to them to have work.”

In the distance, I could see the Lafarge cement factory, which I would visit later in the afternoon, and two others, nestled against the hills. None of them hire local people in the valley, and many of them employ what a manager at the Manaseer factory calls, “low-cost, low-complaint” workers from elsewhere. The valley, a long flat strip in between two rows of hills, hosted several small Kurdish villages and many private properties with orchards, as well as a large stretch of common land for grazing cattle, goats, and sheep. The river ran through the valley, with carefully partitioned aqueducts moving water into the folds of the hills. The Bazian factory, located on a four-acre plot of land against the hills, would be mining directly into the hillside behind it. The machinery for processing the mined rock— grinding, cooking, and mixing— was enormous, messy, and complex, but it fit into a dense network of the company’s territory, given away through immanent domain by the Kurdish government. However, the entirety of Cement Valley was impacted by a well-planned future that had already begun to change it fundamentally on both spatial and temporal levels.

As I left Bazian factory, I commented to the driver about the wide paved road, with newly planted trees liming the sides. A shepherd and his son had been picking their way through the carved-up hillside earlier in the day, climbing across carved and upturned land to reach a part of the valley that still held a graze-able grass crust. Now they were crossing the road. They looked rushed, as our car approached with the kind

of speed pavement allows. They moved to usher their mixed flock of livestock out of our way, and then ducked under a newly erected fence along the roadside to continue across the valley. The driver, also a Bazian company worker, explained that the road cut across the valley with negotiated permission from the people because the company had agreed to enable free passage for all the herders, along with road use access for anyone who wanted to drive on the road. The road also came with the promise of electricity for the villages in the valley, although I saw only a single electrical line along the road leading to the factory that branched nowhere else. The barbed wire, driving speed, and false promises (working under the premise that promises are not important to keep when the valley is short-lived anyway) all supported Hedi's narrative of cultural transformation. As an industry, concrete narrows possibilities for the future by funneling off other modes of survival. Concrete is hostile to life, according to Hameed, because it takes deep history and deep futures, and truncates continuity among times, places, and people. It turns the rocks and hills around a valley into discrete abstract packages of cement powder.

Cement production becomes the only aspiration model for peace and prosperity because it forecloses all others. Foreclosure is a mode that opens zones of moral exception by closing most modes of survival and resistance. Foreclosure places a monopoly on the future. "In 90 years this whole place will be flat" not only signifies an ethical ground upon which long-term consequences are meaningless, but also an urgency for those enclosed in the loop of end-time. What is one to do when her home is foreclosed upon? Many people have died refusing to leave their houses during

floods, fires, and conditions of war when asked this question. In the next section, I will describe how one man, Kaswan, responds.



Figure 26: Searching for a graze-able crust, photos by Kali Rubaii



Figure 27: Cutting across the factory road, photo by Jay Visbal

Kaswan and Foreclosure

Kaswan¹²⁰ is my friend and comrade. He wears an army jacket. He introduced me personally to his plants one by one, and he re-acquaints me with them every time I visit him. It takes hours. He has a loyal dog. He has happy daughters, a happy wife, and a son who is anxious about his future now that he is a teenager. Kaswan has a shotgun leaning in the corner. His roof is thatch; his walls are cement bricks. He hangs little sheets of metal from his ceiling. “What is that for?” is my only Kurdish sentence. I use it often and he obliges by responding in Arabic, our common language. “Because the swallows made a nest in my ceiling. I can’t displace them, they have nests and this is their home. I have to catch their poop somehow. So I build a flying tray. Do you like it?”

I do like it. I like pretty much everything about Kaswan. In the story of Cement Valley Kaswan is really my hero. We fuel each other. At Kaswan’s request, I write letters to the government; I approach Hedi at Bazian headquarters and Atef at the factory to appeal to their moral integrity; I help with petitions; and I connect him to Christian Peacemakers Team (a nonprofit that supports community organizing efforts). Anything to support his campaign. He is organizing¹²¹ the other people in Cement Valley, most of whom he says have given up and sold out. But some are left, and those are the ones who can resist with him.

¹²⁰ Kaswan is the name of a plant that produces seeds used for prayer beads and spice.

¹²¹ It is difficult to stay in touch with Kaswan because he barely uses a cell phone and can hardly read. I periodically ask a friend to drive to his land in Cement Valley to deliver messages or get updates for me.

Kaswan is a tender man, and he pets his dog's ears until she falls asleep. She drools on the ground, contentedly. He delights in that and points it out giggling, "My daughter drools too when I pet her hair and she falls asleep on my knee." He elaborates on why he cares so much about securing an emplaced, contiguous future on his land. "[My daughter] loves this land, even though she is in school in the city. I teach her everything. I hope she never marries and that she becomes fierce and keeps this land. If she does marry, let it not be to a coward!" He hopes she will not "sell out" and acknowledges that it will take courage for her to continue his efforts. He is trying every way of resistance I can imagine, mostly by making as many sanctuaries as possible for the plants and animals he grew up with:

"Worse case, I will take my gun and hide in the mountains and snipe anyone who tries to take it [his land] down. They say the Kurds have no friends but the mountains. So, we will betray our best friends, cut down these mountains with no love, no gratitude, for how long they stood as our protection? I fought the armies of Saddam. I will fight the armies of companies."

He feels that others in Cement Valley have been duped, bought off cheaply for small prices. At stake is so much more than his daughter's land. Life itself is at stake, as the valley is being overtaken by "a monster" hostile to all living things. Cement, for Kaswan, is a dusty plague that suffocates green things and poisons the water. In Iraq, industries of plunder surf the wake left by the Global War on Terror. Kaswan does not directly confront Counterterrorism, but rather the systematic displacement and abstraction of people at the hands of its corporate followers.

The factory is as close to Kaswan's land as it can be. The only thing between his land and the factory is an abandoned house with abandoned animal paddocks. The

family that lived there recently sold their land for very cheap and left for the city. Their goats were getting sick since the factory started minimal operations. The factory has installed a barbed-wire fence at the edge of Kaswan's land, incorporating the abandoned plot into its territory. Kaswan started to plant trees immediately along the fence to help protect his orchard from cement dust, which he felt was coming over already and would be worse in the future. They are fast growing trees that look a bit like eucalyptus. He picked the invasive species because of the speed it would grow, feeling that the only way to protect his pomegranate, kaswan, apple, and other trees would be to create a rapid barrier and use the fence as a post. The factory is not even fully operating yet, but we know it as an active polluter already. Every morning that I visit Kaswa we spend about three hours wiping black and grey soot from the leaves of his plants so they do not suffocate.

He laughs at me when I eat a pomegranate by plucking out the seeds one by one: "Not like that! Like a donkey." He shows me how to tear the pomegranate open and eat it like I would eat corn on the cob at home, spitting out the bitter papery parts as I go. I laugh so hard I think I might choke. There is no dignity in this method, and my face ends up covered in red juice. "What now, Kaswan?" I ask, looking for something to wipe my face on. "Now you are beautiful like a Bedu." He offers me no solution except to leave the stain on my face like a tattoo. I laugh, but feel way too sticky, so I splash some water from a bottle leaning against a tree. I spit and sputter. It tastes horrible!

"Kaswan, something is wrong with this water. It tastes like fuel." I know he

bottles water from the river. Kaswan thinks that some days the factory releases waste into the river from the factory, but on other days they do not. It seems to come and go. He hands me a bottle of water collected from the river a few days prior. That water tastes sweet and clean. Earlier he had told me, “If you want to see how it is here, you have to come every day.” Indeed, there is no way to just sample a warscape. The sheer inundation of diffuse violations takes time to appreciate. The dust on the crops, the water that is sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter, the gradual partitioning of common land into spaces no longer traversable or graze-able, all tie loosely to Iraq’s opened markets, the neoliberal redrafting of the Iraqi constitution, and the international hub generated in the mostly-independent Kurdistan as a launching space into the wide open field of industrial possibility in mainland Iraq¹²².

¹²² I suspect that Kaswan’s efforts are part of why a study on the environmental impact of the concrete industry in Cement valley came out in 2016, entitled “Soil Pollution by the Cement Industry in the Bazian Vicinity, Kurdistan Region.” The study, published in the *Journal of Environmental and Analytical Toxicity*, found that “the further the area is from the factories, the better the soil,” where “pollution decreases.” The study recommends reducing blasting operations in the quarries, controlling dust with water spray, and preventing runoff into drainage areas (3).



Figure 28: Kaswan's home next to factory under construction, photo by Kali Rubaii

If the future of the valley is foreclosed, then Kaswan has decided to go down with it. He has been arrested twice for blocking the road to the factory with several other similarly angry valley dwellers. He was once picked up by a private car while he was walking down the road. Two men beat him and threatened his family before pushing him out onto the roadside. He is resolute. In the event he disappears, he is keen on sending his Kaswan seeds, which are used to make prayers beads, home with me. He has two ideas, both of which speak to his loosening ties to the land in this valley. First, he wants me to plant a kaswan plant in my home in California. His eyes brighten when I tell him that we successfully planted one in Lucca, Italy and one struggling seedling in Bonny Doon, California. It is a kind of international solidarity through rootedness, anchoring the world to this valley, which might as well be a little “Megiddo,” the place where the world is predicted to end. Second, Kaswan plans to

die in Cement Valley, but when we talk about toxicity and he says he expects to develop cancer from the factory, he also chuckles about the idea of being buried in California one day. Kaswan considers that his body, perhaps radioactive or toxic upon his death, might be sent “back to America.” Kaswan is describing a revenge fantasy, a balanced exchange of harm. When he talks about sending his body “back” to the U.S. even though he has never travelled to the U.S. and his body did not originate from there.

Implicit in his phrasing is the idea that his body works as a container through which toxic particles are sent “back” to their origin. He places this origin in my home state of California, next to “that famous valley where they make new things.” Kaswan is referencing Silicon Valley, heartland of neoliberal technological enterprise. His fantasy depicts the kind of peso-optimistic creativity that foreclosure produces: when the future is predictable and very bad, certain constraints for ethical living are lifted. Kaswan opens up an imaginary scenario that produces conditions for poetic justice, even as immediate justice in Cement Valley is foreclosed upon. He generally directs his activism toward the Bazian factory, but using me to scaffold the distances between himself and the heart of global empire, he forges an ethical exchange in the fantasy-future. He confronts in death the heart of the matter: corporate imperialism as a mode or ideology that sequesters his land from right beneath his feet.

Concrete Is Hostile to Life

Kaswan is not alone in thinking creatively about how the cement industry transforms the relationship between history and the future, or between life and death.

Hassan, an Anbari farmer who now works at a batching plant along the road between Cement Valley and Suleymania, tells me that, “working with crops is about seasons, and thinking of how the plants breathe, drink, take in light. It is specialized. Working with concrete is blunt. It is all the same. Your job is to make everything the same and keep it that way.” According to Ma Jowad, this sameness is one of the biggest problems with concrete because it is unable to be flexible under the heat of a fire. And for Elsa concrete was inflexible differently, being too open and too closed at once for her to engage the world through it. Hassan is concerned with another kind of sameness, the compression of molecular vibrancy, abstraction in essence as well as in affect. For Hassan, abstraction happens when molecules are suspended in time, held apart from the normal process of growth and decay. Hassan says, “Let me explain exactly how cement abstracts. You have a rock, it is natural. You take it, cook the life out of it, and it is ground up into this other kind of rock, a solid thing, you like it—concrete. But the rock had a long lifetime, millions of years. Now it lasts maybe four decades, maybe a few more if you build it right.” He gestures with his hands, reaching wide to show the longevity of stone, and then slowly closing his hands together to make a tiny parenthesis in front of his chest. “Can you believe it? It shrinks time!” Cement is made up of a million atoms suspended outside of life rhythms, particles that do not divide, produce, or decay. Its production is a kind of arrogance, a removal. For Hassan, abstraction is the suspension of rhythm, metabolism, and material responsiveness; it is when ashes do not become ashes, and the dust does not become dust. Cement/concrete is an artifact of abstraction, not only

because the industry for this product coincides with military occupation, base making and sectarianism, but also because it denatures rock, permanently altering its material qualities and simultaneously reshaping the landscape topography.

Cement not only “shrinks time,” it also shrinks space. It generates a prophylactic between rainwater and the soil, channeling water runoff into drains and preventing any saturation below. This is not to say concrete is evil, or to offer the impression that much of Iraq is not already built up. Instead, understanding concrete’s biological and ecological impact is important in understanding the broader effects of urbanization. What matters here is not whether buildings are or are not made of concrete, but instead that the density and concentration of concrete surfaces they create pockets entirely “arrogant” from ecological co-existence and multispecies survival on the warscape. In other words, how far does a drop of water or a spider have to run before it can touch dirt? And Hassan reminds me to ask also, How far does it have to run before it can touch “clean” dirt, dirt that is not toxic? Hassan goes so far as to say that “cement is hostile to life.” He is not referring only to the finished surfaces made of drying concrete, but the entire cement industry. Cement production in Iraq, where the concrete industry is widely unregulated, means that chemical waste is dumped into the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, or small tributaries that flow into them. Hassan describes the increasingly high concentration of concrete buildings and roads across a great distance as “arrogance, total arrogance!”

The arrogance of concrete begins at the site of cement extraction. Cement production is toxic, sending carcinogenic dust into the air, and sludge into water.

First, rock is carved out of the hillsides, reshaping and flattening the land. This is a quarry. Through heat, rock is bound with metals and synthetic chemicals— calcium, silica, aluminum, fly ash, and alite. This is clinker, a combination of natural materials and synthetic chemicals cooked at high heat, 1,500 degrees Celsius. Carbon emissions are high. When clinker is ground down into powder, you get a kind of bomb, a bag of ready-mix. This is cement. When cement is mixed with water, it ignites a chemical reaction. It is what one factory manager calls “a very slow explosion,” a sticky substance that hardens when it is allowed to sit still. This is concrete. It clings to fingernails, shovels, and jeans. It is rock, transformed into fluid. Mixed with small stones and poured around rebar or wooden molds, it takes a form, becomes solid. This is a sidewalk. This is a wall. This is a skate park. This is a prison. They stand for a short time, until their surfaces wrinkle, crack and die.

Somewhere in this process, the properties of earth are transformed. While made of rock and water, the chemicals added to its mixture shrink and compress historical layers of time in rock and water, sapping away possibilities. Concrete surfaces chill life to death, and not only in detention centers. As a technology of empire, cement also displaces life-ways and culturally specific bodies: it takes up a toxic liveliness that impinges on the arrangements of multispecies sociality (Menozzi 2014). Concrete erases indigenous ecological arrangements among livestock, crops, paths, roads, rocks and humans.

Conclusion

This might be a story of four valleys. The Jowad’s valley in Anbar was

flooded and made unlivable. They fled to Mirawa valley, one of many parenthetical fields, holding them in pending, suspense time. Their house-like dwellings and construction jobs are fueled by cement harvested in Cement Valley, haunted by foreclosure, flattening, and corporate plunder. The peace enterprise, which might be symbolized by Silicon Valley, “calms” and makes “peace,” literally paving over dissent, terrorism, and upheaval. The concrete industry offers a figure by which to imagine the subtlety and diffusion of the Global War on Terror as it pervades daily modes of being, senses of possibility, and arrangements of people, places, and relationships.

Perhaps this is a losing battle for people who resist it. Ma Jowad has still not found a formula for a *tannour* and still buys bread stale from a market. Kaswan has no plan for accessing clean air and water. Elsa still smokes cigarettes, although she will soon relocate to another construction site. And yet, “the fish, even in the fisherman's net, still carries the smell of the sea” (Barghouti 2000). The concrete industry touts its capacity to produce peace, which is simply a period of pacification in which ongoing violation continues without organized resistance. But peace has another mode brewing beneath this supposed stillness. Peace is a moment of mass-coerced consent that also offers a pause for resistance to recoil, to gather itself for disruption —again. (In the following chapter I will describe efforts to prevent resistance from recoiling.)

