

The Art of Moral Injury: Decolonizing the Military Subject through Artisanal Destruction

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines combat trauma under U.S. militarism, tracking its psychosomatic effects and aesthetic responses within U.S. veteran communities. It centers the concept of “moral injury,” psychiatrist Jonathan Shay’s term for the moment of psychic, ethical, and sociopolitical disturbance that often leads to PTSD. This dissertation reads moral injury through the lenses of critical race theory and U.S. imperial culture, examining the racial and imperial logics at work in the phenomenon of veteran self-destruction. It argues that the national crisis of veteran suicide exposes the limits of U.S. imperial reach and the ways race, gender, and religion coalesce to both form and undermine the military subject. This dissertation’s analysis of how white masculinity interweaves with the function and effects of moral injury offers insight to discourses on psychosocial wellness as well as disability studies, which often fail to adequately address questions of race and gender. Bringing disability studies into conversation with recent work on militarization, race, and religion offers the insight that moral injury destabilizes U.S. militarism.

This dissertation suggests that discourses on race and war must contend with combat-related moral injury, psychosomatic ability, and veteran self destruction. While the accounts explored are primarily from the post-9/11 Iraq and Afghanistan wars, this dissertation traces the notion of moral injury to the Vietnam war, connecting escalating veteran self-destruction to the emergence of endless militarism as “counterinsurgency” warfare. It reads domestic and overseas militarism as resulting from increased U.S. bureaucratization and socioeconomic demand for security. It contends that any analysis of the ways race interweaves with the contemporary phenomenon of endless war or relations between extraterritorial combat and domestic militarism must consider the nexus between whiteness, masculinity, and ability that produces the citizen subject on which U.S. imperialism depends.

This dissertation also brings moral injury to ongoing discourses on historical trauma in relation to U.S. racial formations. Through a comparative analysis between combat and “inner-city” PTSD, it tracks the racialized notions of moral authority and psychic invulnerability as well as individual, military, and state dominion inherent to moral injury and thus veteran trauma. It pushes psychoanalytic discourse to reflect on the ways trauma cannot be comprehended without attention to how the state deploys it through U.S. imperial culture, and to how it undermines that instrumental process. Through an examination of *Operation Homecoming*, this dissertation reads state desperation to salvage veteran behavior as an investment in the white, Christian, masculine citizen, or keystone of U.S. militarism. Its homogenizing therapeutic practices reintegrate affected veterans into the patriotic, heroic subject of martial might and sacrifice. Through analyses of the Combat Paper Project and Philip Metres’s *abu ghraib arias*, this dissertation then considers the abilities of art practice and poetics to produce an affective and psychosomatic realm through which engagements with trauma open the affected self to relational, collective vulnerability, memory, and experience, past and present. This collective self of historical trauma works to undo the bound, invulnerable, coherent individuality of the military subject. This dissertation concludes with a gesture toward decolonial feminist practices that illuminate a collective way forward.

## Introduction

### **Black Lives Matter**

On July 5th, 2016, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, two police officers killed Alton Sterling, a thirty seven-year-old black man who was selling CDs, outside of a convenience store. The next day, in St. Paul, Minnesota, a police officer killed Philando Castile, a thirty two-year-old black man who was riding in a car with his girlfriend and her child. Pulled over as part of a traffic stop, Castile admitted to the officers that he had a gun in a clear attempt to deescalate the situation, but to no avail. It is apparent that the presence of a gun in a black man's possession exacerbated the officer's fears and when Castile compliantly reached for his identification, the officer shot him, killing him in front of his girlfriend and her four-year-old child. The cases happened within twenty four hours of one another and ignited yet another nation-wide cycle of mass protests decrying continuous, excessive police violence against black bodies. These protests were spearheaded, as they have been for several years, by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.<sup>1</sup> And as with every round of protests since Black Lives Matter launched in 2012, political pundits, journalistic think pieces, and the gamut of social media outlets perpetuated the narrative that the movement was anti-establishment, "cop-hating," and violent. The movement has not only continuously justified its existence against the popular insistence that "all lives matter,"<sup>2</sup> it has repeatedly defined its methods as nonviolent in the face of an increasingly militarized police state. The discursive, affective, and material lines between domestic policing and overseas military pursuits increasingly blurs, becoming more evident in the wake of the Sterling and Castile homicides.

On July 7th, 2016, these tensions produced an equally militarized retaliation. Micah Xavier Johnson, an Afghanistan War veteran, conducted a sniper-style ambush against police officers at the closure of an otherwise peaceful march through the streets of Dallas, Texas. Claiming that he wanted to kill white people, but specifically police officers, in response to continuous police and white vigilante violence against black people, Johnson killed five officers. Ten days later a black man as well as former marine and Iraq veteran named Gavin Long shot six police officers, killing three. He too understood his actions as a way of fighting back after witnessing police repeatedly targeting and killing unarmed black men and women. Both shooters were former military members, both veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. They returned to the U.S. after military service only to find a nearly equally dangerous domestic police force, for them and their communities. Their black bodies remained under duress and threat by the very state that their militarized bodies worked to protect.

U.S. military service by African American men and women began with the buffalo soldiers who emerged after the civil war. Sylvester Johnson traces this history, examining the ways that militarism has "functioned as sacrifice" and thus exposed the religious influences "at the heart of U.S. Nationalism" (41). In nearly every assertion of "loyalty and patriotism" in relation to the U.S. military, African Americans also explicitly or implicitly refer to the "contradictory experience of anti-Black racism" within U.S. borders. For Johnson, Black service members were able to hold these contradicting experiences and loyalties in tension by "interpreting Black militarism (including the work of Black women in the Red Cross)" as a "practical means of

achieving equality” as well as a “willing sacrifice” for the sake of “freedom and democracy for the United States and the entire world.”

Johnson contends that the “murderous plight” of U.S. racism in many ways drives this urgent pursuit of “principled sacrifice.” In other words, police and vigilante violence against Black people on the domestic front becomes a primary reason Black men and women embrace military service as well as the militarizing ideological and social forces that accompany it. They participate in U.S. militarism as a way of “alter[ing] the course” of the U.S. “and the world” away from Black fungibility and death (55). Black service members understood military service as their ticket toward not just a better existence abroad, through the spread of democracy, but at home as well. Their patriotism in part served to position them closer to the obedient citizen subjects valued enough to become sacrificial. Johnson contends that Black men, in particular, but Black women as well, took up military service with the hope that the “White U.S. Government” would “extend the actual conditions of citizenship to African Americans,” a hope that clearly has never materialized in the ways Black people hoped and anticipated (44).

The always escalating police violence made visible through the Black Lives Matter movement has been called a revived race war connected to histories of the state targeting black and brown men in particular; some theorists and activists consider police brutality against black men an extension of the violence against black people that began with slavery.<sup>3</sup> This violence escalates alongside increasing police militarization. Police forces that confront protests against police brutality arrive decked out in full riot gear, accompanied by weaponry designed for conflicts with enemy combatants on domestic soil.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Johnson and Long’s histories as service members rendered them less intelligible than popular discourse would initially allow. Weeks after the events, nearly nothing had been researched or written about these two men, which is never the case with media treatment of the many other, primarily white and male, mass shooters. This silence has been in part an uncertainty about which normative frames can and should be used to describe and begin to understand these men as well as their acts of violence against the state. Their situation evokes a political and discursive impasse: if they served in the military, could they be terrorists in the same way that Malcolm X, for example, was considered an enemy of the state? But the media silence also foreclosed the possibility that either Johnson or Long would be pathologized and therefore excused, to an extent, for their psychosocial struggles. That their roles as veterans were not immediately and pervasively framed through typical discourses on combat trauma demonstrates that their blackness interfered. Their blackness ensured that their crimes remained the central, if conflicted, story. I will return to this point in my discussion of Chelsea Manning below.

In lieu of detailed investigations and analyses into the shooters’ lives, a few images circulated to confirm the shooters’ allegiances over and against their military records. Contradictory images of Johnson, for example, nearly all of them taken from his Facebook page, or his curated portrayal of his own blackness and the histories it evokes, suggest the conundrum of a single subject exhibiting both pro and anti-state sentiment and allegiance. One image combination, in particular, juxtaposes Johnson’s supposedly simultaneous militarized and radical leanings. In one image, Johnson is dressed in what seems to be reminiscent of certain continental African traditions; he stands with his right fist elevated, a gesture commonly understood to signify decolonial and anti-racist resistance that is also associated with the Black Power

movement. In the second image of Johnson, in his full Army Combat Uniform (ACU), he maintains an authoritative, disciplinary stance with his hands appearing to be on his hips. The juxtaposition between state-authority and anti-state resistance, repressive and decolonial stances is jarring, as the subconscious or conscious experience of inhabiting these two worlds would undoubtedly be.

In this militarized condition, Johnson's body becomes simultaneously the quintessential U.S. sovereign subject, creator and implementor of U.S. law, and that which is abject, hunted, the terrorist who renders law enforcers precarious. The black body is soldier and victim, affectively inhabiting a threshold between subject and abject, colonizer and colonized. Similar to the buffalo soldiers before him, this service member pursues a militarized path while remaining critical of police and vigilante violence against his community. Johnson's choice of traditional African garb suggests that his identifications and loyalties lie outside the realm of the U.S. state and his own citizenship. He refuses the multiculturalist ideals of a united, diverse citizenry by demonstrating an allegiance with his claimed lineage, one that precedes his family's lineage under a state founded on slavery and settler colonialism.

In addition to black service members inhabiting the threshold of patriotism and social critique, the militarized black body exists in the shadow of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.<sup>5</sup> Generally understood to develop in response to a specifically "shocking, scary, or dangerous event," an event of acute physical and/or emotional trauma, PTSD often involves a vast range of acute psychosomatic reactions and responses. A PTSD diagnosis follows the repetition and continuation of these often destructive responses long after the initial shock and danger of the event has long passed.<sup>6</sup> The origin of trauma is a continuous debate; one theory centers around the concept of an initial "moral injury," (re)coined in 1994 in relation to PTSD treatment by Department of Veteran's Affairs Psychiatrist Dr. Jonathan Shay, which this dissertation discusses in chapter one. Theorizing moral injury through analyses of Vietnam veteran experiences in relation to the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Shay describes it as the "primary injury" of war that often leads to the development of PTSD.<sup>7</sup> He explains that moral injury can occur when "there is a betrayal of what's right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high-stakes situation." Examining the notions of morality imagined and promulgated through state-sanctioned projects for healing and redemption, this dissertation tracks this morality's relation to racial and religious rubrics of military domination.

The ways U.S. military discourse perpetuates narratives of brokenness, healing, and redemption related to combat PTSD is a primary focus of this dissertation. Some common PTSD symptoms are consistent and destructive anxiety, easy susceptibility to startle or shock, inconsistent or nonexistent sleep, avoidance coping and failure to complete daily tasks, difficulties remembering details of the trauma and surrounding events as well as the details of daily life following the events, malaise or a loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities or projects, and triggered or consistent outbursts, aggression, or even violent acts, particularly suicidal ones. PTSD can emerge from any number of traumatic events in people's lives, but one of the most commonly referenced and depicted forms in U.S. popular discourse is that which originates from military combat and often ends in suicide.<sup>8</sup> That combat-related PTSD is the most prominently discussed demonstrates the ways militarism inundates and dictates U.S. culture.

Popular discourse and media, especially, have long associated PTSD related to military experience with erratic, aggressive, and self-destructive or violent behavior. It would seem that acts of extreme aggression from military veterans, such as the killing of police officers, would be regarded as clear examples of PTSD manifested. The silence points to a cultural hesitancy, or perhaps incapacity, to see an affliction commonly associated with military heroism related to acts classified as domestic terrorism. The notion that PTSD might have served as one of the destructive forces at work in Johnson and Long's actions seems at once obvious and unimaginable, even less imaginable because of their blackness. They could inhabit the military subject enough to qualify for the psychosomatic rupture that leads to moral injury and often PTSD; yet the question of PTSD in their cases troubles this formulation. What multiple traumas have they experienced long before embarking on military service. As Black men, Johnson and Long remain disproportionately susceptible, more-so than every other citizen subgroup, to violence from incarceration, police, vigilante gangs, and infrastructure more generally. Their positions as Black male-citizens of a militarized, racial state upend the common narratives of psychosomatic ruptures of combat PTSD in that they destabilize the impenetrable military subject prior to the moment of moral injury. I return to this question in chapter one when I discuss the diagnostic distinctions between moral injury and "hood disease," or a form of PTSD that psychologists associate with inhabiting the urban centers of the largest U.S. Cities, and thus with predominantly Black communities.

Johnson's and Long's aggression pointed outward, targeting the people they perceived as at least partly responsible for their suffering and the suffering of their communities. This outward turn to domestic "terrorism" is distinct from the more common familial destruction or, most common, suicide. This distinction becomes a departure point for this dissertation's exploration of the ways anti-black racism intertwines with U.S. militarism on a global scale. If Johnson and Long are domestic terrorists of a certain kind, men who turned against their national status as military heroes to become essentially enemies of the nation itself, we must ask: to what, beyond police violence alone, were they responding? Carol Anderson has offered the term "white rage," which describes aggressive and violent responses from the white voting public to the economic and social advancement among black communities.<sup>9</sup> Anderson elaborates the connections between black Americans' historical advances and white Americans' legal, and material responses. As she puts it, "for every action of African American advancement, there's a reaction, a backlash" (Ferguson). Anderson's "white rage" resembles Van Jones' "whitelash," coined to describe the onslaught of white men and women who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election; Jones understood the election of Trump as an angry response to the fact of Barack Obama, the first black president, in the White House for eight years.

This white reactionary rage manifests in institutional arrangements and policies such as 2013's *Shelby County v. Holder*, a decision that essentially gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Through coded and not-so-coded legal and political language, white rage reared its head in the 1876 *United States v. Cruikshank* decision, the 1956 Congressional Southern Manifesto in response to *Brown v. Board of Education*, and even the so-called "Reagan Revolution" of the 1980s and Tea Party uprising during Obama's presidency. These events of white rage become primary examples of the ways U.S. histories of anti-blackness, specifically, but also racist and colonial violence reanimate time and again. They demonstrate the continued centrality of race-

relations in U.S. political and cultural discourses. As terrorists, Johnson and Long operated alongside and through this pattern of “whitelash,” their actions responding to the demonization and vulnerability their communities face daily, even as they have also inhabited the position of exalted war veteran, worthy of national idealization and sacrifice. As both war heroes and demonized assailants, they navigate these contradictions in rage and despair. Their slippage between the two tropes demonstrates the ways they remain targets of state and national ire even as they participate in what is considered to be the highest form of national and state service. They render the sacrificial military member porous, fraught with the tension of their blackness in service to a white racial state.

From the intersections among cultural and clinical discourses concerning U.S. militarism, PTSD, moral injury, healing, sacrifice, destruction, and whiteness as well as anti-Muslim and anti-Black racism, this dissertation emerges. It centers questions of disability and wellness, whiteness, and militarism within the rubric of U.S. imperial culture. Keith Feldman has described U.S. imperial culture as the “crucible” through which “enduring U.S. National ideology of territorial expansion and its attendant regimes of racial domination and war-making have been codified, reified, naturalized, and contested.”<sup>10</sup> For Feldman, this culture secures an “opposition between the foreign and domestic” that works to ensure domestic “consent” for ongoing and expanding “extraterritorial violence” under rhetorics of protection, such as homeland security. U.S. imperial culture also propagates “strongly normative epistemological frames” that determine legitimate or “proper” knowledge at the expense of forms of knowledge rendered “aberrational, subjective, or fictitious” (8). The belief that Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are plagued with and must heal from PTSD becomes, I argue, not just one of these normative frames but a fundamental narrative that fosters militarization and white nationalism. This dissertation also reads this normative frame and narrative as formed and operating in and through racialized notions of citizen subjectivity and belonging.

The notion that healing is necessary not just for veterans but also for protecting U.S. domestic and foreign cultural interests pivots on a certain way of narrating and thus understanding traumatic combat experience, even when it is recounted with little temporal or spatial distance from the traumatic event itself. The largely state-sponsored programs centered around veteran healing foster and circulate this mode of remembering and relating to the horror of combat. These narratives deflect from the fact that most of the bodies diagnosed and protected mirror the standard cultural image of the vulnerable and damaged white male soldier in need of repair toward a wholeness never examined. Attention to this volatile constellation questions what sociocultural and structural positions, what militarized, sociopolitical trends, have exacerbated these service members’ condition?

### **Legal Violence, Militarized Vulnerability, and Carceral Whiteness**

In his work on the shifting meaning of rights in the contemporary, “transitional moment” of U.S. late-modernity,<sup>11</sup> Chandan Reddy argues that we have entered an era of post-security. For Reddy, post-security means that the “apparatuses of security have been seized by the state apparatuses of violence.” This phenomenon has never been clearer than what we have

observed in the increasing militarization of the domestic police force, which runs parallel to the ever-expanding military presence in territories in West Asia and North Africa. While the question of whether U.S. militarization should be theorized in ways that separate or connect its domestic and extraterritorial iterations is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this chapter follows Reddy's suggestion that increasing domestic and overseas militarization results from increased bureaucratization as well as cultural and economic needs for greater security.

Reddy suggests that today is a "moment in which the impossibility of giving affect a determinate cultural form,"<sup>12</sup> such as state and global moves to address economic precarity in the face of corporate greed that fail to examine the ways differently racialized groups are distinctly affected, is indicative of separations between the nation, the state, and the U.S. as well as global economy. For Reddy, these cleavages are symptomatic of the rise of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls "the post-state state." Referencing Roderick Ferguson, Reddy describes this new post-security state, formed through transnational labor and capital movements and dependencies as well as a combination of neoliberal and moral logics, as an "administrative state" that is "freed from modern power," one that relies heavily on increased militarization at home and abroad. Its law governs through bureaucratic, objective recourse to morally, culturally, and historically vacant terminology, and with no consideration of the material or cultural circumstances of its subjects. And this administration produces what Reddy calls "racial cruelty" which is the excessive and "surplus violence" that accompanies the state-sanctioned and sanitized or necessary violence of militarism, such as excessive police violence against communities of color.<sup>13</sup>

One effect of this increasingly bureaucratic governmentality is the way the U.S. state attempts to render notions and experiences related to militarization, combat, wellness, and even sexuality, according to Reddy, "calculable." It then deploys what "data" it procures for bureaucratic and, in the sense of military recruitment and strategizing, violent ends. In this sense, for Reddy, as for Gilmore as well as Foucault, calculation, however absurd, is one way that an increasingly bureaucratized state produces increasingly complex metrics through which citizen life and the boundaries between citizen and non-citizen life are organized. And yet the more metrics we are subjected to, the less legible our lives become. As I address in chapter two, the affective and sensorial experiences of daily life become erased through the numeration and calculation necessary for expansive amounts of data to be processed and circulated.

Another effect is state co-optation of "progressive" agendas. A key example for Reddy is the state's increasing acceptance, with contingencies, of gay rights as demonstrated through events such as the inclusion of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act as a rider to the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2647) of 2010, as well as the *Windsor v. U.S.* and *Hollingsworth v. Perry* in conjunction with the *Shelby v. Holder* and *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* Supreme Court decisions in 2013. Some scholars have suggested that the hate crimes act gained legal and social importance not just because it joined the most extensive national defense budget in U.S. history, but also because there was growing awareness and outcry over teen suicides resulting from sexual humiliation, most notably around the time of the suicide of Rutgers student Tyler Clementi.<sup>14</sup> For Reddy, this adoption of gay rights has occurred at the expense and continuous erasure of the material conditions of non-white, non-western, and indigenous people, those rendered unknowable, irrelevant, or threatening through

normative institutional knowledge and domination. The LGBTIQ of color communities have rarely achieved the same inclusion sought through gay rights agendas; the ways the media framed the South Asian college students who exposed Tyler Clementi is one example of the ways people of color, regardless of their actions, remain the shadow of white male protection and liberation through progressive social movements. In this case, white male fragility, even as it includes non-normative sexuality, is centered as a primary social and legal concern. Non-normative sexuality no longer serves as the same kind of threat to white-maleness when compared to the threat of shame and physical harm at the hands of people of color. The specter of suicide is present as well; that Tyler would destroy himself as a result of an invasion of privacy by people of color is ideologically unthinkable.

Reddy also insists that the recent gay rights agenda, as a social movement adopted for state ends, undermines a historical focus on the cultural specificities of social movements, replacing cultural struggle and possibility with the right, so to speak, to be culturally vacant. A key example is the LGBT movement, which found success in 2015's *Obergefell v. Hodges*, to join the administrative function of the state through the right to marry. For Reddy and many queer of color scholars, the move towards gay inclusion in institutions such as marriage and the military fosters the continued production of the heteronormative, white-masculine, militarized, state subject. This citizen and consumer-subject is normalized while gender non-conforming people of color, non-normative modes of kinship, and alternative ways of life are increasingly excluded, rendered morally bankrupt and dangerous to the population.

The "transition" of the current sociopolitical milieu, as Reddy calls it, is one in which the state is fighting to maintain power over insurgent possibility in the wake of its "declining vitality" or sovereignty, resulting from increasing surplus labor and populations as well as expanding transnational economies, citizenry, and labor practices. One way this fight manifests is the state's adoption, and thus control, of various forms of queer life, particularly those that prior to this adoption remained under state and legal radar. Reddy describes this practice, clear in the acceptance of non-normative sexuality into the institution of marriage, which the state regulates, as indicative of "transnational disorganization of national interests" and legal violence's extension into the realm of mere life.<sup>15</sup> Apart from rights legislation, the state also responds with ever-increasing militarization of the domestic police force, which corresponds with increasing militarism abroad. As the events in Ferguson, Missouri; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Dallas, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; and many other locations in recent years, as well as the ongoing military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and increasingly North Africa make clear, bureaucratization hinges on ever increasing domestic militarization and expanding militarization overseas. This dissertation examines the psychosomatic effects of and aesthetic responses to this militarization in U.S. veteran communities.

Another subgroup included in the 2010 Matthew Shepard Act was disability, which includes attention to and clinical treatment for stress and mental disorders such as PTSD. In this way, concern for disability services and even rights also latches on to ever increasing military budgets, and thus military activity, to gain legitimacy. This brings me to the third case of a military subject who turns against the state, the military, and itself. In addition and juxtaposition to the domestic terrorism of Johnson and Long, the infamous whistleblower Chelsea Manning inhabited a distinct form of domestic and international threat. In Manning's case, the

intersections among disability in relation to mental wellness, anxieties around both gender and sexuality, militarization, and whiteness emerge.

In 2010, this whistle-blowing former Army service member leaked hundreds of thousands of classified military and diplomatic documents to Julian Assange's WikiLeaks. It remains the most expansive and comprehensive leak in U.S. Military history, exposing sensitive papers from various military operations to the world.<sup>16</sup> The very first of the leaks was accompanied by an anonymous note that read: "This is possibly one of the more significant documents of our time removing the fog of war and revealing the true nature of twenty-first century asymmetric warfare. Have a good day."<sup>17</sup> As Matthew Shaer of *The New York Times* puts it, Manning's act of sharing an extraordinary number of highly classified documents "represented the 'beginning of the information age exploding upon itself': a new era in which leaks were a weapon, data security was of paramount importance and privacy felt illusory."<sup>18</sup> A lower-level intelligence analyst in Iraq, Manning's leaks of classified documents led to astounding global consequences. It foreshadowed the prominence of WikiLeaks in world cyber politics as well as Edward Snowden's disruptive leaks of National Security Agency documents. Among the prominent documents and media released from Manning's leaks was the helicopter video that recorded the pointed eradication of Iraqi civilians, including children, and a few journalists working for the international news agency, Reuters.<sup>19</sup> Manning's position straddled bureaucratic and military powers, which gained her powerful access to the very classified documents that would scandalize and injure, setting her apart from most military members. In prison, Manning became an extremely controversial public figure, the subject of heated debates over the nexus between government and military transparency and the necessity of keeping highly sensitive or classified information from the global public. Anti-secrecy activists dubbed her a heroic icon, while many military and government leaders considered her a traitor to not just U.S. security and efforts throughout the globe, but Iraqi and Afghan civilians who risked their lives to aid the U.S. war efforts.

Long before President Obama commuted her sentence and her subsequent release in the spring of 2017, an event to which I will return, Manning received inhumane treatment at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Prison authorities placed her in solitary confinement numerous times to supposedly protect her from herself. Her nearly complete isolation throughout much of her seven years in prison led to a number of stress and despair-related mental disturbances as well as several suicide attempts. After the last of the attempts, prison authorities refused additional or emergency treatment for Manning, making no attempt to help or salvage her despite her status as U.S. service member, if also a criminal. Instead, they punished her with further isolation which only heightened her distress. The Army also attempted to charge her with violating the military code of conduct through her own suicide attempt, effectively charging Manning for attempting autonomy over her own life.

These charges deployed legal violence to delineate the material, affective, and psychic components of Manning's body that, once imprisoned, were no longer or perhaps never had been hers. Reclaiming Manning's body as belonging to the military and state, the charges were meant to further humiliate her in the face of continuous criticism and criminalization of her secret-breaching action as well as, I would argue, her gender non-conforming presentation. Rather than meeting her actions with the therapeutic cocktail common to veteran healing groups, the state not

only found Manning guilty for transgressing her own body--in more than one way, given her status as a trans woman--but punished her with the torture of limitless solitary confinement.<sup>20</sup> This continuous, extreme solitude exposed the ways Manning posed a stunning security and identity threat to the success of U.S. Militarism. Her incarceration alone was not enough; military leaders were attempting to erase not just her influence but sanity. In this way, like Johnson and Long, Manning's criminality against the U.S. military and state ruined her status as the invaluable, impenetrable military subject. In this sense, when veterans harm themselves or others, they are nearly always understood as suffering from the injuries of warfare and taken into redemptive care, unless their violence turns against the state, that is. In this sense, righteous retaliation in response to moral injury itself works to undo the military subject.

Like Johnson and Long, Manning's trans identity rendered her body a simultaneous embodiment of the repressive military subject and its abject; prior to transitioning, Manning spent most of her time in a military with a "don't ask, don't tell" policy which effectively silenced and erased her sexuality. After transitioning, Manning entered another group ostracized and, recently under the Trump administration, nearly banned in military life: trans people. Manning's case demonstrates that sexuality and gender are also capable of marking the limits of white enfranchisement and protection in U.S. military life. Manning's case also demonstrates the ways suicide confounds, in this case it adds to Manning's transgressions and rebellion against which the state must intervene. Like Tyler Clementi, Manning's suicide was an extreme threat to the state's sovereignty, enhanced when the white body is incarcerated and under continuous surveillance. In these cases, state anxieties over veteran destructive behavior emerge in state intervention as healing and punishment through retaliatory violence.

Yet, unlike with Johnson and Long, Manning's case ends with a commuted sentence and clemency.<sup>21</sup> Her extensive and consequential crimes against the military and state, once framed as everything from espionage to aiding the enemy, were eventually forgiven. Particularly after transitioning, Manning embodied what seemed to be the military's fundamental abject. Yet, the mounting pressure from anti-secrecy groups and trans-rights groups throughout the U.S., as well as the increasing visibility and sociocultural acceptance of trans people, affected Obama's decision to commute Manning's sentence just before departing from his presidency. Returning to Reddy, this pardon was an acceptance of not just LGBTIQ visibility and rights into military culture and life, but of Manning's supposedly righteous acts of transgressive transparency. LGBTIQ acceptance was waged to further a more tolerant or even liberal version of U.S. militarism that will, inevitably, effectively quell civilian discontent or dissent against U.S. military culture, broadly, and the imperial projects it promotes. Manning's whiteness, as well, is forgiven, despite his enormously destructive acts; a grace impossible for Johnson and Long, even as their crimes could have been framed as emerging from distress from combat injury as well as PTSD.

In this case, LGBTIQ acceptance and rights cut across the spectrum between whiteness and blackness in U.S. military culture. Throughout her case, Manning's lawyers used her "condition" of "gender dysphoria" to argue that she was not in a stable mental state when she chose to leak the documents. Her lawyers insisted that her distress over gender identity as well as the military's inability to accommodate her sexuality or gender led her to become more vulnerable to rash behavior and faulty judgment, which led to her crimes. Her decision to leak the documents was

attributed to her struggles with her LGBTIQ identity rather than what she first and consistently identified as her ethical and even moral awakening. As she made clear in an interview with ABC News, “I stopped seeing just statistics and information, and I started seeing people.” She continued “counter-insurgency warfare is not a simple thing. .... It’s not as simple as ‘good guys verses bad guys.’ It’s a mess.”<sup>22</sup> Rather than her trans identity, Manning references the workings of moral injury as the primary motivating force behind her decision to leak information. But this moral and ethical quandary was illegible to Manning’s legal counsel, prison administrators, and others with authority over her future. And in upholding Manning’s gender as a fundamental cause behind her illegal actions, her legal team pathologized Manning’s transgendered self. The claim that struggles with gender identity lead to extreme lapses in judgment to the point of criminal behavior pathologizes gender non-conforming behavior to downplay the severity of criminality. This pathologizing worked to incorporate Manning’s aberrations into the military fold; her legal team and military officials highlighted her difference to render her accessible to a world that would never comprehend her actions as justice, deflecting the ways they were a clear, even explicit, response to the political, ethical, and moral distress of U.S. militarism.

Johnson and Long, on the other hand, responded to what they saw as pervasive and historical domestic injustice. Theirs was a moral injury that occurred in and around combat in a different way; their sense of injustice was similarly ignored, but the ways it related to their military service and experiences were also erased. Returning to Reddy, the state and military developed a vested interest in incorporating Manning’s transgender identity into military life and therefore military surveillance, rendering transgender identification both recognizable and regulated within militarized rubrics. In doing so, it could minimize the critique of U.S. militarism, military culture, and imperialism abroad inherent in Manning’s crime. The frame of gender-based psychological or psychosomatic distress sanitized Manning’s righteous discontent and ethical criticisms; in foregrounding Manning’s gender struggles, the military backgrounded and even displaced the ways she turned against her military position, risking her life to expose widespread state and military corruption. This nexus between gender identity, pathology, and whiteness comprises what we might term a new form of “carceral whiteness,”<sup>23</sup> or punitive delicacy that foregrounds illness, whether real or fabricated, rather than moral injury, betrayal, treason, or criminality. We can see numerous cases of similar sanitation in media responses to the ever-common white, male mass shooters.

Manning’s case also launched a new age of insecure information that effectively undermines if not destroys concepts of classification and secrecy in relation to state and military projects. In this sense, Manning’s grand, treasonous gesture undermined the state’s sovereignty over its own imperial reach, exposing the necessary lie of state and military invulnerability. Snowden’s aftershock through the NSA as well as Assange’s instrumental power throughout Obama’s presidency and pivotal role in the 2016 U.S. election owe much of their existence and effects to Manning. The military’s inclusion of Manning’s transition has faced regressive push back from the Trump administration, particularly Trump himself, which again places the executive at odds with not only the law but military. Yet this reactionary response against LGBTIQ and feminist progress so common under Trump’s administration fails to undo the ultimate militaristic gains from its growing inclusion of LGBTIQ needs. As Reddy makes clear, the intersections between whiteness, LGBTIQ visibility and rights, and psychosomatic ability

buttress U.S. militarism at the expense of people of color both in and outside the military. Yet, in their status as structuring forces of U.S. militarism, these intersections also expose what remains both vulnerable and self-destructive about U.S. military culture.

### **Race/Religion/War and its Military Sacrifice**

Yet the intersections between gender and ability are not the only lens through which this dissertation explores the raciality of moral injury and veteran destruction. This dissertation also examines the ways the phenomenon of veteran suicide not only exposes the limits of U.S. imperial reach, but also the ways race, gender, and religion coalesce to form and undermine the U.S. military subject. It follows Keith Feldman and Leerom Medovoi's formulation of the "race/religion/war" triad as a "meaningful constellation" for understanding the "radically open-ended" orientation of contemporary western warfare, offering the notion of moral injury as one concept through which to understand this constellation and its ongoing effects (1-2).<sup>24</sup> Feldman and Medovoi offer the race/religion/war triad as an analytical rubric for approaching the question of how "certain forms of war making" have "produced" certain forms of "race making or religion formation" while possibly "unmaking" other race and religious formations (2). Looking to the genealogies of theological as well as political formations of the "other within" throughout Europe and the U.S., Feldman and Medovoi complicate the ways Franz Fanon's "phobogenesis," from his foundational *Black Skin, White Masks*, has been taken up in theories of anti-blackness (8-9). For Feldman and Medovoi, Fanon's reference to the othering of the Jewish man in relation to that of the Black man actually offers a way to understand the complex histories of racialization in and through religious difference throughout Europe, leading to the nexus between race, religion, and war in current militarization (8-9). Put differently, the race/religion/war triad frames Fanon's famous references to both Jewish and Muslim difference in ways that expand rather than narrow our understanding of Black racialization as an "antirelational" object under whiteness, the state, the military, and imperial culture. I return to this point in chapter four.

Questions of Black, Arab, and Muslim difference within contemporary militarization emerge in relation to the fetishized figure of the white, masculine, military subject, particularly war veteran. While the accounts and practices examined in this dissertation are primarily from post-9/11 veteran communities and therefore from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, this dissertation traces the notion of combat-related moral injury to the war in Vietnam, connecting the recent upsurge in veteran suicide and destruction to the first of the U.S. wars to demonstrate endless militarization and security as "counterinsurgency" warfare. It also follows David Theo Goldberg's recent discussion of militarism in its intersections with both race and religion. Building on the notion that race is "the secularization of the religious," Goldberg suggests that "racially-indexed warring" has a long history throughout Europe, leading to contemporary amalgamations of militarized states and religion, Israel being a key example, that are "underpinned by a more or less explicit commitment to the civilizational identifications with the Global North, and most notably European articulation" (20-3). For Goldberg's militarism, race is "born, fashioned, and reproduced" through warfare" (20). Calling these new articulations the "religiously racial," a shift in emphasis and function from the "racially religious" of early

modernity, Goldberg contends that militarization is “sewn together” with the theological, the theological “secularized . . . in state expression” while the state becomes “theologized in its reach for ever-expanding sovereign power.” Indeed, for Goldberg, U.S. militarism exerts a form of “muscular Christianity” (25).<sup>25</sup> Returning to Manning’s case as well as Reddy’s assertion that increasing militarization is a response to security breaches that undermine state sovereignty, this theological component of militarism demonstrates the ways increased severity in doctrine and dogma often emerges in response to shifting sociopolitical and cultural landscapes.