The modes of Counterterrorism made visible through concrete (greyness, suspension, abstraction, parenthesis, foreclosure) are resisted through rhythmic

engagement, modes of continuous heterogeneity, interspecies intimacies, drunk and disorderly valley dwellers yelling over the locked gates of factories, and the continued presence of Kaswan, with his loaded shotgun leaning in the corner. Kaswan and Cement Valley are unwittingly linked to cement and its seepage into landscapes. Through his refusal, he is tethered to places as far off as Anbar. Kaswan and his fellow valley dwellers are people with behaviors and attachments that make them precisely that which Counterterrorism seeks to root out. Like Anbari farmers, they are imaginable as wolves in sheep's clothing, holding onto modes of being that brew beneath the seemingly docile hands of men who gently pet their dogs, or women who seem playful when they reconstruct *tannour* ovens. I do not mean to overemphasize their agency: they are as certain as I am that theirs is a losing battle against abstraction¹²³. They are increasingly confined, not in prisons, but in foreclosed spaces. The more "stuck" they become between the past and the future, between this place and that place, the more they struggle. The struggle to maintain connections to home, which is itself a figure of zoned possibilities, means that the work people do to stay in place ironically abstracts them further from it.

¹²³ Part of what makes Kaswan different from Atef is his behavior in the face of an end-time. Atef argues that actions in the present are morally exempt, since the end is coming. Kaswan argues that actions in the present are morally weighted *because* the end is coming. In Iraq, I have not found that people struggle for justice or survival because they have hope. In fact, while I do not have the space here to back up my claim with literature on "post-hope" or on different orientations toward "endings," I suspect that hope may be a distinctly Christian orientation to the future. My certainty that Kaswan's is a losing battle is not an indicator that I lack faith in him or his project. In fact it is the opposite. The work of most Iraqi interlocutors in this dissertation poses a broader question about why people do what they do: What does it mean to center one's aims and execute a long-term project without a hopeful inclination toward the future?

Even as one works hard to refuse abstraction, it becomes unclear whether one needs to quickly sew up a closing parenthesis, or hold open the dilated abyss that appears as the future. It is precisely this paralysis, and the ubiquity of its affective modes, that rebrands abstraction as a version of peace and stability. Peace-by-abstraction is achieved through corporate and nonprofit actors managing “good” workers and good consumers as they become loosened from their land. This loosening-up is not a direct process as it is often presented in the border-crossing stories of the average refugee narrative. It is more like Anna Tsing’s “bumbling,” a here-and-there that funnels a person up and out of a place in increments, in moments (2015). People end up somewhere —a place they go for vacation or en route to the grocery store or walking down the road to their mailbox— and they get stuck there. And by the time they can go home, they find themselves repulsed by what they find: a bomb, an office building, an abusive family member, an empty lot, a flooded plain. While they were stuck waiting for the parenthesis to close, everything changed underneath them. They discover that this was never a parenthesis at all: it was a bypass, and they cannot ever get home.



Figure 29: Kaswan's trees facing Bazian cement factory, photo by Kali Rubaii

*“One day you will ask me which is more important? My life or yours? I will say mine
and you will walk away not knowing that you are my life.”*

—Khalil Gibran

*This piece is dedicated to Rania, who got out of parenthetical time via suicide in
January 2016. Her death left Elsa to mother Rania's one-year-old baby and remain
the sole female in her house-like construction site. When we last talked in a Facebook
chat, Elsa was trying to take the baby and get out of Mirawa, to her mother in
Suleymania.*

CHAPTER 5
Living Counter-resurgency in Iraq's Anbar Province
Figure: Dryness
Mode: Counter-resurgency, Salting the Fields

Guerre de course: making war on an enemy's economy.

Insurgency: A surging up from below and within, popular resistance.

Resurgence: a surging back up from below and within, again.

Shock: a sudden, altering event inducing a state by the same name of acute biophysical distress often more damaging than original injury.

Dependency: the state of relying on and/or being controlled by someone or something else.

Teratogen: any agent that can disturb the development of an embryo or fetus in the process of fertilization or gestation.

Dryness: a material and metaphorical quality of lacking moisture. Demobilization of the flow of things against and past one another. Paucity, austerity. (Sad: "hazin" and "mahmum." Dry or shriveled: "nashf")

Counter-resurgency: a mode of Counterterrorism that attends to the enduring aftermath by limiting the scope of repair or resurgence, permanent counterinsurgency.

Introduction

[T]he deliberate manipulation of the environment is intended to ...create dependency” as well as “an increased sense of learned helplessness.

—*The Bybee Memo*, Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzales Counsel to the President.
Re: Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C 2340-2340A¹²⁴

The Shamal Wind¹²⁵. When it happens in Iraq, it really happens. A wave of dirt and sand higher than skyscrapers comes crashing across the land, flooding every millimeter of three-dimensional space with fine particles of dust. In the cities, the dust is so fine it coats your lungs like the everyday smog, only thicker and browner. It makes the elderly wheeze with a chronic cough. Its particles are carried over a great distance from the Turkish mountains. They sting as the wind drives shards of sand into any flesh left vulnerable.

Like in the scenes of *Grapes of Wrath*, the dust swirls through cracks in the walls, or between the floor and the door (Ford 1940). People tuck cloth into the gaps to keep it out. Outside, the horizon shrinks behind the murk. Whole cities disappear in the yellow haze, and then so do the nearby trees, the neighbor’s houses, and eventually the back of your hand when your arm is outstretched all the way. Since war visited this place —a plantation of date palms near the Euphrates, north of the big

¹²⁴ See [REDACTED] 69500 (070009Z APR 02).) (See sections “Abu Zabyaydah detainee review” in Volume III, and Volume I of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program report.

¹²⁵ To watch the speed and intensity of the Shamal, see this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3rty710QIw>

cities like Fallujah, and away from the smaller cities, like Saqlawiya— dust storms are more frequent, more severe, and more devastating¹²⁶.

I lean with my back pressed against the sturdy trunk of a date palm, feeling her roughness against my back. It shields my legs. Although they are covered in a thick cotton skirt, the wind is fierce today. It kicks up tiny rocks that puncture my calves and ankles. I hear the sound of the tree trunk being sandblasted with the onslaught of tiny debris like a rain-stick, while I pull the hem of my skirt up to see where some of the driving sand grains have made me bleed. A very thin texture of grit sits on the back of my bottom teeth. I distract myself with that, and duck out from behind my friend's sturdy trunk. I absentmindedly pat the tree and say, "*Shukran*" (Thank you) to her for being my buddy and protecting me from the wind for a minute. Back to the hoe, which I use to repair the line of an aqueduct that was cut off by tanks driving across it near the road, and then crumpled by neglect down here, near the trees. I am eager to quench my friend's thirst. Her farmer has taught me that giving her water is an act of insurgency against corporate imperialism.

¹²⁶ Other factors may also play a role in their increasing frequency: changing wind patterns could have something to do with climate change. War has affected the land cover and the toxicity of the dust itself.



Figure 30: Shamal Wind in 2005, photo by Alicia Garcia, U.S. Marine

This tree is one of thirty-seven in the plantation of female palms. She toughs out the sand storms as long as she is irrigated properly. I admire the toughness of these trees. They have waited for their farmer for a long time, while he was shuttling his human family to safety in Kurdistan. Their fronds are tattered by the wind at the top like hair so windblown that each strand splits into two on the ends, fraying out like a stiff, unkempt broom. This tree looks like she dyed the tips of her hair blond. The green has receded from the edges, and a pale brown crust lines the split ends.

It is not the kinetic ferocity of the Shamal Wind that makes the storm devastating. It is the dust. When the wind softens at night or dies down after a week, the dust hangs in the air. It is not made up of only sand and dirt, laced with traces of

car fumes from the city. This is war dust¹²⁷. It is thick with toxic remnants: metals like strontium and aluminum from bomb blasts and slowly eroding munitions casings; dioxin from the nearby burn pits that operated nonstop for years as the U.S. burned military waste in open air; and soot from the not-so-distant oil refinery churning out black smoke day and night without regulation (Al-Hadithi et al 2016, AbulRahman 2013). When I breathe in this air, I cough and sneeze. The tree cannot. She soaks up what she can, through the choked, coated pores of her fronds. She bears fruit that is cracked, dry and stunted. Of course, the complexity of her fruit bearing is not as simple as toxic dust.

Not only is this dryness a product of war toxicity, it is also the result of economic policies and landscape-altering Counterterrorism practices. Whether planned or opportunistically, counterterrorism takes aim at the land and more-than-human living things. It disrupts relationship between things. It pacifies through environmental manipulation. My palm friend's ability to produce fruit at all is predicated upon complex congruencies that say something important about intergenerational time and multispecies insurgency, in the layered wakes of a War on Terror. Her life is connected to the human lives of those who cultivate her. She is part of human worlds and human politics. Her farmer is targeted as a potential terrorist, displaced as a refugee, and dispossessed as her cultivator.

¹²⁷ Catherine Fennell's description of lead dust in Detroit (2016) and Jerry Zee's description of dust in China (2017) beg further discussion on how dust distributes the materiality of and responsibilities for industrial production.

People in Anbar, living out the transformation of their homescape into a warscape, are explicit in articulating how the so-called aftermath of military incursion is not an aftermath at all. Rather, they remember how Bremer's 100 Orders reflect an intention by the U.S. to systematically privatize and globalize Iraq's economy. They experience their decreasing capacity to rebuild a livelihood or to return home as the result of American aggression. In previous chapters, I have explored sectarianism, abstraction, and suspense, modes of Counterterrorism that expel people from Anbar province. How might one recognize modes of Counterterrorism as they seep into soil, tree trunks, and food? What comes of farmers who try to return home, and what becomes of their land, in the wake of war? This chapter addresses Counter-resurgency: a mode of Counterterrorism that perpetuates the enduring aftermath of war by limiting the scope of repair or resurgence. Counter-resurgency prevents an insurgency from recovering. In Anbar, where counterterrorism campaigns have targeted the people as "terrorists," counter-resurgency pulls together many factors that leave them either struggling to sustain—or eventually abandoning—old ways of coexisting with their plants, animals, neighbors, and land (*ard*). Upon return visits to their land, farmers like Othman and Hameed, whom you will hear from later, confront what seems like "irreparable" damage. In the negotiation for fecund, rich sociality with other beings (human, living, or otherwise), what new relations of power are forged through Counterterrorism? How does counter-resurgency actually work on the ground to prevent recovery from military pacification?

Anbari farmers commonly refer to dryness (*jafaaf*) a quality of bodies, land, and relations that indexes a foreclosed future, intergenerational discontinuity, and severance from interspecies and material integration. Dryness indexes a mode of Counterterrorism predicated on limiting the capacity to repair and recover from destruction, as well as the processes that are not-quite destruction, but rather the limitation of liveliness in many forms. Dryness makes relations between things painful¹²⁸. Wetness (*alratuba*) and dryness get at what my friend Mariam calls the “sexy nasty things” like thirst, urine, dry crying, menstruation and grief, reproduction, human fertility/partial and failed fertility, chemical dependency, and dead babies. It also includes more-than-human courtship, like that between date farmers and their work of fertilizing trees, or the human involvement required in breeding horses. Looking at the world with attention to what Anna Tsing calls “sticky materiality,” we might approach dryness as the quality after stickiness, when stickiness evaporates (2005, 1). Not only does dryness signify material conditions, it also gets at something less literal. Dryness captures the painfulness in the un-lubricated and demobilizing flow of things against and past one another, even metaphorically.

¹²⁸ Scholars have done a lot of work to undo the assumption that dryness is bad or that deserts are empty and infertile or the assumption that wetness is better (Davis 2016; Voyles 2015). I do not want to undermine their interventions, and I show in the section on dry-crying, Anbari people do not always favor wetness over dryness. However, in fertilizing dates, watering plants, having sex, menstruating, drinking, and giving birth, dryness is a painful quality that highlights just how many aspects of daily survival are impacted by military incursion. Anbari farmers did invoke “dryness” in association with mostly bad or sad things. Perhaps this simply adds texture to the diversity of claims about what a desert is, what fertility means, and what qualities are desirable among various people.

Counter-resurgency exhausts cycles and relations, hindering the ability of a place or people to resurge and restore. In *Economies of Abandonment*, Elizabeth Povinelli argues that the state need not kill publicly to manage biopolitically, and in her later work she argues that perhaps biopolitics is no longer a proper conceptual frame for understanding what is happening in the world (2011). Rather, “Neoliberalism works by colonizing the field of value — reducing all social values to one market value — exhausting alternative social projects by denying them sustenance” (Povinelli 2011, 134). This exhaustion of “alternative social projects,” through the denial of “sustenance” for those projects, is perhaps what Anbari farmers are referring to when they describe “dryness.” Dryness is hard to render into a singular figure, because of the very terms by which neoliberalism disperses responsibility and harm through non-eventfulness and non-entity. But it is the very un-eventfulness of counter-resurgency that makes so important to name and ponder. Povinelli asks, “How is eventfulness utilized— put to work— by market and state actors to make sensible the social distribution of life and death?” (2011, 134). Indeed, this chapter explores the mode of Counterterrorism that is most out of reach and most difficult to pin down as such, but approaching the redistribution of life and lives scattered across Anbar province.

The “drying up” of enduring, or “ethical,” life on the landscape of Anbar province is not simply an externality of war: it produces a less-than lethal means of deprived living. As Naomi Klein argues in *Shock Doctrine*, and Laura Nader and Ugo Mattei argue in *Plunder*, counter-resurgency is both a means and end of U.S.

occupation, producing conditions of economic and biological dependency among Iraq's population (2008; 2008). Dryness, which opens up the ability to speak and think about counter-resurgency, might also describe a revised iteration of the military concept, "salting the fields." "Salting the fields," a symbolic tradition, is derived from the Greco-Roman history of spreading salt on conquered fields to symbolize a curse on any inhabitants who attempted to rebuild. "Salting the fields" severs farmers from multispecies and intergenerational social relations —or, as Povinelli describes it, the reduction of social values into one single market value¹²⁹ (2011).

This chapter begins with sections that lay out the broadest contextualization for how counter-resurgency is taking place in Anbar Province, and then moves on to the more specific details of difficulties farmers in Anbar face in recovering their lives. Part I: Deprivation, describes the historical relationship between agriculture and war and highlights the central role of seeds in Iraq. Part II: Resurgence, details how people living under conditions of hardship endure with the help of dates, date trees, and date flowers, even when all three are "dry." Part III: Too Many Gifts, describes how an opened agricultural market and the influx of agricultural companies, chemicals, and products has affected the capacity of farmers to sustain ongoing relationships with their crops. In sum, the sections identify the processes by which

¹²⁹ Kristina Lyons also writes about this: "Antidrug policy has become a pretext not only to wage a war against the people (*guerra contra los pueblos*) (Paley 2014) but also to wage a war against life (*guerra contra la vida*). Or, similarly, a war waged in defense of growth at the expense of all forms of life. In the process, a variety of social values become reduced to one exchange value, and a diversity of ecologies, ethics, and practices said to produce death in life (that is, illicit coca cultivation), or that cannot be assimilated to or openly resist growth-oriented and extractive-based priorities, are actively dismissed or rendered impossible" (2016).

farmers are prevented from returning to landscapes that once were, and the ways people and plants endure nonetheless.

Part I: Making Dryness through Deprivation

If anyone of you is fasting, let him break his fast with dates. In case he does not have them, then with water. Verily water is a purifier.

-The Prophet Mohammed, *Koran*

The Boys at Hotel Star tell me the best way to talk to farmers from Anbar is to go to the Barzani Foundation “food drop” and ask around. They escort me there. Down the hill, a wide building outside of Shaqalawa that is normally used as a school-house, is covered with a banner that read “Barzani Foundation.” Men and women come in and out of the building with large bundles of food. Some wait in line at an outside window. Others enter the main building quickly on the side when they are sent through. The building has all its doors opened, and the wide courtyard in the back is visible through the doors from the wide patio in the front. The entrance is dusty from foot traffic. Some people use dollies to move the heavy canisters of oil, burlap sacks of grain, and boxes of sugar. This is where Kurdistan provides its food rations to displaced families living outside of refugee camps. Most of my interlocutors from Kharma and Saqlawiya come here each month for their ration. They carry family ID cards that are good for four months of rice, flour, cooking oil, and sugar. After four months, they are on their own. Many sell a portion of their rations in exchange for other essentials like medication or soap. Some work in the

nearby cement factory or as part time staff in the hotels, but for most this is their main source of food. A woman at the entrance starts screaming and crying in despair as she is denied food. “What do you mean?! This is my family ID card. We are all here!” The man at the counter feels she is committing fraud. He says he knows she sold some of the food. “No, sir, we are hungry. We eat everything and still we starve!” She is raising her hands up and making dramatic gestures to garner support from the crowd. Men gather around and look at her ID card, trying to figure through the situation. They tell the man at the counter that they have never seen her selling anything. One man points out that she is a widow with seven children, appealing to the man’s sense of civic duty. It is no use. The man is calm but unrelenting. He says he will confiscate her ID card if she does not move on. This quiets the sobbing woman. She wipes snot from her face with her hand and flicks it into the dust. The men cannot give her their rations in front of the building, but someone gestures her to the back. She walks away with a bulging *abaya* and two coins in her hand.

— * —

Two boys from Hotel Star started asking around in the crowd— are you a farmer from Anbar? Are *you*, brother? This lady wants to learn about the soil conditions today, brother. Three men came forward, happy to talk. They were all three agricultural engineers, now refugees receiving food aid at the Barzani distribution center. One of them called his sister, Fatima, who was also an agricultural engineer still living in Fallujah. She joined our conversation on the loudspeaker of his phone. One man eagerly accepted the sandwich I offered him and said as he chewed,

“The soil is drying up! We have to return to the fields and wash the soil with sweet water¹³⁰. There is so much bad stuff in there, it does not yield anything.”

Of course, there are things one cannot wash away. “But it is not only the soil,” crackled Fatima’s voice. “The deprivation of nutrients is for a long time, but it is much, much worse now, since after the U.S. built bases and deregulated the oil industry. There is thick smoke everywhere— they are extracting oil so fast now, there is no rest, and there is no time for the plants to breathe. It is like a vacuum for them, and for us. The plants go to breathe in the air and their pores are stopped up with waste. They shrivel up and become tired.”

Her brother nodded to the cadence of her voice, and added that deprivation from fresh air is because, “the burn pits are really bad. Every morning the first thing when I wake up is to wipe the black soot from each leaf to let it breath. Can you imagine, every leaf! This is a big project. Even with the help from children we cannot do this every day. Every day. Every day it goes on and on and it never stops even for Eid, even for Friday prayer it never rests. So, we are resting from this as refugees and meanwhile the plants suffocate.”

“It is not only this,” said the first man, whose eyes seemed quite large looking at one of the extra sandwiches sitting in a stack next to me. “It is the dust. If the soil were wet, if the irrigation were proper, there would not be so much dust and soot. But everything is floating away. Iraq is being deprived of its farmers, its nutrition, its life.”

¹³⁰ Sweet water, as opposed to salty water, is fresh, clean and desalinized. It is a term in both English and Arabic.

Fatima explained to him through the phone that this dustiness is not only about war, but also about a failure for Iraq to catch up to technological advances. “We have very few greenhouses compared to other countries, we are coming out from under sanctions, from the isolationist policies of the U.S. and the U.N., which is like any kind of sanctions, depriving the population of food to punish a government that does not care. Our children suffocated from lack of inhalers from the sanctions, now our plants suffocate from lack of regulation.”

These visibly hungry agricultural engineers talked about isolationist policies, deregulation, degradation, deprivation, suffocation, shriveledness, dustiness, and dryness as general modes of daily living that seep into all phases of plant life creating a general agricultural malaise¹³¹. The change over time is self-evident to them. It does not take long for political conditions to register as materially obvious on the landscape. As I detail below, farmers in Anbar province contend with deprivation in three ways: They are prevented from saving and planting multi-generational seeds; they work in war-torn environmental conditions; and they struggle with the effects of Counterterrorism’s so-called “insurgency-relevant developmental work” (U.S. Counterinsurgency Guide 2009), which builds into their livelihood a newfound dependency upon corporate chemical inputs. Dryness —the quality that makes necessary movement and connections painful— requires them build to a tenuous, uneasy love with the warscape in order to grow food and rebuild lives upon it.

¹³¹ They are describing the alienation of Polanyi’s “formal economy,” where their land and labor are disembedded from their social and ecological context in order to be transacted as “fictitious commodities” (1944, 71). Dryness, therefore, is the condition of what remains of the “substantive economy.”

Salting the Fields

“They salted the field!” says Fatima, at the end of our conversation about soil conditions in Anbar. “Salting the fields” not only refers to various forms of soil degradation resulting from military incursion. It also other ways of making it hard for people to return to and re-cultivate the land. As part of the Global War on Terror, the U.S. and its allies adopted components of the less-lethal and less-than-lethal models of population control. These modes of counterterrorism include restructuring economies and material surroundings in order to not only limit the capacity for ongoing insurgent resistance, but also restructure flows of resources toward imperial ends. “Provincial Reconstruction Teams” (PRTs), are made up of civilian and military personnel “to undertake the insurgency-relevant developmental work that has been essential to success in both Iraq and Afghanistan” (U.S. Counterinsurgency Guide 2009). Development work in Iraq is code for neoliberal economic reform through privatization, made plain in Paul Bremer’s 100 conditions of U.S. withdrawal. But what is “insurgency-relevant development work”? How does a restructuring of economic and multi-species relations work to counter insurgency, and what does this say about where insurgent potential actually lies? Flows can dry up. Others can swell. The notion that environments can be made inhospitable to indigenous ways of living is at the heart of less-than-lethal paradigms of Counterterrorism: the doctrine is to “let live” instead of kill. But in letting live, Counterterrorism forces people to live differently.

As a counter-resurgent act, “salting” reflects barrenness, disinfectant purification, and a warning against rebuilding and restoration. The insult and the injury are the same. In the Book of Judges (9:45), Abimelech sowed his own capital with salt after quelling popular uprising against him. More famous examples of fields being sewn with salt include Roman texts claiming that the army plowed Carthage’s fields with salt after sacking the city in the Third Punic War, forcing survivors into slavery. The concept became well established in folkloric motif in the Middle Ages, and beyond (Chavalas 2006). In Spain, salt was poured on land owned by traitors, who were also beheaded after their houses were demolished. In 1759 there is record of this occurring in Portugal when the Duke of Aveiro’s palace on Lisbon was “salted” after the duke conspired against King Joseph I. A still-standing stone memorial where the palace stood reads: “In this place were put to the ground and salted the houses of José Mascarenhas.... *In this infamous land nothing may be built for all time.*” To render land unusable or permanently devastated is to impose a curse upon returning, rebuilding, or repairing from conquest.

In writing about “salting the field” (which is always symbolic, and in this chapter also a metaphor), I attend to rural impacts of Counterterrorism in order to understand the full picture of contemporary pacification campaigns, which often overlook rural landscapes and focus on urban warfare (Graham 2002; Lambert 2013; Weizman 2007). While Iraq is about seventy percent urban, the links between urban and surrounding rural communities weave a social fabric integral to the exchange relationships that Deborah Bird Rose describes as “ethical networks” that sustain life

ecologies (2012). This interconnectedness became obvious to urban centers when the U.S. erected cement T-walls around Fallujah and prevented anyone from entering or existing without military approval. The siege choked the city of its fresh food supply, and all the social relationships that daily inter-urban transhumance generates (Khalili 2013). But it was disrupted before and after, too. As I detail below, farmers returning to Anbar province are returning to metaphorically salted fields, places that are marked by insult, damage, and violation in the wake of war.

As Vijay Prashad describes them, people from the northern part of Iraq like Anbar province are “earthen people.” Places like Fallujah have a high degree of rural-urban integration. The edge of the city is quite abruptly rural. Politically, the city itself is rural in the sense that everyone has farmland somewhere and everyone visits their villages on holidays. The integration of people with the land, even if they are city dwellers, means that a focus on urban warfare misses a major environmental component of Counterterrorism in Anbar province. It underestimates the continued importance of food and agriculture to counterinsurgency projects.

Victor Davis Hanson, writing about agriculture in Classical Greece, makes an important hypothesis that helps the reader understand the relationship between farming and war: “Any society that mobilizes troops must plan both to feed its own men and to seek to deny supplies to the enemy” (1998, 1). Consequently, Greek armies were careful to time their incursions onto communities with cycles of the farming year. Hansen argues that, “Almost every consideration of a Greek army—logistical, tactical, strategic, psychological, and technological—was in some way

connected to agriculture” (1998, 19). Although it is true that in a few early instances walls were constructed at key border passes to prevent entry into friendly territory, the most effective method of “defense” among rural people was evacuation from the countryside, regardless of whether their own forces chose to fight. This is not unlike what people in Anbar do. Many of them have fled their region repeatedly and returned when battles were over. No amount of military or political sophistication replaces the fundamental function of counterinsurgency: controlling the capacity for life itself in order to choke off political resistance. Even if popular discourse forgets this fact, militaries never do.

For example, Palestine’s *First Intifada* (organized insurgent uprising against Israeli occupation) was far more effective and cost far fewer lives than the *Second Intifada* (Hammami and Tamari 2000). This is in part because during the first intifada, insurgent communities endured in successful campaigns against Israeli occupation because of family gardens and internally produced food supplies. In fact, the comical film, “The Wanted 18,” highlights how eighteen milk cows became the target of a major military hunt by the Israeli army seeking to target the revolutionary power of local interspecies collaboration (Cowan and Shomali 2014). By the second intifada, Israel had undermined food sovereignty, taking advantage of the geographic structure of communities in Palestine: homes were traditionally clustered in small town centers and with farmland in the valleys below. It was easy for Israel to cut off farming land from dwelling places, slowly, and to impose economic conditions that made it more and more likely for people to stop farming and take up other jobs. By

the second intifada, most households and towns relied on imported food from settlement fields. Resistance was less successful and less enduring because people were easily starved out. In other words, the landscape was transformed for siege-ability, the vulnerability of a place to being put under siege. Isolation worked against the insurgency, instead of for it. As Vivian Sansour argues, so integrated is this mode of domination that outside of settler colonialism it is often overlooked as an active Counterterrorism project (2010). It is not always obvious how economic and agricultural policies are or are not related to military occupation. I agree with her that the modes of Counterterrorism impacting access to food supply undergird other, more eventful, more obvious forms of violation.

In fact, for those critical of Counterterrorism and invested in insurgent potential, attention to the ways Counterterrorism [tries to] curb agricultural sovereignty is inspiring. The bane of any oppressive regime from above or outside is the fact that they do not know the landscape as intimately as those who live there. Hanson emphasizes that crop devastation in warfare is very difficult to actually accomplish. To be effective, it takes extended time and effort. For example, in the countryside around Athens during the Peloponnesian War, over a generation of Spartans engaged in an unparalleled effort to ruin Athenian agriculture. “During much of the year fruit trees, vines, and even grain fields were difficult to destroy. Even when chopped or cut down, vines and olive trees grew again quickly” (Hanson 1998, 174). The effort never fully succeeded, as the Spartans could not overcome the tendency of growing things to grow back. What is required in order to stop the

indomitable resurgence of such landscapes is counter-resurgency. Counter-resurgency forecloses, or curbs return, revival, and resurgence. Counter-resurgent projects alter living landscapes in order to prevent revival of insurgency efforts. In Hameed's worlds, the U.S. "reaches into the future" to prevent insurgencies from future generations.

While human beings are often leaders of *insurgency* — direct resistant to domination from outside or above — non-human species lead *resurgent* movements. Because of this, counter-resurgency targets the relationship between humans and their companions: the slaughter of Tibetan yak herds by the Chinese military in the 1950s, the U.S. deforestation of Vietnam in the 1960s, and Saddam Hussein's draining of the Iraq marshes in the 1990s are just a few infamous examples. In post-2003 Iraq, policies like Order 81 and others I will highlight throughout this chapter, take the "let live" approach. Rather than devastate like the Spartans, they reconfigure. They transform, erode, and "dry out" the nature of relationship among species and groups. Dina and her farming family, the Jowads, are well aware of this. Dina says, "Without seeds, we have no food. Without food, we have no seeds [pointing to her belly to indicate children]." Her statement reflects the overall approach of Anbari people to "dryness," which is a mode of Counterterrorism that limits a landscape's capacity for multispecies resurgence against imperial environmental harm by attenuation. For Dina, an attack on human and plant reproduction is at the heart of Counterterrorism's method: rather than killing, it preemptively stops new lives from being made. This may be why Anbari people can so frequently claim that they are surviving

“genocide,” even as they gesture at less-than-lethal modalities like Counter-resurgency.

Seeds and Food in Battle

When farmers from Anbar tell me that farming has become unaffordable and that it costs more to grow food than to buy it, they speak of more than environmental toxicity. Farming troubles are the result of extreme isolation through sanctions in the 1990s, followed by sudden flooding of the agricultural market with private companies from all over the globe after 2003. Legally, this looks like Order 81, one of 100 conditions of U.S. withdrawal drafted by Paul Bremer, titled “Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety.” This order amends Iraq’s original patent law of 1970. With important implications for farmers and the future of agriculture in Iraq “[t]he purpose of the law is to facilitate the establishment of a new seed market in Iraq, where transnational corporations can sell their seeds —genetically modified or not, which farmers would have to purchase afresh every single cropping season” (GRAIN 2004). For generations, small farmers in Iraq operated in an essentially unregulated, informal seed supply system. Farm-saved seeds, free exchange of planting materials among farming communities, and significant national involvement in distributing new seed strains and subsidizing grains, has been the basis of agricultural practice in Iraq. What Order 81 does is allow companies like Monsanto¹³² to patent any seeds they “describe and characterize” in Iraq. Once seeds are patented by multinational corporations, Iraqi farmers are

¹³² Note that Monsanto’s direct role in Iraq appears to be minimal to date.

prohibited from saving and sharing seeds that have been passed down for generations (Smith 2005).

But Order 81 never needs implementation as a legal restriction. Farmers do not need to be punished for saving or planting certain seeds. “The market” itself generated conditions of deprivation during the 1990s sanctions, and then a rapid influx of goods and economic players since 2003. Order 81 is part of a process already in play, already started before the law was ever written. Ecological and landscape transformation is *already* integral to pacification of rural people in Iraq, such that farmers are clamoring for any seeds that will produce robust crops at all — never mind the more important but less urgent matter of economic dependency, and the ultimate evacuation of food sovereignty from Anbari tribes.

Iraq’s national seed bank in Abu Ghraib was moved to Syria in 1996 (Levine 2007). The collection of more than 200 seed samples was stored at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo (Clarke 2003). In 2012 most of those seeds, about 90 percent of the collection, were moved to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway to sequester them from the volatility of civil war (Duggan 2018). The Syrian seed scientists working at ICARDA parted ways with the seeds and were relocated to Beirut as refugees. Dryness was the quality most prized in this seed collection: the seeds’ adaptation to arid climates is intriguing to the

international community, especially as scientists anticipate increasing desertification and reduced global water supply¹³³.

Yet, I never met farmers in Iraq who were part of this endeavor, or who had even heard of it — or Order 81 for that matter. They were more preoccupied with the prying apart of farmers from land and did not see the privatization of seeds and seed distribution as core to what undermined their sovereignty in Anbar province. Some farmers, like Hameed, did make comments about multinational corporations like, “We like the mother companies [seed providers], they have crops that are immune to viruses. The only problem we have is they don't give agency to the farmer.” But many of the engineers in the agriculture industry, like those working in the seed distribution industry, felt that liberals and environmentalists were too fixated on “indigenous seeds” themselves. “They are like those who save statues and art during war while letting human beings be slaughtered,” said one engineer. Another, Mariam, who talked to me on Skype from Baghdad, said, “They want to bank seeds, but what about the policies? The policies about the farmer are more important than the seeds directly. For example, we can use the tubers (potato) for two seasons, one year: the mother companies have exclusive rights to the genetic material of the crops.” Her point is key. Who owns the genetic material of Iraq, and who owns the right to reproduce particular kinds of life in Anbar? Through isolation, shock and law, the relations between farmer, crops and land are increasingly owned by outsiders. For example,

¹³³ This value on “dryness” may be misplaced, since most of Iraq’s crops are grown using irrigation systems and therefore are not adapted for dry climates in the way some may desire.