Goldberg offers the notion of “martial races” to describe the kinds of militarized subjects central to state militarization with its theological and political ends. For Goldberg, martial races, which are “militarized and militarizing races,” are comprised of “social subjects fashioned to embody” military qualities which Goldberg understands to be “raciological and religious character,” such as aggression, “manliness and loyalty,” a “fighting spirit,” “individualized privilege and independent power,” and “sovereign judgment and sacrifice” (27). These subjects then “enact warring masculinities” during and after, in and outside of combat. Of the martial qualities he describes, sacrifice, a deeply theological term not just in Christianity but in each of the Abrahamic religions and many world religions, becomes most important. Service members sacrifice for the military, the combat brethren, the nation, the military and domestic family, the “team” and “corporation,” the profit, the “institution,” and the “race.” Sacrifice becomes emblematic of this martial race.

To sacrifice or be sacrificed for the greater good, within the realm of specifically Christian tradition or theology, the one sacrificed must be worthy, as Jacques Derrida makes clear in his work on responsibility. Offering a form of relational ethics, Derrida considers Søren Kierkegaard’s reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac to consider the concept of “the gift of death,” which he describes as a “marriage” between faith and responsibility. This death describes the sacrifice of the self through the simultaneous sacrifice of another that the apprehension of death makes possible. It sacrifices justification of action and legibility among others to enter into an absolutely ethical, unknowable relation with “the transcendence of the other” which Derrida describes as a divine, “selfless goodness” (6). This divine mystery, which is based on a gnostic version of Christian theology, demands a responsibility that cannot be understood as such, or is understood as its opposite, in its moment of execution.

Following gnostic and forms of Christian mysticism, Derrida’s gift of death remains distinct in a number of ways from the more traditional Christian theology of Goldberg’s theological militarism. His reflection on the enormity and suffering of sacrifice within these mystical traditions, however, reveals the affective and emotional struggles true sacrifice is meant to demand. Derrida claims that when one chooses to sacrifice, one chooses to hate what one actually most loves: “I must sacrifice what I love. . . . Hate wouldn’t be hate if it hated only the hateful, that would be too easy. It must hate and betray what is most lovable” (65). Derrida’s repetitive language reiterates this impossibility; it counsels as if no finite number of reminders can suffice when the sacrificial challenge is this destructive. To sacrifice, one must hate what one loves for it to be an impossible act. Kierkegaard describes this paradox as a form of “madness.” For Kierkegaard and Derrida, the gift of death manifests as a sacrifice of love to absolute love through hatred, betrayal, and even murder. And in murdering what is most loved, the giver of death also receives death.<sup>26</sup> It relinquishes self-preservation; the absolutely ethical relation

between the self, other, and divine formed through betrayal is more valuable than the normative bodily or emotional needs that otherwise would be spared. Survival surrenders to this unknowable ethical commitment toward an impossible demand; it cannot be easy or it fails to be absolutely ethical.

Both Kierkegaard and Derrida challenge us to recognize and work through the productive fluidity between love and hate in relation to sacrifice. For the sacrifice to be a sacrifice and thus, for Derrida, ethical, love must become its opposite. For love to exist, it must become its opposite, and the same is said for hate. I want to suggest that this notion of Christian mystical sacrifice, which demonstrates the ways love and hate must cross the continuum into their opposites, informs an examination of moral injury in relation to combat trauma. With Christian sacrifice as the cultural and moral guide for militarism's sacrifice for state and nation, service members understand and follow one sacrificial ideal while experiencing the shock of the military's version of sacrifice. As I elaborate in chapters one and two, at first it seems that the uniformed service member exemplifies the idealized, invaluable citizen subject, the state's "most loved." But the impossibilities of Kierkegaard and Derrida's sacrifice disappear when militarism's sacrifice for the sake of combat, state, and nation actually takes place. Service members feel the fungibility that they actually embody. Rather than feeling worthy of utmost sacrifice, they recognize, at the moment of their or another's death, the broad disposability of both enemy combatants and U.S. service members. Thus one component of moral injury is the stark discontinuity between ideal forms of Christian theological sacrifice and the "sacrifice" of military combat.

In this sense, the Christian sacrifice within U.S. militarism, according to Goldberg, undergoes a paradoxical and ultimately destructive transformation, which questions of veteran PTSD and suicide unearth. Cases of veteran PTSD and suicide make clear that the militarized subject is bound by when, why, and how it is sacrificed, if the term sacrifice can even suffice for experiences of combat violence. Veteran PTSD and suicide question who sacrifices whom, and for what purpose? When the subject exceeds his boundaries through self-destruction he renders his status as martial race, fetishized subject untenable if not destroyed. Additionally, they undermine the state's and military's security, which is built on this subject's reification and sacrifice. As I discuss in chapters one and two, the military and state go to great lengths to limit or sabotage veterans' destructive efforts. This self-sacrifice becomes its own counter narrative to that of the loyal military subject and family, one that threatens a state sovereignty formed through Goldberg's theological-military violence. Bringing disability studies into conversation with this recent work on militarization, race, and religion offers the insight that moral injury, which often results in PTSD and even suicide, destabilizes U.S. militarization.

Sacrifice undertakes a third iteration when extended to discourse on racial capitalism and neoliberalism more broadly. Human capital, as Wendy Brown makes clear, reframes the citizen subject as "at once in charge of itself, responsible for itself, yet an instrumentalizable and potentially dispensable element of the whole," a fungibility military members embody in a visible way. Military subjects' disposability is reframed as sacrificial responsibility, or individual sacrifice, another tenet of neoliberal valuation. The notion of individual sacrifice for the good of the economy, or the good of the democratic whole, is significantly reimagined under contemporary neoliberalism (212).<sup>27</sup> "The people" breaks apart, becoming individuals who are supposed to understand the necessity of austerity, contingency, disappearing hours and benefits,

and other effects that undermine the stability of their existence. For Brown, neoliberal rationality applies market rationality to all areas of life and “configures human beings exhaustively” as “*homo oeconomicus*,” or market actors (30-1). These individual actors must accept “shared sacrifice,” which often includes “curtailed investment in education, infrastructure, public transportation, public parks, or public services,” always in the name of the economy (211). This citizen sacrifice for the economy parallels and counters contemporary notions of citizen sacrifice in the form of police militarization, diminished civil liberties, and military service in the name of national security. And each of these versions departs from the Christian sacrifice in and for love. When veterans self-destruct, the state exercises its paternalism, intervening to correct the cultural narrative and images gone awry, which demonstrates that veteran suicides do not count as sacrificial within rubrics of U.S. militarism. This paternalism works to maintain the structurally dominant, white, heteronormative citizen subject, fundamental to militarism, at the expense of those rendered disposable or invisible through militarism. This dissertation reads these forms of disposability as racialized in that the desperation to salvage veteran spirits and behavior is an acceptance and investment in the white, male, masculine citizen that remains the keystone for military dominance in both domestic and overseas spaces.

Referencing Orlando Patterson, Ruth Wilson Gilmore states that the “power to put humans in cages” stems from the very same power “to kill.” This power to kill manifests not only through the “ritualized punishment of the death penalty,” but also “by life sentences, as well as the ritual of serially excused police killings that transformed #BlackLivesMatter from a lament to a movement.” Gilmore shares Patterson’s simple explanation for this “continuum of killing to keeping: ‘One fell because he was the enemy; the other became the enemy because he had fallen.’” Gilmore explains that “human sacrifice rather than innocence” has always been what has “organiz[ed] the carceral geographies of the prison industrial complex” (236). Johnson, Long, and Manning, in their ways, understood and lived this continuum, each responding to this history and power of violence through disobedience, betrayal, and counter-violence.

Following Reddy’s discussion of security; this dissertation also sees increasing militarization as one key response to the ways U.S. military “enemies” fail to follow rules of engagement or conform to recognizable regimes. This dissertation does not assume a position in relation to scholarly debates on the question of perpetual warfare, on its global, economic, or political functions or its conjunctural frame. Rather, it contends that any analysis of the ways race informs or interweaves with this phenomenon of endless war, or of the relations between extraterritorial combat and domestic militarization, must consider the nexus between whiteness, masculinity, and ability that produces the repressive actor on which U.S. imperialism and militarism fundamentally depend. Therefore, these discourses must contend with combat-related moral injury, psychosomatic ability, and the continuous and growing threat of suicidal and other forms of veteran self destruction. Foucault famously names war as the event and politics as the “legitimation and consolidation of the hierarchy imposed in war” (5).<sup>28</sup> The concept of moral injury invites more thorough analyses of the ways war bleeds into daily politics.

Attention to moral injury and veteran self destruction, in particular, insists that the temporality of contemporary notions of perpetual war remain open to the veteran-civilian-insurgency dynamics that emerged during the years of the Vietnam War. In other words, this veteran destructiveness in response to endless counterinsurgency warfare traces beyond the limits

of a post-9/11 temporal frame. In this sense, the ways moral injury becomes racialized, one of this dissertation's key examinations, can be extended to and even claimed to originate with veteran encounters with Southeast Asian populations. This reading of the ways particular notions of U.S. white masculinity—fundamental to the military family and military culture—interweave with the function and effects of moral injury offers crucial insight to discourses on psychological and psychosocial wellness as well as disability studies more generally. As I discuss at length in chapter one, academic and popular discourse surrounding veteran PTSD, even that which considers the primacy of moral injury, nearly always fails to address the question of race as it relates to U.S. militarism as well as the encounters between U.S. military members and targeted populations abroad. This dissertation reads moral injury, or the moment of ethical and sociopolitical disturbance that often leads to PTSD, through the theoretical lenses of critical race studies and U.S. imperial culture. This reading illuminates the racial and imperial logics at work in the phenomenon of veteran suicide and self-destruction under U.S. imperialism.

This dissertation also brings the question of moral injury to ongoing discourses on individual and historical traumas as they relate to U.S. racial formations. It attempts to unpack the ways moral injury itself carries racialized notions of moral prowess, invulnerability, and individual, military, and state authority, understanding this racialized moral injury as fundamental to veteran trauma. Notions of combat trauma continue to evolve as modern warfare shifts its modes of presentation and dissemination. Paul Virilio, for example, has traced the emergence of “interstate delinquency” in fighting increasingly invisible targets as well as the expansion of states engaging in acts of war as a form of law enforcement rather than “legitimate” warfare. Virilio’s “war without war,” one of his most successful predictions, describes the manipulation of increased surveillance and other mechanistic technologies that accompany the numerous and expanding domestic police forces as well as render them more powerful.<sup>29</sup>

Introducing what he calls “dromological force,” Virilio has charted the ways contemporary warfare has followed the patterns of our digital era, relying heavily on movement and speed alongside and through technology and increasing the chasm of contact between service members on the ground and their targets. Yet this physical chasm shifted and increased technological intimacy, at times radically altering the context and expectations surrounding the moment of traumatic combat experience. Digital technology often provides clear images of targeted victims before and after death, which has a particular psychological and visceral impact on weapon operators. And the speed and ubiquity of contemporary militarization operates through different modes on the domestic front. Digital recordings of police brutality, for example, render instantly accessible systemic violence against people of color, circulating the disturbing footage in ways that (re)traumatize not only those involved but also members of the targeted populations. Yet this circulation simultaneously bears witness to these patterns of violence at the hands of domestic police. The ubiquitous imagery of protesters in Ferguson, MO, or Baltimore, MD encountering police forces in gear designed for opposing riots as well as enemy combatants serves as evidence of the ways domestic life remains a continuation of the state’s violence against its abject populations. Moral injury and veteran trauma framed through the question of U.S. militarism and race broaden these discourses to reflect on the ways trauma, especially combat trauma, cannot be comprehended without an understanding of the ways it is often used to buttress, yet also undermines, U.S. imperial culture and military pursuits.

Politics as enacting war logics is yet another effect of the ways imperial domination operates through the at times conflicting rubrics of racial capitalism and racial neoliberalism. Attention to both racial capitalism and “racial neoliberalism” becomes necessary precisely because of the unique sets of racialized figures and discourses produced through the intersections of neoliberal and capitalist logics, increasing militarism being a primary effect. My understanding of “racial capitalism” follows recent work by Jodi Melamed and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who make clear that capitalism itself “*is* racial capitalism.”<sup>30</sup> According to Melamed, capital must accumulate, and it “can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups” divided by race (77). As Gilmore puts it: “capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it” (240).<sup>31</sup> Melamed is clear that racial capitalism “displac[es]” the “uneven life chances” fundamental to capital accumulation, instead blaming the “fictions” of “differing human capacities” which isolates along race lines. Gilmore suggests that racial capitalism is a “logic of *antirelationality*” or a “technology” for “reducing collective life to the relations that sustain neoliberal, democratic capitalism.” Racial capitalism categorizes and organizes people and social forms, producing “social separateness” that distinguishes between groups and separates people from nature (78).<sup>32</sup> People remain even densely near one another but consider themselves too different for the kinds of identification and recognition often necessary for political connection.

Melamed makes clear that state ideologies of “democracy, nationalism, and multiculturalism” are the maps through which racial capitalism segregates populations and “truncate[s] relationality for capital accumulation” (79). Antirelational modes of identifying, communicating, and living, which increasingly feed capital, cover over the life and collective affirming modes of relationality found in most indigenous traditions, for example, or in Black radical thought, to name a few. Returning to Marx, Melamed recounts the ways Marx offers the histories of colonialism and the credit system as emerging together. This “dual system of whitewashing” eviscerated entire communities, including children, to earn capital through resource extraction, only to feed that money into the credit system, rendering it “neutral, clean, and earned through right” (81). Marx is clear that “capital comes into the world dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood.” For Marx, the democratic, capitalist state renders it impossible for its citizens to understand themselves as collective; relating to one another through things alone, people see in one another “not the *realization* but the *limitation*” of their own freedom (qtd. in Melamed 82). Today, these separations and bloody histories remain evident. Market interests and capital accumulation for state interests increasingly incorporate bodies of color while at the same time rendering non-white bodies within U.S. borders excessive and expendable, left to be policed, struggle, and even die.

These forces equally render non-white, non-U.S. citizens abroad collateral damage to U.S. militaristic and neocolonial interests.<sup>33</sup> Through discourse on inclusion, racial capitalism frames bodies of color as commodities that strengthen the prestige and power of its fundamental political, economic, and cultural institutions. The long inclusion of men and women of color into the military is a primary example of this process. As with the more recent inclusion of LGBTIQ people into military life through the repeal of *Don't Ask Don't Tell*, people of color have been drawn into military life, serving alongside men and women whose rights have far exceeded their

own and often suffering severe injuries or dying for a state that has failed to protect their communities.

This dissertation's understanding of neoliberalism as a logic, or a mode of reason, borrows in part from Brown's recent work on the dominance of neoliberal reason in contemporary politics. Brown names neoliberalism's logic of financialization as a governing force that continues to increase in influence and power. Neoliberalism is a "distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a 'conduct of conduct,' and a scheme of valuation" that serves a general mode and practice of "'economizing' spheres and activities" that have otherwise been produced through logics of social and public good (21). This shift dictates the bureaucratization of racial capitalism, particularly through the figure of the fragile, disrupted veteran. *Homo oeconomicus* read through the frame of racial capitalism, underscores the racial compositions meant to accrue the most or least value over time. Thus human capital serves as a useful concept for approaching the constellation of the relation between the self-destructive veteran and U.S. militarism.

Brown states that "no capital, save a suicidal one" will or can "freely choose its activities and life course" (41). That "capital" would be suicidal to be free, or to break from this realm of competition and scarcity, re-frames the suicidal veteran as yet another position and behavior through which *homo oeconomicus* is policed, which yet again intertwines the state, its militarization, and its imperial projects. The veteran's destruction is a threat to militarism's narrative of masculine heroism, resiliency, strength, and sacrificial service. As a trope of state power, the heroic, impenetrable veteran comes at a significant monetary cost, and this state and social investment is lost when the veteran is destroyed in ways that disrupt the bounds of state-sanctioned military sacrifice. In this sense, as Foucault makes clear, death serves as the subject's limit, the threshold upon which the state's power trips, falls, and fails.<sup>34</sup> To stop veteran suicide is to stop both the stagnation or erasure of the capital invested and accumulated through militarism and the state's loss of control over its narrative and the subjects this narrative produces. It is to stop the failure and bankruptcy of U.S. militaristic investments. As human capital, citizens become either "invested in or divested from" according to their potential "GDP enhancement" (110). We see this clearly in the continuous scramble to offset veterans' destructive behavior, primarily through state-sponsored treatment and wellness programs; veterans, in this sense, are not to have autonomy over their own demise. Their symbolic status is too great and stakes too high.

In addition to tracing the stratifications of racial capitalism, Reddy, Roderick Ferguson, and many others complicate notions of neoliberalism by centering both race and sexuality as rubrics through which an increasingly economized public sphere functions. If Brown names the economy as producing and governing the social hierarchy, queer of color theorists name race as the primary rubric through which neoliberal sociality is organized, with sexuality as a mediating force and frame. For Reddy, racialized bodies rendered less than human domestically and abroad remain under heavy surveillance while the increasingly free and rapid movement of bodies and commodities for the sake of the global economy remains celebrated but fostered. Yet, once again, Johnson, Long, and Manning trouble these distinctions and trends. As military members, they are trained for combat against those considered threats to the state and thus disposable; in uniform, they embody and perform the military subject, serving as commodities of inclusion for imperial

ends. But when they violently turn against other members of the state repressive forces or the state itself, they interrupt this process. In this moment, Johnson and Long embody the excess their bodies always simultaneously signify and produce, one fundamental to their subjection. Manning, on the other hand, embodies the tenuous line between state servant and enemy, accountability and treason, idealized white subject and deviant abject. Johnson and Long enact their abjection in relation to the heteronormative, white, male body their militarization upholds; Manning both inhabits and subverts that body, demonstrating a carceral whiteness that grapples in a different way with service member destruction that deviates from notions of state and military sacrifice.

### **Critical Trauma Art and Artisanal Destruction**

Suicide, one of the most common responses to both combat trauma and PTSD, among U.S. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans alone has increased so substantially that the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) has made suicide prevention its top priority. In 2012, for example, approximately twenty two veterans died by suicide each day. The DA's Veterans' Crisis Line, or suicide hotline, "has had more than [two] million callers since it was established in 2007," with approximately 490,000 "coming in last year."<sup>35</sup> Veteran suicide rates have become a national crisis. This self destruction becomes an outlet for expressing the space between subject and abject, human and nonhuman, state actor and insurgent opened through moral injury. Therefore, the military must manage it.

State and state-sponsored programs geared toward eliminating these destructive impulses have multiplied in the last decade. Most of these deploy methods centered around narrating the experiences, classified as trauma, to "work through" and "come to terms" with all that disturbed the injured veteran. Narration through primarily autobiographical writing remains a central component of these support groups and programs. This dissertation reads these ubiquitous, therapeutic practices as a homogenizing force that works to reintegrate the reactive, affected, and unpredictable veteran into the patriotic, heroic subject of martial might and sacrifice. An examination of these allows for a broader understanding of the role of veteran healing in U.S. militarism.

The second half of this dissertation departs from its focus on healing to addresses some of the ways non-narrative visual and performance art apprehend and address combat trauma and memory. It considers the question of art's ability to produce an affective realm through which traumatic experience can be engaged in the present, over and against its memory, and reads this engagement as a radically distinct approach to moral injury and combat trauma for the injured military subject. Trauma studies has long contended that trauma is fundamentally beyond the scope and possibility of representation. In this sense, "trauma art" becomes a conflicted notion. In her study of art's relation to trauma *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett unpacks the dichotomy between sense memory and "common memory." Common memory forms when experiences are translated into familiar narrative tropes that adhere to the language of healing and redemption. Bennet pushes us to ask what the lived experience of trauma, expressed through art practice, conveys about the ways U.S. militarism organizes the

military body schema with its affective registers. In other words, what do forms of art in response to trauma reveal about the underpinnings and relations of that trauma, and conversely what that trauma exposes about the nature of the relations involved in moral injury?

Bennett is most interested in the “affective operations of art,” and on the at times conflicted ways art becomes situated in relation to trauma (3). She opens the question of how art becomes a realm through which experiences are (re)engaged, the memory of those experiences put into play, and the experiences and memories themselves reworked.<sup>36</sup> Art, for Bennett, “operates” on this porous “boundary” between trauma, memory, and creative practice when it engages the subject of trauma without centering or prioritizing a coherent narrative of the original traumatic experience (4). In this sense, the form an art piece, practice, or performance takes is equally important if not more important than the narrative account of the traumatic experience or the “meaning” behind art that seeks to understand the complex relationship between art and trauma. Nonnarrative art more closely examines this porous threshold.

Arguing against the need to theorize art in ways that “commit us” to “programmatic understandings” about art’s relation to “experience and subjectivity,” Bennett suggests that the “manner in which a visual arts ... register and embody affect” needs to be the investigative question for those interested in art practices that engage trauma (4). The historical specificity of the traumatic experience remains, if marginal to the affect and experience created in the time of the practice. Perhaps this marginal or tangential relation to trauma is precisely what produces the transformative affect of what this dissertation terms critical trauma art, or art practice that renders strange memory’s normalizing force in relation to trauma. This dissertation examines the intersections among art practitioners’ psychosomatic responses to their practice as well as the affect they produce and relationality they apprehend. While this dissertation does not directly engage debates in psychoanalytic and memory studies surrounding the question of trauma, it examines the ways discourse on PTSD, specifically, restricts and undermines the potential of critical trauma art to produce affective registers that break open the psychosomatic schemas that organize subjectivity under U.S. militarism. On the other hand, it approaches this critical affective potential through an examination of veteran art practices that approach traumatic experiences without legible, narrative catharsis and healing. This dissertation asserts that the potential of critical trauma art practice would be most useful for psychoanalytic discourse on PTSD. As Bennett suggests, trauma is often “not evinced in the narrative component” or even the “ostensible meaning” of art pieces, but rather in a “certain affective dynamic internal to the work” (1).

In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster famously addressed the question of what art does and its relation to subjectivity, offering that trauma discourse is a continuation of “poststructuralist critique of the subject by other means” (168). For Foster, the subject of trauma discourse is simultaneously ““evacuated and elevated.”” Evacuated, the traumatized subject opens the psychosomatic schema to, among other contextual influences, the series of relations that work to produce the injured military subject at its onset. Critical trauma art approaches, if also reifies, the wounded veteran as the primary subject of combat PTSD discourse, exposing the immense U.S. cultural and institutional investments in an impenetrable, white, male, military subject.

This dissertation examines the relations between militarized subject and abject, traumatized in distinct ways. Through their aesthetic engagement with at times shared traumatic experiences,

in what ways are participants in critical trauma art practices deconstituted, their relations to one another exposed, even as their structural positions remain upheld? Chapter one, “Moral Injury, PTSD, and the Limits of the Human,” traces the discursive and experiential connections between moral injury and increasing suicide rates for combat veterans. The chapter contends that Jonathan Shay’s foundational examination of the relation between moral injury and PTSD exposes the ways the morality of the U.S. militarized subject is bound up with ongoing projects of white, Christian nationalism. The white, Christian, male subject and his nuclear family are not just the bedrock of the state but fundamental to the experience of moral injury itself. This chapter then reads “moral injury” alongside “hood disease,” or “inner-city PTSD,” a concept developed in 2014 by clinicians at Harvard’s School of Public Health to describe the effects of daily violence on U.S. inner-city school children. In contrast to moral injury, hood disease upholds the ways bodies of color and urban spaces remain always already “pathologically non-heteronormative,”<sup>37</sup> outside the realm of patient and thus person. To be a patient like the teen and veteran is to be capable of benefiting from empathy and therapy, of growing from ill to well. With hood disease, there is no aspiration to wellness; psychosocial illness and vulnerability to ubiquitous violence frame these urban bodies and spaces. Institutional authority frames morality as injurious in a time when rights discourse is increasingly one of morality without specificity, history, and thus meaning. Each of the combat PTSD projects use creativity as a means to suicide prevention as the implicit end. It understands veteran suicide in response to moral injury as a destructive evacuation of the disorientation brought about through moral injury and, in this sense, a response to the violence of militarism. Through this destruction, the veterans’ relation to their militarized subjectivity comes undone.

Therapy and healing are not just to reverse this critical destruction, they are its antithesis. Chapter two, “Operation Homecoming: Veteran War Writing, Atmospheric, and Compulsory Healing,” tracks this primary function of bureaucratic expansion. Through a focus on *Operation Homecoming*, the Veterans’ writing program that launched in 2004 and was a “landmark partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Defense,” this chapter understands the increasing public demand for Veterans’ combat narratives as a bureaucratic pattern of surveillance and management as well as a means through which the state reifies its militarized racio-religious subject. It outlines the ways combat experiences are written and retold in at times meticulous detail and then archived. Often accessible to the public, these experiences are reframed, publicly valorized, and disseminated for expanding military surveillance and recruitment. *Operation Homecoming* makes calculable and instrumental the experiences of domination over military “enemies,” by whose labor and death western citizenry expands. The continuously increasing public demand for Veterans’ combat narratives itself not only perpetuates the surveillance of U.S. citizens but glorifies the racial, religious, masculine, and martial components necessary for citizen status in a militarized U.S. state. The chapter contends that these stories demonstrate the workings of white supremacy in combative encounters with Iraqi and Afghan people, and how this narration sutures militarized whiteness to its imagined Christian community.

Continuing to examine questions of personal narration in response to trauma, chapter three, “Undoing the Militarized Body Through Artisanal Destruction,” turns to the Combat Paper Project, a mobile art event in which community members pulp military uniforms to press into

paper.<sup>38</sup> It suggests that Combat Paper as a practice creates the conditions for writing or performative expression in relation to trauma rather than the expression itself. Combat Paper destroys to create. Its destruction produces new conditions, creating anew a surface for an emerging “self” who could attempt to represent the violent histories of US combat. Distinct from the militarized subjects that arrive to destroy the uniform, this self emerges through destruction, a process this chapter terms artisanal destruction, which disorients the military body from its uniform. Artisanal destruction precedes recourse to a form of self-referential expression that can and would “speak” about experiences of combat violence and trauma. This emerging “self” is collective, comprised of bodies that apprehend their vulnerability to and through others that U.S. militarism renders toxic and inhuman, with whom they are agonistically connected. This chapter contends that critical trauma art, or art practice that centers artisanal destruction in its engagement with individual and collective trauma, enacts a form of remembrance, which, for Walter Benjamin, is a mode of commemoration that holds open the psychosomatic wounds of destruction. This remembrance keeps “moral injury” open and volatile.

Through its play with destruction, Combat Paper functions as an alternative to the suicidal escape. The artisanal process reconnects body, human, and object, producing an affective realm that opens to the abject and even nonhuman. The affect created is a disorienting, unsettling sense that adheres to no recognizable political sensibility.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, artisanal destruction is an affectively and psychosomatically destructive practice, engaging the trauma of moral injury, that centers yet gestures beyond the experiences and memories of the military subject’s encounter with its other. In its destruction, it becomes a moment of critical trauma art, one of collective play with commemoration.

This critical trauma art, with its affective registers and body as porous threshold, lead this dissertation to its concluding examination of the intersubjective relationality and ethical sensibilities that emerge through destruction. The fourth chapter, “*abu ghraib arias*” examines Philip Metres’ chapbook [2012] of the same name. The longpoem is comprised of excerpts from varying texts such as U.S. soldier emails, testimonies from Abu Ghraib torture victims, the Standard Operating Procedure manual for Camp Echo at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, the Bible, and the Code of Hammurabi, to name a few. The first edition--only 200 copies, printed and hand-bound--was made with combat paper from the pulped uniforms of Army veteran Chris Arendt, who was stationed at Guantanamo Bay.

The text, described as an “echo chamber” for the “unspeakable,” assembles numerous redactions and caesuras, attempting to demonstrate the violent disintegration of bodies under torture. Returning to Benjamin’s remembrance, what temporalities does the paper as object engage and reveal? This chapter contends that *abu ghraib arias* is an example of not just the ways art and literary objects might embody and produce forms of remembrance but also the ways poetics approach and respond to apprehensions across difference. It asks: can, or when can, agonism, rage, and hate be transformative? *arias* in many ways stages the conflict apprehended through artisanal destruction. Through its erasures, caesuras, and multivocality, it demonstrates the antagonistic yet fragile relations of militarism. This chapter suggests that the military subject’s undoing exposes an affective and psychosomatic vulnerability to difference, and that *arias* demonstrates this through its juxtaposition between the echo/ex and blues series.

This dissertation concludes with “World Breaking: a Decolonial Feminist Practice,” a discussion of the affective and political possibilities brought forth through the practice of critical trauma art. Reintroducing the notion of the human and building from the relationality examined in chapter four, this chapter turns to the notion of “decolonial ethics.”<sup>40</sup> As Jodi Melamed makes clear, in recent years indigenous relational theory, its own form of decolonial thought, has emerged as a form of critique that can counter racial capitalism’s divisive rhetoric and even systems. This chapter follows María Lugones’s decolonial feminism, which centers a decolonial ethics of emerging collectivity. This ethics is grounded in an understanding of collectivity as organized through the relational binds among bodies gathered in concert. For Lugones, these binds are among human bodies as well as those of non-human animals and organic objects from the surrounding environments. This collectivity, these relations, make both sensible and visible our dependencies.

This concluding chapter begins the work of developing a decolonial ethics from the position of the military subject, with attention to questions of antagonism as avenues through which relational dependencies can be understood. Lugones’s contends that the possibilities of relational coalition open not through “a rethinking of the relation with the oppressor,” but rather through “the logic of difference and multiplicity and of coalition at the point of difference.”<sup>41</sup> I will argue, by way of conclusion, that the practice of artisanal destruction makes available what this dissertation terms a “politics of non-arrival.”<sup>42</sup> This dissertation contends that artisanal destruction accesses not only this ethical sensibility that builds from the relational components of combat trauma, but also produces the conditions for a decolonial sensibility, practice, and ethics. Following José Esteban Muñoz’s queer futurity that rejects the present by sensing the present’s past and future, the conclusion considers the affective and psychosomatic effects this disorientation and non-arrival make possible.<sup>43</sup>

## Chapter One

### **Moral Injury, PTSD, and the Limits of the Human**

Returning from seemingly endless military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. veterans often suffer psychological and psychosomatic injuries. As Amy Amidon, clinical psychologist at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego, reflects, many service members share experiences in which “they, or someone close to them, violated their moral code.” This could mean a number of scenarios: “hurting a civilian who turned out to be unarmed, shooting at a child wearing explosives, or losing trust in a commander who became more concerned with collecting decorative pins than protecting the safety of his troops.” But injury could result from inaction as well. Service members might feel “haunted” by what they view as cowardice and non-action, “traumatized” by a tragic mistake that they “witnessed and failed to prevent.”<sup>44</sup> Though they have existed from the origins of state and social warfare, Sophocles’ Ajax being an early example, these stories of anxiety, dread, and guilt related to moral transgression in and around combat appear today, in the ongoing aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, with frequency and urgency.

After nearly a lifetime of work with Vietnam’s struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Veterans Affairs Psychologist Dr. Jonathan Shay reintroduced the classic term “moral injury”<sup>45</sup> to describe PTSD’s primary injury. The notion of moral injury has become prevalent throughout the psychological and clinical literature on PTSD as well, in part following Shay’s seminal work.<sup>46</sup> Psychologists define moral injury as an “act of serious transgression that leads to serious inner conflict” primarily because the experience “is at odds with core ethical and moral beliefs.”<sup>47</sup> Though it is often used in relation to combat PTSD, the concept has been applied to many similarly difficult circumstances, for example, teachers’ disciplinary behavior towards students.<sup>48</sup> More specifically, moral injury occurs in response to events in which the subject is “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs.”<sup>49</sup> What these core ethical and moral beliefs might be becomes paramount to understanding what lies at the center of combat PTSD, which, according to Shay, is one of moral injury’s common results. Shay’s correlation between moral injury and PTSD has been contested; some clinicians working with veterans today separate moral injury from PTSD entirely, suggesting that, rather than the origin of combat trauma itself, moral injury is its own psychosomatic struggle. They claim that one key difference between moral injury and PTSD is that PTSD is the result of fear, while moral injury results from guilt over infringements that are more fundamentally social.<sup>50</sup> While distinctions between fear and guilt in this context are important for a longer study, Shay’s analyses of the ties between veteran PTSD and moral injury remain useful for understanding the temporality of moral injury in relation to the intricacies of trauma under U.S. militarization and imperial culture. For Shay, “moral injury” describes the crux of the psychological, psychosocial, and psychosomatic injury that occurs in military combat and often leads to the development of PTSD. It is the “betrayal of ‘what’s right,’” particularly by someone who holds military and thus a certain moral authority, and this betrayal proves “essential to combat trauma.”

Referencing the “vast and distant military and civilian structure” that organizes and maintains the military’s involvement in modern warfare, Shay’s work, seeks to make clear the ways the military is “ultimately a moral structure,” a “*fiduciary*,” and a “trustee holding the life and safety” of the service members (15). In this sense, Shay’s understanding of the military as inherently moral, as a fundamentally moral sociopolitical structure, is compatible with classic philosophical work on military and war by theorists such as Carl von Clausewitz and his contemporary counterpart Michael Walzer.<sup>51</sup> The legitimacy and effectivity of the military as a moral structure is assumed not only by service members themselves but the civilian population they serve. For Shay, it is when this assumption is compromised or proven to be an assumption that moral injury takes place. Shay claims that it is the “moral dimension” of trauma that “destroys virtue” and “undoes” what is otherwise understood to be a service member’s “good character” (37). Shay’s introduction of moral injury into the discourse on the growing pervasiveness, and multiplying varieties, of combat-centered PTSD has influenced psychoanalytic and sociocultural criticism, war journalism, and other analytical fields. His connections between trauma, PTSD, and moral injury invite inquiry into moral injury’s unanticipated effects. In this chapter, I contend that Shay’s seminal work on the relation between moral injury and PTSD exposes how the morality of U.S. militarism is bound up with the ongoing project of white, Christian nationalism and its masculine, able-bodied, impenetrable, human, citizen subject. As discussed in the introduction, this white, Christian, man and his nuclear family are not just the foundation of the U.S. nation state but fundamental to the experience of moral injury itself.