Dr. Dahlia Wasfi speaking about Order 81 in U.S. media, noted that six strains of wheat were supplied to Iraqi farmers after 2003, and half of them were for pasta (Smith 2005). She notes that “Iraqis don’t eat pasta,” emphasizing the “outside influence” in terms of consumption interests (Wasfi 2008).

In 2017, I emailed Mariam a celebratory news story about Arizona farmers using Iraqi seeds brought from an Iraqi refugee to plant in the arid climate in the U.S.. I asked her opinion. She wrote back immediately: “Iraqis cannot access those seeds anymore.” To her, what looked like “rescuing” seeds was just ordinary extraction, “like British museums that to this day have yet to return mummies to Egypt.” International concerns about seeds beckons a broader conversation about farmers and land, and how conditions are set to reduce the possibility for their repair of and return to Anbari land. This process is readily summed up by many Anbari farmers as part of *guerre de course* state breaking. I call it, instead, counter-resurgency.

Attacking Sustenance

The strategy of destroying the food and water supply of the civilian population in an area of conflict has been banned under Article 54 of Protocol I of the 1977 Geneva Convention¹³⁴:

It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

¹³⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross

Nonetheless, the U.S. Army Civil Administration (CA) Operations seek to not quite destroy, but to rewire, the workings of “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population” by doing the “armed social work” David Kilcullen refers to when speaking about controlling popular uprising against foreign invasion. “CA operations play a command support role in all operational environments and across the operation continuum. The U.S. Army organizes, trains, equips, and provides CA units to support all operations where the civilian populace of an FN [Friendly Nation, although CA work occurs in occupied nations as well] is involved... CA operations encompass the relationship between military forces, civil authorities, and people in a friendly or occupied country or area. *CA operations support national policy and implement U.S. national objectives by coordinating with, influencing, developing, or controlling indigenous infrastructures in operational areas*” (Department of the Army 2000, 3-1). Instead of destroying, the CA “influences, develops, and controls” things like irrigation, agriculture, and other forms of “sustenance.” What is being dried out in Anbar, therefore, is not a population —not dates or farmers or Anbari men— but any set of relations among them that runs up against the interests of neoliberal extraction, 24/7 production, and full integration into global capitalist speed (Tsing 2005). The embedded forms of relating to landscapes as “sustenance” are by nature insurgent. They surge from under and inside, upward and outward, like sprouts pushing up and out of their seed casings, breaking the crust of the earth. They respond to surges of blossoms, surges of birth, and pulses in the land. They are an affront to obedience. Even as individual earthly beings perish, generations refuse to die; they

surge back up again. To pacify resurgence, Counterterrorism works against forces from under and inside, to meet the inexhaustible demands of colonial consumption. It exhausts and dries out the wet, sticky, and inchoate gaps between intervals of resurgent bursts.

While Greek and Roman militaries symbolically tossed salt onto fields to tether military conquest with agriculture, developments in both war technology and capitalist agricultural industry have continued to work hand in hand, making new symbolic mergers between war and food (Carson 1962). This partnership systematizes and globalizes extreme limits to multispecies revival from military violation. It is a significant and often cited fact that Monsanto, Dow Chemical and Diamond Shamrock produced Agent Orange as a war chemical, and later produced agricultural chemicals (Kohls 2015). It was more than a symbolic event when in 2017 Monsanto, the American seed and chemical corporation, merged with Bayer, the German pharmaceutical corporation. These corporate genealogies index the very underpinning of chemical and economic dependency as both a mode and a result of military domination over humans and other species. Anbari farmers say things like, “war genetically modifies crops” or “we are compelled to use them” of agricultural inputs, because they experience materially how war and corporate agriculture work together to scramble the conditions of survival.

What is the significance of these genealogies in understanding the ties among chemical dependency, militarism, and economic dependency, especially among farmers? Operation Ranch Hand —the U.S. herbicidal warfare campaign from 1961-

1971 that used Agent Orange as defoliant in Vietnam and the borders of Laos and Cambodia— is the historical legacy of Roundup, which kills bees and butterflies in proportions, devastating to the interlocking dependency that all humans have on pollinators that make plant reproduction possible (Kohls 2015). The same chemical companies producing herbicide also produce products like painkillers and fertilizers. Chemical dependency means that repair and recovery from what is called a body's "toxic load" depends upon the chemical support of the same violators that induced this load. Somehow campaigns to suppress indigenous resistance are all tangled up in the way the world's food supply is both suppressed and made possible. Companies like Monsanto and Bayer are keenly aware of this and will profit from global food shortage: "By the time 2050 rolls around, the world will have 10 billion people, and the demand for food will double," said Robb Fraley, Monsanto's chief technology officer (Varinsky 2017), who speaks of food in market terms of "demand" and supply. Food is a market made profitable by human hunger.

There are other corporate and government interests in ecology and food that tether this story more closely to the Global War on Terror. For example, federal laws in the United States classify radical environmentalism, or eco-terrorism, as one of the "foremost domestic terrorist threat" in the country, alongside right-wing extremism (Jarboe 2002). In 2008, "terrorists" like green activists were moved to Communication Management Units (CMUs), prisons especially designed to limit the communication of inmates with the broader community (Povinelli 2011, 127). Povinelli writes that in 2011, the governor of Michigan, which hosts one such CMU,

offered his prison system to house Guantanamo Bay detainees, as well (2011, 127). Seeing how Guantanamo Bay “terrorists” and “eco-terrorists might be considered reasonable co-inhabitants of a specialized anti-terrorism prison helps us imagine the “War Machine” and our dependence upon it, as a kind of churning enterprise that eats and deletes.

The military onslaught in Anbar has changed the landscape subtly. When driving westward from the mountainous, green Kurdish region, the land morphs into grassy fields of wheat and then bleeds into rocky flat land with occasional goats grazing near the road. Eventually the rocks grow smaller and smaller until the long flat stretch of desert becomes a 360 degree horizon. Then, heading closer and closer to Fallujah, the landscape becomes more textured with plant life. Rich green swaths of green fan out along aqueduct lines jutting out long distances from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. What stands out are the stacks of black smoke from various factories that rise up in the distance, or areas where ordnances, broken tanks, building scraps, and other blackened carcasses of war objects lay out in the open.

As a province, Anbar might have always been described as a “dry” place, but the relationships among people and things were not “exhausted” of “shriveled” as they are now. Hameed (a date farmer you met in Chapter 3 sweating at a Kurdish checkpoint) says “War genetically modifies crops.” In Anbar, counter-resurgency is the “modification” of how land is cultivated and reproduced. Hameed is not concerned about whether crops are actually grown from GMO seeds when he talks of genetic modification. What he means to express is that the reproductive relationship

between lives has been transformed by chemical companies *like* Monsanto, with legacies of investing in war at the same time as they invest in growing food. Controlling global food supply, generating conditions of chemical dependency, and suppressing resurgent anticolonial resistance are all integrated both genealogically and ideologically. The Global War on Terror does not only targets kinds of people, but also kinds of trees, kinds of food, and kinds of multispecies relationships. In many ways, counter-resurgency works at eradicating insurgent rhythm —the kinds of time that rejuvenate across generations, seasons, and life kinds.

Part II: Resurgence

Farming is impossible without multispecies resurgence.

—Anna Tsing, “A Threat to Holocene Resurgence Is a Threat to Livability”

But trees grow back. In spite of military domination, the capacity of plants, animals and people to recover is remarkable. Even in nuclear disasters where human people have been cleared off the land, multispecies life thrives (PBS 2011). What “salting the fields” does is to declare the end of farmers, rather than the end of growing things. In Iraq, fields have been metaphorically salted: chemical toxicity, destruction of irrigation channels and aqueducts, and economic shock all undermine the capacity of farmers to grow food (Klein 2008). This undermined capacity is what Anbari people refer to when they speak of “dryness” not only as a material reality, but also as the more abstract mode of Counterterrorism: counter-resurgency. Nevertheless, Anbari farmers continue to return to the land and make a go at resurgence, following the stubborn leadership of their plants in order to do so.

On a trip into Anbar, I joined a farmer named Othman in returning to his rural village a few miles away from of Saqlawia. (You met Othman when he was sweating at a checkpoint Chapter 3. And in Chapter 4, we entered his house expecting it to be rigged with explosives). His was a small orchard with fig and apricot trees, as well as tomatoes, grapes and other vine plants. He prized his two olive trees, which his father had kept in his family garden since before he was born. We were here to see if it was tenable to bring his wife and children back. It became evident early in our visit that it was not. Othman muttered under his breath to himself while we stalked around the house and orchard, “This is irreparable! Irreparable! What do I start with?”

The little squares made by traditional irrigation had disappeared and left only a trace of where the ground raised up in a small lip. The main aqueduct was cut off near the road, where a tank had driven over it and crushed the small trench Othman shared with his two neighbors. Before, each household had access to the water two days a week, using a rock to reroute the flow of water on allotted days. Now the trench only filtered a trickle of water into one neighbor’s orchard, the one who stayed behind in the village to fight with the local tribal militias, first against *Al-Hashed* (Shi’a militias working for the Iraqi government), and later against ISIS. Othman squatted down and tasted the dirt. It was salty: “This soil needs to be washed. It is infertile now.” Washing soil means running “sweet water” through it from the river until the salt and heavy metals run out of the dirt down the river toward Baghdad. In visible despair that made a crust of wrinkles across his forehead, Othman scanned the work ahead of him. He declared, “I think there is no agriculture anymore. It costs too

much to go back: with salt, you can rinse the soil with sweet water. With these chemicals, I don't know."

Military violence was always pending and loomed like a ticking clock over moments of pause, respite, and calm. Othman got started right away. He picked one small area and ran sweet water through the top layer. Tasting the water that came out for salt, he seemed satisfied and repeated the process. He pulled out a small plastic box with strips to test PH levels. The reading seemed unclear and he paid little attention to the strips after dabbing them with the sweet water. Tossing a strip on the ground, he said, "Over time, the rivers with sweet water start to dry and we make wells. The PH is too high." Hours clicked by. Washing the soil is hard and crouching even harder. I wanted to stand up, but we saw movement by the river, so we stayed low. Othman recruited his neighbor, Mohammed, to dig a small channel to irrigate the area while he tossed a packet of corn seeds from Kurdistan as a test. The package said *Dabana*, the name of a seed distribution company. The handsome Mohammed, helped cover over the soil with a shovel. The sweat on his forehead glistened for a moment before dirt stuck there, marking him with what looked like a *zabiba*¹³⁵.

The work was slow and casual. Othman and Mohammed were telling me about the rapid and widespread repossession of farmland like their own. Small farmers who "abandoned their land," something Othman risks if he does not cultivate it with enough frequency, either had their land taken over without any sale by large

¹³⁵ A *zabiba* is a mark on the forehead of devout Muslims. It is sometimes called a "prayer bump" or "prayer callous," and comes from the friction between a person's forehead and their prayer mat as they pray regularly.

agribusinesses, or they willingly sold their land at cheap prices since they are unable to cultivate it. This consolidation of property meant that some farmers across Iraq ended up working as day laborers on the very land they once owned. Mohammed snorted and spit on the ground in a gesture of contempt: “We are becoming men who belong to other men.” Nonetheless, Othman is considering selling his land. It all depends on how well the corn seeds will thrive without much attention from him. As you read in the chapter before when Othman and I returned to Kurdistan across the Kirkuk border, travelling to and from his fields is treacherous and rife with risk. It is not safe to bring his family back, and there is no sign that military skirmishes over Anbar province are near an end. The corn will have to do well on its own.

“Destruction is destruction: it delays communities,” Mohammed says. He and Othman show me how delays, lags, and arrhythmia in reproductive seasons prevent them from fulfilling their mandate as stewards of the community (simply by being the only people left) to build the next generation of the lives that make Anbar province Anbari.

Infertility and Redistributing Dryness

Othman brushed his hands off against each other, finishing his work with the corn seeds: “If it is fertile, we will see green next time. If it is sterile, we will not come again.” Othman is in the majority by referring to certain seeds, soil, and places as sterile. Sometimes as Othman talks about land and fertility, I sense a hint of innuendo, as if he is trying to show me how the Global War on Terror renders him impotent as a farmer, and therefore as a man. Later, Othman referred to himself as

“chemically castrated,” and I felt too uncomfortable to clarify whether he was talking about his fields or his ability to have children.

Dina Jowad, one of Ma Jowad’s daughters, certainly intended this slippage between growing crops and growing babies. Looking at a sonogram image of her uterus at a fertility clinic, she joked about the crescent shape image on the screen: “more like the *infertile* crescent! No matter how many seeds my husband plants, we grow nothing.” I asked if she was talking about sex or farming. She said, “Both.” Dina, is part of a family with many children, and yet she “has contributed none.” Altogether, the family has six children with birth defects (read women), three adults with thyroid cancers, and two infertile couples (read men¹³⁶). Dina worries about her chances of conceiving and bearing a healthy child, saying of her nieces and nephews born without obvious birth defects, “They have nothing we can detect *yet*.” The whole family saved all of their own potato and tomato seeds until bombing in nearby Fallujah shook the ground so hard the plants died of root shock. They had some seeds stored, but when they tried to plant them again, the soil was ruined. “They want us to become factory workers, the whole world hates farmers,” Dina tells me. “I am preempted from having children. We know this is connected to the genocide against Sunni people, against us.” Who “they” are in Dina’s sentiment, or why she equates Sunnism with farming, is best explained in my first chapter in sectarianism as a container for broader disposessions. What I am interested in here is how she easily

¹³⁶ While birth defects and miscarriages are associated with women’s physical health, infertility is associated with men’s physical health. This is a general rule of thumb among the families with whom I worked.

bundles farming, fertility, and genocide as a common campaign to suppress plant, human, and cultural reproduction. Others do the same. Hameed makes similar bundles, telling me how “the land is polluted. The trees make very little fruit and the chickens have fewer eggs. What can I do?” In his bundle, trees bearing fruit and chickens bearing eggs are evidence of the landscape itself being polluted in general. He expresses a similar sentiment to Dina when she says, “I am all dried up, just sad from this life. It is too difficult.” They share a sense of burden and loss in failing to reproduce a way of life by caring for a collection of lives. It is not just the land that is dry; they are.

Dina was in tune not only with seeds and reproduction, but with the environments conducive to this duty. Were we to have talked in terms of “teratogens,” I think Dina would have incorporated a whole bundle of factors that made wombs, land, and places inhospitable. She often referred to “hospitality” not only as the custom of invitation, hosting, and social debt, but also as the kind of labor required to make a place (or human body) livable. For example, Dina and her sisters were rather aggressive about monitoring my menstrual cycles while I lived with them for several months. Each month, Dina would make a disappointed “tsk, tsk” sound, irritated with me for having a regular cycle. Ma Jowad was also disappointed with me because she felt that the regularity meant I was not in “real solidarity” with the women, that I had not embodied physical manifestations of shock. For Dina, crop reproduction and baby-making were bundled as two kinds of the same target of teratogenic shock —they are just two forms of limited resurgent cultural and

biological continuity, and equally as central to the War on Terror. For Dina *being* harmed was a passive act of solidarity that would happen to my body if my disposition were correct.

The Jowad sisters were not the only ones to comment on this. Nadia and Dania, Hameed's wives, explained the regularity of my cycles as evidence that I had not fully embodied what it means to live Counterterrorism *as a woman*. Indeed, I spent much of my time with the men and much of my research focuses on the men's lives as they were targeted for being "wolves" in the global struggle for control over Anbar province. Nadia pondered out loud: "Men worry about wheat, we worry about bread. How can we teach you the worries of bread?" The "worries of bread" are about fostering new life and keeping it going, about making new conditions of possibility that turn a raw good like grain or semen into something both life sustaining and culturally specific like bread or a baby. According to Nadia, men can grow all the wheat they want, but it is women who turn that wheat into sustenance. If I wanted to be in solidarity with women, I experience the physical harms they faced, too, not by actively accepting risks as men do, but by receiving and bearing out the disposition of hardship.

A year later that "real solidarity" made itself material to me: I was responsible for the life of Azraq, a child who was days away from dying because of a congenital heart defect left untreated amidst conditions of war and displacement. I was on Skype calls at odd hours of day and night, having sent him to India after a frantic fundraising campaign. There were delays, lags, the stress of waiting, the stress of feeling rushed

while the hospital was in no hurry, the precarity of Azraq's impossible breathing, language barriers, delayed money transfers, and a sense of slow, enduring panic... in short, I felt the logistical stress and sheer anxiety of possibly losing a child, even one who was not my own. My shoulders were tensed up for weeks, and although I was back in my own bed in the U.S., I slept as I had in Iraq, dream-planning scenarios of escape and resolution from various real-time quagmires that involved visas, financial negotiations, and heart valves. I missed a period. When I returned to Iraq, I mentioned it to Dina. She was very pleased and almost shouted, "Dry! You got exhausted too!" She immediately told all her sisters and her mother. Ma Jowad was still angry with me: "You let your body become shriveled for this child you barely know, but not for us? What about *our* miscarriages, *our* suffering?" She shifted into joking, and said, "You owe us a baby." For the Jowad family, seeds were the concern of men, but metaphorical soil was the concern of women.

Often the women in this family would pressure me to breast feed their babies, or at least mimic the act. Ma Jowad made reference to malnutrition during the Iran-Iraq war, when she was raising children of her own, by telling me that one way to feel the materiality of Counterterrorism would be to feel the frustration and sorrow of trying to give milk to a child and "running dry" of milk while his eyes run wet with tears. While incredibly uncomfortable with these interventions to my body, I understood them as incursions into experiments with justice. Ma Jowad reminded me that in the years she was "running dry" nursing her own children, my mother was nursing me richly. And a few years later, in the early 90s, my family grew food from

an organic orchard in California: her family was living on meager rations and farming what they could from their own land. Asking me to unsuccessfully nurse babies or celebrating arrhythmic menstruation were both attempts at redistributing dryness.

Food and Nutrition

Controlling food supply —inducing dryness— has been a classic and explicit project in breaking the Iraqi state. Invading armies no longer needed to raid local food supplies, as is evidenced by the large Burger King and Cinnabon chains built into U.S. military bases in Iraq. But cutting off the supply relationship between urban centers and rural outskirts continues in undermining food sovereignty among insurgent local communities. Food circulation in Anbar province was under stress during 2014 and 2015, so much so that families living outside of the area would send cars of food into “hot zones” to support family members who experienced periods of food shortage. In 2015, a car packed full of food and sent from the border of Jordan to Fallujah cost about 700 U.S. dollars, not including the food itself. This cost covered bribes for safe passage, high costs of fuel, and the driver’s time moving through endless checkpoints¹³⁷.

Insufficient nutrition is not new to the families I lived with. The contemporary conditions of public health in Iraq can only be understood in the context of a deeper military history (Singer and Hodge 2010, Dewachi 2017). People living in Iraq have seen four decades of war and economic isolation: the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the

¹³⁷ In fact, so common was this method of circulating food that I and others would sometimes disguise other items like medication in food containers to get them through Daash, Al-Hashed, and Iraqi police checkpoints.

First Gulf War in the 1990s, decades-long UN-imposed sanctions and a separate U.S. trade embargo in the 1990s, the “Second Gulf War” in the early 2000’s, and finally a subsequent decade of U.S.-backed neoliberal interventions and sectarian proxy battles. Iraq was dependent on imports for over seventy percent of its food supply prior to the First Gulf War (Blum 2004).

This made Iraq particularly vulnerable to economic embargo imposed in the 1990s, which induced widespread malnutrition (Hodge and Singer 2010). Elizabeth Fernea recounts in her 1985 book, visiting her friends in rural Iraq and finding them significantly thinner as a result of these policies. Saddam Hussein imposed a food rationing system, but it only met about sixty percent of daily caloric intake (UNICEF 1996). International concern about the “minimum of political dividends... against a high human price” (UNICEF 1996, 23) inspired the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program (U.N. Security Council Resolution 986 passed in April 1995). Nonetheless between 1991 and 1997, malnutrition among children increased by seventy-two percent (UNICEF 1997). By 1997, one million Iraqi children in a total population of 26 million were malnourished (UNICEF 1997). War conditions did not alleviate this but accelerated it.

Since 2003, families I met did not report improved nutrition. It was common knowledge among aid workers in the region that the average child from poor rural families would bear the obvious signs of malnutrition. When I first met the Jowads, all of the children in the family showed signs. An aid worker visited the family while I was there and asked the children to line up so she could predict the size of clothing

they needed before purchasing used winter jackets for them. She guessed their ages. Pointing to the oldest boy, she asked, “How old are you?” “I’m thirteen.” “Are you sure you are not playing tricks with me? Are you really thirteen?” “Yes, honestly.” His parents confirmed that he was about thirteen years old. The boy looked no older than eight years old, although his face was weathered, too. The aid worker said to me in English, “It is very hard to tell the ages sometimes, because the parents cannot be sure exactly and the children are very stunted in their growth.” After going down the line of children and confirming their ages and sizes, she decided she would purchase jackets that were made for children about four years younger than each child’s actual age. She was not surprised by this, telling me, “Families — from rural parts of Anbar especially — are malnourished. You see how light their children’s hair is, like blonde on the tips? This is not from sun or genetics. They lack vitamins. See how dry their skin is? This too.” Their hair was tipped like the leaves of the date palm tree in the Shamal wind. Enduring periods of hunger is old hat to many Iraqis because the project of undermining sovereignty through and with food is a slow one that extended over decades and generations. Many Iraqi people are quick to say, “the sanctions were a war,” as a reminder that violations to human bodies in Iraq remained continuous and never stopped between epochs of bombing. The dryness of children’s skin, and bloneness of their hair, is yet another index of economic and nutritional lack, induced as a military strategy.

Dates and Bridging the Gap

The Jowads really wanted the aid worker to bring them dates. They understood dates as a vitamin supplement, something that would remedy some of the missing elements in their meager diet. The one woman in the family who was pregnant was eating one date every day to “stay strong and keep the baby from taking all the life from her.”

Dates sustain in a special way. The three commercially packed date varieties from Iraq —Hallawi, Khadrawi, and Sayir— contain 100 percent of four essential amino acids, and 23 types of amino acids in total (Al-Rawi and Markakis, Bauer 1967). Dates also contain vitamins A, B, B6, and K, iron, potassium, tannins, copper, magnesium, manganese, niacin, and riboflavin (Self Nutrition Data 2014). Because of their nutritional value, they are touted as a possible meat substitute. They are easy to digest and the fiber in dates binds with cancer-causing chemicals in the colon (Yasin and El-Fawal, Mousa 2015; Enani et al. 2014). Many families I met in rural parts of Anbar province talked about dates not as much for detoxification value, but as a form of important sustenance: “A person can survive on almost anything, but on dates they can go on and on. They are energizing. And they hold moisture.” This is what Nadia told me as she prepared me for a trip with her husband, Hameed, to their home village.

The date does not quite register a symbol, but instead figures as a nutritional bridge in moments of insufficiency, extending survival. Dates are a foil to dryness, because they “hold moisture.” They travel well, like a fruit rollup. They are generally consumed as a luxury, and often imported. The quality of the skins, density of the

flesh, ratio of flesh to pit, and dryness of the fruit flesh all determine whether farmers can sell their dates on the internationally competitive market. Because of this, many “low quality dates” are available to be consumed locally, mostly by date farmers themselves. Nadia tells me that, “Dates are the local way of surviving. We are lucky we are a family who can eat what we cannot sell.” Especially in rural village areas, neighbors and relatives fed visitors coming from Kurdistan, but they also had access to orchards, plantations, and fields where they could pick some of their own food. On one such trip, Hameed and I lived solely on dates for six days. The dates we ate were filling and Nadia was right; I did feel I could “go on and on.”

Uneasy Love

When I was first getting to know Hameed, he started telling me a story that my own father told when I was a little girl. It is a good story about wetness and dryness, highlighting the “nasty” things that articulate how dryness indexes modes of harm and arrogance. *Once there was a prince. After his engagement was arranged, he decided to leave his father’s kingdom in the Gulf to retrieve his betrothed in person from somewhere in the Levant. He would return with his bride to become sultan. He felt it would make a grand impression to amass a royal caravan to accompany him in style across the desert. The trip was many weeks long, and his caravan included animals and people in the hundreds. One morning, the prince returned from around a sand dune after relieving himself. To his shock, he was alone in the desert! In the chaos of breaking camp, his caravan had left him behind and was well on its way across the dunes. He tried to follow them, a small dot in the distance, but travelling*

on foot, he soon fell behind. The sun was high in the sky, and it made him delirious. He started to swerve as he walked and got turned around. Each dune looked the same. When the sun started setting, he sat down on the sand not knowing what to do.

Then he saw the shape of an old man materialize on the wavering horizon. The vision moved slowly toward him in long robes. As he approached, the man appeared to be real, with clarion eyes and white eyebrows. He carried a staff, and had a bundle tucked under his robe. When he arrived in front of the pathetic strange visitor wearing royal gowns, he said, "Welcome!" and offered him a small basket of dates from under his robe. They were cracked and dry, but well-kept. The prince, who did not call the old man Haj with respect, and did not stand to greet him, sneered as the man lay down the basket at his feet.

Rising, he dropped his pants and pissed on the dates. "I am a prince. I do not eat food so unfit." The old man shrugged, and returned in the direction he had come, leaving the soiled dates behind him. As the night grew chilly, the constellations rose and moved across the sky. The prince did not know how to read the stars, so he did not travel by night. He was growing very hungry. He approached the basket and looked closely at the dates. Plucking one from the edge of the basket, he said to himself "Well, this one wasn't soiled." He popped it into his mouth. "Hm, well this one wasn't soiled," and he ate a second. They were delicious. "Maybe this one wasn't soiled, either." He tasted the salt of his own urine but told himself it was not so. By sunrise, the prince had eaten all of the dates. He walked somewhat refreshed, until he approached a Bedouin camp nearby, where the old man happened to be the

sheik. Children surrounded the prince, and jeered, “The one who drinks his own piss! The one who drinks his own piss!” Having disrespected the basic tenets of hospitality, he found himself begging to be taken in as a servant to the sheik. The sheik accepted him and took him into his house. But until his dying day, the prince never managed to learn how to read the stars and find his way home. Without humility, you will be humiliated.

This story about humility, hospitality and locality, is one I had forgotten until the day Hameed presented me with a small cracked date. A farmer from outside of Saqlawiya, near Fallujah, Hameed had met me many times at Hotel Star in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan, where I conducted interviews with men from Anbar. This day, he invited me into his rented house to meet his immediate family. (You met his relatives in the story about The Conductor in Chapter 2.) I spent nearly an hour trying to explain what I thought “bearing witness” meant. He spent another hour discussing the conditions of farming in Iraq. He talked about birth defects and chemicals. He talked about dryness constantly, using words like sad (*hazin* and *mahmum*), dry (*nashf*), and shriveled (in reference to “shriveled tree” *shajara nashifa*). As we talked, hospitality ushered in and out on trays of tea that came in overflowing and disappeared empty into the back room with his two wives. “Nadia! Bring some dates. I want to show her about *busnaqi*.” Nadia sent her son into the living room with a white plastic bag. It was heavy with dense dates, so he held it from the bottom like a bowl. I was surprised to see that it was one of those loop-handled SAFEWAY bags. It was an uncanny moment, not unlike the time I found a “Santa Cruz” sweatshirt in the flea market in

Amman, Jordan. "Where did this come from?" Hameed laughed at me. "It's from you, *Majnoona* (crazy one)! You brought your mother's scones in it." My mom had made me heart-shaped scones to take with me on my fieldwork and packaged them in the Safeway bag. How quickly we become enmeshed. How quickly we loose track of our enmeshments.

Unwrapping the bag and rolling down the sides, Hameed showed me his latest harvest: "You see these dates, see how their skins broke and they are mushed? This is the problem with homogenization [of crops]. It is the result of the *busnaqi* insect. Here, have an Anbari date. You can't take it home [to the U.S.], it will alert the radiation detectors."

After delivering this list of three problems (homogenization, the insect, and radiation), he plucked out a single date and held it up into the light between his scuffed fingers. He was smiling at me with loving, challenging eyes. His son, now flopped onto a mat playing a videogame, never lifted his eyes from the screen, but he was listening to our conversation. "*Baba*, she should test the bag with a Geiger counter." He knew I had rigged my iphone to very inaccurately measure radiation. This "app" is sometimes used by people living in contaminated zones who must choose less-radiated foods over more-radiated foods. Families in Chernobyl's vicinity did this for years, although not with iPhones. I ran the device over the dates. The phone alerted a high level. This food was undoubtedly radioactive. It was toxic and harmful. Hameed was not surprised. He had seen bombs and chemicals saturating his land for decades. He put the date he held out for me into his own mouth and chewed

slowly. He left the pit on his tongue and played with it between his teeth, pondering. The pit clinked against his molars. He ate a second date, and then spit both pits out. “You are welcome, welcome.” He gestured with the usual signs of hospitality. Open flat, downward pointing palms angle toward the feast of dates on the table. They were warm hands that said, “have some!”

In a flash, I saw myself as the prince in my father’s story, being offered food that I felt was unfit to eat, being offered the opportunity to eat my own metaphorical piss, to eat the salty residue of decades of U.S. occupation. Without hesitation, which pleased Hameed, I took a date and ate it. In spite of what he said about its cracked skin being damaged and the toxicity of the fruit, it was delicious. My eyes were wide: “This is tasty!” I ate several more. My affinity for sweetness exceeded my knowledge that this food was also harmful. Hameed was offering me something more than hospitality. His offer was a gesture that said, “You say you want to know it. I am showing you.” Hameed believed me when I told him I see the body as a site of justice and ethnographic inquiry, that solidarity is “being in it with” him when and as I can. As I ate a fourth date, I said: “I guess I’ll reap what I sow.” He responded: “Yes, but there is love in the date too. I grew it myself and even coaxed the nectar from its flowers.”

This love he speaks of is an uneasy one. It grows over time between farmers and their crops against decades-long warfare. It is also an uneasy love between a prince (me) and someone willing to offer all the malevolence and generosity of hospitality. We [may] share an understanding that our entanglements come with a

price, that our solidarities come with sacrifices, and that even as he adopts me into his movement to and from his home, his trees and his family —even as he guides and protects me on the journeys we have ahead— he will also hold in close keeping the secrets of navigation that would ever get me out of my American indebtedness to him. This uneasy love is predicated on a commitment to the idea that in order to study harm I must be willing to be harmed, and that there is no absolution from this harm through Hameed's guidance.

Uneasy love also includes a strangely apolitical attachment to survival and endurance on Hameed's part through cooperation with people or institutions positioned as his enemies. Hameed is willing to forge a relationship with me in an uneasy way, and he does the same with the very multinational seed companies that destroy him as a farmer over time, because surviving dryness is a gradual and tenuous matter. Endurance takes place day by day, even hour by hour. Priorities are set in the short term, because there are no other terms. Under conditions preset to induce dependency, the urgent eclipses the important. Thus enduring dryness, or something the reader might better recognize as *austerity*, means making many short-term concessions in a row, that add up to a long-term endurance only retroactively. Uneasy love requires no commitment to permanent love. It simply commits a person to holding one end of a thin life-line that keeps a plant or human body breathing, for now, regardless of who or what holds the other end. Enduring survival is about buying a little time, not a whole future. This is not exactly cruel optimism, but it is a type of compelled attachment, because very often the other end of that lifeline is held

by the very force of its demise. Thus, enduring survival means eating dates that give sustenance today and cancer tomorrow. Or buying a pesticide that save Hameed's crops today and destroys the soil tomorrow. Endurance is sustenance that is uneasy.