## **The Morality of War**

Referencing ongoing debates about just and unjust warfare, Étienne Balibar recently suggested that the “conditions” that made possible US engagement in the Iraq War contradicted international law and undermined the United Nations. They “illustrate[d] a regional politics of power” as well as a far-reaching, “global” and even “revolutionary claim of sovereignty.” For Balibar, this sovereignty has been “reducible neither to material national interest[s]” nor to the “status of protector of the existing international order.” He sees the “target” of this sovereignty as not Iraq or even Al Qaeda but rather “the United Nations themselves,” which “the Bush administration wanted to radically delegitimize.”<sup>52</sup> In this sense, in particular, the Iraq War was as much about a national moral principle in its relation to international sovereignty as it was about oil, and in many ways this solidified the breakdown of conditions for determining whether warfare is just or unjust, moral or immoral. Indeed, recent US warfare seems to have expanded far beyond the striving for resources and strategic military positioning of most of the twentieth century. For Balibar, US anxiety over even the semblance of international sovereignty far exceeds the power or effects of international law.

The morality Balibar referenced remains the driving force in US international relations. What cultural tropes and narratives shape this injurious morality? What do we mean when we reference morality, and not just from a psychoanalytical and psychosocial lens? This morality of U.S. militarism has roots in specifically Protestant forms of Christianity, as does U.S. law. The

connections between law and morality have been a subject of philosophical inquiry for centuries. Often, if one refuses to follow a law or any number of sovereign laws, one is considered not just violent, but immoral. As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron White once made clear, “the law,” as in US federal law, is “constantly based on notions of morality.”<sup>53</sup> The notions of morality White references are Biblical; Protestant Christianity, specifically, remains the foundation for a militarized moral compass.

Yet “absolute morality” in U.S. political life—morality based on Christian doctrine, idealized as it buttresses and is defended through U.S. warfare—is “never as absolute” as it sounds. The discrepancy between absolute and necessity frame combat’s moral injury. The moral prohibition against killing, for example, central to most major world religions and secular laws as well, remains in conflict with the presumed inevitability and necessity of war, or organized killing on a grand scale. This contradiction nearly guarantees that moral injury will occur, and is no surprise. The “vast majority” of U.S. citizens acknowledge that basic moral commands demand occasional disobedience, and embrace military combat as an exception. William Bennett, a conservative political pundit who served as secretary of education under Ronald Reagan, argues that “war itself is a moral crucible,” or the “place” where the “highest moral values are forged,” suggesting that people opposing war, such as those involved in anti-war movements, are “harbingers of moral decay” (131).<sup>54</sup> Absolutest morality as the official morality of U.S. social life is incapable of recognizing difference, nuance, agonism, or contestation, all of which are central to any genuine democratic process. People’s experience of morality demonstrates that contradictory, equally powerful forces influence daily moral judgments. Morality lived becomes situational, eligible for discussion and even critique, whether or not the eligibility is recognized.

Janet Jakobson and Anne Pellegrini examine the long history of the relation between U.S. law and morality as it relates to religion and the regulation of sex and sexuality. They outline the ways that certain forms of Protestant Christianity remain the bedrock of U.S. Legislation and insist that a discussion of “morality in American public culture” is almost always a discussion of “religion,” which is to say Christianity (4). That U.S. institutions refer to a particularly Christian morality remains common sense in US political and social discourse. Citing debates over public holiday displays and events, in Supreme Court rulings on marriage and sexuality, and more, Jakobson and Pellegrini describe entrenched collaboration between U.S. state and military institutions, U.S. law, and Christianity.

Yet Jakobson and Pellegrini question whether consensus among religious views to address morally contentious issues on a national level, which would lead to claims of moral cohesion and thus superiority, would be the best method for imagining a public morality that might guide U.S. citizens. Referencing the “rich history” of U.S. progressive movements, they argue that morality in U.S. social life has never been simply conservative. And they suggest that U.S. secularism is hardly secular. The “Christian Coalition” foregrounds the notion of “Americanness” as closely linked to Protestant “commitments” (13). They claim that lack of religious freedom in the U.S. directly relates to the fact that there is no true disestablishment in U.S. political life. Protestantism remains the “de facto established state religion” (104). Ultimately, for Jakobson and Pellegrini, the heterosexual couple and its single-household, Christian, nuclear family maintains the symbolic status as “the nation’s anchor,” or the “body

politic on a smaller scale.” This family, built on exclusion and acts of differentiation, stands for the state’s reproduction and future (122). Any other domestic arrangement becomes immoral and unstable; this historically racialized dichotomy works to reassure the moral majority of the U.S. population. For one group to claim “moral rightness,” it must establish another group or groups as inherently immoral or even abhorrent (135). Many freedoms supposedly guaranteed to all citizens, such as forms of privacy and protections, become determined in relation to the self-contained, property owning, white, Christian nuclear family.<sup>55</sup> The discrepancy between this narrow moral compass and the lived experiences of a tremendous number of citizens subject to U.S. law also forms the conditions for injured moral sensibility.

More recently, as discussed in the introduction, David Theo Goldberg has unpacked the racio-religious components of U.S. and European militarism, suggesting that the military has become “to modernity” what “the [Christian] church had been to the medieval: the symbol and instrument of regulating social order, the disciplining fraternal order, the mark and measure of social character, social personality, the locus of prevailing political economy” (33).<sup>56</sup> The military follows the Christian church in its normative function, the nuclear family expanding to the “military family—a ubiquitous phrase in military training and social circles—of white, Christian nationalism.

### **Moral Injury: The Power of Myth**

During warfare, the discrepancy between absolute moral mandates guiding warfare and the practice of combat exposes reactive behaviors that provoke “terror, shock, horror, and grief.” Jonathan Shay acknowledges that these experiences of shock are enough to cause irreparable psychosomatic damage but insists that his work with veterans leads him to conclude that “moral injury” itself remains “essential” to “combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury.” Shay determines that Veterans can, actually, “recover” from the horror and grief they experienced during combat once they are no longer in extreme danger, but only “so long as ‘what’s right’ has not also been violated” (19-20).<sup>57</sup> As long as their understanding of militarized morality remains without contradiction, their psyches do not reach irreparable rupture. For Shay, moral injury pushes war to “destroy the social contract” that “bind[s] soldiers to each other, to their commanders, and to the society that raised them” (17).

Comprised of not just the “shared expectations and values” of the military but the “traditions” and “archetypal stories” of social life, the sociality that shapes the service members’ understandings of absolute morality offers lessons to be “emulated or shunned” (6). Produced through these social and military channels, this moral world becomes what most service members “regard as legitimate, ‘natural,’” and “personally binding.” As military subjects, they feel bound to the moral ideals that guide their personal and military lives. For Shay, this moral clarity becomes necessary for motivating service members to enter dangerous combat situations (6). Particularly the US military is “a moral construction” that functions and operates through this defining characteristic (5).

Demonstrating not just what moral injury looks like in contemporary warfare but also its genealogical ties to European history, Shay comparatively analyzes his therapeutic sessions with

Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD alongside the plight of Achilles in Homer's *The Iliad*. Explaining why Achilles' tragedy relates to moral injury and PTSD, Shay points to the Greek name "Achilles (Akhí + lâuos) which means he 'whose *lâós* [host of fighting men] has *ákhos* [grief].'" In name alone, Achilles is linked to a life-altering, debilitating grief; his legacy "entails *pêma* [pain, grief] for ... the Achacans" when he finally "withdraws" from his devastating war (25).<sup>58</sup> Paired with grief, rage, or what Shay qualifies as "indignant" and even "divine rage," immediately erupts through moral injury. Indeed, Shay suggests that "rage," rather than "*Iliad*," would be the more accurate title of Homer's epic poem, one that Homer's audience may have known (20). Shay focuses on the notion of dignity, mined from "indignant." Indignant rage "aris[es] from social betrayal" and in doing so "impairs a person's dignity" through the "violation of 'what's right.'" In *The Iliad*, Homer uses *mênis*, what Shay translates as "indignant rage" or "indignant wrath," for the "rage that ruptures social attachments," this indignant rage becoming "uncomfortably familiar" to anyone who works closely with combat veterans (22). And indignant rage clears the path for what Shay describes as "berserk rage," or rage central to extreme destruction of social and political bonds as well as self-destruction, often resulting in veteran suicides.<sup>59</sup>

Shay argues that the "moral strength" of any military becomes "impaired" by every wrongful actions and "injustice," and that this damage takes place regardless of the proximity or distance between the affected members and the trauma (27). Moral injury wrecks veterans' fundamental respect for those who have died in combat regardless of nationality, humane treatment of prisoners of war, and basic respect for and adherence to military protocols and chain of command (25-6). Moral injury also betrays "*thémis*," or the way military members often understand combat, and the world more generally, in dichotomous frameworks, an understanding aligned with notions of absolute morality. This overly dichotomous "simplification and shrinkage" of the political landscape renders combat adversaries as either "absolute all[ies]" or "absolute enem[ies]" (25). As Shay explains, "normal adults wrap *thémis* around themselves as a mantle of safety in the world." For these veterans, an absolute enemy cannot be respected even in death. U.S. militarism relies heavily on policy and strategy that follows moral absolutes, yet absolutist rhetoric and action undermine military might by exacerbating the psychic divide and ethical conundrum. At the same time, this psychic break reverses the disjunctive shift between absolutist morality and practical life; service members enter combat expecting to be guided by a moral compass, yet this militarized morality morphs into increasingly absolutist notions of enemy, ally, and violence.

In addition to the repetition of the disjuncture between absolutist and practical morality, found in civilian and combat experiences, the idealized nuclear family also creates the condition for moral injury. Shay connects what he calls "good parenting" with "good character," which, for Shay as well as the military, becomes invaluable for military "success" (32). He compares the relationship of vulnerability between a child and a parent to that of a soldier and the modern military. Several of Shay's veteran interviewees describe the corruption and immoral behavior they encountered from their commanders in Vietnam as akin to "a mother who sold out her kids to be raped by [their] father to protect her own interests" (5). This trauma, then, mirrors that of primary, parental neglect, violence, and even Oedipal disturbance. For Shay, "good parenting" is what establishes a child's and eventually adult's "moral character," a developmental model for

shaping civilians into combatants ready for military service. And character also determines moral injury. These veteran accounts of shattered trust and moral sensibilities demonstrate that if one's "moral character" is established in childhood, there is no guarantee it will remain intact. Moral injury indicates that character may not withstand the shock of trauma. Shay's work also demonstrates the ways the nuclear family remains the psychosocial foundation for military and national morality and belonging. As Lee Edelman would suggest, children, and their relations to their parents, remain the state's cultural and imperial future.<sup>60</sup> Shay's case studies also connect this family unit to the dichotomous thinking necessary for service member vulnerable to moral injury.

Again referencing Achilles' plight, Shay notes that "moral tragedy" or "moral unluckiness" ultimately destroyed Achilles' character, destroying his self-respect and will to persevere in accordance with his principles (30-1). The term "unluckiness" suggests that what happened to Achilles, and by extension to service members in combat, is tragic happenstance. Luck and chance may be components of Greek tragedy, but they trouble the links Shay draws between Achilles' story and veterans' experiences. "Moral luck" mystifies the predictability and even inevitability of moral injury as an outcome of U.S. militarism. Shay touches on the contradictions and flaws of the chain of command and its highly technological, impersonal combat tactics, though these contradictions existed long before current military technology. A common combat acronym, "SNAFU" or "Situation Normal, All Fucked Up," originated not in Vietnam but in World War II (19).<sup>61</sup> A normalcy about warfare and combat is that the abnormal, inexplicable, and irredeemable will happen.<sup>62</sup>

Yet through what Paul Fussell calls "Norman Rockwellized" and "Disneyfied" military films and texts,<sup>63</sup> U.S. militarism socializes soldiers and civilians to be shocked over the visceral horror of combat. Particularly the mutilation of bodies and losses of limbs. This fear of death and dismemberment "breaks down many fixed contours of perception" while "utterly dissolv[ing] others," leading to either numb or hyperactive senses and a fundamentally paranoid mode of moving through the spaces of combat (10). I will return to question of bodily mutilation and psychosomatic sensation in chapters three and four. Sanitized cultural representations of war, and even simulated and live action war training, cover over this visceral component, combat's raw horror; and the targeted populations remain, as do the dead (6). These remnants, their haunting, (re)awaken grief, or the mourning of those unjustly exterminated in ceaseless, global militarism and warfare. In these spaces of sudden ethical and moral disorientation, service members face the horror of these losses and the demand to mourn those they never knew or even perhaps killed. They mourn through a visceral horror. In this sense, grief arises with responsibility, the two inseparable in combat. Shay explains that for veterans suffering from PTSD, the "dead . . . continue to hover" (7). Daily, afflicted service members are forced to reconcile their positions against the specters they encounter. The largely nonwestern populations, governed by international laws that both abandon and smother them, challenge the service members' sense of not just morality but justice. White, Christian national belonging unravels, leaving behind anxiety, aggression, and despair.

Veterans from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, in particular, encountered deceptive warfare that shock their moral sense as well. Shay points out that "enemy combatants" messed with the "most basic functions" of the mind. While mind games have always been part of war,

the range and effects of psychosocial and psychosomatic trickery have expanded since Vietnam (34). Shay links the experience of object deception and surprise, for example, with experiences of torture; prolonged states of panic, suspicion, and vigilance “destroy” their “confidence in [their] own mental functions” (35). Like torture victims, service members lose their capacity to trust their senses, their relations to objects in the physical world around them, and the language they hear, which leads to mental states resembling schizophrenia. Thus, combat PTSD is often confused with many mental and personality disorders; as I will soon discuss, combat PTSD’s chameleon-like qualities render it nearly impossible to diagnose quickly, if at all. Simultaneously every and no disease, PTSD indexes the boundaries of mental wellness. Shay describes the “social institution of war” as creating “total captivity” with opposing sides working together to “keep soldiers in place and at each other” (36). In betraying “what is right,” combat exposes that something fundamental to militarism eludes justice, as well as the injustice of U.S. law itself, a point I revisit in chapter four.

Shay contends that the only way to begin to heal from the trauma of moral injury is to seek its “communalization.” This healing involves having the spaces and resources to “tell the story to someone who is listening” and “who can be trusted to retell it truthfully” to people who might help (4). At times this communalization is often “impossible” in that “high-stakes betrayal” is often too “frightening and painful” for people who have not experienced combat to hear. For Shay, narratives of war trauma jeopardize the “adult cloak of safety,” mentioned above, the shelter from the contradictions of white, Christian national identity. Veteran trauma narratives undermine the legitimacy and affective potency of *thémis*, leaving civilians powerfully motivated to “deny the truth” of trauma narratives, “avoid hearing them,” or “forget them” (37). They might become “terrified and disoriented,” an affective slippage that I examine more thoroughly in chapters three and four. Yet U.S. culture also demands a certain kind, the right kind, of war narratives. Civilians readily consume combat material through blogs, memoirs, or projects spearheaded and curated by the state, as chapter two makes clear.

This need for community storytelling and collaboration also demonstrates the ways the military subject is never, from the start, the self-sufficient individual its citizen ideal portrays. Fundamentally communal, healing can occur only through communication with others, through connected suffering with people beyond one’s inner circle of loved ones and troops. In this sense, programs centering Veteran war narratives, discussed in chapter two, become clinically necessary. And they make possible the circulation of memories that, even as they serve to reify the strength and heroism on which militarism relies, unsettle the citizens they encounter.

And with combat trauma, language itself becomes suspect. Its deception, unstable veracity, leads service members to lose faith in communicative truth. For example, leadership that deploys “lies and euphemisms” continues to destruct the “social trust” and “destro[y]” the service members’ “confidence” in language (33). The political language of militarism undermines the idea that meaning can be “trustworthy,” leaving veterans increasingly paranoid, despairing, and destructive. What, then, do service members engage when they deploy language for therapeutic ends?

## **Guilt, Sacrifice, Substitution**

Rage and grief are not alone in the psychic work of moral injury. Another primary feeling, leading to a number of psychological and psychosocial responses, is guilt. According to Shay, guilt stems from distinct psychological conditions, one being the “closeness” that two service members—one who lives and one who dies—share, a closeness that allows the survivor to view the deceased as a “double” (69). Again referencing Achilles, Shay points to how Achilles calls his beloved friend Pátroklos, over whose death he becomes destructive, his *therápon*, or his “double, his substitute.” *Therápon* originally refers to “ritual substitute” or “stand-in,” a theological origin that affects contemporary U.S. veterans who have experienced the doubling and substitution of *therápon* in and after combat. When a fellow service member or civilian dies in combat, survivors often insist that “it should have been me!”<sup>64</sup> This substitution recalls Judeo-Christian parables and scripture, central to the militarized U.S. subject, such as the belief that Christ died to expiate human sin. Whether resulting from grief or guilt over having been spared, which is rarely clear, veteran suicide in this way mirrors the self-destruction and sacrifice of these mystical and theological traditions.

Common in combat, death in and through substitution leaves many surviving veterans feeling “condemned *to* death” rather than “redeemed *from* death” (72). They recognize the need for expiation, yet feel nothing but smothering guilt over their survival, a common form of “self-blame.” Shay points to the fact that the majority of U.S. service members identify as Christian, secondary identifications being Jewish and Muslim; the Abrahamic religions influencing the tendency to see faulty substitution and feel crushing guilt. That U.S. militarism and law build upon Judeo-Christian doctrine, as discussed in the introduction, adds to weight of this guilt, the impossibility of self-sacrifice in combat undermining and shattering the belief in the “ethical universe” of the Abrahamic religions. Shay explains that when God fails to protect, save, or honor the agreements of sacrifice, he “violates the covenant” many service members understand and follow as an agreement formed through religious life (74). Thus the service member’s guilt joins bewilderment, betrayal, and rage at what becomes a “devastating sense of spiritual abandonment and meaninglessness” (76). This betrayal and accompanying emptiness lead many veterans to suicide, by their own hands or recklessness in battle. Thus moral injury returns us to Christianity’s role in militarism’s morality, and the devastation these ideals wreak on service members’ psyches when they experience a violation of not just morality but divine covenant.

Guilt enters *The Iliad* at its climax. Achilles rages, channeling his destruction through a “beast like and godlike rampage” (76). This guilt has the melancholic function of keeping the dead “present” for the guilt-ridden. And Shay makes clear that “in modern American life” most veterans are overwhelmed, unable to access methods of “purification” from this destructive guilt over survival and substitution (70). That is, other than veterans who have sought purification and expiation through suicide, the number increasing every year. In 2016, for example, a VA study found that approximately twenty veterans commit suicide each day.<sup>65</sup> For some veterans, suicide’s stigma compels them to self-destruct by other means, such as “going berserk,” as Shay puts it. This often happens during combat. They effectively place themselves in the most vulnerable positions to ensure they are killed (73).

## Decent into Destruction, or the Berserk State

For Shay, this “berserk” state describes a “special state of mind, body, and social disconnection,” often accompanied by foggy, unreliable, or nonexistent memory of the violent episodes, that moral injury can trigger (77). Going “berserk” becomes a state of survival, an example of the body’s psychosocial “fight or flight” response. Demoralized and hopeless, the service member acts as though he or she “has nothing to lose” from reckless mayhem (79). Shay explains that “betrayal, insult, or humiliation by a leader; death of a friend-in-arms; being wounded; being overrun, surrounded, or trapped; seeing dead comrades who have been mutilated by the enemy; and [even] unexpected deliverance from certain death” can lead to this berserk state (80). One service member describes this destruction as an inability to do “enough damage,” as well as an “ecstasy of power” and “pure frenzy” (82). The extreme stress of combat, including the acute betrayal of moral injury, produces this ecstatic destruction.

Shay compares these accounts to Achilles’ berserk state. Veterans describe this state of recklessness, vulnerable and invulnerable, exalted and intoxicated, numb to physical and emotional feeling and prone to mania with the colloquial phrase that one is “losing it.” Most equate losing it to losing “humanity,” to becoming a non-human “beast-god,” which equates cruel, excessive violence with animal rather than human destruction. As one Veteran put it: “War changes you. .... Strips you .... of all your beliefs, your religion, takes your dignity away, you become an animal” (82). For him, war broke through his sense of self, belonging, and character; his status as a subject, as a human, shaken if not destroyed. He explains that his commanders demanded a “body count” and so he gave it to them through excessive killing, recognizing that “they don’t have to live with it” while he does (83). This total loss of what Shay refers to as “human restraint” remains, indicating a form of recognition for the presence or even value of the lives taken, even those of “enemy combatants.” That the service member “live[s] with” his destruction demonstrates that militarism cannot extinguish every form of recognition and incorporation of the other.

And this very recognition, including over the loss of restraint, can lead to the breaking point or moral injury. In her foundational *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein*, psychoanalytic scholar Jacqueline Rose returns to Clausewitz to explore the phenomenon of continuous war.<sup>66</sup> Following Freud, Rose suggests that war can only take place when there is the illusion of perfection and denial of mourning, or the internalization of the ambivalence we feel toward those we love, the “conflict of feeling at the death of loved yet alien and hated persons.” Freud suggests that we mourn because we acknowledge that we “have destroyed as well as lost,” and what we have destroyed is what “belongs to us most intimately.” This intimate belonging is a “stranger or enemy,” a “type of foreign body in the mind.” What relation between this foreign entity and the grief and guilt of combat does moral injury expose? It seems that the combatant and subject must reckon with the abject, the terrorist, both without and within.

This trauma’s inherent contradictions, its violent encounters with the enemy of the state whose death is required, transform the militarized psyche. Referencing the post-battle practices of the Papago indigenous people of North America, Rose marks their difference from U.K. and U.S. returning veterans. For the Papago, the “hero or homicide and the mourner” both “behave

like a case of melancholia, i.e. with aggression turned inward and identification with the dead” (Rose 21). This melancholia recognizes the abject other within. The pride upon return required by U.S. militarism, on the other hand, depends on a denial of the other within or identification with victims of war. It also demonstrates the ways a surrender to this mourning involves inward aggression born from identification with the one who has ceased to exist. In this sense, the practice of mourning traumatic loss is not just fundamentally relational but connected to indigenous histories of reciprocal belonging; it exists in contrast to a U.S. veteran life that relies on militarism’s reification of the white, male, citizen subject through, among other practices, heroic storytelling. The other must be exorcised from the self for contemporary military and imperial success, reiterating the ways the bound, impenetrable, military citizen subject forms through a denial of this internalized relation, a relationality on which I elaborate in chapters three and four.

Militarism cannot function without this impenetrable citizen and human subject. As the comparison between suffering service members and animals makes clear, moral injury at the heart of PTSD tests the boundaries of the human. The threat of “becoming animals” stems from the belief that animals are incapable of “all mental, ethical, and social restraint” (84). To become like an animal is to lose restraint, embracing that part of the human that remains animal.<sup>67</sup> Yet, this animal-like state is also a god-like state. As Shay puts it: gods “are invulnerable,” an impenetrable realm inaccessible to humans who remain fragile and easy to destroy. The berserk state thus produces responses that go beyond the human in that beasts are “beneath” human restraint and gods are “above” it (84). In *The Illiad* rage leads to a destruction that renders one above and beneath what is human; the god experiences “bodily changes,” which are “neurochemical,” that “deaden pain, hunger, and desire, resulting in an emotional coldness and indifference” (92). Numb to pleasure and pain, the veteran becomes “hyper alert,” overly sensitive and reactive to all environmental stimuli. In this sense, the berserk state produces godlike experiences of emotional transcendence over the realm of bodily senses and limitations. With enhanced receptivity and responsiveness, this “godlike” state consumes, destroying the veterans’ “capacity for virtue” and rendering them incapable of being in “human community” (85-6, 94). At the heart of the godlike berserk state, creating its conditions of possibility, is the betrayal of “what’s right” or the original moral injury.

The berserk state, as Shay sees it, remains distinct from the *aristeia* exalted in *The Illiad* for its “absence of restraints” which permanently alters service members in psychological and physiological ways (97-8).<sup>68</sup> Vacillating between god-like and beast-like feelings of invulnerability, destruction and chaos, veterans lose their sense of “being valued and of valuing anything” from the position of the subject. Thus their godlike and beast-like feelings exacerbate the chasm between their affective state and that of their peers, distinguishing them from not only the realm of militarized subject but also of the human.

Rose compellingly argues that an “ethics” that would be against war is “an ethics of failure,” suggesting that war “breaks out, uncontrollably, because we are not willing to fail enough” (36). Calling us to “hang on to failure” and derision, which would undermine “reactive triumphalism” by “pre-empt[ing] it” if we want to stop war before it begins, Rose articulates a mode of understanding and embodiment that cannot succeed for the sake of limiting imperial destruction (37). The berserk state as the military subject’s failure reframes moral injury as

exposing the failure of military and state authority, dominance, and dominion. Through the berserk state, militarism's failure to enact the moral clarity ascribed to it throws the moral framework of justified war into question. Going berserk exposes the authoritative destruction, and reactive destruction of authority, inherent to moral injury. I suggest that the most extreme effect of this state is suicide. Following Foucault's notion of death as (bio)power's limit, veteran suicide becomes the ultimate act that undermines the impenetrability, authority, and moral clarity of the military subject. Suicide stands as the ultimate failure that often state-sponsored healing projects, for example, work to prevent. For Foucault, death "insofar as it is the end of life," becomes the "term, the limit, or the end of power as well;" operating "outside" of state power, death is "beyond the reach of power."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, for Foucault, that "death should now be privatized, and should become the most private thing of all" makes sense and even follows "natural[ly]" (248). As I discuss in chapter two, however, state and military efforts to create, promote, and collect veteran's narratives of combat trauma attempt to sanitize and curtail public veterans' struggle over death, albeit not often their own. In this sense, death's intense privacy equally threatens martial power. The state wants accounts of brushes with death as the ultimate failure to frame, circulate, and neutralize their destructive power. As I discuss in chapter three, suicide's destruction in response to combat trauma deconstitutes the white, Christian, masculine, military subject, leaving potential in its wake.

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the DSM**

Shay consults the DSM-III-R to explain the distinction between what we might refer to as combat PTSD and all other forms of PTSD, usually roped together. The general criteria requires that the affected person experience:

"an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, e.g., serious threat to one's life or physical integrity; serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being, seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence" (166).

PTSD can emerge from a number of scenarios that involve violence against one's own body and mind or that of another. But Shay points out that the first of the five criteria listed for determining PTSD is far more ambiguous and less "clinical" than the others. What constitutes "usual human experience" determines the boundaries of morality that are tested and injured. Shay explains that this version of the DSM "fails" to address the ways that clinicians often mistake PTSD for other psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, and manic-depression; each of these illnesses also can occur in response to trauma (168).<sup>70</sup> Many of Shay's patients have been previously diagnosed with a number of personality and antisocial disorders. PTSD can "mimic virtually any condition in psychiatry," a unique characteristic, resulting in frequent misdiagnosis. Difficult to diagnose with certainty, PTSD serves as an almost generic description of the gamut of emotional, personality, and psychosocial disruptions and afflictions people can experience.

Yet, Shay identifies one key way that the DSM fails to accurately describe PTSD: the ways PTSD “wreck[s] the personality” and moral character of veteran sufferers in particular; along with the disorder’s many psychological and psychosocial symptoms, veteran sufferers undergo profound personality changes. One of a wrecked personality’s most devastating and permanent effects is the loss of “trust” over one’s own “perceptions” (170). This loss could be understood as a profound perceptual disorientation, which I discuss in chapter three. In other words, veterans face what becomes an endless need to question their sensory, cognitive, and emotional experiences. One describes this fundamental disorientation: “Nothing is what it seems. The mountain there—maybe it wasn’t there yesterday, and won’t be there tomorrow. You get to the point where you’re not even sure it *is* a mountain” (qtd in Shay 170). For Vietnam veterans, for example, it was “extremely common” to hear military commanders and others in charge of their missions instruct them to reorient their memories of prior experiences. What become clear instructions for increased repression, veterans were told “You didn’t experience it, it never happened, you don’t know what you know” (171). Hypervigilance follows this state, leaving veterans often examine everything multiple times to be sure that the things initially perceived are in fact what they appear to be.

This jarring discrepancy between the horror of the combat experience and what commanders demand their soldiers “remember” might be understood as an affective and psychosomatic disorientation, an alienation from their visceral and psychosocial experiences, a failure to arrive at an orientation. Their senses and perceptions are no longer trusted, their relations to objects unsettled if not entirely broken. This disorientation becomes one of the primary effects of moral injury in that it is the command from those in power, with legitimate authority, to deny the horror and ethical transgression of the experiences. When disoriented, service members are caught in a state of uncertainty about their very selves, their status or autonomy as state actors, their purpose, their lives.

In what might be considered an extreme form of gaslighting, military commanders instruct those subject to their command, those for whose safety they are responsible, to shut down and shut out their often horrific experiences of violence. They demand that service members reorient everything they perceived and understood not just in relation to the trauma but to their peers and commanders during those events as well. This denial and disorientation becomes the norm; a betrayal of “what’s right” by those whom service members are supposed to trust is the betrayal of absolutist and nuanced moral principles that leads to moral injury. The extreme effects, such as the berserk state, lead service members to the break. In “losing it,” they expose the limits of militaristic morality, the lie of impenetrable citizen subjectivity, and the compulsion to fail. They also expose the military’s and state’s deep investment in preventing their failure.

### **PTSD, The Limits of the Human, and Hood Disease**

The DSM offers a generic overview of PTSD that, though broad, exposes the variety of traumatic psychiatric disorders. It makes clear the distinctions among the cultural narratives surrounding PTSD in its many forms. One form, for which the discourse is distinct, exposes the fragility and anxieties of Veteran PTSD in a different light. In May of 2014, CBS San Francisco

claimed that Harvard School of Public Health researchers have determined a form of PTSD particular to inner city school children, which CBS offensively labeled “hood disease.”<sup>71</sup> In contrast to combat PTSD, this “inner city” PTSD is triggered and sustained by the violence of daily life in city neighborhoods. The CBS segment opens with gunfire and images of overseas combat before shifting to footage of Oakland city streets, explaining that with this form of PTSD the children “never leave the combat zone.”

The media and public health descriptions of this urban PTSD make explicit connections to combat, the spatial and temporal distinctions between combat and urban space the point. The framing of this “urban PTSD” through the imagery and language of combat questions what the introduction of a form of PTSD specific to inner city life does to discourses on populations vulnerable to PTSD or capable of wellness. Most associated with militarism, as the news segment makes clear, PTSD’s disaggregated forms demonstrates the distinct ways these bodies and spaces are pathologized. PTSD as a concept and set of diagnostic criteria delineates the ways notions of wellness are spatially and racially constructed. PTSD makes visible the ways concepts like “hood disease” and “moral injury” work to reify the black/white binary along lines of able-bodied and minded citizenship, urban PTSD as a distinct health condition in “concentrated areas of deep poverty.” As the CBS segment reports, children attending inner city schools live life in a state of perpetual fear. Suffering consistent traumas, their “condition” can produce a permanent state of anxiety akin to symptoms associated with PTSD.

The triggers and effects of PTSD revealed through the comparative discourses on urban and combat life involve distinctions of economic and political power as well as race, as the terms “moral injury” and “hood disease” make clear. “Hood disease” is seen not as a rupture of normality, but rather as a normality of living with PTSD. In this case, black and brown communities in particular are described as embodying a pathological reaction to external violence, an embodiment mirroring the ontological pathology attributed to blackness and brownness. Black and brown communal life is seen as always already disturbed; with combat PTSD, the language of disruption rests on the assumption that militarized bodies in overseas combat are otherwise always well if not exemplary. Wendy Tokuda suggests this distinction when, at end of CBS’s PTSD segment, she raises her palms and shrugs “it’s biological... you know... it’s in the biology.” “Biology,” particularly when used to describe a behavioral pattern among groups, suggests inherent pathology whereas “disruption” suggests that the disturbed bodies epitomize moral respectability and responsibility prior to injury, discussed above as fundamental to the upstanding military subject and therefore militarism itself.

And these distinctions are spatial. Combat PTSD stems from a singular experience in a space outside U.S. borders and disrupts a normative, Western moral compass, while urban PTSD describes the continuous, normalized experience within U.S. borders and inner city sociality. The extraterritorial space of combat provides the conditions of possibility for the moral disruption of white, masculine military subjects, while the domestic space of urban life cannot be morally disrupted because it is constituted through black and brown pathology. Discussing these historical connections between morality, race, and wellness, Roderick Ferguson suggests that spatial and moral distinctions along race lines lay the groundwork for U.S. civil institutions and imaginaries.<sup>72</sup> For Ferguson, the U.S. state infrastructure itself was constructed “within a genealogy of morality” which describes the power and privilege that accompanies “political and

civil enfranchisement.” Morality was and is the “promise” of freedom with a check in the form of regulation. Like Jakobson and Pellegrini, Ferguson traces the contradictions and discrepancies in this relation between morality and citizenship, what he terms a “dialectic of freedom and unfreedom,” and adds that it stems from a “racialized genealogy” which “links emancipation and subjection” and mandates “commitment” to the ideals of citizenship. For Ferguson, U.S. citizenship, normality, and morality are fundamentally interconnected; a deviation from these normative choices and spaces not just forfeits a state-sanctioned moral compass as well as claim to citizenship and its protections, but reifies state structures of dominance.