After our "date pact," I grew very close with Hameed's family, and fast friends with his two wives. Theirs was a classic story about farmers disappearing from farms and about multinational neoliberal interventions. And it is the even older war story about "salting the fields," hampering the capacity of farmers like Hameed to repair from military violation, or to transform war that is ongoing into an aftermath through the delicate work of his hands. Hameed was one of the few farmers who insisted on remaining a farmer and keeping his land. He quotes the Prophet Mohammed to explain why: "In the Haditha it says, 'Even if the end of days is upon you, and one of you is holding a palm shoot in your hand, plant it.'"

Most of his colleagues and neighbors work as construction workers and day laborers, and sometimes as farmers on now-corporate agricultural land. He describes them as entering the global market "in new uniforms; same dirt," meaning they still have dirt under their nails but are aligned with new contours of power configured in part by military units like "Provincial Reconstruction Teams" and by policies like Order 81. This mode of Counterterrorism, counter-resurgency, stunts possibilities for repair and regrowth. It creates conditions of dependency by isolating people from other species and other generations. This project is slow, subtle, and complex. It desertifies the field of resurgent possibility.

Making New Lives Under Conditions of Dryness

“For a long time,” Hameed tells me, “My date trees were so close and so leafy that I was afraid to go in there even in the middle of the day, even at noontime with the sun so high and hot, it was pitch black inside. It was shady and dark. Can you imagine that now? The closer to the river, the darker. You know that they used to call Iraq ‘Land of Black’ because from the sky it looked like a dark color. They call it Sumerian blue. It is a green so dark and deep that it looks black, or dark blue. This is the fertility of the fertile crescent.” He describes the trees as once very fertile, very beautiful, even as he goes on to describe challenges in fertilizing them now.

The date flowers —pretty white broom-heads of blossoms— tell a story of teratogenic shock in post-2003 Anbar. “Teratogenic” is an important word. It includes two parts. First, it references the formation of a new life by the project of fertilization. That is, the merger of two or more individuals to make a viable third or many thirds. “Viable” means, simply, able to develop and live. Second, it references the development of thirds into self-sustaining individual lives. This is gestation. A teratogen is any agent that can disturb the development of an embryo or fetus in humans and animals, and the term can apply to plant reproduction as well. Something can happen in either the process of fertilization or the process of gestation, to disrupt how life moves as expected from one generation of beings to the next. Teratogenic shock might come from an event, or a chemical, or a cluster of things that shape the possibility for exchange between generations.

This is not the same as infertility, which is the incapacitation of conception in the first place. However, farmers in Iraq often refer to both infertility and poor

gestation of crops, animals, and human babies as part of the same overarching problem: severed or damaged relations of reproduction. Date flowers, and their date fruits, incorporate both infertility and teratogenic shock by showing how “dryness” happens in waves over time as the counter-resurgency practice of “salting the fields” took place in Iraq. They simultaneously index a strained possibility for repair on Anbar’s landscape.



Figure 31: Date Palms in Anbar, photo from Nahoko Takato

Hameed, like many other date farmers, hand pollinates his trees to save space. Male date plants take up space and energy, but do not bear fruit. Through manual pollination, a single male tree produces enough pollen for about forty female trees.

Natural wind pollination requires a 1-to-1 ratio of trees, which would make plantations of dates uneconomical.

At first date flowers look like giant ears of corn. Then they open up and fall like bushy, limp brooms. The blossoms on each flower are lined up like a string of pearls, shaped like closed grain heads until they burst at the end of summer. When the female blossoms open, Hameed climbs up with a rope and handmade harness to pollinate them. He presses the pollen into almond size cloth pouches and ties a few pouches of pollen to each female flower.

Hameed buys dried pollen in seed markets, bustling flat places with well dressed men sitting behind ground cloths bearing piles of seeds and plant stalks, nursery plants, and every imaginable product to enhance farming. I was not able to go to a seed market in Anbar, but I visited one in Kurdistan, where people used tables instead of ground cloths. Farmers worked with trusted vendors or relatives to purchase quality seeds. Hameed can determine the quality of the male flowers by smell. Male date flowers hang on a rope, and the pollen inside lasts about three months. If Hameed buys refrigerated pollen, it lasts a year, but he prefers not to do this because he suspects that the lag time reduces the quality of fruit. He has only used refrigerated pollen once, since he was forced to leave Anbar and hide his family in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan¹³⁸. This is the first of many forms of lag and temporal disconnection wartime farming has to teach us.

¹³⁸ It took me months to convince Hameed to take me across the regional border to his date farm, which he visits in between violent skirmishes between the many militias in Northern Iraq.

It is this refrigerated pollen I watched him use, when he agreed to take me with him from Shaqlawa back to his fields in Anbar province. He had limited windows of time to visit his fields. We made two trips: one during harvest time, and one during pollination time. While fighting between the Iraqi government and ISIS (ISIS) made travel unsafe, his main concern was the threat of closing borders between Kurdistan and mainland Iraq. Not only did Hameed risk being harmed by bombs from the Iraq government or guns from ISIS, he also risked being accused of *being* an ISIS fighter because of his transhumant movement.

Before we depart Shaqlawa, Hameed teaches me what will need to be done. This trip is for pollination. We have a conversation over a plastic sheet spread across the floor. Around us is some refrigerated date pollen, little squares of cheesecloth, and strings cut six inches long. Hameed, his two wives, and I press pollen into the cheesecloth and make little, tightly packed pouches tied off with string. If I press them against my hand, they leave a dusting of pollen, like a circular stamp. Hameed's son is still young enough to find that amusing. I stamp his face with pollen. Hameed chastises me like a daughter. "Stop it, Kali." (*Bikafe*, directly translated, means "Enough!")

"But it's nice, like a stamp," I protest, but I do stop wasting pollen.

His first wife, Dania, starts stamping him on the face, teasing him. "Let me stamp you, Hameed. You are getting older. We need to liven you up!"

Hameed, with a passionate grin, grabs his wife by the wrist and turns her hand toward her own face, stamping her on the nose with the pollen she holds: "If you were a date

palm I'd encourage this stamping nonsense. Be useful." The whole family is jovial most of the time, making jokes about reproduction, farming, fertility, and sex. This day, his wives are making more jokes than usual. As his second wife Nadia says, "We joke to reassure the children that life is sweet." Everyone is feeling nervous about Hameed's trip back into Anbar, mostly because returning to Kurdistan might be tricky. (Recall the concept of rural evacuation in the earlier section of Hellenic invasion practices.) We drop all of the pollination pouches into a white plastic bucket. After closing the lid, Hameed tosses a bag of onions on top of the bucket. I wonder if they might be for cooking. We load the trunk of his car with supplies. Nadia dresses me up in a thick, black *abaya*. She slips a piece of cloth with an elastic band, used to cover the bottom half of my face into my purse, "In case you run into crazy fanatics who are afraid of your smile!" She winks. I trust Nadia and Dania with my life. Nadia is the one who caught two important details that would have given me away: my shoes were too sturdy, she replaced them with a very ugly and uncomfortable pair of jewel bedazzled slip-on plastic sandals. My hands were too clean, and my nail beds looked "blue" to her. She hennaed by fingertips a week before. Now they were faded to her satisfaction. We left with a car full of "maybe future baby dates, inshallah."

Hameed's two wives are active participants in the "date pact," navigating uneasy love with me by pushing the boundaries of cultural possibility. They are careful to welcome me into their home as a daughter, even though I am their age. They do this to find a culturally acceptable way to justify my relationship with Hameed, which is one that requires me travel alone with him on a journey that

includes overnight stays with relatives. By making me a “daughter” and calling themselves “Um Kali” (mother of Kali), Nadia and Dania help me forge an uneasy status in their family as a member/non-member that makes our collective project possible. I once treat too heavily on this navigation by naming it explicitly, confiding in Nadia that, “I wish I were a boy. That would make my work with Hameed more simple.” Dina feigned insult, and corrected me while she pet my face and hair affectionately: “If you were a boy, we would not be so close. Can we give that up?” Uneasy love necessitates, and is necessitated by, ruptures in the way things traditionally work, and an eagerness to make things work nonetheless.

Dry Crying

In spite of the wall of dust we could see on the horizon— the Shamal wind coming fast in our direction— the air is still clear. Because of Anbar’s heat, blossoms open quickly. Hameed and I walk through the rows of his female trees, a small plantation. He tells me that usually, as soon as the date fruit turns ripe, the trees start growing new blossoms, but that was “before¹³⁹.” After 2003, there is a second type of lag time between harvest and the emergence of new blossoms. “Before, my trees made almost fifteen bunches of dates every other year. Now, you can see.” Each tree carried about seven flowers, what might be thought of as seven broom heads in flowering time, or seven bunches of dates in harvest time. These are the flowers we will pollinate today. Quantity is a financial problem, but conception is social concern.

¹³⁹ 2003 as a common marker in time, so when people say before or after, the date is implied.

Hameed describes how he desperately tried to pollinate his dates last season, but they were “too stressed to bear fruit.”

“Iraq is drying up. I noticed when I tried to pollinate the dates that the flower had no natural moisture. It wasn't making nectar, so I thought about how the woman must have moister to conceive. I felt very silly to do it, and I waited until I was alone to try it. Then I thought, could it be that the trees need to cry, to make the moister of mourning¹⁴⁰. I tried to make it have tears with an onion. I cut the onion in half and held it up to the flowers and blew pollen onto them. It worked! I was surprised. But this is how we will repair Iraq. With tears, with onions. It is beautiful, no? You see, the need forces creativity, which forces the solution.”

It really is beautiful watching Hameed interact with his trees, personally and romantically. It is also tragic. He is agile, and moves with fluidity, sometimes stopping to sniff a weed or to gently pet the trunk of a palm. The trees, lined in neat rows, are nothing like “Sumerian blue,” the tips of the palms are tinged with brown and they look limp and thirsty, like my houseplants after I return from a weeklong vacation — not dying, but exhausted. The leaves are less green than I would have expected, and they are covered in soot and dust from a nearby oil refinery on one side and a now defunct burn pit on the other side. The soil is dry and grey, and it kicks up into a fine dust when I trip. There are some weeds growing around the trees, but they too look dry. I can tell Hameed misses being at home here. He interacts with the trees with nostalgia. He talks to them and sings to them when he is fertilizing the flowers in

¹⁴⁰ Moister of mourning is Hameed's way of speaking about tears and crying.

the way one might sing to someone moving through the process of death. It is the kind of beauty and tenderness practiced with great care in the face of unlikely chances and austere circumstances: the last days of this kind.

As we move tree by tree, carrying the white bucket, rope and harness, and onions, he tells me that he is proud of me for developing the capacity to “dry cry,” by which he means witnessing and living with things that are very sad without letting my eyes drain. I tell him I understand: when my close friend was in the last hours of his life, people would come to the bed to say goodbye. Their first moment seeing him made them erupt into tears. After a few minutes with him though, the dying became matter of fact: we had to help usher him through death, and crying was wasteful and distracting to the laborious process of dying. We became “in it” with him, dry-eyed as he needed us to be. In a way crying only demonstrated a failure to understand what was actually happening in the room. Hameed listens to what I am describing, thinks for minute, and then nods: “Yes, exactly. We cry only when we can, and we can cry when we are safe. If you cry, it is because you feel safe. Maybe the sad things are apart from you through a window. Or they are apart from you in the past. When you are here right now with me, with the trees, you will not cry wet. You will cry dry.”

Hameed’s is a working sadness, which includes getting practical and entangling with daily harm as mundane, real, and uneventful. There is only so much time for mourning or hoping. He mostly speaks in terms of yield, quantity, and marketability. This is not a family orchard. It is a plantation and a business, even as it is —also— a way of life under threat. Hameed’s work chafes against Counter-

resurgency, which is sometimes overt, like Order 81 or Provincial Reconstruction Teams, both of which manufacture new conditions for Hameed and his date palms. Others, though, are opportunistic, like the Dabana seed distribution company. For Hameed, the ethical implications of his displacement are collapsed into their material forms. His land has been transformed into a warscape, a place where material things are antagonistically related to one another. Situated amidst various antagonisms, he sustains his trees by forming uneasy love with people, beings and institutions that are not always his ally and not always his foe. Hameed is not only making new lives, he is making new *kinds* of lives as he contends with dryness in many forms.

Part III: Too Many Gifts Dearth

*Equo ne credite, Teucri. Quidquid id est, time Danaos et dona ferentes.*¹⁴¹
—Virgil

The dryness of date flowers is concomitant with an influx of pests and chemicals entering Iraq, mostly in large trucks from Turkey. Beginning in the early 1990s, sanctions insulated agricultural production in Iraq. A strong internal market meant that farmers could make a living within the highly regulated and centralized system. For example, Hameed's family made a living off his small-scale date plantation during the sanctions era, never experiencing serious poverty. Since 2003, an influx of crops from all sides of Iraq's newly opened borders has driven prices

¹⁴¹ "Don't trust the horse, Trojans. Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks even bearing gifts" (2006, 138).

down. Farmers like Hameed cannot compete with the quality and prices of outside crops. Additionally, Hameed struggles with yield, and finds himself buying up chemical agents that can help his trees recover from the ravages of bombing and ground invasion. More inputs into the soil and seeds mean higher yield. In the wake of war, this helps Hameed recover from a much-reduced yield, but it still does not meet his original level of production. While both outside crops and new chemical products are flooding Iraqi markets, the soil itself is at an all-time low in productivity.

This is a moment nested within other moments: teratogenic shock is actually part of a bigger story about market shock, induced by military incursion. As part of what he calls a “Medusa situation,” Hameed describes sectarian militia activities in Iraq as part of the “opening of Iraq” to global markets, global proxy wars, and global speed. The effect is that Medusa, symbol of chaos, multiplicity and terror, also turns everything to stone. Somehow so many moving parts —including Hameed himself who scampers across borders now and then, proxy militias, trucks of imported goods and trucks of exported oil— are paralyzing to the multispecies world in his small patch of land. Hameed is left with nearly ossified trees, dry dirt, refrigerated seeds, and dry flowers that produce cracked and dry date fruits. While the speed of contact whirrs, the rhythm of farming gels up and calcifies.

Once fertilized, many of Hameed’s date flowers wither, or the dates come out looking strange, small, or cracked. A combination of pests like the “*busnaqi* insect,” and chemical remnants of war and unregulated industry —strontium, depleted and enriched uranium, fly ash, aluminum, dioxin, and heavy metals— have made fruit

bearing nearly impossible. Hameed relies heavily on synthetic fertilizers to renew the radiated soil, and on internationally banned chemical compounds to rid his trees of new pests. I never saw the chemical labels on the backpack-plastic tank he used to spray, but he mentioned that the most effective pesticide is one he knows is banned in Europe. He tells me that the *busnaqi* insect is not foreign, but has become a problem since the soil no longer hosts some of the common wildflowers and plants that normally grow around and under the date palms. *Busnaqi* insects, which I could not identify in any internet searches, existed in manageable numbers among date palms before, because they preferred surrounding weeds and wildflowers. But now they impact the texture and quality of date fruits by making their skins cracked and crumpled. Hameed shows me that what dries out the dates is not any singular factor, but rather the phenomenon of being overwhelmed by the invisible and rapid switch from state-farmer intimacy to a new corporation-farmer relationship. (Hameed made mention of this when he said that “mother companies” control the autonomy of farmers at the beginning of this chapter.)