In this sense, the chasm between combat PTSD and urban PTSD points to distinctions between what trauma disrupts or exposes. At stake in the language of rupture and injury circulating through psychoanalytic discourses on combat PTSD is a sense of loss; combat PTSD describes destruction in relation to a normality that maintains socio-economic and racial hierarchies. Thus notions of psychological wellness in discourses on PTSD work to define and police the bounds of U.S. citizenship and morality. With urban PTSD, sufferers are the targets of illegitimate violence and their own prior pathologies; in combat, they are the perpetrators. In this sense, to suffer urban PTSD is to be psychosocially aligned with the non-western other of combat, an alignment strengthened through historical connections between race, morality, and citizenship. In this sense, the space of urban PTSD challenges the very boundaries of citizenship. That the urban life can produce continuous anguish places it, and the black and brown bodies it is meant to contain, both within and outside the realm of state belonging and protection.

Distinctions in the discourse surrounding moral injury and urban PTSD demonstrate that domination is often framed as wellness and dictates which bodies are salvageable—a necessary therapeutic pursuit—and which prone to pathology, which suffer disruption and which prescribed violence. PTSD narratives produce political and social spaces through these raced notions of wellness. As moral disruption, combat PTSD reifies the white masculinity of militarism beyond U.S. borders as it upholds the pathology of (un)civil belonging ascribed to bodies of color and inner city spaces. And, following Ferguson as well as Shay’s clinical studies, moral injury exposes not just the limits of the citizen and moral subject, but the human. I return to the ways combat exposes these limits in chapter four.

Returning to the moment of moral injury from combat, often in the heat of passions such as rage and grief, service members move to a place, as Shay puts it, both beneath and beyond the realm of the human. In inhabiting through action and affect both god and animal, service members “go berserk” undermining the bounds of subject and human. What specific destruction takes place? A look at the state and military’s normative measures to prevent soldier self-destruction and promote healing allows for a greater understanding of what is at stake.

Chapter Two

**Operation Homecoming: Veteran War Writing, Atmospherics, and  
Compulsory Healing**

In May, 2003, in an email to his family when he was in Afghanistan, thirty-four-year-old U.S. Army Sergeant Andrew Simkewicz wrote:

On the trip [outside the wire], I saw many small children, some no older than four or five, off by themselves in the middle of nowhere, waving and smiling as we passed by. The poverty level is so high. They have little food and little resource for potable water to drink. We were told not to give any of our food or water to the natives. However, I find it hard to see these cute children starving on the side of the road while I have a case of bottled water next to me in the cab.

Simkewicz explains that he chooses to throw bottles out to the children regardless of his orders. “One kid really earned his; he saw our vehicles approaching and ran 150-200 meters across the land as fast as a deer. I couldn’t believe how fast he was!” He decides to toss water to this one child, explaining that as he “approached him, it was evident that all he wanted to do was wave like a kid at a parade. He was 7 or 8 at best and wearing a cloth with no shoes.” (67).<sup>73</sup>

Sergeant Simkewicz is just one of the eighty-nine chosen contributors to the 2006 printed collection compiled from the National Endowment for the Arts’ *Operation Homecoming*.<sup>74</sup> Similar to many service member anecdotes found in emails, letters, or even recorded phone messages from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Simkewicz’s story offers insight into the militarism at work in and around deployment spaces. His focus on the children works to render the local Afghan population innocent and thus in need of U.S. guidance and protection. Many accounts like Simkewicz’s suggest that only children, rather than adult men and women, inhabit the towns, villages, and farms that lie beyond the U.S. military bases. A description of children without adults infantilizes Afghan populations and culture at the outset, which boosts support for the paternalism behind the U.S. presence in both countries. Simkewicz’s use of terms such as “natives” to describe the children seems to cite the U.S.’s long history of settler colonialism and its genocide against native peoples.<sup>75</sup> The sanction against “feeding the natives” also resonates with not just histories of encounters with indigenous people, but rules regarding contemporary tourism in “developing” spaces throughout the world. It recalls as well encounters with wild animals in the wild and captivity; one might consider the signs that often line zoo fences and habitats, warning against the negative consequences of feeding the animals.<sup>76</sup> The animals might become too dependent on tourists, or fail to distinguish between themselves or their “kind,” and the zoo’s visitors. This injunction to resist feeding “natives” works to render distinct and impenetrable the sociocultural boundaries between the service members on patrol and the Afghan children, and by extension citizens, they encounter.<sup>77</sup> As discussed in chapter one, the boundaries between military subjectivity and animality are crucial for U.S. imperial success; chapter four returns to the ways these boundaries intersect with race as they define the human.

Simkewicz reads the children as starving, following paternalistic assumptions common to the military that deem non-western cultures to be dysfunctional, corrupt, and incapable of providing for their populations without U.S. and European aid.<sup>78</sup> In his narrative, Simkewicz adopts that roll of humanitarian aid worker. Choosing to share water with the child who just wants to wave “like a kid at a parade.” Youthful, whimsical amusement or joy, or so Simkewicz perceives, compels him to see the child as simultaneously more than simply an Afghan “native.” He reads the child as enduring a humanitarian crisis, needing aid from the white saviors of developed countries. In his narrative, Simkewicz defies the implicit command to remain indifferent toward the starving inhuman native. Instead he exercises the ethically superior empathy available to his militarized position. The military in Simkewicz’s narrative has achieved its goal, it seems, hence the child’s supposed fantasy of a parade; the military convoy becomes a victory celebration. In his encounter with Afghan children, Simkewicz embodies at once a destructive and saving force, combatant and humanitarian.<sup>79</sup> These contradictions form the crux of an increasingly militarized U.S. society and the imperialism it feeds.

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Military and state-sponsored therapeutic interventions become a primary method through which the effects of moral injury are managed, rerouting the suffering service member back toward her military function. Many psychiatric and recovery programs often offered through Veterans’ Affairs clinics and other institutions address service members’ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder through the practice of writing through their experiences.

This chapter examines one of the first and most prominent writing programs dedicated to veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars: *Operation Homecoming*. Launched in 2004, this veterans’ writing program was a “landmark partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Defense.”<sup>80</sup> This chapter tracks the ways war writing serves as a primary function of bureaucratic surveillance, expansion, and management as well as a means through which the state reifies its racio-religious, military subject. The continuously increasing public demand for veterans’ combat narratives itself not only perpetuates the surveillance of U.S. citizens but glorifies the racial, religious, masculine, and martial components necessary for citizen status. This chapter contends that the stories found in *Operation Homecoming* demonstrate not only white, western supremacy in relation to Iraqi and Afghan people, but also how combat narration sutures white militarism to the imagined Christian community central to US citizenry. The narratives also make clear the ways this military community necessarily excludes nonwestern people as well as Jewish and especially Muslim identifications.

To make this argument, I will first examine why narrative accounts through writing matter to state and military clinicians. Psychologists have noted and explored the therapeutic qualities of writing for nearly a century, and in the last quarter century the scientific community has teamed with psychology to investigate the beneficial effects of writing through difficult experiences.<sup>81</sup> These effects are demonstrable whether the writing is personal narrative, fiction, poetry or other creative forms. The first of more contemporary studies, published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* in 1986, concluded that university students who engaged in “the writing cure,” or writing out their feelings and thoughts regarding negative experiences, were far more likely to be in better physical health and need fewer visits to mental health facilities in the near

future. After that initial study, psychological and social science studies ballooned, and today there is overwhelming evidence that “expressive writing” is integral for healing processes from a number of traumatic experiences, such as incarceration, rape, job loss, death of a loved one, HIV-diagnosis, depression, and certainly PTSD.<sup>82</sup>

Yet psychologists and neuroscientists are unsure about precisely why expressive writing has healing qualities. Some studies have suggested benefits such as the release of suppressed emotions to forms of forced exposure that, through repetition, decrease the affective charge of the experiences and memories. In particular, psychologists and neuroscientists have offered that writing enacts a form of compulsive “cognitive processing” that works to greatly increase the potential for psychological and physiological healing. In this context, cognitive processing is understood to be the practice through which people organize their experiences and their emotional and physical responses during and after traumatic events. This organization involves sorting through, “labeling,” and “structuring” the events and their responses.<sup>83</sup>

With cognitive processing as one of the most common explanations for writing’s healing effects, what narratives are available and persistent in framing this cognitive reorientation? Through what masculinizing, militarizing, racial, and religious rubrics do veterans battling PTSD label, organize, and structure their visceral and cognitive memories of their traumatic experiences? Through combat writing, veterans recount not just traumatic events but the mundane details of deployment life. These narrative practices reorient the traumatized and shattered toward the very military sociality s/he fears losing. What might interrupt the militarizing cognitive frames that shape this healing process?

And the compulsion to organize experience into comprehensible narrative remains bound up with a compulsion to heal that becomes fundamental to maintaining military subjects. As Shay insists, the traumas of war “destroy the trustworthy social order of the mind.” Thus, according to Shay, to heal means to train the mind whose trust has been “destroyed” to reorder its memories to try to regain that trust, to re-collect what the trauma of combat scattered or destroyed. The literature on therapeutic writing suggests that the active reordering of memories works against trauma’s destruction, discussed in chapter one. And recollection connotes the recalling of prior events through memory as well as the extensive and exhaustive efforts often needed to consciously remember.<sup>84</sup> The effect of remembering comes with the effort of recollection. The notion of “collection” suggests the active gathering and (re)ordering of details, dialogues, affects, feelings, emotional responses, and other scattered experiential pieces of the moment of trauma and related events. In collecting, labeling, naming, and structuring, this recollection gathers, sorts, and organizes according to the value systems guiding the memory exercise. This guidance might range from therapeutic or social conditioning to verbal guidance from a counselor, writing coach, psychologist, or any number of institutionally sanctioned mentoring positions. To collect is to aggregate through a process of differentiation and comparison with a desired or advised image, or an endpoint, in mind.

That image of recovery is of the productive military citizen. Shay points to what he terms the “painful paradox” that veterans suffering from PTSD face. A “breakdown” of any psychological kind, but particularly an “excessively emotional one,” can inhibit the veteran’s ability to continue a position in the military. Shay’s many patients became convinced that a psychic or emotional breakdown would render them “unfit” to be U.S. citizens at all (loc. 337

kindle). These anxieties register the ways that psychosocial as well as physical strength, stability, and resilience produce the white masculinity necessary for U.S. military subjects.<sup>85</sup> And, in this sense, the compulsion to heal would be the compulsion to become the indestructible, unaffected, impenetrable masculine subject able to be sacrificed for the state, as discussed in chapter one. Psychosomatic healing initiates this process of becoming the martial character of militarism.

Thus the images of U.S. veteran recovery and service member recruitment, or that which militarizes new cadets, remain the same. Discrepancies arise between the kinds of narration expected or sanctioned and the service members' experiences, causing confusion or anxiety, even stalling their progress. When describing his work with U.S. veterans from the Vietnam war, Shay explains that "one of the cruxes" of war, which includes the task of giving accounts of events in war, is the "collision" between the experiences related to combat events and "the language available, or thought appropriate, to describe them." The "available" language cannot adequately capture the varied experiences of combat-related trauma. Also gleaned from trauma literature is the notion that the traumatized person would face gaps, holes, and fissures in the narrative.<sup>86</sup> A key element of the writing process would be the need to fill at least some of those gaps; how that task translates to the amount and kind of agency the service member has over an imagined future remains a question practitioners and counsellors regularly address. The rules of "appropriate" language in this context also render visible the military position engaging it. For Paul Fussell, the disconnect that Shay references was less about the question of language itself in relation to trauma, but more of "gentility and optimism" (loc. 358).

The task of healing compels if not coerces service members to appear and sound genteel, refined, and superior in relation to not just vilified extraterritorial others, but other U.S. citizens as well, those who fail to assimilate to the martial standards of sacrificial militarized citizenship. The language available for narrating moments of combat trauma upholds these distinctions between service members and U.S. civilians as well as foreign nationals and insurgent combatants. The language limits, confining the ways events can be psychically, emotionally, and viscerally remembered. This language largely dictates veterans' understandings of their own experiences. In this sense veterans, like anyone recollecting, depend on how the story is told. The narrative framing works to (re)frame the subject herself.

These thematic and linguistic restrictions expand throughout combat surveillance. Every report gathered, written, and archived is produced through these narrow rubrics. To understand "impact" as well as other measures related to U.S. projects, the military uses what it colloquially terms "atmospherics," or atmospheric intelligence. "Atmospherics" describes the gathering of largely intuited and sensorial information regarding general military-local population activity, hidden or more explicit, in and around targeted areas in both Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>87</sup> As service members describe it, gathering atmospherics involves tasks as transient as noticing and noting a townspeople's folded arms, unsmiling face, or even absence near a goods shop.<sup>88</sup> To collect atmospherics is to notice the ways the local population interacts around provisions, services, markets, and leisure activities alongside a constant U.S. military presence. It is to read and note body language and tone in every interaction, with or without interpreter help, and to consider these forms of communication when assessing not just the mood and satisfaction levels of the local population but the general safety of the area. It is also to interview, with or without interpreter help, to gain understandings of people's needs and desires.

Just one example of the ways atmospheric intelligence serves to inform military leaders and initiate reciprocal action is the case study of the Nawa district in Afghanistan's Helmand province. In the summer of 2009, U.S. and British troops located in this district were under fire whenever they departed from the military base. When military personnel tried to gain insight into this repetitive violence, local farmers and villagers refused to talk with them out of fear of the Taliban's retaliation. Therefore, in July, hundreds of U.S. Marines, in a concerted effort, established twenty-four patrol bases throughout various Afghan villages and towns of the province, a vast expansion of checkpoints that mostly limit the mobility of the local population's least privileged. This close proximity enabled marines at the company level to "work closely with local village elders and the district governor to discuss local personalities, issues and grievances" (Flynn 2010).<sup>89</sup> The marines and civilians supposedly worked together to gather information regarding the concerns, grievances, and needs of the local population; this extensive information was passed up the chain of command, which in turn ordered the "facilitation of development projects" based on the population's needs. In the end, these projects were implemented with relative ease and led to a transfer of power from the Taliban to the village elders. According to a 2010 report co-authored by Captain Matt Pottinger and Paul Batchelor and Major General Michael Flynn, the acting senior intelligence officer in Afghanistan at the time, this broad use of atmospheric intelligence enabled the U.S. military to "drive a wedge between the people and the insurgents," one that ultimately led to the ability to "stabilize the region" from insurgent influence as well as IED and mortar attacks.<sup>90</sup>

According to the report, local farmers, shop and land owners, and other village and town leaders felt empowered to share intelligence information with U.S. service members, such as the locations and plans of insurgent combatants in the region. For Flynn, Pottinger and Batchelor, the story of the Nawa district "illustrates the pivotal role intelligence plays" in a military "commitment" to "understanding the environment" as well as "the enemy" (Flynn, 2010).<sup>91</sup> This establishment of "trust" and the narratives it produced became a key strategy for implementing security as well as movement restriction and administrative violence. Indeed, most counterinsurgency strategies rely extensively on these forms of atmospheric intelligence, now considered crucial for a "commander or decision maker" to "fully understand their operating picture" and thus make informed decisions.<sup>92</sup> Yet, this form of information sensing and gathering also follows the language deemed available and appropriate for military chronicling and reporting, and the rubrics of correct or legible explanation encompass local and military populations alike. The problem remains of the military's ability to pass atmospheric information, also considered "soft data," up the chain of command without the intuitive details and understandings getting lost in what amounts to a shift from qualitative to quantitative data for intelligence sorting and reporting.<sup>93</sup>

Jonathan Shay's research offers the insight that the rejection of atmospheric protocols and metrics that dismissed intuitive and sensorial understandings of people's moods and behaviors actually earned leader respect. In Shay's veteran's psychoanalytic accounts, the most respected leaders who did not betray the moral fabric upholding the veteran's military sociality were those who "were not swayed by bureaucratically structured measures of 'productivity' derived from industrial processes" (17). These were people around whom "personality cults" formed; the service members working with them remaining loyal regardless of the circumstances the unit(s) faced. The leaders at the center of these personality cults were sure to risk their own

lives alongside those they led; they followed more difficult, if more safe, routes and strategies, even if these failed to adhere to the latest protocol or meet new command standards. This behavior proved the leaders to be more concerned with the safety and effectivity of their troops rather than the bureaucratic metrics related to awards and promotions. In this sense, they demonstrated an ethical commitment to the idealized “brotherhood” foundational to military subjectivity. Yet, in their hero worship, service members miss the connection between their experiences and position and bureaucratic data collection, with its indifference for “humanizing” affective or sensorial conditions.

Thus a disconnect forms between U.S. service members serving and operating among local populations and their chain of command even as the events—combative, traumatic, or mundane—unfold. The sense is that military commanders who remain removed from the Iraqi and Afghan people are unable to grasp not only the details and strategies most protective of U.S. Troops, and thus the intelligence service members most vulnerable to injury or death would find most valuable, but also the information most effective for improving the very “missions” the service members are there to carry out. What follows can be a demoralizing sense of loss and even worthlessness that precedes the trauma that leads to moral injury.

This disconnect also emerges through veteran narratives about their traumatic experiences, though not always explicitly, given their fear over complaining about the military structure itself. Counsellors, psychologists, writing coaches, or others assisting in the therapeutic writing process are then, in a sense, tasked with working through these disappointments and accusations alongside the service members. A primary method for this work is dubbed “war writing” or “trauma writing.” While much of this writing remains private and relegated to the spaces of the clinic, counsellor’s office, or retreat center, a number of veteran writing programs with similar therapeutic and reflective goals have emerged since the beginning of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. An exploration of the kinds of texts emerging through war writing projects offers a sense of the narratives, tropes, and frames U.S. militarism produces and mandates for understanding combat experience.

One of the largest veteran writing programs to emerge from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is *Operation Homecoming*. Launched in 2004, the program was a “landmark partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Department of Defense.”<sup>94</sup> Directed by Jon Parrish Peede, *Operation Homecoming* paired veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with writers, poets, and counselors who assisted them in crafting either new narratives or revising previous accounts from journals, emails, and other outlets. These writing sessions occurred in the form of workshops that took place throughout the U.S. from 2005 to 2006; workshop teachers were “an impressive sampling of America’s finest” poets and writers, such as “Richard Bausch, Mark Bowden, Tom Clancy, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Barry Hannah, Victor Davis Hanson, Bobbie Ann Mason, Marilyn Nelson, Jeff Shaara, and Tobias Wolff” (xiii). The NEA also sought the leadership of Andrew Carroll, whose work on war writing was already extensive and well-known. The project culminated in the 2006 publication of an anthology titled *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*. In her preface to the book, Chairman of the NEA Diana Gioia makes clear that the project was meant not only to share the veterans’ deployment experiences with a national audience, but also facilitate writing as a response to the trauma of combat. Gioia seems to

suggest that a selling point for the collection is the way the narratives it features were first produced “in the midst of the war” and at times “on the front lines” (xi). She insists that the narratives “are not retrospective accounts of a completed conflict” but rather “episodes from a war still unfolding and unfinished” (xii). The minimal time between the event as experienced and the writing that recounts it supposedly suggests a raw description untainted by the very organizational rubrics of recollection discussed above.

Gioia continues to explain that the idea behind Operation Homecoming emerged during a gathering of the U.S. state poets laureates. The attendees discussed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and determined that service members might “benefit” from the “opportunity” to write on their deployment experiences, particularly if they faced trauma (xii). The poets and NEA representatives discussed what they determined to be the odd separation between writers and poets living in the U.S. and U.S. service members: “we spoke about how separate the worlds of literature and the military are in our society, and how crucially important the art of literature might be to military personnel undergoing changes in their lives.” In what was clearly an attempt to address the psychosomatic responses veterans might experience in relation to combat, the NEA envisioned state-sponsored and guided workshops for writing through events and experiences of war. As Gioia asks “what would happen if the nation fostered a conversation between its writers and its troops?” (xii). Gioia points to how the voices of U.S. service members and their families are not often heard, even with the accessibility and availability of blogs and social media, and thus *Operation Homecoming* sought to foster this discourse. But more importantly, according to Gioia, the program “met genuine human needs by providing people facing enormous challenges with the opportunity for reflection and clarity that the reading and writing of literature afford” (xii). Again, the program upheld the therapeutic benefits of writing, offering that writing through memory enables the writer to organize and “clarify” the details and affects of traumatic experience. Gioia makes clear that these therapeutic effects were one if not the primary reason for the NEA’s launch of *Operation Homecoming*; beyond the military sponsored counseling and treatment for PTSD that can follow deployments, the U.S. state sponsored veteran writing both after and during deployments through this NEA writing program.

For Gioia, the NEA “exists” to make “the best of the arts” accessible for U.S. citizens, and yet she regrets the fact that the NEA had never before approached to collaborate with “the more than three million” U.S. service members. She wonders whether that track record indicates a form of “unexamined cultural snobbism” or rather simply a “failure of imagination” on the part of the NEA. *Operation Homecoming*’s trailblazing efforts, then, rendered it “a unique program in American literary history” in that it combines national arts and military interests (xii). Again, no participant, artist, organizer, writer, or service member sensed a contradiction between the goals of U.S. militarism and the NEA, solidifying the ways state institutions function in service to U.S. imperial ends even as they might claim otherwise. And apparently service members’ need or desire to participate was great. When the program was announced in April of 2004, the NEA’s phone lines and offices were bombarded with calls, emails, and letters from service members and even their families. Personnel called from Baghdad and Kabul, asking to be involved in workshops. The demand among service members was so high that the Boeing Company, one of the program’s primary sponsors, “graciously agreed to increase its support;” more writers were recruited to be faculty members, more workshops scheduled (xiv).

That one of the world's largest manufacturers of not just commercial aircraft but military grade aircraft and weaponry<sup>95</sup> is one of *Operation Homecoming*'s primary sponsors demonstrates not just corporate investment in the state project of veteran recovery, but the ways U.S. militarism demands an overlap between corporate and state interests. Perhaps there is no clearer demonstration that, through its therapeutic effects, war writing works to maintain and reify not only existing military subjects but produce new ones as well, new subjects ready-made to serve military, state, and corporate imperial interests. A company that profits tremendously from U.S. militarism in general and especially warfare will invest in a project that gives military subjects even greater exposure throughout the civilian world. Companies like Boeing see cultural and even monetary value in supporting the creation and circulation of combat narratives, even if those narratives recount extreme trauma or ethically compromising circumstances. Something in the process and dissemination of war writing itself reifies the hyper-masculine, white, Christian militaristic nationalism that U.S. war efforts need to endure; the sociocultural and therefore monetary benefit of veteran healing and narrative exposure was significant enough for Boeing to consider increased sponsorship an important investment.

In her preface, Gioia seems to anticipate the ways that *Operation Homecoming* might be read politically, either in support or condemnation of the war efforts. Careful to address this inevitability by warning against any instrumental method of analysis, Gioia states clearly that with no help or input from the Department of Defense and an eye for the authors' passion and skill in their storytelling rather than the stories' content, the NEA selected the pieces that would be included in the anthology. She makes clear that the anthology includes a range of views that will "support" and "contradict" every distinct perspective and view on the war efforts. But, she warns, "selective reading misses the true character of this volume," a request that readers refrain from critical analysis. For her, *Operation Homecoming* "comprises a chorus of one hundred voices heard as much in counterpoint as in harmony. These independent-minded people have earned their right to speak, and they do so candidly" (xiv). "Independent-minded" attempts to distance the pieces found in *Operation Homecoming* from any writing that could be mistaken for propaganda. The independence of mind is meant to emerge through the writing itself; at least a few of the narratives selected question and even critique the circumstances framing and producing the two wars. And yet, as I argue below, even those narratives that are partially critical of the war efforts still work to reify the hyper-militarized subject at the heart of U.S. imperial efforts. The re-collecting at work in this kind of trauma writing, in particular, reassembles the scattered details of the events towards a figure that makes sense in the ways the service members have been socialized. Framed to be understood and elicit some form of socialized empathy, the experiences demonstrate the ways service members live out their calling to be the state's sacred sacrifice. Gioia ends her preface with the suggestion that "one cannot tell the story of a nation without telling the story of its wars, and these often harrowing tales are most vividly told by the men and women who lived them" (xv). The nation, insofar as it is wrapped up in the creation of the modern state, "dances with death," as David Theo Goldberg suggests, and Gioia seems to agree that this dance with death is "part of [the state's] defining constitution" (21).<sup>96</sup> If the story of a nation defines it, renders it legible and thus materially effective, then warfare and militarism remain a nation's defining components.

The narratives and poetry chosen for the collection are organized into six sections with distinct themes: “And Now It Begins: Heading into Combat,” “Hearts and Minds: Interactions with Afghans and Iraqis,” “Stuck in This Sandbox: Gripes, Humor, Boredom, and the Daily Grind,” “Worlds Apart: Life on the Home Front,” “This is Not a Game: The Physical and Emotional Toll of War,” and “Home: Returning to the United States” respectively. In what follows, I focus on narratives in the “Hearts and Minds” and “This is Not a Game” sections, given their subject matter, but the organizing concepts and structures I discuss operate in the pieces throughout the collection.

Similar to atmospherics, “hearts and minds,” a long-standing U.S. military phrase, references the supposedly effective strategy of influencing local populations through means other than martial might, such as individual conversations and culture sharing, favors and gifts, structural adjustments and reparations, more explicit forms of propaganda, and other well-established modes of rapport building. The phrase also, however, calls to mind its ironic usage in relation to Peter Davis’s infamous 1974 documentary film that chronicled the horrific devastations of the Vietnam War.<sup>97</sup> The film deploys the ubiquitous phrase to point to what becomes the impossibility of “winning” hearts and minds of the local populations through military destruction, chaos, and the extensive, devastating trauma that follows. The film argues that the violence of war simply cannot produce a population of gratitude and liberation. In this sense, the use of the infamous phrase builds irony into the title, working to undo the very structure of the exchanges it categorizes and describes.

The following excerpts do not exhaust the ways war writing reifies the militarized U.S. subject. I chose them to give a sense of the tropes and narratives available and used in service member accounts. The first is a journal entry from U.S. Army First Sergeant August C. Hohl, Jr. Hohl’s entry offers a range of the discourses service members often reference in their accounts of their time in deployments, from dehumanizing stereotypes to forms of universalizing empathy that render the local populations “just like” U.S. citizens. He writes: “The majority of the people of Afghanistan are still living in the biblical times of Jesus” referencing pervasive U.S. stereotype that West Asian populations lie stuck in ancient history, refusing to work towards technological growth or modern ways of thinking or living. But Hohl also references the ways West Asia remains caught in discourses and conflicts related to the history of the Abrahamic religions. Narratives like Hohl’s seem to indicate the ways this history remains entangled in U.S. foreign policy and ideologies of East versus West more generally, buttressing U.S. imperial and martial efforts in the region. Through his reference, Hohl points to the explicit and implicit justifications for U.S. war efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and to the ways the U.S. pursues them in relation to its steadfast support for Israel. He suggests that “they,” meaning the Afghan people, “don’t take well to pity.” Pity becomes the condescension he assumes, or imagines, U.S. service members feel and enact towards the local population. To pity a group of people is to place oneself in a position of superiority to those for whom one feels pity. Pity for entire populations fosters increasingly paternalistic discourse and policy that continues to justify U.S. military presence in the regions. State paternalism, which includes extensive military might, increases towards populations deemed most vulnerable or abject; pity can be mobilized to increase imperial surveillance and control.

Yet Hohl also observed that the Afghans he met have “personal and religious beliefs” that are “not unlike” his and even “ours,” in that the Afghan people “understand” and demonstrate the “importance of reaching out to and being charitable towards one another.” He adds that traveling to Afghanistan has “shown” him that “while we all might live differently due to environmental, geographical, and educational conditions, people are basically the same inside.” This form of identification and even empathy is also common in service member narratives. A humanizing force, the statement that “people are basically the same inside” references the desires and needs that remain universal among different populations. In this sense, it may seem to do cultural work that departs substantially from the otherwise militarizing and masculinizing forces of U.S. imperial culture. Yet, it too, in the end, builds on and reifies Westernizing and paternalizing notions of cultural superiority. The rubrics through which “sameness”—and thus a humanizing solidarity, acceptability, or promise—is measured are formed through militarizing definitions of acceptable human desires and behavior. The more the Afghan people prove themselves to be like Hohl, in Hohl’s mind, the more he is willing to narrate their existence through the language of commonality, shared values and goals. This form of identification forecloses the possibility for Hohl to recognize that the Afghan people might be fundamentally different, even antagonistic, and that this difference could be productive and even necessary. For Hohl and his military peers, the erasure of difference with the hope of identification forecloses possibilities of recognizing, let alone valuing, difference, and increases the possibilities for violence against those forms of difference that Hohl cannot assimilate into his worldview. It bases the hope or promise of nonviolent encounter and alternative resolutions on the ability for service members like Hohl to find commonalities, no matter how uninformed or misguided, rather than to attempt to know or understand the local people as they are, with their particular world views, needs, and desires. Indeed, Hohl suggests that “learning some of the history, social habits, and religion” of Afghanistan enabled him to feel a “profound sense of hope” that “we,” and by this he means the U.S. military, “can assist the people here.” He then adds “but we’re not so smart that we can’t learn from them too.” Again, if he is able to reach an understanding of the Afghan people through which he can identify and sympathize, Hohl is able to see the positive outcomes to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan that military reports put forth. His hopes remain in line with military narratives. These forces of identification curb the feelings of hopelessness, loss, or despair that service members might face during deployments, particularly after encountering or experiencing violence, that might lead to more critical responses to the war efforts. Again, Hohl references the ways U.S. service members might “assist” the Afghan people, continuing the paternalism of his earlier remarks. It seems that his admission that U.S. troops could learn from Afghan citizens is open to alternative approaches to difference; the phrase gestures toward militarism’s fissures.

In a piece that similarly seeks to forge bridges, the U.S. Chief Warrant Officer Jared S. Jones, who chronicled his time in Afghanistan from 2004-2005, describes his fondness for Jegdalek, an Afghan village, and the ways he helped a young village girl with a severe medical condition. He claims that “nearly thirty people” live in her home, which he characterizes as a “humble, three-room abode.” Jones describes the ways the girl’s family is grateful for the U.S. presence in Afghanistan: “they told us that since America has come to Afghanistan, fighting for *their* freedom and a way of life, the village has prospered like it never has before” (emphasis

his). Jones sets the scene with immediate validation of the U.S. presence in the region. Right away we understand that his affinity for the young girl and her family stems at least in part from her family's reiteration and validation of the U.S. as an occupying force.

Jones continues to offer a redemptive account of not just the village itself but the U.S. presence and aid to the villagers. "After we said goodbye, as I was riding on the CH-47 Chinook, I realized, even away from family, friends, and the luxuries of home, I had so very, very much to be thankful for. .... It is always a pleasure to see the difference we are making for these people, even if it is only one small village, whose people have next to nothing." His emphasis on poverty and destitution again furthers the paternalism of the U.S. military presence; the Afghan people are rendered nearly helpless, which renders them more vulnerable to U.S. and foreign intervention. Jones also emphasizes his gratitude for his work in the region; he finds self-satisfaction in perceiving what he understands to be definitive progress, what he terms "making a difference." He goes on to describe the sick young girl as having a "winning smile," a colloquial phrase often used to describe children that connotes adorable or emotively compelling expressiveness, its U.S. centrism clearest in the inclusion of the term "winning." After describing what he has gained through his deployment experience thus far, Jones describes combat itself as "only one facet of the military, a necessary evil we must sometimes wage against evil people." His rhetoric exemplifies the west versus east, us versus them dichotomies central to militarism's cultural conditioning in the U.S. and abroad, and Jones clearly separates Halima and her grateful family from the Afghan citizens who fail to embrace the U.S. occupation as a force of progress and liberation. Jones is able to humanize Halima and her family, and others in the village, precisely because of their gratitude; the chasm between those "evil" others and U.S. liberation forces remains as certain Afghan citizens are brought into the fold of imperial idealism. And, like so many of its kind, Jones's narrative echoes the religious rhetoric of good versus evil that underpins every component of U.S. Military culture.

The notion that the U.S. plays a significant role in bringing progress to Afghanistan continues throughout Jones's piece as he states: "I have seen entirely too many small fences, something I hope changes as this country continues to progress." His account of his last visit to the village continues these narrative themes:

This week we said goodbye to our adopted village, Jegdalek. I saw Halima and some of her family—our little Cinderella, as we have fondly dubbed her, is doing better than ever. I gave her some one-two-threes, a family tradition of tossing a child into the air, higher with each number. One of the brothers did something incredibly heart-wrenching—he gave me a small ruby; a gift of friendship. By the way, the rubies of Jegdalek are world renowned. .... Here is a boy, with almost nothing, giving me something, anything. I was so moved by this that I ended up giving away nearly everything I had on me .... my gloves, my pen, my watch. Anything means everything to these people.

Jones and his support team encounter Afghan people with so little providing joy in their lives, or so Jones imagines, that U.S. Service members become god-like figures ripe for sacrificial offerings. This goodbye mirrors ritual sacrifice. It reifies the white, masculine, western, militarized, Christian figure through which service members are to demonstrate enough

superiority and ethical standing to be eligible to be sacrificed for the state. In their generosity and benevolence, these divine service members resemble deities to whom others must sacrifice.

Jones later discusses Asedullah, a young boy from the village who also has a medical condition; his ailments required him to leave country for treatment. As Jones makes clear, Asedullah will return to school, his studies, and “resume the life that previously could not have been.” He adds: “What a happy ending to an amazing story.” Jones reads his success in helping Asedullah as further validation for his company’s efforts. The story enables his company to find satisfaction and moral clarity in their occupying positions. For Jones, the trips to Jegdalek “have been the highlight” of his deployment. Jegdalek has “served as a home base” among the people he feels obligated and compelled to serve. He states “I will never forget the faces of this humble village. . . . our friendship forever sealed, the people welcome us as family now” (73). He uses the language of friendship and family, forms of kinship that solidify human bonds beyond the violent and dependent forces of occupiers and occupied. This romanticized affiliation is reminiscent of the ways young U.S. citizens describe leaving an especially enjoyed summer camp, a cohort after studying abroad. Or, perhaps more-so, when they return from an experience of “poverty tourism,” as it is often called, in which, through a university or religious program, they participated in humanitarian service trips to locations throughout the “global south.” The extreme disparity in power and resources between the service members and Jegdalek people seems all but forgotten in Jones’s already nostalgic language. In this narrative, Jones and his company are thrown together with the Afghan people and navigate their extreme differences to discover their common humanity. Absent is any reference, let alone critique, of the underlying conditions for their encounter. In this sense, Jones’s story functions in service to the occupying forces that brought Jones to the region and continue to dictate life in the combat zones long after his departure.