Hameed describes this shift as one that overwhelms the exchanges and rhythms of interspecies time with an influx of new material, chemicals, and systems: “It is not just the dates that are changing, the sad dry females and the slow blossoms and the sad-dry soil. It is me. I am the farmer, but I am abstracted.” What I think Hameed means is that the conditions of chaos and war in Anbar province have displaced him on chemical and geographic levels, as well as intergenerational ones. Hameed lives in Shaqlawa, Kurdistan, and can only get permission to return to his

plantation in Anbar periodically, leaving the care of his crops in the hand of untrustworthy neighbors. He ventures cautiously through dangerous checkpoints and on dangerous roads in a transhumance that is new to him. When we first ventured through a checkpoint toward his farm, he muttered to himself as he looked out the taxi window: “I am not a nomad.”

Transhumant farming changes rhythm in ways Hameed was not able to articulate clearly. In fact, his inability to remember in detail how things “used to be” is part of this rhythm interruptus. He is not farming in a regular pattern, with seasonal migration or cyclical movement. He is living a type of uncertainty that makes it difficult to build any kind of rhythm at all. He cannot regularize his visits to his farm, nor can he be sure he will ever be able to return, or when his flowers will bloom. His relationship with land is blocked by temporal and chemical impasse, as well as the more easy-to-conceptualize impasses of regional and national borders. Hameed is aware that this arrhythmia has permanent consequences, not only in the exchange between generations of dates, but in the exchange between father and son. Hameed is uncertain about many parts of the future, but he can be certain about those futures that have already been negated: “My son will not be a date farmer. I do not want it for him and how could he learn anyway? We are abstracted from our land and he is not learning well. The trauma is in his mind like in the trees.”

Even as Hameed navigates inhospitable planes of space, he draws my attention to rhythm and time, and to the ways in which his subjectivity changes into that of a “nomad.” He expresses an ethic about rhythm— there are right rhythms and wrong

ones. Here lies a knot of forces that punctures continuities handed down from generation to generation. The Medusa-like state of the Iraqi state — the market for farmed goods, the soil, the precarity of ongoing fighting, and the chemical saturation in Anbari soil and air— transforms culturally specific rhythms of ethical time.

What is ethical about time? Hameed’s sense of greyness, and his struggle to keep his dates fertilized and viable for eating and selling, illustrates a sense of inability for the living to meet the “accusation of life,” the ethical responsibilities to give death for life in the future, and to receive and maintain the interlocking relationships inherited from the past. The moment of this exchange —conception and embryonic development— relies heavily on rhythm to be possible. Lives intersect in the pass-off between generations. This is exactly ethical time: death that produces life; lives that give way to each other, passing along *life* as an ongoing substance in a relay across lives and beings (Rose 2012). But for Hameed, dryness is the condition under which death does not pass along life, when the decay of a plant fails to infuse the soil. He is struggling to bring the end of a line back to the beginning, dragging the line of life with great effort so that it can connect at the ends. The all-female harem of date trees Hameed cares for (and exploits) rely on him as a prosthetic father to their fruits, and his irregular visits disrupt the pattern of blossom outbursts. Chemical dryness in the soil and air has stunted their color and growth, delaying their cycles of flowering and pollination. And their “sad dryness” disrupts the easy romance between Hameed and his flowers.

Hameed is isolated from his son as well, in a strange mismatch between generations existing in different worlds. Interrupted rhythms of conception, gestation, and generations carry lags and mismatches. Lag time, like all times, has ethical consequences by limiting the capacity of creatures to respond to the “accusation” of life¹⁴². Counter-resurgency removes intergenerational exchange from its scope: so too the introduction of agricultural patents blunts intergenerational, interspecies paring of seed and plant, farmer and crop, rendering each season a singular biological event rather than an embodied continuity between past and future through the landscape. This is the isolation of things from each other, of farmers from the land, according to Monsanto’s credo that the most inefficient thing about a farm is the farmer.

Chemical Saturation, as told by Dabana Company

While the nature of seeds themselves is not very important to the farmers I work with, it is important to Dabana. Dabana is the name on Othman’s seed packet, which I saved, so I tracked the company down in Erbil. This seed distributing company has test fields they use to plant seeds samples from the international companies that court them. They measure things like nutritional content, yield, immunity to pests, input requirements, fruit or stalk size, and market taste (like gluten levels in wheat and sweetness in corn). Dabana is a fledgling company taking over the recently privatized role of what the government used to manage, that is

¹⁴² “One lives in the accusative, one is already obligated and involved. If any ‘we’ is to be articulated, it can only come about through a recognition of the weight of this accusation” (Hatley 2002, 219).

distribution of seeds to farmers across the country. The agricultural engineers at Dabana were patient with me, and spent hours showing me their pamphlets. On the first day, I sat through a very long slideshow presentation listing every single type of potato ever grown in Iraq, while up-close photographs of each tuber. I tried to be interested. Afterwards, we arranged for a second meeting.



Figure 32: Dabana's greenhouse plot (behind cows), photo by Kali Rubaii

One rainy day, they took me on a fieldtrip to their test fields, where they decide which seed strains, by which multinational corporations, they should package and sell to Iraqi farmers. Thunderheads were threatening a storm. In the dark afternoon, the engineers (eight in total) walked me around a four-dunam plot (about an acre) with small grids of corn stalks in rows of twelve and twenty. Each was labeled with the company name and the name of the strain of seed.

As they describe to me the passive role they play in receiving corporate suitors, they explain which “mother companies” they like the most: “The foreign companies are Monsanto, Pioneer, Siemens, Syngenta...” I mention that if I were a farmer I would boycott American products. The agricultural engineers, eight of them, all nod in one sudden upward motion, meaning “No.” The youngest one replies: “No we need them. They are helping us repair. They are extracting from us, but it is the only way.” Another engineer chimes in: “War now is a financial war. They got there at the same time: chemicals for crops and chemicals of war. We have to adapt to the problem by becoming the problem.”

As we walk, we are holding umbrellas and trying to stay on the muddy path to keep from eroding or trampling the test plots. I am wearing mesh running shoes, which are now completely saturated with soil. The soil is rich and black, and the color of the green stalks is very dark. I recognize the color from Hameed’s recounted stories of the past. I touch the stalk and say, “Sumerian blue!” Delighted by my recognition of the color-concept, the engineers, who are incidentally Kurdish and Arab, switch into a colloquial code, and stop talking about yields and crop strains. They take my cue in touching the stalks and instruct me to smell the different leaves. I ask permission to dig a hand into the soil. They are surprised, and one of them offers me a handkerchief to clean my hands. I see three earthworms and a few small bugs I don’t recognize. I also see white pellets from fertilizer deposits in the soil. I ask which kind it is, but none of them is sure.

“Smell this one— what do you think?” One of them gestures at the green leaves of a corn plant that reaches up to my hip. It is the shortest one in the field, and clearly will not be leading in output ranking, given how few places I see baby ears forming. I smell the strong smell of corn plants. It smells like Davis, California. I am transported to my runs through the cornfields when I was in college. The smell is strong in the damp air. “Okay, now smell this one.” I smell one of the more robust looking stalks, about the height of my shoulder. “I don’t smell anything.” They all nod, and one whispers to another something I cannot make out. It seems I have verified a point in a longstanding argument among the engineers. They tell me they think it is genetically modified, but they are not sure. They feel strange about a crop with no smell but are also impressed with this corn’s ability to withstand drought pressure. “We have starved it of water the most, and it continues to produce. This is round three of testing. It is doing the best.”

“We are very concerned about finding something that gives high yield. We have to prioritize yield over health, but we know the soil is very bad now. The cradle of agriculture could be a grave if we are not good at our job.” Staying at an unofficial register, the engineers pointed out how something is happening in the moment of fertilization and embryonic development for plants, farm animals, and humans alike. The engineers showed me personal photographs on their phones of things happening outside of this test-site paradise. From places like Ramadi, Diyala, Mosul, they show me “two-headed” tomatoes, insects with extra limbs, and photographs of goats and cows carrying excess body parts. They echoed personal concerns that mirrored the

foremost concerns among Anbari farmers I interviewed: stopping teratogenic distortions and replenishing the state of “sad dryness” (*mahmuma-nashifa*), or what is sometimes called “shriveled” (*nashf*) referring to plants.

Hameed’s brother, who kept several flocks of hens and sold eggs in Fallujah up until 2015, mentioned the interspecies distribution of chemical harm, adding that he openly uses internationally banned substances because they are the strongest and the only ones that work and are freely available on the market: “We are compelled to put it in the soil. These chemicals do not meet international standards of health. We use ‘Tylocin’ to treat the chickens for flu. It is illegal because it causes cancers. We use it. We needed more and more chemicals to treat the diseases and pests that came in.” So the relationship between yield and quality is inverse. But dependency on chemical inputs to support both yield and quality is parallel and made so by conditions of general environmental degradation evident in the soil and the crops themselves. The agriculturalists at Dabana are investing in what they call “sterile” crops, from corn to tomatoes. They talk about how chemical saturation forces them to become dependent on crop types and chemical types that disrupt plant reproduction and rhythmic farming practices. They, along with Hameed and his brother, all feel compelled to manage pests and poor soil by adding more chemicals to an already chemically saturated landscape. They are “compelled” because the land has been damaged by war, but also because the economic structure they are used to has been rearranged by policies that devalue their roles as farmers and undermine their capacity for self-sufficiency.

Market Saturation, as told by Dabana Company

The topic of chemical inputs is eclipsed by other matters of productivity, as we stroll down another row of beautiful corn stalks: “Everything is speeding up. We used to leave land fallow but now all over Iraq we do continuous agriculture. We grow even on the roof, even on the walls. Every surface is going all the time.” I ask why. “We are being globalized. It is very bad for farmers, and for the soil, but we now have access to inputs and products that have much higher productivity. We have to find the right arrangement, so the agricultural industry can grow instead of perish.” The engineers show me some very robust stalks emerging from the soil of various sample sites. Apparently, Monsanto was offering seeds about five years before, but stopped courting the seed market in Iraq. Most of the company names I do not recognize, but I see some labels for Syngenta and Siemens.

These crops are being planted at an odd season, and this is part of the experiment. One engineer explains “In continuous agriculture, you store some seeds for the next year. Seasons don't work that way anymore. We have a lot of dusty winds. It is new. The only hope is plastic greenhouses.” Another adds a rhetorical question: “Can we use glass houses and the changing weather to have off-season growth? Can we do double seasons?” The answer so far is, not really. But meanwhile glass houses (greenhouses) are going up across most of the fields I could find, shaping little microclimates for various crops planted in otherwise arid places. The move to mechanically formulated weather conditions inside greenhouses for

strawberries and tomatoes is becoming the norm, under the pressure to produce more and more, better and better, in competition with international markets.

Hiwa, one of the Dabana engineers who specializes in tomatoes, does not see this as outright globalization. He calls it *guerre de course*, war on an economy. “Since 2003, the Americans are opening the Iraq markets up and getting rid of farmers. Outside countries are flooding the market at cheap rates to drive prices down in Iraq. Before 2003 Iraqi farmers grew 90 percent of all tomatoes consumed in Iraq. Now, Iraqi farmers grow 10 percent of all tomatoes consumed in Iraq. In just five years, where did all these farmers go?” His colleague responds, “The market saturated them out.” The founding members and founding year of Dabana are both mysterious, but the staff all receive paychecks from the company itself. Those old enough to have been employed before 2003 were previously paid directly by the Iraqi government. I never understood whether Dabana existed as a brand name before 2003 or not, but as a seed distributor, the company’s sources of seeds are newly international, and newly influenced by a market for which many are clamoring.

Back from the test fields, we sit together in the small headquarters office on the first floor in a row of brick buildings that were once military barracks and are now small office buildings for local companies seeking contracts with large multi-national corporations. Each is struggling to outbid the other in whatever international partnership they can form. These small buildings are cool and shaded. They sit in the shadow of skyscrapers, all brand new or under construction by the all-in-one construction company, “Empire World.” These buildings are clustered in a nascent

business center, advertised heavily in Iraqi Kurdistan with large billboards.

Something in the translation is insufficiently coded, so the name *Empire World*, bold as it is, comes with the tagline: “Building the future world.” The place is teeming with potential investment opportunities that seem to attract the highest concentration of men in suits from European, Asia, and North America (only surpassed by the Weapons Expo hosted by KASOTC in Jordan).

In the case of the agribusiness industry, the story of how empires make worlds goes like this: Seed distribution was a national project in Iraq, where large farmers got seeds each year from the government and promised to return a certain amount of yield. Especially for wheat, national silos were important for mass distribution of food. This also meant that farmers often saved seeds and planted new crops with these seeds. They also sold seeds in markets within Iraq. Small family “farms” with orchards and multiple crops supported families. The supply of seeds came from the government, which bartered seeds up until the sanctions. For example, the most famous “Mesopotamian wheat” is actually a hybrid from Australia introduced by the British. But then, under sanctions in the 1990s, Iraq was unable to import new seed strains, and farmers were only able to work with limited seed diversity. Crops became hybridized, meaning they were cross-bred and became less and less productive year after year. As Hiwa, one of the Kurdish engineers at Dabana told me, “In addition, we had low diversity but also low market pressure. So, we could grow the amount we could on the soil without too much depletion.” Hiwa believes that the plan to open Iraqi markets and privatize the whole society started in the first Gulf War: “It takes

time to have many kinds of shock. Have you heard this idea of root shock, when you try to move a plant or shake it? This is what they did to all the living plants in Iraq. It took three hits.” Hiwa is referring to the First Gulf War, likely known the reader as “*The Gulf War*,” which transitioned into economic sanctions. The economic isolation was an important tactic that went hand in hand with what Hiwa calls, “the third step” in a pattern of shock, deprivation and more shock: the Second Gulf War, or what I have been calling the 2003 U.S. invasion. “They weakened Iraq, the economy, the soil, everything making it vulnerable, so that when the Second Gulf War [2003 occupation] came, it would break the national independence.” The concept of breaking independence is evident in agribusiness, which was opened up to global private forces, flooding the dearth of crop diversity and soil inputs made by sanctions. The result has been to dismantle Iraq’s (previously forced) food sovereignty, sever relationship between farmers and land, and incentivize private venture capitalism in Iraq.

In a post 2003 world, Hiwa explains that farmers sign a contract with the “parent companies,” mostly multinationals, agreeing to the number of seasons they can plant the seeds. “If the farmers plant an additional season, the company will refuse to sell them seeds anymore, and they will have lower and lower yields, and they will be out of work in a single season.” Farmers I met from Anbar province described a new relationship with “parent companies” as an accepted consequence of the conditions. Just as they describe chemical dependency in order to recover from chemical saturation, they also describe economic dependency as necessary for

surviving economic violence. They are not alone in their experience: plotting seed prices in relation to market share, Farmer Business Network¹⁴³ argues that greater market dominance is correlated with higher seed and chemical prices. Always and everywhere (Varinsky 2018). Globally, farmers spend about one out of every three dollars on seed and pesticides at multinational corporations like Monsanto, in spite of the fact that these companies drive up prices that hurt farmers. Dow-Dupont gets one out of every four dollars (Varinsky 2018). This is another, rather ugly iteration of uneasy love.

One farmer I met from Anbar who grows strawberries with seeds he buys from Dabana explained to me that he prefers the companies with high yields even though he knows they are hurting him. When I asked about the possibility of being sued by a company if he overplanted a seed strain he promised to plant for a single season, he explained, “There is no need for that. I need the company too much. If they decide to refuse me seeds, I am not a farmer anymore. They have this power through scarcity, not through the legal things. The contract is just to inform me of their power, not to make agreements.” In other words, the contract is not legally binding in a way that matters. The whimsy of the company is what matters more.

According to most farmers I talked to, especially the agricultural engineers at Dabana, the gas pedal - brake pedal - gas pedal car chase against Iraqi farmers is all one continuous process that has three stages, each of which is central to breaking

¹⁴³ <https://www.farmersbusinessnetwork.com/analytics>

Iraq's agricultural core, inducing an overall "dryness" in the market as well as the dirt. The result is a dusty frontier ready for plunder.