Staff Sergeant Clint Douglas, on the other hand, offers a different approach to encountering the local population. From his essay titled “Lunch with Pirates,” Douglass reflected on not just the “cultural sensitivity” training he received prior to entering Afghanistan, but also the angers, frustrations, and even strong ambivalence veterans can feel in relation to those they are supposed to help, or possibly destroy. He tells the story of “Zia Audin,” or, as he qualifies with sarcasm and disgust, “*General Zia Audin*” (his emphasis). Douglas immediately characterizes Audin through some of the most Orientalist tropes available for West Asian men. Clarifying that Audin, who supposedly, and secretly, organizes the night rocket attacks against the U.S. troops as well as IED attacks near Gardez, attempted to kill service members not out of “a sense of either hatred or malice in his heart” but rather “out of jealousy and pride.” “For Zia Audin” Douglas contends “was heartbroken, . . . suffer[ing] from an unrequited love of America,” which was “awkward for all parties.” He continues: “So Zia Audin, in a fit of adolescent pique, did what came naturally—he tried to kill us. Outright murder wasn’t on his mind so much as grandiose posturing. What he wanted was attention and respect” (75). Douglas infantilizes Audin in ways distinct from yet related to Hohl’s and Jones’s narratives, calling him a person who has “adolescent” fits stemming from an “unrequited love” for U.S. life and culture. This understanding, it would seem, emerges from colonizing notions that those under occupation most desire to enter the westernizing world that occupies their land, an imperial dream that West Asian populations seek only to westernize their cultures and lives.<sup>98</sup> Douglas’s language of jealousy,

love (unrequited no less), and revengeful attacks paints Audin as an immature being who seeks only attention, a charge that in the U.S. is often launched against toddlers or teenagers. Unable to contain or control his emotions or respond to stressful circumstances like his adult U.S. counterparts, Audin embodies the underdeveloped nation in need of westernizing care and support on his journey toward maturation.

Douglas then offers a curious reading of Audin, stating that Audin's "anonymous, nighttime rocket attacks" that "rained down" on service members in their beds was an attempt to "reinforce the perceived necessity of his power and authority, if" as Douglas suggests, "for no other reason than to protect us." He then characterizes Audin as a "bandit and a thug" adding that these traits "of course" rendered him "a close American ally" (75). Douglas sees Audin enacting violence as a way of protection, a notion that flips the paternal narrative on its head. Audin becomes the one demonstrating a form of abusive authority, but for the sake of alliance with the U.S. military. In an attempt to gain the service members' attention and acceptance, which apparently is to protect them, Audin tries to kill them. Douglas seems unsurprised by this contradictory behavior; his tone betrayed through phrases such as "of course." He narrates what he expects. And Audin's ability to be a "bandit" and "thug" make him easily relatable for a U.S. readership; figures of U.S. history, both the bandit and thug involve an existence that remains above, if outside, the law. They are both despised as corruptions in the system and cherished for their innovation and bravery. The Afghan man thus becomes lawless, but in this case his lawlessness is not in the sense of international terrorism but of the great American criminal, the U.S. antihero.

Douglas also rendered the Afghan man effeminate, again following the most common orientalist notions of West Asian men and culture. He describes Audin as "not surprisingly" a "small man," though he was also "broad across the shoulders" and "handsome." For Douglas, Audin's gender deviated from the norms of U.S. military masculinity. Audin had "meticulously combed and pomaded beard" as well as a "fresh haircut" that included a "discreet amount of hair creme." Douglas also describes Audin's hands as being "soft for an Afghan, with long manicured fingernails." Indeed, his hands "were no longer accustomed to physical labor," which Douglas, paradoxically, did not associate with Afghan men. Audin had the soft hands of someone unfamiliar with physical labor, labor that in U.S. discourse is always masculinized, and who had "lost the taste for guerrilla fighting and living in caves," the masculinity available to West Asian men in U.S. narratives of international terrorism and even anticolonial insurgency. In losing the masculinity available to him, Audin had become the feminized, gender-deviant Douglas expected. Douglas finished the description with the assertion that Audin was "afraid," his fear a necessary consequence of his abandoned insurgent conditions and existing in contrast to Douglas's militarized fearlessness (81).

But as Douglas's narrative progresses, Audin's relation to gender and sexual deviation emerges even more clearly. One of Douglas's peers, Bill, who attended the luncheons with Audin alongside Douglas, was, according to Douglas, "the son of Norwegian farmers from Minnesota" and "looked every bit the errant Viking that he was" aggressively questioned Audin in a striking scene (81). Addressing rumors that Audin and his men were raping young boys, Bill threatens "If I hear about another crying schoolboy, I'll come back and execute the lot of you." Douglas describes Bill's voice as "cracking with rage," and explains that Bill made the threat often and

“with solemn Stalinist sincerity, and it always worked.” In his descriptions of Bill’s appearance and actions, Douglas’s deployment of race reifies the chasm between west and non-west, whiteness and other. Bill, the viking, a popular historical figure for many white-supremacist groups in the U.S. and throughout Europe,<sup>99</sup> asserts himself through a particularly violent masculinity that also hinges on paternalism in the form of protection and even chivalry. He becomes a white savior for the young Afghan boys subject to Audin’s deviant and abusive sexuality, another pervasive historical trope for West Asian men in U.S. discourse. Bill threatens execution, giving himself even more authoritative power, with “Stalinist sincerity,” a curious reference to a Soviet whiteness that seems to resonate tremendously with current white supremacist movements throughout the U.S. and Europe. Douglas adds that Bill could “say things that we couldn’t and we admired him greatly for it;” Bill could also successfully deploy shame, which “is a powerful force in Afghanistan” (76). Through his description of Bill, Douglas again contrasts Audin with the forceful, brash, heroic U.S. service member who threatens execution in the name of protection of those most vulnerable in relation to untrustworthy, deviant, and even sadistic West Asian men. Militarism’s tactics of extreme violence are deployed yet again; martial might becomes an authoritative figure protecting decidedly western, normative modes of warfare and cultural encounter, behavior toward family and particularly children, masculine behavior in general, and sexuality.

Douglas briefly references the ways Audin might be interpreted differently, offering that Audin “had also generated no small amount of goodwill among much of the local population.” The U.S. service members in Audin’s district, then, “tolerated” him as a “necessary evil.” Douglas admits that he “became obsessed” with Audin. Calling the Taliban a more “nebulous” foe, “as much rumor as reality,” Douglas thought that eliminating or at least changing Audin, who “flirted” with the Taliban to “play both sides against the other in a last desperate bid to maintain some kind of relevance,” was a concrete way to make a difference. Douglas describes the duplicity of the encounter over lunch when he admits that the lunch of pleasantries was simply a cover for the opportunity to “size each other up” (78). Looking at the interpreter, whom Douglas “suspected had been doing a lousy job at the translation to begin with,” Douglas infantilized the interpreter as well as the audience in the room by telling him and them to “pay close attention” to his words as he chastised Audin and his men for their duplicity and failures (82). But then Douglas humanizes Audin, to an extent, in a way similar to both Jones and Hohl. He states that Audin was

trying to find a way to hold on to some scrap of his power and prestige, while we tried to disabuse him of the notion that he had any future in Gardez. . . . He was alone and justifiably terrified of the future, surrounded by enemies; a prisoner behind his own castle walls. Perhaps pity was a truer description of what I felt for him, however fleetingly. He was just a man after all and not the monster of my imagination. . . . He had made his own enemies, and I counted myself among them more than ever. It was his obvious position of weakness that I’d seen during lunch and it was this frailty that had spoken to my humanity

But, for Douglas, this glimmer of humanity “didn’t last.” Instead, he instantly “felt a clarifying rush of bloodlust” (83). Douglas began to recognize what amounted to a weak, infantilized, and vulnerable humanity of the men in the room, one that he does not equate with

himself or the military subject he represents. Again, pity emerges as the most humanizing affect the U.S. service members can access. If they can feel sorry enough for those they encounter, they can justify switching from an aggressive or violent position to a paternalized humanitarian one. But this recognition of vulnerability itself remains short lived. He states “I decided while I sat there listening to this man pontificate that anyone in Afghanistan who talked at length about peace, security, and stability was probably working overtime to undermine all three.” His fundamental distrust of the men he sees as double dealing broadens the frame through which he views all the Afghan people he is there to “serve.” He reveals this frame through the phrase “anyone in Afghanistan.” Again the local population registers en masse and as interchangeable. His position as militarized subject strengthened.

A final account, taken from the section titled “This is Not a Game,” touched on the question of PTSD. In an email sent during her deployment working from September of 2004 to February of 2005 as a clinical psychologist at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Captain Lisa Blackman offered an overview of the kinds of patients she regularly encountered. I quote the email in its entirety:

Lately I have had a string of combat trauma evaluations. Several have been Army troops passing through for R & R [rest and relaxation]—they come here for a bit and then go back to Iraq or Afghanistan. As if this is a glamorous vacation site. But, they are grateful to be someplace safe (and someplace with alcohol, which I will surely complain about at a later date). Anyway, each one presented with a different complaint. One guy wasn't sleeping, one gal was angry about 'sexual harassment' in her unit, one gal was depressed, one guy just wanted to go home. Standard stuff. I had no clue that the problems were combat related and no idea that I should be assessing for acute stress disorder or PTSD. None of these guys or gals said 'I was in combat' or 'I saw someone die.' None connected these experiences to their symptoms. It was as if they didn't remember how hard or unusual it is to be at war. They're used to the danger. They've been out here too long. Why would a war mess with your mood, right? Each evaluation started with the typical questions: 'What brought you in today?' 'When did the problem start?' 'Have you ever experienced these symptoms before?' 'How's your sleep?' etc. Etc. Etc. I kept asking questions and thinking that the symptoms did not add up. Something wasn't right. I wasn't getting the right reaction. Stories were incomplete. Affect was blunted. Level of distress did not match presenting complaint. Alarm red, people, alarm red. At home I ask people if they have ever experienced or witnessed a traumatic event or abuse. But out here I ask, 'Have you ever been in combat?' Apparently, this is a question with the power to unglue. .... Because all four of these troops burst into tears at the mention of the word 'combat.' And when I say burst, I mean splatter—tears running, snot flowing, and I literally had to mop my floor after one two-hour session. In other words, I mean sobbing for minutes on end, unable to speak, flat out grief by an otherwise healthy, strong, manly guy who watches football on the weekends and never puts the toilet seat down. Each time I sit there with not a clue what to say ... offering tissues ... saying I'm sorry ... trying to normalize ... trying to say, 'It was not

your fault that so and so died’ and ‘If you could have done differently, you would have’ and ‘You had a right to be scared.’ And even worse, ‘You had to shoot back’ and “Yes you killed someone, and you still deserve to go back to your family and live your life.’ Next time you are hanging out with a friend, think about what you would do if he turned to you and said, ‘My boss made me kill someone, and I know I’m going to hell for it so why bother?’ What would you say to ‘normalize’ that? I will probably never see these folks again. I have no idea if I have been helpful. Maybe I planted a seed of reprieve that will grow into self-forgiveness. Maybe I did absolutely nothing but sit here. Who knows? I can’t stop thinking about the fact that these folks have lost something that they will never get back—innocence (and a life free of guilt). My heart hurts for them.<sup>100</sup>

Several tropes emerge in Blackman’s account of her counseling sessions with service members likely suffering from PTSD. At the outset that Blackman seems to consider complaints about sexual harassment to be symptoms of PTSD and not legitimate claims related to aggressive behavior and abuse of power. How does this implicit assumption also demonstrate the ways the service member as citizen subject is always already entitled to exercise dominion in all areas of life, including through forms of sexual prowess built on the power to take what is not offered? Blackman feels enormous surprise, it seems, when she recognizes the ways their behaviors depart from the militarized masculinity central to U.S. war efforts. The tears, unrest, rage, and guilt overwhelm her as she listens. She seems shaken by the affront to U.S. militarism that combat can inflict, describing the shift and her shock by clarifying that the behavior of these grieving service members is a steep departure from what she considers “otherwise healthy, strong, manly” men “who watch football on the weekends and never put the toilet seat down,” in other words, men who otherwise embody the impenetrable masculinity of militarism. Again, there seems to be a tendency to infantilize, but in this case it is to demonstrate an exception rather than a norm; it is to make clear the ways combat can break even the “strongest,” most conditioned, most militarized and thus most masculine service members around. In this sense, the break is rendered relatable for a U.S. audience. These men and women are broken and in need of repair; they need counseling, therapy, and other services to help them become the whole people they once were.

Blackman also pointed to the ways service members are unable to immediately connect their experiences, or perhaps symptoms, to their combat experiences, suggesting that they’re “used to” the violence and vulnerability to harm or that they simply cannot remember that combat is supposed to be life changing. Blackman herself fails to consider the ways that service members are conditioned to miss these connections; they are instructed to see their circumstance in different terms, through the frame of their own invulnerability to physical or psychosocial harm. To be a service member in the military is to be impenetrable, one reason these men and women cannot immediately tie their feelings and visceral responses to combat. As they narrate in therapy sessions, they remain within the discursive bounds of U.S. Militarism and military culture which seek to keep injury and its disorientation distinct from martial duty.

These narratives point to the ways war writing questions the use of retrospective, first-person, contained, and self-referential language and storytelling in response to trauma. War

writing of the sort examined above functions to regroup, reorder, and reconstitute the militarized subject. War writing communities use what is often autobiographical narrative as additional surveillance and ownership of these combat experiences; it serves imperial ends. As I will discuss in chapter three, practices that deviate from this service, however, are more likely to break from these historical patterns of racio-religious imperial progress.

### Chapter Three

## Undoing the Militarized Body Through Artisanal Destruction

*And it's very easy for the .... American public, to say, hey, yeah, let's take care of those veterans. Let's get them to doctors. Now, with moral injury, the kind of the distinction that I think is so important is .... it's not necessarily a medical issue anymore. Now it's a social issue. Now, when a veteran says, hey, I have a moral injury or I have something more that's challenging my moral code, that means it's challenging society's moral code. And that means that it's a discussion for everyone, not just the medical community. .... It's, hey, we all need to be in this conversation. And we are all, by the way, responsible for whatever transgression that he or she is involved in. That's our transgression, too.*

- Tyler Boudreau, author, *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*<sup>101</sup>

After six years in the United States Army, Drew Cameron joined an art collective where he met artist Drew Matott. In 2007, they collaborated to form the Combat Paper Project, a transient, mobile art community that welcomes current and former service members, artists, activists, and community members to gather together, eat, listen to music, dance, type a collective journal on an antique typewriter, and destroy military uniforms. They cut, tear, shred, and pulp the uniforms to press into paper. According to Cameron, the “fiber, the blood, sweat and tears, the months of hardship and brutal violence” are “held within” the uniform material. Combat Paper’s mission is to “reshap(e) that association of subordination” into “something collective and beautiful.”<sup>102</sup>

My interest in Combat Paper stems from how it responds to combat trauma in ways that are psychosomatically and affectively distinct from practices of therapeutic writing. In chapter two, I suggested that the increasing public demand for Veterans’ combat narratives, which these projects feed, becomes a bureaucratic pattern of surveillance and management. As queer theorist Mel Chen makes clear, bodies “deemed ‘sick,’” such as veterans returning with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, are often understood to be “a polluting scourge” in relation to “human normative securities” (211). In sponsoring these veteran life writing projects, the state fights this threat to its control and security. Combat Paper, on the other hand, demonstrates that in our subjection to U.S. militarism, we are vulnerable to, affected by, and “implicated in” one another’s trauma.<sup>103</sup> Combat Paper responds to trauma differently, revealing connections among bodies, experiences, materials, and memory. It collectivizes trauma. Cameron and Matott largely avoid resorting to prescriptive narratives of therapy, healing, redemption, victimization, “disability,” and rehabilitation that so often circumscribe veterans’ communities. The shredding and cutting are not about healing or even survival, but destruction, and as much about the pleasure of destruction as catharsis. In this sense, Combat Paper actively challenges normative ability narratives, even as the trope of the mentally sick, unstable, damaged veteran, and the public anxiety it invokes, remains ubiquitous.

With questions of personal narration, art practice, and trauma in mind, I want to suggest that Combat Paper as a practice creates the conditions for self-referential visual, written, or

performative expression, but not necessarily the expression itself. Combat Paper destroys to create. Its destruction produces new conditions, creating anew a surface for a (re)constituted or emerging “self” who could attempt to represent the violent histories of US combat. This emerging self is distinct from the militarized subjects that arrive to destroy the uniform. This destructive and largely unproductive practice, which I term artisanal destruction, disorients the militarized body from its uniform, deconstituting the martial subject of U.S. militarism. In this way, artisanal destruction precedes recourse to a form of self-referential expression that can and would “speak” about experiences of violence and trauma under U.S. military occupation. This emerging “self” is communal, a collective of bodies that apprehend their agonistic connections to those U.S. militarism renders toxic and inhuman.

Before examining Combat Paper as a deconstitutive practice, I will return to the ways it serves as a response to combat trauma that refuses to center narration and even self-referential expression. For auto/biography studies, for example, notions of non-narrative self-representation and self-referentiality remain important for understanding the vast range of responses, therapeutic or not, to trauma. Julie Rak and Anna Poletti, for example, have suggested that non-narrative “identity work,” which engages numerous forms of media such as “music, video, print, and imaging technologies,”<sup>104</sup> makes “certain kinds of identity presentation possible (and others unthinkable)” and is foundational for “auto/biographical discourse in digital media” (7). This work does not produce or build any traditional narrative forms at all. Rak and Poletti understand digital self-representation as one realm that “challenges the tendency to read for narrative” which has been central to auto/biography studies work on trauma. The artist’s body, as art object, becomes central and yet relies heavily on the accompanying materials that often surround it. Or the body is absent, but its material imprint remains.

Recently, Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki examine self-referential art that “theorize[s] the ‘force’ ... of intercorporealities, emotions, and frames alike” (7). Brophy and Hladki illuminate their notion of “critical embodiment” through a number of examples of visual autobiography, focusing on artists that use the body “as a medium for communicating” material and social conditions.<sup>105</sup> Narrative is often absent in the pieces explored by Smith and Watson as well as Brophy and Hladki. The visual autobiographical piece might be a messy bed adorned with condoms and tissues, as with Tracey Emin’s work, or a protest performance of body, text, and fabric as with Rebecca Belmore’s *Worth* (2010). Forms of individual self-presentation, and the condition that the works be clearly self-referential, remain crucial to their function as visual auto/biography. It seems that a speaking, gesturing, performing self, if at times constructed through interactions between audience and performer or visitors and installation, remains necessary for this form of art practice. The space must reference a subject; the trauma must be addressed through a self.

Combat Paper approaches the question of self-representation in art through the intersections among militarized selfhood and subjectivity, the iconography and affect of military uniforms, and the effects of combat trauma. Often, programs dedicated to writing in response to war trauma, such as *Operation Homecoming*, center narrative tropes and the details of the traumatic events as a way to work through the trauma’s toxic effects. In this sense, art practice in response to trauma opens additional affective and visceral spaces for reflection. I am suggesting that Combat Paper engages individual traumatic experiences as well as combat’s traumatic

history differently. Fundamentally inaccessible, trauma immediately poses the problem of what can be apprehended, known, and aesthetically engaged. As Cathy Caruth makes clear, trauma in history can be understood only through the “inaccessibility of its occurrence.”<sup>106</sup> Through their artisanal destruction of the uniform, participants in *Combat Paper* engage the traumas of combat through the affective and psychosomatic registers of one body and many bodies; military, insurgent, and civilian positions; all interconnected. In this way, it works against what Mel Chen has described as the “discourses on sickness” that continuously “bleed” from references to “medical immunity” into “nationalist rhetoric,” a clear function of medical rhetoric surrounding Veteran PTSD, as I discussed in chapter two (194).<sup>107</sup> Operating within a commemorative framework focused on war experiences from the position of the service member, the papermaking practice seeks destruction, pleasure, and ephemerality over product, working against the isolating individuality that frames and emerges from therapeutic narratives of combat experience. I argue that *Combat Paper* produces an affective relationality that works to undo the military sociality it commemorates.

This practice is an example of what I term critical trauma art. Building on the destruction of the form and relation between the fabric and body, critical trauma art locates and engages trauma through the present and transhistorical collective rather than individual, functioning in opposition to the compulsory healing demanded from veterans. This destruction renders the militarized self fundamentally lacking, full of grief, despair, and, I suggest, a heavily mediated relation to supposed personal trauma. I contend that with its attention to transhistorical, communal trauma beyond the suffering of individual subjects and ritualistic repetition, critical trauma art practice enacts a form of remembrance, a term central to Walter Benjamin’s theories of convergent and divergent temporalities. For Benjamin, remembrance is a mode of commemoration that holds open the psychosomatic wounds of historic destruction. Seeking allegory over symbolism, Benjamin insisted that a social refusal of symbolic closure through artistic and commemorative practices would instead create the conditions for a future “paradise,” even utopia, that the anti-war suicides of his friends demanded (Jay 22).<sup>108</sup> In contrast to the commemorative rhetoric of healing promoted in the war poetry of the Weimar period, Benjamin believed that “ritualized repetition” alone would interrupt the amnesia and reopen the wounds of war. In the case of combat trauma, remembrance is historic, communal traumatic memory relived, reignited, and deployed through ritualized repetition. In doing so, it remakes spaces of art practice into transient sites of critical commemoration, critical in their interrupted attention to the disorientation artisanal destruction produces. This remembrance keeps open and volatile “moral injury,” the Department of Veteran’s Affairs Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay’s term for the primary injury of war or the site from which PTSD emerges. As I discussed in chapter one, moral injury stems from the trauma of dehumanization and destruction against the other, a fundamentally relational event in that the morality fundamental to U.S. militarism cannot be undermined without a jolting and binding encounter with an other.

A partly ironic homage to paper as an historical object of records and contracts with the authority of newspapers and intimacy of letters, *Combat Paper* produces a number of paper-based art objects as well as, and most often, fabric scraps that are never again used. In this sense, it is at least as unproductive as it is productive. The piles of unused pulp, rotating from location to location, resist both commodification and traditional archival practices. Through its non-

productivity, Combat Paper becomes a process devoted to destruction and at times (re)creation rather than utility; through destruction, it opens the conditions of possibility for text, narration, and storytelling. And the project is mobile. While Combat Paper has several more established affiliate paper mills, the original and primary project wanders. With its custom-made, portable paper mill and beater, the group hosts events throughout the U.S. and world. In 2014, for example, Combat Paper visited communities in New Hampshire, North Carolina, Iowa, Texas, Maryland, Virginia, Michigan, Arkansas, Oregon, and California, including UC Berkeley, where I have participated numerous times.<sup>109</sup> During the gatherings, participants bring materials they hope to shred, the combat uniform--Army Combat Uniforms, for example--the common choice. In this way, the bodies and fabrics that arrive to each site produce site-specific, fundamentally collective work spaces.

### **The Uniformed Body**

Following some of Cameron and Mattot's early remarks regarding the project's beginnings and goals,<sup>110</sup> in what therapeutic ways is Combat Paper a response to trauma? At first, it seems that it approximates the distinct temporalities of military subjectivity, and thus "selfhood," and engages the forces that expose the fissures and failures of both. To start, narratives are often present in the scene of the practice, but they are far from central. The ripping and shredding of materials is what drives the practice. Not sequentially organized or narratively driven, the practice also works to destroy the symbolic and affective histories of violence and trauma that might not "belong" to the specific participants. A family member might bring the clothing of son or sister who was killed in combat; a person might bring the belongings of his disaffected or uninterested roommate. In this sense, at the onset the memories held within the material are shared, dispersed and viscerally engaged among the participants who may or may not know the owners of the uniforms personally or have touched the fabric before the moment of desecration. In this sense, no individual or singular self is referenced; there is no "self" at all apart from its relations to others, including those encountered in combat from both the US and Iraq or Afghanistan. The self is the one whose uniform changes hands in storage or through gifts, remembered or relived through descendants. It is a self that is intergenerational, communal, and relational. It is a mode of selfhood that cannot exist apart from the other "selves" encountered or on whom it depends.

The practice functions as a form of communal memory that, throughout, refers less to specific or individual experiences of trauma than to the trauma of combat in spaces of U.S. militarism, the trauma of the violence creating the uniform itself. The practice neither forms nor projects a bound or coherent self, let alone representing subject, which is a requirement, it seems, for the practice to be legible as autobiographical. Instead, it references then works to destroy a communal and relational collection of subjects formed in and through the violence of U.S. militarism. And it does so primarily through its material.

At the center of the practice is the uniform. It is the ground on which the transient communities build. The concept "uniform" connotes homogenous fixity, a consistency unaffected by circumstances or emotions. As clothing, the uniform is created en masse and

exchanged among military and non-military members, which can lead to what the military sees as misuse. For example, when a “civilian” wears a uniform in public to accumulate what is commonly referred to as social capital, the colloquial term for this masquerade is “Stolen Valor.” The symbolic power of state authority and political sacrifice renders a uniformed combatant--body and fabric--a mobile, highly valued commodity. If this power can be stolen, the question is from whom. It seems that for military members, to misuse the cathected cultural object is more than theft and destruction; it is desecration. Notions of theft and desecration circulate among Combat Paper participants as well; the practice undermines and even destroys the uniform’s sociocultural power. But the notion of stolen valor also points to the ways bodies and the uniforms adorning them are affectively, sociopolitically, and even psychosomatically interconnected. It matters what body wears a uniform; its fetishistic potency resides in its relation to the body. The adornment of the uniform works to transform the body socially, culturally, and politically, a transformative power of U.S. militarism that Combat Paper works to destroy.<sup>111</sup>

Combat Paper enacts this form of destructive desecration with impunity. Participants experience differently the connections and boundaries between bodies, the fabrics they adorn, and the military socialities they produce, resisting in particular the corporeal boundaries that regulate U.S. militarism. But that is not all. The uniform also represents the state’s authority, power, and monopoly on violence. It is a visual testament to the notion of legitimate warfare and thus that legitimate violence is capable of taking place and has taken place. The material both protects and marks the service members as agents of this authority, agents that always, already operate collectively. And in this sense, the U.S. uniforms are hypervisible in contrast to the invisibility and illegitimacy of the insurgency they oppose. They uphold representational frameworks that reify state violence, rendering military bodies protected and non or anti-state actors expendable. Through these representational channels, the uniform produces the conditions of possibility for the state’s claim to legitimate violence. In destroying the uniform, Combat Paper also works to deconstruct this sociocultural and political potency fundamental to U.S. militarism.

Cameron and Mattot insist that the uniforms “often host our feelings and memories, our guilt and fears,” pointing to this affect and the most commonly white-male body that accompanies it as the militarized figure of war. Unified with the body, the uniform is the image of the impenetrable, white, masculine, citizen subject that therapeutic discourse of healing and redemption often seeks to revive. Though the uniforms hold these feelings and memories, they often remain “relegated to a box in the attic or a corner of the closet.” Cameron and Mattot point to how the reverence for the uniforms is often intensified if the material remains “tucked away.” Tucked away, they become a “symbol of our relationships to ourselves” that, nonetheless, occurred “in another time and place.” Hidden, they remain “at best, a reminder of our strength” and “at worst, a festering memory of lost humanity.” Cameron and Mattot name an acute ambivalence that seems to reside at the crux of the relation between military uniforms and bodies that wear them. Their apprehension of a “humanity” that is suddenly “lost” when contemplating the uniform demonstrates the ways this ambivalence itself is already insight into the fragile character of the militarized subject. And in their description, the uniforms are plural, as are the people they encounter. Indeed, prior to entering the destructive space of papermaking, the

uniforms are communal, connected at once to specific experiences and attachments and the broader experiences and affect of militarism.

The uniform's destruction also leads to an affective and psychosomatic disorientation.<sup>112</sup> The sudden unfamiliarity of the destroyed fabric disorients the participants from the increasingly martial public and private spheres that frame militarized life. My use of "disorientation" builds from Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology and materialism more generally. Examining traditions of phenomenology to call attention to the powerful forces that situate bodies and objects in space and time, Ahmed's work enables a refined look at the ways the tearing and rendering strange of uniform fabric startles or awakens otherwise dormant sensibilities. Ahmed contends that "orientations" affect and even determine "what is near or proximate to the body," including the objects that we labor with or on in our daily lives. For Ahmed, "orientations shape the corporeal substance of bodies" as well as the objects that cohabit the bodily space. Orientations determine the bodies and objects that "occup[y] space." Ahmed contends that orientations have an effect on the ways "subjects and objects materialize" or "come to take shape" and on what those subjects and objects do (235).<sup>113</sup>

Combining the legacies of Marxist historical materialism with phenomenology's corporeal materialisms, referencing Husserl's foundational work in particular, Ahmed explores the ways our senses can consciously obscure the referential and learned familiarity of our surroundings. Our senses, under focus, can purposely obfuscate the learned meaning and habits of objects to locate the ways perception "intends" and "apprehends" objects (237-8). Ahmed points out that "the background as what is 'unseen' in its 'thereness' or 'familiarity'" enables a way of understanding the familiar as that which "takes shape by being unnoticed" (239). Ahmed points to the ways that Husserl's table, his object of choice for demonstrating his theory of perception, must "coincide" with him for him to even write about the table philosophically. Object and body must coincide in some way for their phenomenological encounters, and the labor and sociality they produce, to emerge (240).<sup>114</sup> What objects and bodies are relegated to the background, or out of sight, for certain orientations to be possible? I will return to this question when considering the histories that artisanal destruction's disorienting effects lay bare.

Ahmed parses the notion of coincidence, claiming that when bodies and objects "coincide" it is not through happenstance or chance, but rather a product of histories that orient the objects toward each other. Referencing the multiple connotations of the notion of a "background," Ahmed points to historical processes, those which produce the conditions that allow for these encounters and responses to emerge. This analysis is what a turn to Marxism allows. Criticizing Feuerbach, Marx and Engels make clear the ways that objects result from "the activity of a whole succession of generations" (qtd. in Ahmed 40).<sup>115</sup> For Ahmed, these histories of labor and generations of social formations shape objects and determine where and how bodies and objects "arrive" in the social scene together and in relation to one another. These objects, and the bodies they encounter, cannot be apprehended "as simply given." This history becomes imperative for understanding what can be apprehended, affectively and sensorially, when bodies encounter and engage objects.

Ahmed also looks to Marx's *Capital* to examine the ways the process of commodity fetishism also serves to obfuscate the histories of labor and sociality constituting the objects that become commodities (240-3). For Marx, labor's object becomes a commodity when it enters the

capitalist exchange economy. Calling commodities “mysterious things,” precisely because of their ability to simultaneously erase and naturalize, or render inconsequential, the “social character of men’s labour,” Marx claims that social relations between producers manifest through commodity exchange, or their relations between products. Commodities themselves become “social things.” Marx is clear that capital allows workers to relate to one another only through the exchange of commodities; the object of labor and the commodity facilitate relations among laboring bodies (320-1).<sup>116</sup>

Describing the ways Marx understands materials as taking form in the process of commodity formation, Ahmed notes that Marxism’s commodity fetishism “relies .... on a distinction between matter and form.” For Ahmed, this distinction between the table and the wood as its material, or the “becoming-table of the wood” is distinct from its commodification (242). Ahmed seems to see a temporal continuum among these stages, the relations between them nonlinear and even without causality. Matter is formed, and multiple histories of labor, from natural processes to human labor, affect the form the matter takes. These histories of mobility, transformation, use, and exchange in mind, Ahmed determines that no object is “reducible to itself,” which means the object does not “‘have’ an ‘itself’ that is apart from its contact with others” (242-3). The histories of the object include the histories of the bodies that labor with it and the other objects it encounters. These layered histories intertwine, forming temporal constellations in and through the object. And these histories shape the object’s form, capacities, and use. Ahmed sees the “occupation” as a way for objects to “do,” to be “busy” (244). Referencing the table again, Ahmed suggests that what we do with an object, or what such an object “allows us to do” is actually “essential” to the object itself (244). Indeed, bodies labor on things, but “things” might also “do bodies” (245). The uniformed body, or military subject not “in itself” the militarized being without its uniform, and therefore the bodies and labor that created the uniform, can be read as a commodity. It effaces these histories of labor and exchange as well as its relation to the body it adorns.

Understanding the uniform as a crucial component of the fetishized military body, the material encounter that animates the body into the combat soldier, what effects might the tearing and shredding have on this subject that is also a commodity? The disorienting process of papermaking, the tearing and shredding that renders the uniform unrecognizable, begins to sever this relation between body and uniform. The uniform, as a sociopolitical and affective extension of the militarized body, becomes undone. This relation between the body, uniform, and revered combatant comprises a semblance to the nearly superhuman, fetishized military subject. When the material is torn and rendered strange, this fetishism is interrupted. It might expose the tenuous boundaries of not just the militarized subject and these histories of labor but what is and is not human, to which I return in chapter four. Along with the fabric, the fetishized military subject dismantles through its desecration, revealing the ways it is already divided into these histories of its creation with and through its others. I am suggesting that the impenetrable, glorified militarized self that speaks and writes of combat comes undone through this practice of artisanal destruction. In this undoing, the martial subject’s relation to its object, to its others, can be apprehended.

Returning to the role of history in determining the ways bodies are oriented, Ahmed contends that orientations, which remain “an effect of what we tend toward” also “point to the

future, to what is not yet present” (247). What is “behind” a body or object, such as its history or that which is spatially “behind” or in the margins, shapes the body’s or object’s orientation. The past points to the future, collapsing past and future into the constellation of a body facing or engaging an object in the present. And these histories are traceable. Property ownership and kinship relations determine not just the wealth upon which those bodies will flourish in the future, but the objects and experiences with those objects the bodies will encounter; they determine our “arrival” to a space and before an object.<sup>117</sup> And the objects that bodies inherit “are not only material” but can be “values, capital, aspirations, projects, and styles.” The background that enables the objects and bodies we encounter to surface also determines, in most cases, what we “aspire *toward*.” In both history and spatial organization, it determines the path forward.