On my way out of the Dabana office, I bumped into a self-proclaimed Canadian "seed peddler" who had just dropped off literature and a proposal to Dabana for potatoes. He was very friendly and gave me a great deal of unsolicited advice on how to make a profit in the "new global industry that is Iraq." In fact, he asked me a question many private military contractors asked me, "How are you making money here?" His assumption was that by being here I must be finding a high profit opportunity in the wake of "the war" (a simplistic term from the perspective of farmers, who view the U.S. invasion as a final blow in a long series of military and economic tactics leveraged against them over decades). "This is a whole new economic frontier. You could be rich within a few years." When I explained to him that I was interested in exactly such a process, he offered to take me to dinner and help me overcome my naivety and shortsightedness. The result of that dinner was this primary lesson, taught to me after the Canadian had plenty of wine: "You need to think *big* picture. I mean think *globally*, because if you, if you can spread out across countries, you can move your imagination outside of just one kind of regimen of creativity. Timing is the main opportunity here, this is a moment to *seize* up all the opportunities you can. You are wasting your talent not getting rich here. This is the frontier. This is the new *world*, so to speak."

What the Canadian was peddling is what Dabana is buying. Dabana is approached by large and small multinational companies, mostly selling seeds of

varying hybridity and modification, but also chemical inputs and machinery to go with them. Erased from this equation are farmers themselves, by the disruptions of both chemical and market shock. While Hameed carefully and creatively pollinates a single date flower, and takes great risk coming and going from one stand of trees he has pollinated since childhood, the Canadian spreads timing and opportunity across the globe, betting on a “new world” opened up in the wake of Hameed’s disappearance. Of Anbar, the Canadian sees a landscape of juicy economic opportunity. Meanwhile Hameed is wrung out like a washcloth¹⁴⁴.

Conclusion

Hameed’s wife tells me, “We knew it was time to go because the birds went quiet.” Her sensitivity to the absence of the birds as a signal of impending military onslaught echoes other phrases that reference the severance of “earthen people” from their land and from the landscape (the patchy interspecies set of relations that make a place the place that it is). Hameed read the warning signs of malevolent toxicity in his food, in the chemicals he used to treat the soil, and in the possibility for enduring life on his land in the “episode of sicknesses” that started after the early 2000s: “So many animals got sick. My brother’s chickens were walking strange with few feathers.” He adds, as a kind of conclusive statement about the general condition of Anbar

¹⁴⁴ I do not mean to imply that there are no farmers benefitting from shifting economic conditions in Iraq. There are certainly some, and in the long run there may be greater stabilization of the agricultural industry in Iraq. What I aim to capture in this chapter is the moment of shock when a community under sanctions is opened up to the rapid influx of privatized, globalized agriculture. I also aim to show the lived result of counter-resurgency as it impacts those who are already living out Counterterrorism’s less-than-lethal modes of preemption, divide-and-rule, suspense, and abstraction.

province, “War will not leave anything alone. War genetically modifies crops.” His son, the one who plays video games a lot and never lifts his head, responds dryly, “Sick is better than dead!” The whole family starts chuckling. It is true, sort of. Hameed shakes his head, “I don’t know, Child.” His son looks up from the game with a serious, suddenly philosophical face. “No Baba, it really is better.”

The let-live paradigm of Counterterrorism, in which insurgent life is disabled without being eradicated, is full of tearless, bloodless suffering. Through tactics of deprivation, shock and isolation, counter-resurgency forecloses kinds of lives and relations between kinds of lives. It makes men feel as if they “belong to other men,” and women feel as if they are failing in their responsibility to make metaphorical bread —that is, conditions hospitable to culturally specific arrangements of new life. Dryness is both an economic metaphor and a material condition. It is induced first through deprivation and later by flooding, through a gas-pedal-break-pedal switch that leaves farmers reeling. In this way, counter-resurgency forecloses multispecies resurgence by putting pressure on formerly robust relationships between people and their land. As an economic policy, it makes men like the Canadian rich. As a Counterterrorism strategy, it works to permanently secure land from insurgent people, alienating generations and types of creatures from one another.

While hope might be a naïve and even offensive way to conclude, people like Hameed and plants like that stubborn blonde tree sheltering me from the Shamal Wind, are incredibly hard to kill off. Even as conditions of economic dependency threaten them both, their stubbornness (sumud) is made possible by another kind of

dependency: their lateral and mutual biological reliance on one another is sensitive to even a few onion- induced flower tears. Together, they produce significantly fewer date fruits, but they still produce edible life nonetheless. “Sick is better than dead” is surely a capacious terrain of possibility.

Creatures need other creatures more than they need food. Popular resistance, armed or unarmed, against colonial occupation resists the generally accepted metabolism of continuities between days in one’s own life, lives in one’s own world, and the life of that world, defined by sets of interlocking resurgences. Sometimes all one can do is buy time by reaching others from across the divides of isolation. In doing so, one forges the good kinds of dependency that are lateral, and refuses the other kind, the vertical dependency in which the prisoner relies on the prison guard for food.

Back in Mirawa, Dina Jowad is still trying to conceive a baby. She watches her husband pick his fingernails clean from the crust of cement collected at a short-term construction job. She looks down on him softly from the roof, where we are resting. She watches him toil at the end of a world. Of the pact between men and women, she tells me a conspiratorial truth: “We cannot be okay if they are not okay.” Then, in classic Dina style connecting all the dots, she sweeps her hand across the span of our view, scooping up the scene into her hands. She takes in the muddy driveway, her mother making a third attempt at a *tannour* oven, the single goat with his bell, picking the hillside clean of weeds, the children playing in a pile of concrete dust, and the taxis packed with refugees waiting in line on the road down in the

valley. She makes the motion of breaststroke, pulling all those things toward her belly, as if filling herself with the responsibilities of motherhood for everything around her. She restates herself, with new meaning, “We cannot be okay if they are not okay.” *They* grow like rings on the surface of disturbed water.

Dina is one of millions of women in the world whose people are being eradicated by one thing or another. The war on her farmer husband is a war on life. Her insurgent act is to make life in spite of teratogenic violence, to stake claims and to spite claims on that “genetic material” and those enduring relations threatened by global capitalism and induced locally by the War on Terror. She, like her Palestinian comrades, is birthing the nation. She — gently, quietly, carefully — rages with insurgency against insolation, against shock, against dryness. She and her husband wet the land of Anbar with tears, with sweet water, with blood, urine, and sweat. They follow quite literally the Haditha, as an act of insurgency. It is the end of the world, and they are still planting trees, not because they have hope, but because they must.

“we are the new farmers
in this ancient field
harvesting sadness
from happy seeds
like short lived tulips
in a doomed plain
no sooner arising from earth
we pledge ourselves into the winds”
-Rumi



Figure 33: New Life, photo by Hameed's son

This chapter is dedicated to that sandy-haired tree, who guarded me like a stalwart sister from the Shamal wind and who holds steadfast even as she thirsts, even as she suffocates. She is the insurgency.

CONCLUSION

Disfiguring Hope

Counterterrorism is simple: sometimes overtly and sometimes subtly, it wrests power from people. In this dissertation I have endeavored to disfigure Counterterrorism. By disfigure, I mean to tear it apart from the figures that most often distract us from what it actually does in the world: the gun, the bomb, the drone, the prison. Less-than-lethal counterterrorism hides its modalities behind misleading figures that direct our attention to lethal force. Instead, Anbari farmers theorizing Counterterrorism have given you other figures: the cement construction site, sectarianism, the T-wall, the checkpoint, the dry date. In mobilizing these figures to tell stories about Counterterrorism, they show us where we should look. Instead of noticing lethal force, Anbari people have asked you to notice of “things worse than death,” manifestations of less-than-lethal militarism.

Less-than-lethal Counterterrorism hunts the wolves it imagines to be hiding in Iraq. Anbari farmers refigure Counterterrorism in terms of daily life, showing how people anywhere can see, touch, and engage its many modalities. Preemption, divide-and-conquer, suspense, abstraction, and counter-resurgency are visible in Anbar through figures distinct to Anbari daily life. Yet, the modes of less-than-lethal pacification may be noticeable through different figures in different places.

Anbari people offer a study of Militarism that does not center the military. While they use figures to think and talk about Counterterrorism, I have asked you not to be distracted by the figures themselves. Disfiguring Counterterrorism is about

seeing with figures *in order to* access modes that are otherwise easy to ignore or dismiss. *Preemption* moralizes and popularizes violence by giving armed men exemplary power to conjure fantasies about what could happen in order to enact mass violence in the name of peace and harm-reduction. This is, after all, how the 2003 invasion of Iraq was made politically palatable to the American people —by the threat of weapons-of-mass-destruction that never were. *Divide and conquer tactics*, written into the Iraqi constitution by Paul Bremer, leveraged social cleavages to restructure the social and territorial landscape. It scattered the insurgent unity initially mounted in Iraq against the U.S. preemptive war. In other places, the categories by which people are separated change (citizenship, race, political party), but the mode does not: divided people fail to overthrow regimes of their oppression every day. *Suspense*, which withholds the capacity for people to make meaning out of what is happening around them, paralyzes them with fear. A diffuse feeling of suspense and uncertainty coerces people into accepting and even begging for more acute forms of control (like checkpoints) that they might otherwise resist. *Abstraction* dispossesses people of not only their land and property, but also their own lives. It renders people helpless, working for the very forces that harm them. The abstracted are unable to make plans, claim ownership of political moments, or forge relationships of accountability. And finally, *counter-resurgency* salts the fields of possibility for return, restoration, and recovery. Counter-resurgency dissipates movements, exhausts individuals, and strains collaborative relationships. Counterterrorism has branded itself as a new global war against “terror,” but its modes reflect how it is a new

iteration of a very old project. Counterinsurgency, which has reinforced colonialism, upheld white supremacy, busted up unions, and criminalized the movement and gathering of people, deserves contemplation as a set of durable modalities. With a figure, it is easy to deflect personal responsibility, to say, “Trump is not my president.” With modes, it is difficult to extract oneself from the problem, to say, “It is not my white supremacy.” Less than lethal or pacification, however difficult to see, deserve an insurgent confrontation that tackles the actual modes by which it operates.

As a way of noticing, thinking through figures to see modes lends itself to a particular kind of ethnographic practice. Critical analysis of Counterterrorism that approaches its modes on the ground cannot emerge without a reorientation of the responsibilities inherent in doing and thinking. The transhuman ethnography reflected in this dissertation is patchy because it traces the evasive ways power dissipates responsibility. This kind of seeing requires physical movement: going many different places, and going to places that are unsafe or difficult to access. It also requires many eyes: a researcher must be different people in different ways at different times, which may be conducive to collaborative or prosthetic research with assistants and partners. Furthermore, seeing Counterterrorism where it is (a lot of places) in the way it works (modally) means redefining research altogether so that scholarship only happens in service of making and meeting ethical obligations, and only in solidarity with or support for insurgency. It means doing real things in the world to that end, instead of doing real things in the world as a method of study.

One of the main functions of writing this dissertation is to channel the voices of Anbari people to you, and for you to experience third-hand solidarity —if not a shared cost, then at least a shared sense. That sense is not hopeful, nor should it be. Hope, with a long history of mobilizing people, is not something I want to generate out of thin air. The air is not thin; it is thick with dust, with suspense, with a sense of doom and isolation. Disfiguring also makes an indirect attack on hope, which is one of the things counterterrorism consistently seeks to undermine. It is evident that in spite of Counterterrorism's success in destroying the revolutionary capacities wrapped into hope, people find a way to go on anyway. Hope, it seems, is not really necessary to insurgency. I like writing Mike Davis' attitude about this, in response to this interview question by Vogkli and Souvlis during: "Once the socialist cultural critic Raymond Williams said that, 'To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing.' Where do you stand on this?" Davis' response disfigures hope: "'Hope' is not a scientific category. Nor is it a necessary obligation... Against this future we must fight like the Red Army in the rubble of Stalingrad. Fight with hope, fight without hope, but fight absolutely" (Vogkli and Souvlis 2016).

The way Anbari farmers have theorized and responded to Counterterrorism is a call for post-hope radicalism, for a fight that must be fought regardless of our disposition to the outcome. In other words, they have disfigured hope. Indeed, in spite of great hardship people have agency and people are resisting. This is not because they have hope. (I believe Counterterrorism has successfully eradicated hope from

Iraq.) Anbari farmers are approaching tomorrow knowing that today has been better than tomorrow ever could be. They do not fight because they think they might win: they fight because they have to. They fight in order to lose well. They “fight absolutely.”

When I was staying with the Jowad’s, a young woman who lived in the construction site nearby came to Ma for help giving birth. Most women went to the hospital for labor, but because her husband was still in Anbar and she had already been harassed by secret police, she could afford neither the taxi fare nor the risk of being detained and questioned. She had reached the acute stages of labor and Ma helped her to squat against the cement wall, talking this woman through what was her first birth: “You have to push, *Habibti*¹⁴⁵.” And then, when she was not pushing enough, “If you don’t push, *Habibti*, you will die.”

So often people —researchers, people with unrealized insurgent potential, people standing at the lip of devastating change— are paralyzed not because they do not know what to do, but because they do not want to do it. This is a stillbirth, and all her labor, all her love, all her planning, is for naught. She can know this in advance and she can labor nonetheless as a mode of being that is without hope, without possibility. So there you have it. Such is the mundane work that is insurgency: in this labor, we arrive nowhere. We struggle everywhere. We are dying and we know it. Ours is not even a world anymore, but the end of the world is not a catastrophe. The world as it was could not sustain any longer.

¹⁴⁵ Meaning, “My Dear,” or “My Love.”

The people in this dissertation are here, telling you this. This is not a moment for ideology. This is a moment for grit. We are preempted. We are divided. We are suspended. We are abstracted. Our resurgence is blocked. Without any hope left, without even a world left, we keep going. And it is not noble or beautiful to do so. It is simply is what we must do.

When I was torn by war
I took a brush
Immersed in death
And drew a window
On war's wall
I opened it
Searching
For something
But
I saw another war
And a mother
Weaving a shroud
For the dead man
Still in her womb

—Sinan Antoon, *The Baghdad Blues*

ⁱ Full Translation of ISIS Bulletin:

The Islamic State
Caliphate According to the Way of the Prophet
The Ministry of Justice

In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate
To the Ministry of Health

Praise be to Allah, the Dignifier of Islam and Muslims, and the Humiliator of Paganism and Pagans, and peace and blessings upon him who was sent, with the sword, as mercy to the universe, and upon his household and companions:

(LINE1): For after Allah, Peerless and Sublime is He, has blessed the State of the Caliphate with this glorious victory, and allowing its soldiers to eradicate paganism (LINE2) and pagans, and allowing them to implement the law of God on earth, the path of faithfulness has become abundantly clear, as have the intentions of many people

(LINE 3) through their support of the truth and the people of the truth, for they were in the camp of faith, whereas those who supported paganism and helped it are in the trenches of disbelief, and may Allah protect us from that.

(LIKE 4)He, peace be upon him says: "Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended. Whoever migrates with an intention for Allah and His messenger,

(LINE 5) the migration will be for the sake of Allah and his Messenger. And whoever migrates for worldly gain or to marry a woman, then his migration will be for the sake of whatever he migrated

(LINE 6) for." And it is a narration that is agreed upon. Therefore, the supporter of the religion of Allah, glorified and magnificent is He, and the path of His messenger, will migrate to the State of the Caliphate and will support it, whereas he who supports paganism

(LINE 7) will abandon the Abode of Faith and will migrate to the Abode of Paganism. How different the two are! And amongst those are the professors of medicine who teach in

(LINE 8) the schools of medicine and who oversee in the Iraqi Board of Medicine and who are the reason for its closure, and the many students who have left to Baghdad

(LINE 9) and North Iraq to finish their studies there. We tell them, after seeking assistance from God:

(LINE 10) That we are granting the professors in all fields of medicine whose places of work and residence are within the borders of the State

(LINE 11) of the Caliphate no more than ten days to return and begin their work here once more. Ten days after the publication of this announcement, if they have not reported to their positions, the State will confiscate

(LINE 12) all their property, whether they took it with them or left it here.

(LINE 13) And Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know

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