In the context of U.S. militarism, this deterministic process of layered temporalities is fundamentally racialized. As discussed in chapter two, U.S. military subject and militarism depend upon the universal, individual, white, cis-male, citizen subject who speaks. Histories of white masculine dominance and its racialized others affect the directions the militarized subjects face, as well as the bodies and objects they face. Indeed, bringing feminist critique to bear on these spatio-temporalities that determine orientations, Ahmed points to the “uneven distribution” of not just resources and time, but attention, vision, and sensation. The bodies and objects that remain in view, that attract our bodies and attention, often arrive on the scene at the expense or even forceful erasure of other bodies and objects.

Within pervasive U.S. militarization, for example, the uniformed soldier or police officer is hyper-visible and ever present. The ubiquitous uniformed subject appears both at the displacement and expense of people of color, for example, and, in combat zones beyond the U.S., at the displacement and expense of local and indigenous populations under military occupation. In this sense, to see the uniformed soldier is to fail to see those targeted through militarism. Ahmed suggests that “if orientations affect what bodies do, then they also affect how spaces take shape around certain bodies.” Ahmed understands spaces as “extend[ing] bodies” through the bodies’ orientation toward objects and experiences. In this sense, for Ahmed, the spaces “extend the bodies that ‘tend’ to inhabit them” (250). The space of militarism, then, is one in which bodies are presumed to be both present and accommodated. Following Ahmed, the spaces that accommodate, or form around, the militarized body in uniform function as extensions of that body. It is not just that armed, uniformed bodies traverse the spaces of militarism, both domestic and abroad. Rather, in a dialectical process of presence and absence, those spaces take shape precisely to carry out the violence of militarization as extensions of the fetish and symbol of the uniformed body.

And these bodies, and the spaces that are their extensions, take shape through repetitive actions and movement, including labor. Ahmed writes that as laborers we “get stuck in certain alignments,” and our bodies “take shape,” through the repetition of our work. Through our work, the object “leaves its impression: the action, as an intending as well as a tending toward an object,” .... *orients the body in some ways rather than others.*” These tendencies can be toward objects which can take the shape of bodies or identifications or ideals (247). For Ahmed, bodies have tendencies toward certain objects and bodies which develop through both history and repetition. And yet, Ahmed also points to the ways that we, as bodies “under [the] pressure” of

these backgrounds, histories, and temporalities, can turn from them. Bodies can and do “refuse the inheritance,” a refusal often colloquially termed a “breaking point.” As Ahmed makes clear, “we do not always know what breaks at these points” (248). It is at this initial breaking point, this turning away from these histories of body, object, subject formation ignited through aesthetic practice, that *Combat Paper* emerges. A mobile, communal practice, it incites affective and psychosomatic breaks through its repetitive destruction of the uniform.

How specifically does *Combat Paper* break this cycle? If the uniformed subject splits in an act of desecration and deconstitution, what is left and what emerges? As Ahmed puts it, once the table becomes an object that disorients, making “things lose their place, which means the loss of coherence of a certain world,” it is doing a kind of “political work” that has the potential to “reshape the very surfaces of bodies and worlds.” She sees what emerges as a new potentiality. As new bodies resurface, they “turn the tables on the world that keeps things in place” (254). In this sense, the new, disoriented body that emerges is one without a coherent, if individual or even apprehensible subjectivity. Returning to the question of the self who speaks, we might ask what self, what subject, emerges. If bodies and objects are disoriented, then the process of their arrival to those spaces built on histories of tendencies and object relations is interrupted. Indeed, to be disoriented is to fail to arrive at a set direction; it is not just a failure or inability to face what one desires or expects, it is a failure to recognize that one faces an object or direction at all. In this sense, to be disoriented is to fail to arrive at an orientation; it is a process of non-arrival.

Insofar as individualized, impenetrable military subjectivity relies on an affective and psychosomatic orientation towards martial modes of being, the subject that becomes disoriented undergoes a process of deconstitution. The body, or self, that emerges is no longer one constituted through combat against threats to the U.S. nation as a way of life. An art practice that responds to the trauma of U.S. militarism, *Combat Paper* “turns the tables” on this very military subject. In addition to the white male of the uniformed commodity, the nation itself, with the white, heteronormative family unit as its bedrock, is also rendered unsteady. With the disorientation of the military subject, the family, the nation, and the white subject itself are undermined. Which brings us to the question of what the affective and psychosomatic openings reveal or make possible. In what specific ways does *Combat Paper* turn these tables?

## **Liberating Rag**

Cameron’s and Mattot’s writing as well as participatory experiences suggest that the self of artisanal destruction is communal, and that communal self includes disorienting bodily relations with objects such as uniform fabric. Traumatic memory is worked in and through a temporality that collects and layers the diverse experiences of its many participants, so that *Combat Paper* becomes a practice in which there is no distinction between audience and performers.

And yet, to be clear, Cameron and Mattot explicitly outline the ways the practice both references and builds from what have become long-standing traditions of veterans’ therapeutic writing, such as journal keeping, in response to war (50).<sup>118</sup> This therapeutic writing is often autobiographical, and often deployed for the purposes of working through combat trauma. Cameron and Mattot explain that the papermaking process can be “catharsis,” which enables

them “to build communities of veterans and civilians .... who want to learn the lessons of war.” In doing so, participants might “begin to heal.” This healing power is collective rather than individual, a power and process that first requires the gathering of bodies. They describe the paper itself as their “means of communication,” but one that does not belong to them, or veterans, alone. Rather, paper as communication belongs to “all.” In this sense, Cameron and Mattot open the healing process they reference to the participants and even interviewers and readers of their collective statement.

To engage with the Combat Paper project *is* thus to open oneself to a process that can (re)orient towards healing, which leads to the question of what, specifically, needs to heal. What dimension of human existence permeates not only the experiences of combat, past and present, the experience of artisanal and even commercial labor, and the open, ever changing community of participants? Cameron and Mattot call the veterans’ homecoming a “life-long journey.” For them, it will “only happen” if the “barriers placed between the veteran and their experiences, between veteran and civilian” are removed (50). This insight into the reparative or healing project of Combat Paper suggests that forming a community of participants is not just important or beneficial, but necessary for the ability to “heal.”

Cameron and Mattot do not elaborate on these barriers. They suggest, as Jonathan Shay makes clear in his extensive work on moral injury, discussed in chapter one, that combat often leads to emotional, psychic, and even physical barriers between service members or veterans and their loved ones, colleagues, and friends.<sup>119</sup> For Shay, these barriers become one primary effect of moral injury; recognition of these barriers is one way PTSD can be diagnosed. Veterans suffering from PTSD become isolated from their traditional support systems, shutting down access and retreating into silence and rumination. In this sense, it seems that Cameron and Mattot are referencing this pervasive struggle in veteran communities as well as the clinical discourse surrounding it.

The papermaking process undermines this isolation by gathering and bridging experiences. But stronger than the simple gathering of bodies is what Cameron and Mattot refer to as the “ritual” of papermaking. It is a process of “deconstructing the uniform” through which there is tremendous “power,” and not just for healing (40). Cameron and Mattot observe the participants engaging this power differently. Some “tear” the uniform “to shreds” while others “reverently remove insignia and buttons,” handling them with care and even saving them as “tokens” for memory’s sake. “This ritual,” they state, “has seen Marines break down after they first cut up their dress blues.” Some participants “cry,” while others “shout.” The destructive acts of cutting and shredding are “highly personal and liberating” for nearly all of the participants--veterans, families, or civilians--which has led Cameron and Mattot to call the specific process of uniform shredding “liberating rag.” Indeed, for them, the very “first step” in papermaking is this liberation.

Who, or what, is liberated? This liberation seems to operate through a number of registers, the destruction of the uniform fabric initiating it. Rendering the uniform unrecognizable, it deconstructs the image of the uniformed military body that participants keep at the center of their mind. This uniformed body breaks open; the affective, emotional, and visceral link between the uniform fabric and participants’ own bodies emerges, liberating those involved from the bind of militarized subjectivity. If, as I am suggesting, the uniform is an extension of the militarized

body and thus subject, then the destruction of the uniform works to destroy the psychosomatic and affective boundaries of this body.

Trauma theorist Marianne Hirsch recently explored the relations between materials, memory, and skin in art practice, understanding art as elucidating the ways we remain connected to others through trauma and its histories.<sup>120</sup> Looking at what she calls “small, fragmentary archives” that allow the experiences of the art practitioners to “travel,” Hirsch suggests that these ephemeral practices function as critical challenges to the “monumentalization” of “traumatic memories of war, violence, and exile.” Often when these memories are monumentalized, they are owned and redeployed for military and national aims, as my discussion of *Operation Homecoming* in chapter two makes clear. These small, ephemeral archives sever the instrumental links between individual and state records and experiences of trauma, as well as their connections through traumatic memory. This memory work opens different registers of engagement with the memories and effects of trauma. Hirsch’s small archives—including those that interweave fabric and skin in ways that challenge their positions as bound, distinct bodies in relation to the trauma they carry—engage temporalities of memory that, like artisanal destruction, hold open the wounds of trauma.<sup>121</sup>

For Hirsch, trauma, as a concept, opens up “new conceptions of time.” Its present temporality leads it to be a concept of “perpetual return” as well as “unknowability” and “aporia” (79-80).<sup>122</sup> The temporality of trauma is thus one of return, of a present that overlaps with the past, the traumatic event, and future, the cycle of repetition. What is the relation between this temporality and the “self” that exists in and through it? Hirsch’s understanding of trauma in and through art as memory work fails to fully explore the affective and psychosomatic connections and fissures between bodies and materials, flesh and uniform. For this nexus, it would be useful to think with the work of Jill Bennett, a foundational theorist on trauma art. Bennett understands visual and performance art as addressing trauma from a tangential, referential position. Trauma, in this sense, powerfully emerges through the relation between art and affect. Affect operates through art in ways similar to traumatic memory itself; this range of affect accessed and produced is not immediately associated with an “identifiable” traumatic experience or “emotional condition.” Affect is distinct from the trappings, structure, and prescriptions of moral injury; indeed, this kind of emergent trauma is one that cannot be apprehended prior to the art that releases it. It is of another level, perhaps another layer of history inaccessible before the sensuous destruction of art practice.

Bennett claims that “empathetic connection” which refuses “sympathetic identification, or recognizable narration,” is at work in this kind of art, which develops what Bennett calls “corporeal promiscuity.” This means that participants “feel into [one] another” through their engagement with the work, inhabiting an embodied sensation that is not “anchored” by the “character or narrative” of trauma (34). Bennett is clear that this realm of art practice “stimulates” the “thinking” of trauma, a cognitive-affective approach to trauma that remains distinct from what guided narration seeks to deploy. With *Combat Paper*, participants tear, cut, shred, and mix fabrics with water, a visceral practice involving organic and inorganic materials. The practice deploys touch above all other sensations, remaining present both sensuously and temporally. But, as we already know, this present temporality is inundated with the multiple temporalities of past experiences, memories, and past or present traumas.

Bennett employs the term “affect contagion” to describe when bodily memory, a visceral bodily response, emerges before “the inscription of narrative” and thus, for her, “moral emotion” (36). In this sense, this contagion also emerges prior to the morality that determines moral injury itself, pointing to the affect that emerges in and through Combat Paper’s artisanal destruction as belonging to a psychosomatic realm that functions beyond the event of moral injury. For Bennett, art is a form of thinking involving “darker regions” of the mind and body than the “conventional thought” that narration allows. If the shredding of material enacts a visceral trace, sensations that disrupt, through experiences of trauma, the practice’s destruction becomes a retrospective gesture, a “continuous negotiation” of the past in the present. It is memory’s “lived process,” one that plays out through the “skin” of traumatic memory, which will rupture, disorienting the body from the experience or memory invoked. Bennett suggests that it is through the “breached boundaries of skin,” what is also the membrane and threshold of affect, that traumatic memory breaks through and remains present with participants. This skin as affect’s threshold expands to encompass the materials, organic and inorganic, that it engages.

This memory also becomes a continuous felt sense that troubles distinctions between the past and present bodies, bodies adorning and destroying the uniform, as well as notions of self and other and of embodied contact. Bennett describes this process as “seeing feeling” through art. With Combat Paper, this broken threshold of skin would seem to follow the tearing, ripping, and breaking of the uniform fabric itself. The practice mimics the psychosomatic brokenness and openness required of remembrance. Linked to the flesh itself through the collective trauma and its layered memories, the fabric torn is the flesh torn. This first step in papermaking, then, is a practice that destroys both fabric and flesh.

Hirsch and Bennett examine the event of aesthetic reflection as releasing affective openings that relate to yet depart from the original trauma. Both show how art that responds to trauma engages temporalities, and their histories, through sensory, affective, and psychosomatic relations among bodies and materials. These histories and this trauma that lies beyond the event of moral injury are thus “liberated” through destruction. The porosity of the boundaries between different bodies, bodies and material, and bodies and memories allows for the apprehension of the ways bodies and objects are connected. And, this porosity opens to the trauma that might lie beyond the recognizable event of moral injury, which the process liberates. Returning briefly to the question of self-narration as opposed to art in relation to trauma, Combat Paper remains self-referential only through notions of an interconnected, communal self that, like Bennett’s formulation of affect and trauma, is born precisely through the temporality of artisanal destruction. This communal self emerges through the process, able to be apprehended only after the bodies are disoriented, only after the destruction of the military subject.

The question of what specific histories emerge through this additional, deep trauma remains. What experiences have been covered over; what relations are participants and practitioners, in their disorientation, able to apprehend? The history of the military subject’s inheritance sets a scene for understanding the kinds of histories that affective and psychosomatic disorientation through art practice can reveal. But, as Mel Chen points out, the realm of the fetish seems inadequate for understanding the relations among bodies and between bodies and objects that form and come undone. Instead, Chen centers the notion of “animacy” as an analytical rubric for examining the ways matter is differentially classified and valued, as well as the socio-

political effects of these processes.<sup>123</sup> Navigating the always porous boundaries defining what is human, animacy demonstrates how biopolitical governance relies on “porous” and even “co-constituting bonds” between the individual human bodies in question and the “body of a nation, a state, and even a racial locus like ‘whiteness.’” (194). Chen is interested in relations of “intoxication” between people and non-human matter that “is not voluntary, is potentially permanent, is ambivalent toward its own affective uptake.” For Chen, this intoxication creates “altered affect” that engages pleasure or displeasure in possibly “unrecognizable” ways (198). This understanding of intoxication, as that which has already permeated the boundaries of the body and, in some cases, might or must be released, is useful for thinking of the kinds of affective connections and binds that form through the body’s destruction. The question of what affects and relationalities become animated, and in what capacities, is the subject of memory work on trauma.

What is toxic permeates the skin, the boundaries, and the worlds of bodies and objects. Toxicity is fundamentally relational; it is “productive” even in its negation of productivity. Chen believes that queerness and toxicity have “an affinity.” They “truck with negativity, marginality, and subject-object confusions” and “have, arguably, an affective intensity” (206-7). Also, notions of intoxication trouble animacy hierarchies, as Chen puts it, particularly when attachments form between animate and inanimate objects, humans and inanimate matter, such as the uniform material. Chen’s focus on toxicity frames the notion of the intoxication of a body by another in menacing and invasive ways, yet the term also connotes enamored if overwhelming attachment, and this double meaning is central for Chen’s understanding of the often ambivalent affective relations between human and non-human bodies at work in discourses of toxicity. Toxicity names that which changes us, for better or worse depending on the value system at work in the judgment. If we are to think of the process of artisanal destruction in these terms, then we might suggest that the destruction of Combat Paper is a destruction of toxicity against healing, an embrace of that which alters, changes, penetrates, and exposes. It is also an embrace, if an ambivalent one, of that which militarization deems toxic: particularly bodies of color and radically difference cultural practices encountered in combat zones.

Examining what they term “serious emotional relationships” with various objects, such as pillows, Chen suggests that these relationships reveal certain “reversals of expectation” regarding the affective potency and “vitality” that inanimate objects “are afforded” in discourses on and related to humanism and the human body. Chen asks us to think “beyond the rubric of fetishism,” to consider the “subjects *facing* these objects” differently and to question why and how we “mark their subjectivity as such” (203). Chen’s analysis points to the ways that there are affective and psychosomatic registers that lie beyond relations of fetishism and that can be exposed through destruction. Chen enables us to read Ahmed’s notion of disorientation as also a break through which the histories of labor between body and object, and their intimate attachments, can emerge. The uniform as commodity and fetish also, in its destruction, makes space for these forms of attachment that lie in its wake. It is not necessarily that the commodity is destroyed and its power dismantled, but rather that other forms of attachment and connection, such as the histories of labor, or the histories of those rendered faceless through the creation of the commodity, can be apprehended once the commodified object-body is disoriented.

Importantly for Chen is the way their affective relation of touch to the couch is possible only when their position within the realm of “human sociality” has been severely compromised through their toxicity. Instead, Chen offers the concept of “transobjectivity” and its partner transcorporeality as alternative analytic frameworks for examining the affective connections and socialities that form among human and non-human bodies. Both transobjectivity and transcorporeality describe this porous realm of exchange among bodies and objects daily. Chen points to Ahmed’s reliance on assumptions of animacy hierarchies in her foundational discussion of queer orientations toward objects. This relational connection is vital, yet even queer epistemologies miss the mark, presuming “the proper” and separate “integrity” of a body and a table. Ahmed’s phenomenology is still primarily concerned with perception, but Chen asks what happens when “percepts are to some degree bypassed . . . by the air itself” (209). Touch, smell, and other sensorial experiences are essential for the affective and intimate connections Chen describes, as they are for Bennett as well. Wishing to go beyond fetishism, Chen pushes this reasoning, asking “what is lost when we hold tightly to that exceptionalism which says that couches are dead and we are live?”

Chen’s reach beyond fetishism also, and again, opens up the question of the destruction and deconstitution of the body and subject. Chen asks if their “nonproductivity” and “nonhuman sociality” render them “some other human’s ‘dead,’” as is the case when people with disabilities are treated as other than human. In experiencing what is often classified as acute trauma, our bodies are undone and (re)done. Our bodies are in and of the material world, and when they are interrupted through trauma, these interruptions “demand recognizing the contradictions within matter itself,” including emerging understandings that cosmologies are “legitimately contestable,” particularly, for Chen, in what we might call the contemporary “posthuman” moment. These traumatic events are also events in which the complexity of matter is apprehended (208-9). In this sense, the rampant national anxiety that the traumatized Veteran produces can be understood as a crisis of not just the militarized subject of U.S. national identity, but a crisis of the boundaries of the human itself.

When we consider contagions or invasive toxic bodies, we consider what appear to be outside threats to our sovereign, bound bodies, psyches, and emotional states. These states, of course, can include the nation-state as a system of idealization and identification. Yet Chen also considers that toxicity is a change in a body’s state of being, a new altered existence that functions by its own rubrics. Yet, in pointing to what they terms the “queer productivity of toxins and toxicity,” Chen references a productivity that opens beyond the sovereign body to an affective and relational field of material belonging that might not have been apprehensible prior to the moment of toxicity. With combat trauma, for example, this realm would not be accessible prior to moral injury. Chen asks us to reflect on the sociality present in toxicity, which can be “painful” and “antisocial,” but which also includes “extant socialities” of queer life, or the “queer-inanimate” sociality that “exist beyond the fetish, beyond the animate” and beyond the human body (210-1).<sup>124</sup> Chen finds an “intimate co-relation, one defined by both integrality and proximity” in the relations between human bodies and their environments. Rocks, stones, and earth become most important in affective and material exchanges.

With this understanding of intimate, affective relations between bodies and materials, animate and inanimate, adorned or kept, we might ask what is liberated through the practice of

liberating rag. Cameron and Mattot describe the ritual of Combat Paper as also “the first step” in “recognizing the story held within the fiber.” For Cameron and Mattot, the “story” of not only the material itself but also its place in the histories of militarism comes forth through the shredding and pulping. Destruction brings forth the story, but which story? The story of militarism and the uniform’s place in it, the story of the violence of combat, or a new story, one born through the deconstructive ritual of papermaking? Cameron and Mattot make clear that “in the end, after shredding and pulping,” the uniform undergoes a transformation. It can become “paper art” or remain pulp to be used in paintings or sculptures. Also, and frequently, the paper becomes pulp to be used for nothing at all, or becomes paper that is left untouched dried and ready for use. This paper marks the conditions for writing, and for the story, but not the story itself. If the practice produces a story, it is not required or even expected. Cameron and Mattot suggest that each material state or effect “holds a personal story.” But the material that remains after the uniform’s destruction, be it paper, pulp, or sculpture, is not what ultimately defines the practice’s impact or effects. They make clear that the “art,” that which disrupts and deconstitutes, is “in the process, not the artifact,” if an artifact remains at all (40). The art is the destruction. There might be a story never voiced. Or there might be a story that only can be voiced collectively, without a singular time or subjective locus. This uncertainty and impossibility is Combat Paper’s contribution to questions of self-referentiality in visual art.

Collaborative at its outset, a creation between Cameron and Mattot, Combat Paper’s communal reference is never complete; the ambivalence itself proliferates, rendering veterans’ affective, emotional, and visceral responses to the uniform as diverse as the spaces and locations in which Combat Paper operates. Thus, when Cameron and Mattot suggest that “reclaiming the uniform as art enables” participants to “move toward a new relationship” to both the material and their time in relation to combat, they point to how the practice collects and directs the diverse experiences and bodies involved. This new relationship is “one of honesty and openness,” which helps participants develop a “true respect” for themselves and “an accounting” of their actions “while shrouded in the uniform.”<sup>125</sup> Reoriented toward the memories and experiences held within the uniforms, participants find and foster new, “honest” relations with their military service that might lead to “true,” as opposed to deceptive or coercive, respect for who they are and could be.

It seems that this “truth” is also communal, honesty as relational. And this new form of accounting for the experiences of the uniform recalls the compulsion to narrate. Yet it seems that this form of narration, a chronicling of combat events which could be autobiographical, can emerge only after destruction has taken place. This narration is also restructured through collaborative, relational practice. The uniforms, then, form a surface on which a range of emotions, affects, and experiences in and around combat are collected, connected, renewed, and even revised.

Cameron and Mattot do not overlook this destruction. Indeed, they connect the history of papermaking to histories of warfare, an already historical and intimate partnership between paper and militarism. They claim that military might throughout history also produced the art and craft of papermaking.<sup>126</sup> Thus, their choice of papermaking as their communal practice not only acknowledges but reenacts these integrated and layered histories of papermaking, message crafting, uniformed bodies, and military conquest. At its onset, papermaking engages past and

present, connecting its early forms of labor with the violence that surrounded and produced them. Participating in *Combat Paper*, then, is a participation in those histories of military conquest and a remembrance of their legacies and effects. This attention recognizes the living character of history, the ways histories of bodies traveling through space for commerce and imperial violence remain present in materials and labor processes.

In producing transient communities of papermakers, the *Combat Paper* process brings forward what might be fundamentally relational about combat trauma. What empathic vision, to follow Bennett's terminology, does the practice expose? What interrelation between the Veteran and community artists and their materials does this make imaginable? With *Combat Paper*, the emerging histories might be those, for example, of the heavily exploited and globally racialized laborers who create the fetishistically and affectively potent uniform fabric, the largely racialized laborers who assemble and fabricate the uniforms for American Apparel in Alabama, for example, as well as histories of military service for U.S. imperial ends.<sup>127</sup> The process might expose the fundamental relations between veterans and those they target, those most vulnerable, the bodies and experiences of the Iraqi people, for example, people whose paths they cross precisely because of their adornment of the uniform. The destruction of *Combat Paper* allows participants to apprehend and even approximate these histories. In this way, this remembrance reenacts rather than recollects alone. It finds "incommensurable realities" and "incompatible repertoires of meaning"<sup>128</sup> that address the "im/possibilities of communication and affiliation across differences." *Combat Paper* exposes these relations, tensions, and antagonisms precisely through its destruction of the uniformed subject. Histories of exploitation, among service members within the military and among occupation forces and civilian populations, emerge, as do and the participants' collective relations to these histories.

For Ahmed, history's ongoing legacies are "not only the work done by generations but the 'sedimentation' of that work as the condition of arrival for future generations." These histories, their functions and structures, "cannot simply be perceived on the surface of the object." For Ahmed, the history does not belong to an object; it is not simply "given in its sensuous certainty," as if it were an object's "property" (241). The story a militarized participant might tell is not his alone, nor a product of the layered histories and legacies that constitute his trauma. Instead, Ahmed writes "we can have a cultural biography of things. This table, you might say, has a story. What a story it could tell." The "larger story," according to Ahmed, is not only of "'things' changing hands" but of "how things come to matter by taking shape through and in the labor of others" (243). It becomes the story of matter, the story of a history revealed through destruction. The deconstitution of the military subject leads one to the greater, the communal, and the global story of bodies, materials, toxicity, and generations of trauma. Of the uniformed body, we might say that the story is an affective and psychosomatic commodity trace. Chen states<sup>129</sup> that "these feelings that are neither exclusively traumatic, nor exclusively private, nor a social archive proper to certain groups." These feelings circulating through disorientations are communal and shifting; their "publics and intimacies" are "not clearly bounded or determinable" in relation to narrative or specific traumatic experience (197). For Chen, the question becomes "which bodies can bear the fiction of independence" and "uninterruptability?" Which bodies remain invulnerable to deconstitution through artisanal destruction? It is clear that *Combat Paper* demonstrates the ways the militarized male subject can, and must, come undone.

What queer theorists such as Ahmed and Chen bring to discussions of trauma and art practice is precisely this: that the self accessed in and through artisanal destruction in response to trauma is not just relational and communal, but constituted through the histories of military violence and difference that have been covered over. They expose the ways art flirts with destruction, and through destruction enables its practitioners and audience to apprehend their constitution through that which is different, be it human or non human animal bodies, materials, or experiences. These exposures and relations produce the conditions for a new reflecting, speaking, collective self. They are prior to and necessary for this reflection. An apprehension of the ways we are not only vulnerable but bound to those different from us, the ways the “us” that speak, and the bodies that carry us, cannot speak or be without those others, is the work of Combat Paper. It is a step toward recognizing the “selves” that might speak, write, practice in the face of the violence and trauma of U.S. militarism.

## Chapter Four

### *abu ghraib arias*

And yet Combat Paper produces objects as well. Returning to Walter Benjamin's concept of remembrance, what does the paper as object produce?<sup>130</sup> What temporalities does it engage and reveal? For Benjamin, remembrance is a mode of commemoration that holds open the psychosomatic wounds of destruction. I turn now to Philip Metres's *abu ghraib arias* to examine a text that, I contend, remembers the torture that occurred in 2004, in the Abu Ghraib prison, in just this way. The longpoem offers the gradual decline of integrated narrative, self-referentiality, clarity, and thus what I've called militarized subjectivity. In this way, it documents the militarized subject's deconstitution through language and redaction. The subject's undoing exposes an affective and psychosomatic vulnerability to difference, and *arias* demonstrates this process and relation through its juxtaposition between the "echo/ex" and "blues" series.

Published in 2012, *abu ghraib arias*, is a chapbook of poems, which Metres calls a "longpoem," comprised of excerpts from varying texts such as U.S. soldier emails, testimonies from Abu Ghraib torture victims, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) manual for Camp Echo at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, the Bible, and the Code of Hammurabi, to name a few. The first edition of *abu ghraib arias*--only 200 copies, printed and hand-bound--was made with combat paper from the pulped uniforms of Army veteran Chris Arendt, who was stationed at Guantanamo Bay. Metres's longpoem examines what becomes possible when combat paper is repurposed and circulated. Assembled with numerous redactions and caesuras, the long poem claims the impossible representation of torture as its project. It seeks to mark the violence of torture while also making visible the possibilities for speech and representation through the event of torture--a difficult, critical task. Abrupt and disturbing, what Virginia Konchan describes as an "echo chamber" for the "unspeakable," the text juxtaposes radically different spaces of power, mobility, and criminality.<sup>131</sup> Notorious Abu Ghraib prison guards offer truncated reflections alongside sporadic, nearly illegible assemblages of words and phrases from Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo torture victims.<sup>132</sup>

This chapter examines *arias* as an example of the ways art and literary objects might produce forms of remembrance as well as the ways poetics approach and respond to apprehensions across difference. It asks: can, or when can, agonism, rage, and hate be revealing and even transformative? In many ways, *arias* stages the conflict apprehended through artisanal destruction. Through its redactions, erasures, caesuras, and multivocality, it demonstrates the antagonistic yet fragile relations of U.S. militarism.

### **Relations of Antagonism**

*arias* is organized through two primary series: the first is the "The Blues of ..." series comprised of brief poems offering the perspective of the prison gatekeepers during the U.S.

occupation in Iraq, specifically the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Each poem in the series names an Abu Ghraib guard or other military official who became infamous after the torture photos circulated. The second is the (echo /ex/) series, which presents text from the testimonies of torture victims in either Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo, the sources never clear. Nearly all of the poems hint at both locations simultaneously: “echo” referencing Guantanamo Bay’s “Camp Echo,” and the inclusion of Graner or “G” which references the guard understood to have been the leader of the torture in the Abu Ghraib prison. Metres’s approach to the (echo /ex/) series began with what he described as necessary sporadic note taking and assembling because reading the testimonies “straight through” was “too painful” for him (25). In this sense, in the beginning Metres could only receive the experiences of torture through broken, incoherent, unintegrated narrative. As discussed in chapter three, non-narrative aesthetic responses to trauma, either the experience of the artist or of another for whom the artist creates, are common. Metres’s reproduced this necessity of broken messaging, indirect imparting, and scattered affect as he reworked the testimonies into his longpoem.

Both series undergo an increase in redactions, caesuras, or censored language as the long poem progresses. (echo /ex/) becomes increasingly illegible until words no longer appear across the page. Poetically, *arias* works to undo in ways similar to the artisanal destruction of Combat Paper. What the Combat Paper practice did through bodies and materials, *arias* attempts through language. And the concept of torture, itself disruptive and largely incommunicable, remains central to Metres’s project. Thus, torture produces a text of nearly endless caesuras, imparting through absence what is impossible to convey. Metres seems to suggest that a narrative in remembrance of torture must be broken; in this way, Metres’s long poem engages what Benjamin understood to be the aesthetic technique of interruption. For Benjamin, the caesura is effectively analogous to the political tactic of the general strike, bringing about in language the affirmative break necessary for deposing the violent norms that structure and police discourse.<sup>133</sup> The cessation of meaning permeates the poetic text, leaving gaps and erasures that not just interrupt the coherence and meaning but refuse the impulse and ability to give trauma in any form a coherent narrative or speaking subject.

*arias* offers a constellated testimony to trauma, which includes access to experiences of extreme, horrific, and ongoing state violence, suggesting that its fractured method might be the only “access” imaginable for the trauma of torture. *arias* offers guidebooks, manuals, and other official and training texts, each with distinct relations to the traumas the text references. Metres comments on the ways militarism broadly, through military training, dictates the ways information, particularly atmospherics, is engaged. As discussed in chapter two, atmospherics is the military’s term for collecting accounts of the progress or success of new social and structural initiatives from local populations under military occupation. The poem titled “Document Exploitation (Standard Operating Procedure)” for example, makes this clear. The poem offers fragments from the SOP focused on instructions for translating poems, proverbs, and other cultural pieces for U.S. propaganda. It looks at translation practices deemed most effective for military purposes. It includes instructions for how to extract and translate meaning, suggesting that military members not translate proverbs and poems “word for word” but rather “ask someone for help,” which indicates that they have no capacity to translate with sensitivity to the nuances and impossibilities between languages. The poem’s opening line contains the beginning

of a simple command: “clearly and legibly,” without indicating what must happen clearly and legibly. After a caesura suggests that they “skip lines” and then, among other breaks, remain “as close as possible,” it becomes clear that these instructions are meant to guide manipulative tactics for gathering military intelligence while quelling anger and rebellion.

Yet, the chapbook separates the legal and even Biblical commands--the SOP, Bible, and Code of Hammurabi--from their context, circulating these languages of control in ways that both reify yet diffuse their power. The traces of their demands lose their impact and even meaning. Through including them in his text, Metres destabilizes the legal language with its commandments. In this sense, while clear language, reflection, and designation mark a particular type of doctrinal and procedural violence, the long poem interrogates and undermines the effects of this violence. One example is the poem “Handling the Koran (Standard Operating Procedure),” which includes excerpts from what seems to be a few sentences drawn from military instructions about interacting with the Koran when visiting Iraqi domestic spaces. The instructions ask military members to treat the text “with reverence,” as if it is sacred or “delicate art.” They are told to “avoid handling or touching,” but if they must, they must use “two hands at all time.” The poem displays the ways this handling is a performance of reverence that robs the text of its cultural and spiritual power and how military personnel feign spiritual or ritualistic engagement with a sacred text to earn trust among populations they govern by force.

The instructions also make visible the ways the military expects greater care from its personnel when they handle cultural texts in the service of atmospherics, rather than the local populations or prisoners. Yet, the inclusion of the instructions, with much of their language omitted, also diminishes their power. The longpoem presents manipulation while stripping it of its influence. It does so as well when it includes phrases from the sacred text, uttered in Arabic to the prisoners, among the other truncated phrases within the (echo /ex/) poems, exposing the ways sacred text is repurposed in the service of torture and therefore undermining the military’s claims to moral legitimacy.

“The Blues of” series centers the accounts of the prison guards and other military members around Abu Ghraib during the time of the prison scandal. What is their relation to the trauma of the torture, a trauma at times inflicted by their own sadistic actions? The language becomes increasingly censored, with the exception of two pieces: “The Blues of Charles Graner” and “The Blues of Ken Davis.” By contrast, these poems are clear and direct, the narration conveying what seems to be a lucid grasp of the motivation and moral awareness of the speakers. The first of the two to appear, “The Blues of Charles Graner” is one sentence: “the Christian in me/knows it’s wrong/but the corrections/officer in me can’t/help but love/making a grown man/piss himself.” Overt and unapologetic, Graner, who became known as the mind behind and leader of the torture at Abu Ghraib, offers dismissive and morally vacuous rhetoric that dissociates a Christian ethics from the position of a “corrections officer.” Corrections officer wins; the poem suggests that the behavior, making a “grown man piss himself,” does take place, the sadistic power of authority over imprisoned bodies surpassing the ethical compulsion to respect or care for others. Corrections officer authority exercises its lawmaking abilities, establishing terror as legitimate retribution. It is clear that the guards consider the prisoners to be less than human, a sentiment inherent to militarism as discussed in chapter one. And this authority expands beyond the role of prison guard. The term corrections officer is separated by a

paragraph break, leaving “officer” to head the line outlining the torture, suggesting that the infantilizing sadism described can arise through all modes of policing. The power of any state officer renders one morally helpless and unapologetic for one’s sadism.

“The Blues of Ken Davis,” on the other hand, conveys moral concern. The poem reads:  
and I remember calling/home that night and saying/I can’t take this  
anymore/because if this is what we’re/going to do if this is what/we’ve  
become then I’m done/they say talk to a chaplain/they say it’s all your  
perception/it’s how you perceive/and every night it’s amazing/because  
you’re lying there/no matter how much/music you play no matter/how  
loud you turn it up/you still can hear the screams.

The message associated with Ken Davis, another prison guard involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal, suggests that some of the participants felt regret and even repugnance over their humiliating practices. But the text’s traditional formal elements and straightforward address pairs it with the earlier poem related to Graner. Despite the speaker’s clearly expressed disapproval of the guards’ actions, the poem ends with the speaker trying to drown the victims’ screams with music. Though the speaker supposedly communicates disapproval to loved ones at “home,” we never know if the speaker leaves the post, ceases participation, or tries to stop others’ behavior. It is unclear who dismisses the speaker’s concerns or tells him to seek a chaplain; we receive only “they,” a pronominal vagueness that remains open to both familial and military communities as well as U.S. popular discourse more generally.

While reports in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib scandal describe Ken Davis as trying to report the abuse to his lieutenant, the lieutenant in question denied and continues to deny having any conversations with Davis.<sup>134</sup> The reports on Davis’s time in Iraq leave his involvement in whistleblowing unclear. In this sense, the poem depicts the speaker’s regretful complicity. The aesthetic coupling of the two poems foregrounds complicity. Though the language in the Davis poem becomes conflicted, the violence remains. Indeed, when Davis describes using music and other escapist methods to try to drown out the “screaming,” he demonstrates his willingness to cover over the visceral experience and therefore memory of another body’s suffering. This willingness or desire to erase the psychosomatic imprints of another’s torture is a willingness to accept his position among the occupying forces that make possible and promote the dehumanization and torture of prisoners. The speaker’s conscience fails to protect the victims and subvert or even disturb the militarization that created them.

It is also true that both Graner’s and Davis’s poems are clearly self-referential, the most clearly self-referential of the text. Following the relation between the individual, military subject’s invulnerable autonomy and clear self-referentiality discussed in chapter three, it is no accident that the most narratively legible pieces belong to violent and complicit narratives. The clear communication of both the Davis and Graner poems suggests a connection between direct discourse, military subjectivity, and the violence perpetuated in U.S. military prison installations. What cultural and discursive work does the bound self, the subject, that narrates the parameters of trauma do? And in this sense, in including these pieces, in what ways does *arias* itself remain not just complicit with but fundamental to U.S. militarism?

In contrast to the self-referential narrator, the notion of vulnerability remains a primary tool for examining trauma and recollection, as well as the tension between nostalgia and trauma

that characterizes what Marianne Hirsch terms “postmemory” (79).<sup>135</sup> This vulnerability has a radical function in that it opens both memory and the senses to experiences beyond the boundaries of the individual subject under structures of U.S. militarism. For Hirsch, engagement with memories of trauma open affective relation to others, close or distant, or even ancestors, past or present. A temporal disruption necessarily breaks with the guided retrospective narration of legal testimony, informative letter, or interrogation. It operates through an “open-ended temporality” of the “threshold” and of “alternate, reimagined realit[ies],” which trauma alone cannot achieve. Hirsch’s postmemory is about connections across generations, relationships to and through the memory of trauma, even trauma experienced long ago. It is what “distant contemporary witnesses bear” to the “personal, collective, and cultural trauma of others,” how generations “know” and “experience” the pain of their ancestors (84). For Hirsch, art makes this form of felt connection and solidarity imaginable.

As Hirsch makes clear, the vulnerability necessary for postmemory enables a “space of interconnection” that serves as a “platform” for new forms of ethical and political “responsiveness” and “resistance.” She suggests that “aesthetic encounters” can work to “elicit” this sense of radically open vulnerability, one that leads toward not just a politics but an “ethics” of “open-endedness” and “mobility” (82). The artists she examines allow themselves to be “marked” by histories and enact a distinct form of “responsibility” toward the “legacies” of these atrocities (84). This responsibility enacts new temporalities that connect the past and present, distance and proximity. For Hirsch, aesthetic practices have the potential to provoke this “multisensory practice of affective engagement” (88). For example, Hirsch notes how viewers of traumatic images, even in a gallery or performance setting, are overcome by the “juxtaposition of divergent temporalities,” the potential of what could have been with what took place (89). In other words, her notion of “vulnerable times” describes the ways art plays with time and temporalities of trauma as they seek to address traumatic experiences and memories. They bring the imagined notion of what could have been to the remembrance of what was. What could have been engages its own futurity; the consideration of what is distinct from what took place opens up an imaginative and, I suggest, affective realm through which those who participate in or encounter the art consider a different future. As Hirsch makes clear, the consideration of what might have been “propels” participants or viewers to “imagine and fight for” what “might yet be” (93). They might even consider an impossible future, one worth pursuing, which I examine more thoroughly in the conclusion.

Through vulnerability, perceived and deployed, what could have been becomes what could be, and aesthetic practice awakens this temporal shift. I suggest that in *arias*, the text performs an affective shift toward this kind of open vulnerability as it navigates away from coherence, clarity, and militarized narrative itself. To start, Ken Davis’s concerned failure to act becomes even more pronounced through the (echo /ex/) piece that appears directly across from the Davis poem.<sup>136</sup> In this (echo /ex/), the linguistic breakdown is far greater than in the previous poems of the series. Scattered across the page, seemingly at random, are twenty eight pronouns, consisting of some “me’s,” a few “I’s,” and many “he’s.” The only additional text is a single letter “G,” which clues from the other (echo /ex/) poems suggest is another reference to Graner. The poem offers references that work to evacuate the space and activity on the page. It provides language that leads away from action yet suggests presence, and more than one; something

names the “me,” “he,” and “I.” The page hints at narration, but with all detail omitted, the pronouns mark nothing but a relation between at least two beings. Pure in that it cannot be defined, yet housed in the context of the long poem, this suggested relation becomes one constituted through the violence of torture. In this case, the pronouns obscure the line between the person committing violence and the victim; the two beings, and bodies implied, act on one another in unknowable ways.

The juxtaposition of the illegibility, impressionability, and openness of the pronominal (echo /ex/) poem with the clear referentiality of the Davis poem also suggests an oppositional yet interconnected relation between the two. The violence of linear, prescriptive narration, and the militarized subjects it fosters interfaces with the psychosomatic destruction of torture. What is clear, linear, and direct remains within militarized discursive and social realms that block access to the most critical impressions and effects of torture and thus thwart opportunities for the vulnerability of connections across difference in location, experience, and political need. This juxtaposition hints at relations of both antagonism and vulnerability between militarized and incarcerated bodies. Considering the narrating military subject discussed in chapter two, I suggest that *arias* builds from Combat Paper in a way that documents the militarized subject’s deconstitution through the erasure of language. I contend that the military subject’s undoing exposes an affective and psychosomatic vulnerability to difference and that *arias* demonstrates this specifically through its juxtaposition between the echo/ex and blues series.

To consider this difference, its destructive power, and the ways it intersects with the racio-religious and humanistic forces of US militarism, I turn briefly to Frantz Fanon’s concept of an historical-racial schema. Like Ahmed and Chen, and in his foundational *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon turns to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to challenge the bounds of the human determining his very existence. Fanon makes clear that theories of “ontology” cannot comprehend and thus ignore the “lived experience” of the black man: “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (90). For Fanon, each day Blacks must face “two systems of reference,” which include their “metaphysics” as well as the defining frames that the “new civilization,” which contradicts their own, imposes upon them. Fanon insists that the black body’s metaphysical grounding has been “abolished” through this colonizing process (90). These conditions have resulted in a “white world” in which the black body cannot “elaborate[e] his body schema” in a functional war, because the white “image” of the black body is “solely negating.” For Fanon, this image is in and of “the third person” (90). Describing the bodily schema of Merleau-Ponty as a “slow construction” of a self “as a body in a spatial and temporal world,” Fanon contends that Merleau-Ponty’s body schema “collaps[es]” when applied to Black lived experience. For Fanon, the structuring of Merleau-Ponty’s body “creates a genuine dialectic” between a body and the material realm that surrounds it, as Ahmed also elaborates at length. Yet it is “beneath” this normative bodily schema<sup>137</sup> that Fanon unearths what he terms the “historical-racial schema.”

To construct this historical-racial schema, Fanon claims to have used “data” that necessarily could not be the data of the human body. Rather than data compiled of “remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature,” Fanon’s data was created by the white man, his Other, the colonizer who “had woven [him],” as a black man, “out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories” (91). The historical racial schema comes with its

own responsibility, which Fanon addresses when he discusses the historical component of the racial schema, which resonates with Hirsch's postmemory. Fanon claims a felt responsibility for both his own body and his race, including his ancestors and describes the white gaze as "sharpened microtomes" that work to "cut sections" of Fanon's "reality" (92). The dissecting gaze is, for Fanon, a betrayal, one that stems from his sense that his arrival marks not a new man, or another kind of man, but rather what he calls a "new species" (95). Fanon as a black man is not granted membership in the realm of the human.

Thus, to apprehend the experience of the Black Man is, according to Fanon, to apprehend that which is necessarily beyond the realm of the human subject which has been created in part through the narratives--the stories and their details--of the human subject, historically understood to be the white Christian, increasingly militarized man. Fanon stages the conflict and contradiction of his humanness, his "manhood," by demanding that he be included in the spectrum of the human. He is clear that he "wanted to be a man, and nothing but a man," but points to the impossibility of this request (92). The white world prevents his participation because it needs him to be the other against which it defines itself. Fanon sees the black man as "overdetermined from the outside," primarily due to what he terms the epidermal racial schema and describes this overdetermination as functioning through hate: "It was hatred; I was hated, detested, and despised" (97). He claims: "my black consciousness does not claim to be a loss. It *is*." He is who he is, a black man (114).

In an aside, Fanon relays an anecdote about a "friend" who casually suggests to Fanon that if "the Arab is treated like a man, like *one of us*, there will be no viable answer" (emphasis mine 92). The space of the altogether Other necessary for forming the white man is at the same time untenable. It can shift from the black man, at once the abject space of the black body and open to expansion beyond Fanon's specific epidermal racial schema. It is noteworthy that Fanon chooses the example of the "Arab." The space of the Other is thus open to "the Arab," specifically, for Fanon, the Algerian. In this sense, Fanon's theory of anti-blackness also offers a description of the process of dehumanization necessary for military might as well as colonization.

He also makes continuous comparisons between Black and Jewish experiences. And at one point he even references embattled soldiers, recalling a wounded veteran who compared his injury to that which Fanon experiences in relation to his skin. A "crippled soldier from the Pacific war," he says, tells a black man that he must "get used to" his "color" in a way similar to how the soldier comes to terms with his "stump." To the soldier, they are "both casualties." The veteran seems to insist that European warfare, the war of white colonialism, is comparable to Fanon's historical racial schema in its psychosomatic effects? Are black men and wounded veterans both casualties of a racial schema that serves as the foundation of both imperial warfare and the lived experience of black life? Fanon insists that, "with all [his] being," he will always "refuse to accept this amputation" (119). Therefore Fanon and the soldier equate the plight of the black man with that of a wounded veteran. Thus race, specifically blackness, in this context is equated with permanent disability and physical deformity. The trauma of race becomes like the trauma of combat, and vice versa. And this comparative connection is one that is felt.

Fanon illuminates not just the unique constitution of the Black experience as abject, but the role affect, specifically hate, played in that construction. And he is clear that the anti-blackness he describes and demonstrates can and will travel across bodies, specifically those deemed Arab

or Jewish, which I addressed in the introduction. He is of two minds, walking among the white men while simultaneously recognizing his dehumanized role in relation to them, his inability to be free when subject to their militarized white supremacy. Again we might return to Micah Xavier Johnson and Gavin Long, discussed in the introduction. The juxtaposition of their uniformed bodies next to their stance of Black empowerment marks the psychosomatic impasse Fanon, who was also a veteran, describes.<sup>138</sup> For Johnson and Long, their membership in the military triggered a distinct kind of moral injury, an injury that undoes the already tenuous relation between their black bodies and militarizing uniforms. The injury, suffered both abroad and at home opens their wounds to their formative relation within the state itself; their status as Black military citizens disintegrates into its antagonistic parts. The deconstituted black military subject opens this tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual realm to the creative destructive process Fanon references. It opens what is left to hate, to that which, according to Fanon, forms the Black body's lived experience. And for Fanon, this abject expands to encompass Arab, Jewish, and other bodies of color. Their hated difference creates the conditions for the white, masculine, military subject formation. These distinctions and divide are exposed, foregrounded, and become an affective breach.

Returning to *arias*, the military subject and abject appear throughout "The Blues of ..." series. The first poem of the text, titled "The Blues of Lane McCotter" opens with "four Iraqis at the gate." The gate is unidentified, without location or descriptions of what lies on either side. By the end of the poem, we know that the four are not granted access, though not who refuses them. It continues: "all of them missing/their hands or their/ ----- story." Each of the four is missing a body part, hands and arms the only parts explicitly named. And it names four "Iraqis," not individuals or names. "Iraqis" seems to be colloquial, military terminology for Iraqi people or perhaps Iraqi men; we are given no explanation. In this sense, the use of the term references U.S. militaristic language and leaves the reader unsure that the four Iraqis are, in fact, people and unsettling the forms of embodiment and subjecthood engaged throughout the text. And this dismembering is also of the body, or their bodies; the four Iraqis, unnamed and unrecognized, are disfigured. In this sense, McCotter's narrative works to frame their bodies as disfigured or other than, less than or beyond the human, remembering Fanon's disfigured soldier, rendered toxic, monstrous, inhuman, and abject. Rather than an anomaly of a devastating injury, their bodies become an embodiment of their expected deviation from the norms of what is human. Their approach fits McCotter's narrative that, in its existence, frames their bodies as other than human.

The poem's censor bars, the first in the book, indicate omissions, referencing the state or corporate powers that would cover over this material to limit access to information and events that question their legitimacy. The censor bars quell dissent that might become a threat to the ways state sovereignty and capital accumulation progress and function. Yet, their inclusion keeps these omissions, or the violence of censorship in the service of state power, visible, recognizable, and present. The censored language cannot disappear into oblivion; it remains an obstruction rather than loss. This state violence also appears in the reference to Lane McCotter, the notorious prison administrator who took charge of the Abu Ghraib prison during the early years of the U.S. military in Iraq. He oversaw the erecting of new prison structures as well as the refurbishing of existing Iraqi prisons, including Abu Ghraib. His background--his overcrowded Texas prisons, handling of the controversies surrounding Michael Valent's death in Utah, and inhumane prison

conditions in Utah--framed his work in Iraq. McCotter oversaw the erecting of new prison structures as well as the refurbishing of existing Iraqi prisons, including Abu Ghraib. After the photographs circulated, many called for McCotter to be held accountable, with the U.S. Senate even debating his culpability.<sup>139</sup>

That McCotter would be understood as accountable regardless of his presence in Iraq points to an ethical relation of responsibility between presence and absence, locatedness and dislocation, labor and its products. A similar association is drawn in the poem. Though the "I" that speaks is never identified, not even as the gatekeeper, the poem's title establishes a relation between McCotter's legacy and history and the refused access to the four Iraqis, as well as the prior violence inflicted against their bodies. The extension of McCotter's name to this violence that, the poem suggests, happened under "Saddam" couples the prison histories and state punishment in both the U.S. and pre-war Iraq, collapsing the distinctions between U.S. militarism and Saddam's "barbarism," which was one excuse used to justify the U.S. invasion. Perhaps these connections are why McCotter has "the blues." Associated with its origins in African American folk music, particularly African spirituals and work songs from the slave culture of southern plantations along the Mississippi Delta, "the blues" continues the tradition of lamenting to attempt to transcend nearly unlivable conditions of subjugation and exploitation. For McCotter to sing the blues, however, is for his body, its history and pursuits, to join this tradition, which is an impossibility; here it's worth noting that a number of scholars in prison studies argue that the contemporary U.S. prison industrial complex produces a form of reinvented slavery.<sup>140</sup> What McCotter might lament is the way he, supposedly, turns away four violently dismembered Iraqis from retrieving their lost parts. He blocks their assemblage, keeping their disrupted states, yet feigns sorrow for his authoritative responsibility in this scene. Yet the title also suggests a lamentation of what is lost or rendered impossible under the political structures that produce the extreme disenfranchisement and dispossession of imprisonment within militarization. A comparative gesture, the title invokes the systemic violence of the U.S. racial state fundamental to the histories of colonial, slave, and imperial conflict at play in the poems, connecting these histories to the moment the four Iraqis arrive at the gate.

The comparative dimension of the title also connects several distinct territories: the history of the U.S. south, specifically slave plantations; the contemporary U.S. south where McCotter's prisons were located; pre-invasion Iraq under Saddam's regime' and post-invasion Iraq. The connections among these distinct spaces and times recall overlapping spaces and temporalities of severe immobility, dehumanization, and exploitation. Through the image of the gate, the text resists the location, time, or actions happening within the poem itself. The poem contemplates the enigmatic relation itself, rather than the individuals seeking access, the gatekeeper, or their interaction. It offers a departure from locatedness, which suggests the ways this departure might be necessary for imagining and enacting political solidarity across disparate socialites and spaces of mobility.

Juxtaposed with the blues series is the (echo /ex/) series, or the prisoner testimonies, the (echo /ex/) marking the psychosomatic violence of torture through the breakdown and disappearance of language. But like its counterpart, this deposing break is not its only form. The (echo /ex/) series does not portray the disappearance of language in a steady progression, as if once a body experiences torture its undoing remains a permanent destructive affliction. On the

contrary, words and phrases disappear and then reappear throughout the long poem, only to disappear again in the final (echo /ex/) poem and final poem of the chapbook. This disappearing and emerging suggests that the violence of torture does not eviscerate corporeally or psychically. Something connected to the sensate power of anorexic language returns, and continues to return, even in end. The language indicates a perpetual return akin to the work of both individual and collective memory, and the psychic and psychosomatic work of trauma itself.

The language that does emerge in the (echo /ex/) poems often describes particular body parts or actions without context. These include truncated phrases such as “it will break again,” “arms behind,” “fucking a kid,” “and breathed,” “his father naked,” “into the toilet,” “go take it and eat it,” “in his ass,” “brought the dogs,” “made me,” “screaming,” “pouring water,” “testicles with,” “without me seeing,” “to stitch the string,” “all this beating,” “in his mouth,” “my penis with a pen,” “no mattresses,” “ordered us to stroke,” “animals not humans,” “for God’s help,” and so on. The decontextualizing of these violent moments opens the experience of reading the poems to a form of psychic violence as well. The breaks and anorexic phrasing incite readers to imagine the unending violent possibilities associated with these commands, and with the flesh, allowing for a mode of witnessing that receives far more than what explicit description could impart. The phrasing marks the violence that actually took place, yet demands that we become disturbed in new ways, deploying our imaginative capacities to produce far more than what would otherwise be contained in integrated narrative form. We imagine exposure, acute, humiliating pain. And this receptive horror both connects Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo Bay and reaches beyond their walls. The long poem circulates these testimonies long after the events, circulating an affect that can incite, roping the reader into its memory work.

The final (echo /ex/) poem is comprised of scattered punctuation, indicating the traces of language, of a possible discourse, and of a now absent relation between what was once a speaker and its recipient. Only the linguistic residue of the book’s antagonistic relations remains. The punctuation--indicating stops, pauses, the approach of thought--leaves readers with a sense of the flow and impression of linguistic acts, but not meaning or narrative. The marks used to clarify linguistic meaning leave open the possibility for new, affective or sensorial, meaning to emerge. Though the poem completes the chapbook, the (echo /ex/) pattern throughout leaves open the possibility of new speakers and modes of communication. With punctuation, it starts, or renews not with the beginning, but the end. And punctuation also interrupts. To punctuate is to “break into” the structure of a sentence, or, in this case, a space blank with erasure yet potential. In this sense, the trace of language remains to stave off oblivion. I suggest that the language’s deconstitution demonstrates the way the encounter of torture deconstitutes the speaking, acting subjects, both the guards and the tortured, who become the dehumanized abject of militarization. Yet this realm of the page that remains is visually, and thus affectively, akin to the space of possibility that opens when structures are interrupted and deposed; perhaps, following Benjamin, this realm converges with the pre-linguistic realm of objects, the space of possibility for language as such opened in and through poetic engagement with torture and its trauma. In this sense, it is also a space of beginnings.

*arias* lays bare a deconstituted subject. It is old and new media, agonistic histories resurfacing and operating in discursive exchange. Its echoes reverberate what was once there but now gone, but also what emerges through this linguistic destruction. The echo reverberates in

absence, keeping the past present; the trace of what was open to the possibility of what could be. An echo also signals a future; its repetition guaranteeing the trace will continue if varied. And the reverberating sounds, punctuations, words and phrases intermix. Just as an echo can pick up additional sounds from its own reverberation, carrying and reechoing again and again, the accounts and testimonies of *arias* take up the sounds, patterns, and affects of their counterparts. “The Blues of...” series is increasingly hidden behind censor bars; the language of echo/ex gradually disappears altogether. But the patterns are parallel, responding to and building from one another. The series intertwine, resonating together. In this way, the poetry enacts the relational components of guard and prisoner. The guard is bound up with the prisoner, abject and subject disintegrating through the remembrance of torture. Torture, in this sense, is an event of moral injury, stemming from the disorienting contradictions and corruptions of combat. Yet potential remains, once this relational bind between militarized subject and dehumanized abject is exposed. This space of past, present, and future, this trace of what was that opens to what will be, is the temporality of the deconstituting militarized subject. Its echoes apprehend a mode of antagonistic engagement I understand to be a form of remembrance that deploys vulnerability for transformative ends.

In opera, the aria interrupts. A solo voice, it stops the narrative to “expresses an emotion or ideal.” It marks a temporal break, a non-narrative temporality through which a state of being is exposed. A collection of these interruptions, *arias* becomes a collective expression of a state of betrayal, injury, exposure, humiliation, and harm that calls to the readers’ vulnerability as well. It expresses ambivalence, rage, and hate, and become a chorus of the most devastating psychosomatic destruction. It stages and sings the moment of moral injury and its resulting disorientation, bound together, literally, in a physical text. The voices collectively interrupt, refusing to narrate, connected in their disharmony.

## Conclusion

### **World Breaking: a Decolonial Feminist Practice**

This exploration of art practice and poetry as deconstitutive, following reading of Fanon with a concluding turn to the temporality and subject of decolonization, through which the question of the human reemerges. As Jodi Melamed makes clear, for example, racial capitalism's "need" to "invalidate terms of relationality" common to indigenous and non-western practices, to "separate forms of humanity so that they may be connected in terms that feed capital," opens the door for its "weakness" as well. For Melamed, "acts of racialized violence" that segregate and partition people and communities from "other senses and practices of social being (non capitalist, nonstate)" are also "futile" (79). Referencing the Black radical tradition, Melamed points to the ways the long histories of Black radical thought and activism centered collectives, practicing the commitment that "collective resistance takes the form of (re)constituting collectives." Black radical tradition "def[ies] racial capitalist modes of differentiation" and therefore becomes "antiracist, anticapitalist, and collective-making" because it seeks to secure "Black survival over and against capital accumulation" (80). Black radical tradition understood that collectives that remain illegible to state, legal, and capitalist power produce the most destructive force.

In particular, Melamed references the success and international reach of Idle No More, the indigenous movement that began in Canada in 2012. Idle No More originated as a resistance to "Canada's Bill C - 45," which overstepped treaties by "removing almost all waterways and more than thirty thousand lakes from treaty protection" to allow businesses to build pipelines other structures that damage and partition the land. The movement and movements it inspired, such as the Standing Rock encampment against the Dakota Access Pipeline,<sup>141</sup> have made visible and fostered "thinking and acting according to a conceptual framework of 'all my relations.'" This orientation toward all relations becomes a "praxis-organizing intention to work for the well-being of the widest conceivable collective," which includes "nonhuman beings" and land, "interconnected through nonlinear time and space" (84). An indigenous movement, Idle No More demonstrates the ways collectives illegible to state, military, and capital forces can crack their foundation.

In her foundational text<sup>142</sup> on what she terms decolonial feminism, María Lugones suggests that it is communal practices that open space for resistance to the coloniality of power, or the logic that structures the realm of the human in capitalist modernity.<sup>143</sup> Lugones understands the "dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human," the dichotomy of Fanon's devastation, to be the "central dichotomy of colonial modernity" (743). For her, "coloniality" describes not just a way of classifying others, but an active process of dehumanization. And she clarifies that the human of Euromodernity is the "European, bourgeois, colonial, modern man," which became a "subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason" (743). Christianity is again a primary component of the colonizing, civilizing process, returning the race/religion/war triad to its colonial genealogy. Yet, Lugones is clear that the task of "turning" the indigenous people under

colonization into “civilized” beings was never the intension of economic or religious colonial processes. For Lugones, the Christianizing mission of conversion, based on the premise that the converted exist within the realm of the human, turns on its head in its colonial context (745). The humanity of the colonized was never an option. The colonized were held to standards of Euro-Christian subjectivity while denied their own place within that realm. And returning to the role of religion in subject formation, coloniality, for Lugones, is “constitutive of modernity.” Indeed, the difference, the hierarchical relation, between what is modern and “non-modern” is the “colonial difference.” Looking to Walter D. Mignolo’s understanding of the colonial difference as the “space where coloniality of power is enacted,”<sup>144</sup> Lugones is careful to avoid the term “premodern” since it remains steeped in these global, colonial hierarchies of power. As I discussed in chapters one and two, the label of “premodern” remains a powerful tool for subjugating not just populations but also religious beliefs and practices, forms of knowledge and cultural production deemed antithetical to global imperial and capitalist projects. “Premodern” is often used to justify further militarization, occupation, and war (749). Instead, Lugones deploys the term “non-modern” to indicate those indigenous, colonized, and racialized people who were never admitted into the realm of the modern Western, national, militarized subject.

Colonization is a process of dehumanization that constitutes Euromodernity’s global citizen subjecthood (745). Lugones offers her notion of “decolonial feminism” as antithetical to the subject; it is a theoretical and political praxis and project aimed at dismantling the coloniality of power and its twin, what she calls the colonilality of gender. Decolonial feminism names the “possibility of overcoming” the colonialities of power and gender, a revolutionary orientation (747). What decolonial feminism looks like in Lugones’s formulation is a collective, communal self, a “resistant self” that is nonetheless “in relation” to others. One that remains at the heart of decolonial resistance (748). Decolonial feminist possibilities fall within “communality” rather than the hierarchical individualism of the abstract, individual subject of rights. A decolonial feminist practice never seeks “parity” with the coloniality of being and gender (752). It seeks decolonization, the subject’s undoing. And its critique must originate from outside or beyond the realm of the modern subject. It must reach the abject, oppressed, and colonized.

Lugones follows Walter D. Mignolo again, referencing seemingly contradictory statements regarding the ontology of the coloniality of power and conditions of possibility for decolonial critique. While Mignolo suggests that the colonial difference “creates the conditions” for a form of subaltern enunciation that functions as a dialogue with the modern subject, he insists that the “transcending” of the colonial difference “can *only* be done from a perspective of subalternity” or from, for him, “decolonization.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, according to Mignolo, the subject cannot participate in a form of decolonization, let alone one that leads to the transcendence of the colonial difference. Yet Lugones reads Mignolo as suggesting that any dialogue with decolonial potential that includes “modern man” or the subject enacts this contradiction. The subject’s “occupation of the colonial difference,” and thus the site in which his decolonial potential emerges, “involves his redemption but also his self-destruction” (752). The subject—the white, male, heteronormative, Christian human—must destroy itself to redeem what emerges. Decolonization names this destructive redemptive process.

As discussed in the introduction, the language of destruction and redemption echoes the philosophy of traditions of particularly Judeo-Christian mysticism. In this case, redemption is

equated with decolonization and, as with mysticism, takes place after destruction and channels the divine. The divine is found, or enters, when the body or vessel of present time is destroyed. One recent take on Judeo-Christian mysticism's relation to political life can be found in Simon Critchley's *The Faith of the Faithless*. Discussing what he understands to be a politics of faith "for the faithless," Critchley describes this faith to be a political commitment to the "infinite demand of love," a demand that shatters the self, a "process of decreation and impoverishment." Following Kierkegaard, Critchley discusses the "rigorous and activist conception of faith" in the commandment of infinite love that has the chance to manifest at any moment of every day (251). Looking to early Christian mystics, specifically, Critchley describes this rigor of love to be a "disciplined act of spiritual daring" that "eviscerates the old self of externality." This destruction then allows "something new and inward" to "come into being," and occurs when the spiritual actor enters into an infinitizing, like-to-unlike relation with the divine (250-1). This mystical process of deconstitution not only binds but eviscerates those it touches, killing the old selves to expose fundamental relations between self, other, and the infinite. In other words, this self-destruction is born from an encounter with difference, a flirtation with an ultimate other that negates the oneness and containment of the individual subject. While there are significant distinctions between Critchley's notion of the divine and the antagonistic relations found in the colonial difference, the necessity of an encounter with radical difference, one akin to Fanon's theorized divide, becomes necessary for mystical destruction and redemption.

Critchley's notion of infinite love destroys to rebuild, and in doing so binds the spiritual actor in an asymmetrical relation to the absolute other.<sup>146</sup> This eviscerating, reconstituting relation between beings and the divine imagines an absolute ethics and its accompanying responsibility. The binding relations exposed through antagonism open the possibility of an ethics based on a binding relationality, a more communal understanding of sociality than the isolated individuality of the military subject. This relation departs from the ways Christian theology and dogma center the autonomy and entitlement of the individual, militarized, state subject. The subject undergoing this mystical transformation is deconstituted as it is (re)formed in relation to both another and the infinite, a binding evisceration that resonates with Lugones's understanding of the subject's necessary self-destruction, then "redemption," in the colonial difference. Lugones sees resistance from the colonial difference to be fundamentally relational, something that happens between and among bodies living together. It is, in her words, dialogue, which is necessary and must involve more than one voice.

In this dialogic sense, "transcendence" can only occur from "the perspective of subalternity," and, following Mignolo, never from the position of the subject alone. The decolonial transcendence of the coloniality of power is only possible through a relationality that centers the perspectives, actions, and epistemologies of the colonized. And it points to a "newness of be-ing" (752-3). While at first the practices Critchley examines seem too individualistic to be placed in dialogue with Lugones's decolonial feminism, mystical self-destruction exposes what remains fundamentally relational—the divine as an ethical link between persons—and therefore lays bare the relational ties among those determined to think and act beyond the colonial difference. When the modern, militarized subject is undone, what interdependencies and affects emerge? If the subject itself is dismantled, how might a relation to

the colonized as well as an affective space for apprehending and then centering the colonized emerge?

Lugones offers her notion of the “fractured locus” to illustrate the interdependency emerging through the colonial difference and its relational practice. For her the “starting point” is always “coalitional, because the fractured locus is in common.” Those working toward a decolonial feminism must “dwell” on the “histories of resistance at the colonial difference” with a commitment to “learning about each other” (753). In part, this fractured locus involves the multitude of bodies that counter the imperial logics that govern the coloniality of power. For Lugones, the “logic [these groups] follow is not countenanced by the logic of power.” In their movement, they form a creativity of communal being in response to the static and oppressive logics of capital. These bodies move, never repeating their movement, never becoming “static and ossified.” In this sense, they never arrive at a reorientation, refusing to be reconstituted as abject in relation to violent racio-religious subjectivity. In this sense, Lugones’s decolonial feminism is a politics of non-arrival, of becoming to no discernible end. For Lugones, these “subject, relations, ground, and possibilities” stem from the fractured locus that “constitutes a creative, peopled re-creation.” They form a politics of continuous creation.

Lugones insists that a community, not individuals, creates the conditions for this form of decolonial action. The community “enable[s] the doing” that imagines the new from the colonial difference. The “passing from mouth to mouth, from hand to hand of lived practices, values, beliefs, ontologies, space-times, and cosmologies” is the work of decolonial feminism. The exchanges that transpire between and among people contain and release the affective intensity and energy necessary for decolonial work, but they can only transpire among those beyond the military subject and even human, those colonized, abject, other (754). Lugones’s decolonial feminist action emerges through the relations among different people as they inhabit the colonial difference. And the only conditions for the military subject to know the radical potential of these relations is through its own destruction.

Lugones gestures toward a decolonial ethics or way of being in the world that operates through the colonial difference. Quoting Audrey Lorde, she describes this ethics as a mode of “be-ing in relation” that expands and “interweaves” its “peopled ground.” Lugones insists again that decolonial feminism cannot emerge from the subject, but also, it does not emerge from the individually colonized, but rather the relations among colonized. To undertake a decolonial feminist practice is not to attempt to restructure or “rethink” the colonized’s relation to the colonizer. Rather, it is to “further” what Lugones calls the “logic of difference” toward more radical decolonial ends. She looks for “multiplicity and coalition,” what makes decolonial feminism possible, in and through the difference that constitutes coloniality, with its struggle, antagonisms, and ruptures. This “logic of coalition” fundamental to decolonial ethics becomes a form of seeing difference not through dichotomies but possibilities for coalition building, one that defies colonial logics of power (755). Difference becomes primary for decolonial ethical practices; anticipating or apprehending this radical difference steps toward Lugones’s decolonial ethics.

For Lugones, this illegible “resistant” politics express themselves “infra-politically.” A keen eye might discern the political affect and potential as infrared light, unmasking the hidden heat, the energy of bodies and objects otherwise invisible. This resistance as infrared light builds

on the understanding that the realm of the visible and legible remains inaccessible to colonized subjects rendered abject or inhuman. The energy that falls under the radar, that “turns inward,” belongs to those who resist from beyond the human and subject; this realm is that of the colonized. This undetectable energy moves among the coalitions, the decolonial feminist community. Lugones writes “in our colonized, racially gendered, oppressed existences we are also other than what the hegemon makes us be” which is itself “an infra-political achievement” (746). To be “other than” the space of abjection, a difference indiscernible to colonizing power and forces, is to demonstrate what Lugones understands to be this infra-political power.

Lugones’s “infra-political” references not just the history of decolonial logics within the colonial difference but also the ethical potential that difference releases through the coloniality of power. A potent metaphor, infrared light describes about the amount of light that emits from an object, rather than the visible light reflected off of an object. Visible only through infrared vision, the light emanating from bodies and objects emerges from even minuscule amounts of atomic energy. Atoms, invisible to normal vision, are constantly in motion, even those of inanimate objects. When heat or light, interact with atoms, the atoms will enter various levels of increased energy or excitation.<sup>147</sup> Electrons that have moved about in the electron cloud return to their ground state in the nucleus, as all eventually do, and release energy in the form of a photon or “particle of light.”<sup>148</sup> These photons from atomic energy are what infrared vision detects. The atomic activity is so low the light, with its energy, is indiscernible to the naked eye.

An infrared sense distinguishes the energy exhibited at this atomic level, even light emitted from resting or inanimate objects. To discern infrared light, then, it is to develop a sense for what cannot be visible. In this sense, the photon signifies a remnant of a past energy and activity that, by the time of its release, has already been spent. Lugones’s metaphoric use of infrared vision gestures toward the ways the past works through the interactions among those navigating the colonial difference. The photon marks the passage of active to inactive energy, or a past that still signals, remaining at work in the present. The past’s effects continue and expand; they can be discerned in people, nature, and even inanimate objects. Remaining in the present, the past acts on those working through the colonial difference. In this metaphor, the layered temporalities of decolonial feminist practice become the low, faint energy of past bodies, now resting. For Lugones, this undetectable, low, hidden energy is that of the trace of the colonized’s past still at work in the present. This past energy is prior to now, yet no longer realizable, and is the state of the oppressed. The interactions among people, their emotional and affective histories and effects, continue undetected by the unsuspecting. Yet their trace produces the potential for decolonial disruption, a trace of colonized histories. Histories that illuminate even in darkness.

## **World Breaking**

The recognition of the past in the present through a sensibility akin to infrared light detection becomes necessary for this decolonial feminist work. Following Lugones, only interactions among those at the heart of the colonial difference and through difference itself can produce the conditions for decolonization. Lugones offers a roadmap toward working through

the colonial difference and, in doing so, producing the grounds for the decolonial break. These grounds are fundamentally relational, born from what is animated between and among those subject, colonized through the colonial difference. A decolonial break is of both past and future, communal relations stealthily eroding the present. This is a decolonial temporality, one that becomes a palimpsest of past, present, and future. Lugones stops short of describing what sociopolitical changes this form of decolonial feminism will make possible, following traditions of critical utopian analysis. She recognizes that radical potential interrupts the time of the present in the most subtle, undetectable ways.

Aligned with the ways Lugones's decolonial feminism refuses logics of colonial power, Jose Muñoz's queer temporality with its queer futurity enact what he calls, borrowing from Marcuse, "the great refusal" of the heterosexual, capitalist, and militarizing norms that organize straight time as well as isolated, alienated, and individualistic labor and life. With attention to queer of color performance and communal life in his influential *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz theorizes what future-oriented modes of being in the present might mean for queer life. He connects queerness to this utopian orientation; to look to the future is fundamentally queer. And aesthetics is the primary realm through which this great refusal as utopian affect and vision emerges. For Muñoz, queer aesthetic most commonly or frequently offers "blueprints and schemata" for a futurity, for a forward orientation. Queerness as a "map of utopia" becomes a temporal palimpsest, a sensitivity and sensibility toward the past to remain oriented toward a utopian future that works to escape, even negate, the present. Acting toward a queer futurity, artists and practitioners reject the toxic, suffocating conditions of the present even as they live the present. They exist in contradiction, refusing to subscribe to a fatalist, destructive notion that the present not only must be negated but is all there is (1). A response to Lee Edelman's polemic of destruction, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*,<sup>149</sup> Muñoz offers a gaze towards a future that rejects both the violent present and its violent, suicidal escape. He offers a creative way forward.

For Muñoz, concrete utopian vision finds a critical, transformative relation to the present (3). But this utopian vision is always "marked" by its "enduring indeterminacy." Following traditions of the Frankfurt School, Muñoz outlines the necessity of engaging the past for the sake of the future. Looking toward the past, queer aesthetics negates the present to orient toward the future. Muñoz follows German philosopher Ernst Bloch, using his notions of the "no-longer-conscious" and "not-yet-conscious" to examine the overlaying temporalities, past and future orientations, of queer aesthetics. Bloch discusses the "anticipatory illumination of art" as having utopian potential. Muñoz makes clear that the "not-yet-conscious" is "knowable" as a utopian feeling. Feeling is crucial for reading utopia through aesthetic practices; the anticipatory illumination of art exposes a "surplus" of "affect and meaning" that originates through the aesthetic (3). Like the echoes reverberating through *abu ghraib arias*, Muñoz names this "backward glance," that itself enacts or demonstrates a "future vision," hope (4).<sup>150</sup>

The utopian, anticipatory function of queer life as appearing or enacting through what Muñoz terms a primarily affective "surplus" that "promises" a futurity that is not yet available, not yet here. The openness and indeterminacy of queer utopian potentiality is "hope itself" (7). Following this indeterminacy in the hope that is queer futurity, how might we understand the destructive potential of hope? We might say that, for Muñoz, hope becomes a specific form of

destruction, a “the site where non functionality and functionality merge” (7). Where dysfunction and function interweave is, as I have elaborated, a site of artisanal destruction.

Muñoz suggests that utopia “exists in the quotidian” (9). Following Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of the plural inherent in the singular experience, Muñoz reads the singularity of queer life, often theorized as anti-relational<sup>151</sup>, as emerging through the plural, making queer relations both anti-relational *and* relational. The anti-relational component is the way that queerness undoes the oppressive toxicity of the present while the relational component is queerness’s futurity, its potential. And Muñoz’s futurity is collective. In this sense, one can approach Muñoz’s queer futurity through Lugones’s metaphor of infrared light. Beneath the radar or normal visibility, the energy of the past remains, working undetected on the present. One must read, rather than see, this activity, affect, and their effects; this method of discernment and reading takes the place of sight, igniting additional, refined sensibilities. But this refined sensibility is not just in queer of color aesthetic practice.

Following Lugones, this layered history and refined sensibility form a decolonial present as well. The precolonial past merges with a decolonial future to undermine and even rupture the present. Muñoz’s past remains present, animated through an orientation towards the future. Here the color spectrum offers insight again. For a queer futurity, we might look to the opposite end of the spectrum, to the notion of ultraviolet light or UV rays. Muñoz’s queer utopian affect works to negate the toxic present that attempts to suffocate queer life. There is destructive, negating potential in queer futurity, one that stems from and relies upon the radical potential still emanating from the past. This is its utopian potential, its gradual erosion of the present. Ultraviolet light, infrared light’s counterpart on the other edge of the visible, is uniquely destructive. While sunlight is necessary for life itself, ultraviolet light, in its high frequency, slowly burns human flesh, leaving pigment and scars as visible traces of its presence and effects. And with each burn, even the most gradual, the skin weakens, growing increasingly susceptible to damage.

The visible effects of UV rays last longer until they eventually, and permanently, alter the flesh’s condition. Human appearance and function are altered through exposure to invisible destruction, to a delicate, gradual burn. On the same spectrum as the no-longer-conscious yet emanating past, UV rays are also undetectable, demonstrating their presence solely through their destructive effects. In their actions that subtly negate the present, the abject, the oppressed draw upon the past to imagine and enact a decolonial future. Queer utopian artists and writers look to the past, to the quotidian and mundane and ephemeral, to experience a critical futurity that rejects and undermines the present. The futurity of decolonial, queer utopia is one that works to destroy the conditions of the present to ignite the potential for something radically better.

But the realms beyond the visible, the conditions of possibility located in the past and the destructive potential of the future, belong to those who resist. The infrared subtlety of the past is a low, sustained energy, hidden from sight. It is invisible precisely because it is the trace of what has been but is no longer, the trace of energy spent. The ultraviolet light of the future demonstrates what becomes possible when action and energy increase, so much so that they too slip beyond the realm of the visible. What is destroyed and what becomes possible when the energies of the past increase so substantially, they cross the realm of the visible? The military subject self-destructs, leaving open the space for new forms of resistance.

One might consider the ways that energy along this spectrum mirrors the function and movement of affect. The amounts and effects of political affect remain fraught in decolonial practice and politics. Ways of feeling and being with and for one another are apprehended, and the feelings intensify towards destruction. Perhaps this increasingly destructive energy is a release that is at the same time sacrificial potential. This destruction is another form of sacrifice, a negation that can apply as much to the subject of modernity itself. Returning to the role of self sacrifice and sacrificial destruction in histories of Judeo-Christian mysticism, this sacrificial destruction, emerging through the temporal palimpsest of the colonial difference, also rejects the spiritually colonizing forces of Catholicism and Christianity. The apprehension of the energies of the past at work in the present leads to the destructive negation of the present to create an openness toward a different spiritual, communal future. It is a sacrifice of the visible for the invisible, a gnostic interruption. This interruption, with its destructive affect, challenges us to consider the world breaking destruction inherent in every practice of utopian world-making. Lugones tells us that the coloniality of power must be undone from within, must be broken to open the space for decolonial possibility. Military subjects cannot imagine the radical potential of these histories, build anew from the colonial difference; even deconstituted, they are not the colonized, the abject. But their destruction sets the conditions for these encounters or apprehensions between subjects and others to take place.

One time traverses another, Walter Benjamin writes. Muñoz insists that the aesthetic realm is both a map and gateway to this affective realm of futurity which I contend is a decolonial relationality or what Lugones would call the discourse of the colonial difference. The time of artisanal destruction, a practice that gazes toward histories of labor and historical relationships between bodies and materials, works to destroy the present self to viscerally and affectively open to a space of redemption, if, following Lugones, redemption is understood to be an imagined reciprocal, relational, and decolonial communality. It opens to a communality that stems from decolonial feminism's self-evisceration. World breaking, the destruction of the present as a gateway to a decolonial, utopian futurity in practice, is the project of artisanal destruction. It is the break in the present, playing with what can be discerned. Though it cannot be decolonial in and of itself, it is a disorientation, an opening and apprehension of a different affective and material mode of relating to one another, that forms the conditions for decolonial relationality to emerge. In this time of the break, the occupying body becomes something able to apprehend the communal horizon.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in July of 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an internationally recognized social and political movement based in the United States. It's primarily a call for an end to systemic racism and violence, particularly police violence, against black bodies, as well as an end to police militarization in general. BLM is a decentralized organization with no hierarchical structure. Its demands can be found on its site: *The Movement for Black Lives*. The Movement for Black Lives, <https://policy.m4bl.org/reparations/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, "All Lives Matter" became a rallying cry among primarily conservative groups. The premise was that no specific group should be prioritized over another, which missed the point of the Black Lives Matter movement entirely.

<sup>3</sup> see Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2010 and Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016).

<sup>4</sup> see Rizer's and Hartman's "How the War on Terror Has Militarized the Police" in *The Atlantic*, 7 Nov. 2011. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/11/how-the-war-on-terror-has-militarized-the-police/248047/>. Accessed 22 Oct. 2016.

<sup>5</sup> PTSD was added to DSM-III in 1980. See "DSM History" *American Psychiatric Association*, <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/history-of-the-dsm>. Accessed 10 May 2017.

<sup>6</sup> as The National Institute of Mental Health defines it. See "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." *National Institute of Mental Health*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2016.

<sup>7</sup> see Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1994. And *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> see "PTSD: National Center for PTSD." *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/how-common-is-ptsd.asp>. Accessed 14 May 2015.

<sup>9</sup> See Anderson's op-ed: "Ferguson isn't about black rage against cops. It's white rage against progress." *The Washington Post*. 29 August, 2014. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ferguson-wasnt-black-rage-against-cops-it-was-white-rage-against-progress/2014/08/29/3055e3f4-2d75-11e4-bb9b-997ae96fad33\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.aca2e774013a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ferguson-wasnt-black-rage-against-cops-it-was-white-rage-against-progress/2014/08/29/3055e3f4-2d75-11e4-bb9b-997ae96fad33_story.html?utm_term=.aca2e774013a). Accessed 4 October, 2014. Also, see Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth About Our Racial Divide*. New York :Bloomsbury, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> see Feldman's *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> see Reddy's lecture: "Precarity After Rights: On Queer of Color Critique." Lecture at the University of California, Berkeley. 20 October, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Reddy links this call for a generalized precariousness to Guy Standing's popular notion of "The Precariat." See Standing, Guy. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> quoted in Melamed (77). See Jodi Melamed's "Racial Capitalism." *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 76 – 85.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jasbir Puar's "CODA: The Cost of Getting Better. Suicide, Sensations, Switchpoints." *GLQ*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011, pp. 149 – 158.

<sup>15</sup> He seems to be referring to Benjamin's "Critique of Violence." See Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence." *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> see Charlie Savage's "Chelsea Manning Leaves Prison, Closes an Extraordinary Leak Case." *The New York Times*, New York: NY, 16 May 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/16/us/politics/chelsea-manning-leaves-prison.html>. Accessed on 24 August 2017.

<sup>17</sup> See Matthew Shaer's "The Long, Lonely Road of Chelsea Manning." *The New York Times*, New York: NY. 12 June 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/magazine/the-long-lonely-road-of-chelsea-manning.html>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See Matthew Shaer's "The Long, Lonely Road of Chelsea Manning." *The New York Times*, New York: NY. 12 June 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/magazine/the-long-lonely-road-of-chelsea-manning.html>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>19</sup> see *CitizenTube's* "WikiLeaks releases video of Reuters journalists killed in Iraq." 5 April 2010. <http://www.citizentube.com/2010/04/wikileaks-releases-video-of-reuters.html>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>20</sup> See *ACLU's* "Government continues to deny Manning access to healthcare." 28 July 2016. <https://www.aclu.org/news/chelsea-manning-faces-new-charges-indefinite-solitary-confinement-related-suicide-attempt>. Accessed 24 August 2017. Also, see Chelsea Manning. <https://www.luminairity.com/>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See Matthew Shaer's "The Long, Lonely Road of Chelsea Manning." *The New York Times*, New York: NY. 12 June 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/magazine/the-long-lonely-road-of-chelsea-manning.html>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>22</sup> See ABC News exclusive interview with Chelsea Manning: Manning, Chelsea. Interview by Juju Chang. *ABC Nightline*, 8 June 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/chelsea-manning-explains-leaked-secret-military-documents-47933513>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Keith Feldman suggested this term during a conversation.

<sup>24</sup> see Feldman and Medovoi's "Race/Religion/War: An Introduction." *Social Text* 129, Vol. 34, No. 4, December 2016, pp. 1 – 17.

<sup>25</sup> Goldberg traces this muscularity of the modern nation-state to the state as an "original father figure," key to the Abrahamic religions (25).

<sup>26</sup> Derrida claims that "the gift of death one makes to the other, [also] put[s] oneself to death, mortifying oneself in order to make a gift of this death as a sacrificial offering to God" (70).

<sup>27</sup> See Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015. Brown points out that "while neoliberalism formally promises to liberate the citizen from the state, from politics, and even from concern with the social, practically, it integrates both state and citizenship into serving the economy and morally fuses hyperbolic self-reliance with readiness to be sacrificed" (212). The polity is then essentially governed by business leaders rather than representatives.

<sup>28</sup> See Foucault's influential reworking of Clausewitz's famous dictum, that "politics itself" has become "a continuation of war by other means" informs this understanding. See Michel Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 – 1976*. Translated by David Macey. 1997. New York, NY: Picador, 2003. Also, see Idelber Avelar's "Introduction." *The Letter of Violence: Essays on Narrative, Ethics, and Politics*. New York, NY: Pgrave Macmillan, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> See his analysis of war technology rendering enemy combatants digital targets rather than human beings engaged in fatal combat. The state's war without war has been fundamental for increasing domestic and extraterritorial militarization. See Virilio, Paul and Sylvère Lotringer. *Pure War*: 1983. Los Angeles, CA: semiotext(e), 2008. Also, see Virilio's *Speed and Politics*. 1977. Los Angeles, CA: semiotext(e), 2006.

<sup>30</sup> (Quoted in Melamed 77). Ruth Wilson Gilmore states: "Capitalism: never not racial, including in rural England, or anywhere in Europe for that matter, where, as Cedric Robinson teaches us, hierarchies among people whose descendants might all have become white depended for their structure on group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, exploited by elites, as part of all equally exploitable nature-as-other, to justify inequality at the end of the day, and the next morning as well." (225).

<sup>31</sup> see Gilmore's "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence." *Futures of Black Radicalism*, Edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin. New York, NY: Verso, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Gilmore's analysis of racial capitalism is here discussed in Melamed's "Racial Capitalism." *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 76 – 85.

<sup>33</sup> see also Nancy Leong's "Racial Capitalism." *Harvard Law Review*. Vol. 126, No. 8, June 2013, pp 163 – 180.

<sup>34</sup> see Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 – 1976*. Translated by David Macey. 1997. New York, NY: Picador, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Kime, Patricia. VA: "Veterans suicide must be a top priority" *Military Times*. 4 February 2016. <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/veterans/2016/02/04/va-veterans-suicide-must-top-priority/79821504/>. Accessed 10 May 2016.

<sup>36</sup> She cites Ernst van Alphen, who contends that "art itself challenges rather than reinforces the distinction between art (or the realm of imaginative discourse) and the reality of trauma and war" (4).

<sup>37</sup> See Ferguson's "Race." *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> See Drew Cameron and Drew Mattot: *Combat Paper*. Curated by Christopher Thompson. Burlington, Vermont: Burlington City Arts, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See Sara Ahmed's work on disorientation in her foundational *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Following Chela Sandoval and Frantz Fanon, Nelson Maldonado-Torres examines this turn to ethics in *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> See Lugones's "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. Vol. 25, No. 4, Fall 2010, pp. 742 – 759.

<sup>42</sup> A thorough examination of Maldonado-Torres's reading of Fanon and Levinas alongside Søren Kierkegaard's discussion of Abraham and Isaac is beyond the scope of this introduction and conclusion but warranted.

<sup>43</sup> see José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> See Maggie Puniewska's "Healing a Wounded Sense of Morality." *The Atlantic*. 3 July 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/07/healing-a-wounded-sense-of-morality/396770/>. Accessed on 20 November 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Shay introduces "moral injury" in *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1994.

<sup>46</sup> The concept of moral injury also has a long philosophical history that would be beyond the scope of this project to review.

<sup>47</sup> Shira Maguen and Brett Litz of the National Center for PTSD suggest that "whereas PTSD is a mental disorder that requires a diagnosis, moral injury is a dimensional problem. There is no threshold for establishing the presence of moral injury; rather, at a given point in time, a Veteran may have none, or have mild to extreme manifestations. Furthermore, transgression is not necessary for a PTSD diagnosis nor does PTSD sufficiently capture moral injury, or the shame, guilt, and self-handicapping behaviors that often accompany moral injury." See Maguen, Shira and Brett Litz. "Moral Injury in Veterans of War." *PTSD Research Quarterly*. White River Junction, VT: National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Vol. 23, No. 1, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> See Meira Levinson's "Moral Injury and the Ethics of Educational Injustice." *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2, December 2015, pp. 203 – 228.

<sup>49</sup> See Maguen and Litz.

<sup>50</sup> See Maggie Puniewska's "Healing a Wounded Sense of Morality." *The Atlantic*. 3 July 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/07/healing-a-wounded-sense-of-morality/396770/>. Accessed on 20 November 2015.

<sup>51</sup> See Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Indexed Edition. 1976, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. Also, see Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. 5th Edition. 1977, Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> See Balibar, Étienne. "Why War? / Michael Walzer, Carl Schmitt, and the Issue of the 'Just War'" Lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, for the Critical Theory Program, on 30 September 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Justice White is quoted in Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> This excerpt is taken from Bennett's address to the US Naval Academy in 1997 and is quoted in *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*.

<sup>55</sup> See Jakobson and Pellegrini's *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> See Goldberg, David Theo. "Militarizing Race" *Social Text* 129, Vol. 34, No. 4, December 2016, pp. 19 – 40.

<sup>57</sup> This chapter focuses primarily on Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*, although it considers both of his major texts on moral injury.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Nagy originally performed this etymological exercise. His work is quoted in Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*. See Nagy, Gregory. *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Indignant and berserk rage as well as overwhelming grief are the two key emotions in the moment of moral injury and its aftermath.

<sup>60</sup> See Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Referenced in Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*.

<sup>62</sup> This is a common trope in fiction and nonfiction accounts of war.

<sup>63</sup> See Paul Fussell's "The Real War 1939 – 1945." *The Atlantic*, August 1989. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1989/08/the-real-war-1939-1945/306374/>. Accessed 9 December 2015.

<sup>64</sup> From *Achilles in Vietnam* (70).

<sup>65</sup> See Klime, Patricia and Leo Shane III. "New VA study finds 20 veterans commit suicide each day." *Military Times*. 7 July 2016. <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2016/07/07/new-va-study-finds-20-veterans-commit-suicide-each-day/>. Accessed 21 November 2016.

<sup>66</sup> See Jacqueline Rose. *Why War? - Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. With attention to Freud and Winnicott, and later Klein, Rose suggests that the connections between war and truth, or the search for the end of war is also a search for the end of knowledge as such.

<sup>67</sup> I will return to the realm of the animal, the non-human, in response to combat trauma in chapter four.

<sup>68</sup> "Aristeia" describes a common scene in Ancient Greek epic poetry when the hero enters the greatest battle and achieves his finest heroic moment. See "Aristeia" *ENCYCLO.CO.UK, English Encyclopedia*. <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-aristeia>. Accessed 24 October 2016.

<sup>69</sup> See Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 – 1976*. Translated by David Macey. 1997. New York, NY: Picador, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> For example, the “cycle of alternating states of numbness and intrusive reexperiencing” is most common in both PTSD and bipolar affective disorder (168).

<sup>71</sup> See “Inner-City Oakland Youth Suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.” *CBS*. 16 May 2014. <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2014/05/16/hood-disease-inner-city-oakland-youth-suffering-from-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-crime-violence-shooting-homicide-murder/>. Accessed 20 May 2014.

<sup>72</sup> See Ferguson's “Race.” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> See Andrew Carroll's *Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and their Families*. Edited collection. New York, NY: Random House, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> In 2017, the National Endowment for the Humanities initiative titled *Standing Together* builds on this project, with its history of personal narrative as a way of reflecting on and healing from war trauma.

<sup>75</sup> For one of many sources on the term “native” as it relates to histories of U.S. settler colonialism, see Shari Huhndorf's *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

<sup>76</sup> As just one example, see “Keep Wildlife Wild: Please Don't Feed the Animals.” *NSW: Office of Environment and Heritage*. Updated 6 June 2017. <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/KeepingWildlifeWild.htm>. Accessed 30 October 2017.

<sup>77</sup> For one nuanced take on the racialized continuum between human and animal, and its slippages, see Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Among the many texts that discuss this paternalism in various terms and fields, see Jeff Bass and Richard Cherwitz's “Imperial Mission and Manifest Destiny: A Case Study of Political Myth in Rhetorical Discourse.” *Southern Speech Communication Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1978, and William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> For more on intersections between militarism and humanitarianism, see Neda Atanasoski's *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

<sup>80</sup> See “Operation Homecoming.” *The National Endowment for the Arts*. Washington DC: NEA, Updated 2012. <https://www.arts.gov/operation-homecoming>. Accessed 4 October 2014.

<sup>81</sup> See Feldman, David and Lee Daniel Kravetz. “Writing Wrongs: Writing About Trauma Leads to Better Endings.” *Psychology Today*, 6 June 2014. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/supersurvivors/201406/writing-wrongs-writing-about-trauma-leads-better-endings>. Accessed on 16 May 2015.

<sup>82</sup> In 2002, Stephen Lepore and Joshua Morrison Smyth edited *The Writing Cure*, detailing writing's therapeutic effects for mass audiences. See Lepore and Smyth's *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being*. Washington, DC: The American Psychological Association, 2002. See also Karen A. Baikie, Kay Wilhelm's “Emotional and Physical Health Benefits of Expressive Writing.” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, BJPsychAdvances*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2005. <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/11/5/338>. Accessed on 17 December 2016.

<sup>83</sup> See Karen A. Baikie, Kay Wilhelm's “Emotional and Physical Health Benefits of Expressive Writing.” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, BJPsychAdvances*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2005. <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/11/5/338>. Accessed on 17 December 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Alternatively, “recollection” simultaneously suggests tranquility of mind and even religious contemplation, as it is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary. “Recollection” *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Updated 9 December 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/recollection>.

<sup>85</sup> For a history of masculinity and race in relation to U.S. citizenship and imperialism, see Gail Bederman’s *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 - 1917*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

<sup>86</sup> See, among many others, Cathy Caruth’s classic *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> See Nancy Youssef. “‘Atmospherics’ intelligence is how U.S. troops read Baghdad body language.” *McClatchy DC BUREAU*. 16 September 2004, Updated 24 May 2007. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/latest-news/article24442108.html>. Accessed 21 April 2015.

<sup>88</sup> See Nancy Youssef. “‘Atmospherics’ intelligence is how U.S. troops read Baghdad body language.” *McClatchy DC BUREAU*. 16 September 2004, Updated 24 May 2007. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/latest-news/article24442108.html>. Accessed 21 April 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Flynn is quoted in “Atmospheric Intelligence Should Be the Focus When Conducting Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations in Afghanistan.” *HubPages*, 29 December 2014. <https://hubpages.com/politics/Atmospheric-Intelligence-Should-Be-The-Focus-When-Conducting-Counterinsurgency-COIN-Operations-In-Afghanistan>. Accessed 9 December 2016. in Hubpages.

<sup>90</sup> See Batchelor, Flynn, and Pottinger’s “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan.” *CNAS*, 4 January 2010. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/fixing-intel-a-blueprint-for-making-intelligence-relevant>. Accessed 5 December 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in *HubPages*.

<sup>92</sup> See *HubPages*.

<sup>93</sup> A comprehensive look into the ways interpersonal communication and intuitive understandings are distorted or lost through the process of collection and distribution is beyond the capacities of this project.

<sup>94</sup> See “Operation Homecoming.” *The National Endowment for the Arts*. Washington DC: NEA, Updated 2012. <https://www.arts.gov/operation-homecoming>. Accessed 4 October 2014.

<sup>95</sup> See “Weapons.” *Boeing*. Updated 13 December 2017. <http://www.boeing.com/defense/weapons/>. Accessed 10 August 2017.

<sup>96</sup> See David Theo Goldberg’s “Militarizing Race” *Social Text* 129, Vol. 34, No. 4, December 2016, pp. 19 – 40.

<sup>97</sup> Despite awards and public demand, the film’s U.S. release was delayed and it faced numerous controversies. The title references a famous quote from President Lyndon B. Johnson: “the ultimate victory will depend on the hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there.” See Judith Crist’s “*Hearts and Minds: The Right Side of History*.” *The Criterion Collection*. 23 June 2014. <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/210-hearts-and-minds-the-right-side-of-history>. Accessed on 7 October 2014.

<sup>98</sup> See, among many others, Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*. 2001. University of California, Press, 2005.

<sup>99</sup> See Judith Gabriel Vinje’s “Viking Symbols ‘Stolen’ by Racists.” *The Norwegian American*, 2 November 2017. <https://www.norwegianamerican.com/featured/viking-symbols-stolen-racists/>. Accessed 30 November 2017.

<sup>100</sup>(297-9).

<sup>101</sup>See Boudreau, Tyler, Dr. Jonathan Shay, and Rev. Rita Brock. “Moral Injury: The Psychological Wounds of War.” Interviewed by Neal Conan. *NPR*, 21 November 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/11/21/165663154/moral-injury-the-psychological-wounds-of-war>. Accessed 10 December 2016.

<sup>102</sup>Quoted in Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis faculty and staff events page: “Combat Paper Project brings paper making workshops to Herron School at IUPUI.” 27 August 2013. <http://archive.inside.iupui.edu/editors-picks/arts-humanities/2013-08-27-combat-paper-project-iupui.shtml>. Accessed 13 December 2014.

<sup>103</sup>Citing Cathy Caruth, David Eng references this phenomenon of aesthetic approaches to trauma in the 2014 Modern Language Association’s presidential forum “Vulnerable Times” (24). Eng discusses an apology of the Sahtu Dene people, one that, as he puts it, “blurs the line between victim and perpetrator.” He continues “it illustrates how one might be victim and perpetrator at once, and it illustrates the ethical stakes of claiming such a position.” See David Eng’s “Reparations and the Human.” *Profession: Presidential Forum. Humanities Commons*, 19 March 2014. <https://profession.mla.hcommons.org/2014/03/19/reparations-and-the-human/>. Accessed 7 October 2015.

<sup>104</sup>See Rak and Poletti’s *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Madison, WI, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

<sup>105</sup>See Brophy and Hladki’s *Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2014

<sup>106</sup>Qtd in Presutti, Kelly. “Picturing Revolution in the Middle Voice” *thresholds*, Vol. 41, 25 April 2013, pp. 172-185. Kelly Presutti contends that with trauma, we “risk missing the point” if we set out to know or claim to know the traumatic event, and thus claim to know the unknowable (177).

<sup>107</sup>Chen references Ed Cohen’s *A Body Worth Defending*, in which he charts the history of the concept of immunity and its transference from legal to medical terminology.

<sup>108</sup> See Martin Jay’s “Walter Benjamin, Remembrance, and the First World War.” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*. Vol. 11, No. 12, Violence in the Modern World (Special Issue). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press. (December 1999-2000), pp. 18-31. Also, in his introduction to Benjamin’s essays on Baudelaire, Michael Jennings explains that Benjamin understood the unique aura, the value of individual works of art in particularly Western aesthetic traditions, to have a basis in ritual. See Jennings’s “Introduction.” *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*. Authored by Walter Benjamin, Edited by Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006.

<sup>109</sup> “Tour History 2007 – 2015.” *Combat Paper*. Updated 2017. <https://www.combatpaper.org/tourhistory/>. Accessed 22 August 2016.

<sup>110</sup> See Cameron, Drew and Drew Mattot. *Combat Paper*. Curated by Christopher Thompson. Burlington, Vermont: Burlington City Arts, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> To further explore scholarship that examines clothing, fabric, fashion, and their relations to race and the body, see Jasbir Puar’s “The Turban is Not a Hat” in *Terrorist Assemblages* as well as Mimi Thi Nguyen’s work on the Hoodie, for example. See *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, and Nguyen’s “The Hoodie as Sign, Screen, Expectation and Force.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2015.

<sup>112</sup> see Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006

<sup>113</sup> see “Orientations Matter.” *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. pp. 234 – 257.

<sup>114</sup> Ahmed builds from Merleau-Ponty’s important theory that “sensory engagement binds” the sensing and sensed objects of a circumstance to one another affectively and temporally. Merleau-Ponty’s “skin” is at the same time a “skin of the world” (qtd in Chen 209).

<sup>115</sup> see *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

<sup>116</sup> Marx, Karl. "Capital, Volume One." *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed: Robert C. Tucker. 2nd Ed. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company. 1978. (294-438).

<sup>117</sup> Ahmed is clear that bodies "inherit proximities" through each and all of these categories.

<sup>118</sup> See Cameron, Drew and Drew Mattot. *Combat Paper*. Curated by Christopher Thompson. Burlington, Vermont: Burlington City Arts, 2009. They state that a "time-honored tradition" for service members is to "keep a journal, to document travels and experiences, to record his or her thoughts to share with friends and family, or for personal reflection."

<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Shay is a Veterans Affairs Psychologist who has worked extensively with veterans recovering from war trauma and PTSD. He (re)coined "moral injury" in relation to veteran PTSD in 1994.

<sup>120</sup> See Marianne Hirsch's "Mobile Memories." Presentation given at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum - Pacific Film Archive. November 14th, 2014.

<sup>121</sup> See the work of Mirta Kupferminc and Alina Szapocznikow, for example.

<sup>122</sup> See Hirsch, Marianne. "Vulnerable Times" in *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> A concept that has been most developed in the field of linguistics, animacy can be understood to be "a set of notions characterized by family resemblances" that is further described as a "quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (2). Linguists use animacy to refer primarily to the "grammatical effects" of nouns but the concept offers an array of possibilities for seeking to understand the ways matter is socio-politically defined. See Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Queer theorists have long been concerned with the affective politics of "desiring the canonically undesired" which includes desiring "disability," "queerness," and inanimate "objects" (Chen 215). Also, see Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

<sup>125</sup> see Cameron, Drew and Drew Mattot. *Combat Paper*. Ed. Thompson. Burlington, Vermont: Burlington City Arts, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> "Historically, papermaking spread from Asia to the Middle East and to the west through war and conquest. Because of wars, the once secret art of papermaking travelled and it was the warrior who first shared the art form" (Cameron and Mattot 50). A thorough engagement with the history and legacies of the craft and art of papermaking is beyond the scope of this chapter. For recent work on paper as an historical and cultural object, see Sharon Luk's *The Life of Paper: Letters and a Poetics of Living Beyond Captivity*. University of California Press, 2017.

<sup>127</sup> A full commodity trace for the Army Combat Uniforms and other military attire is beyond the scope of this chapter. For more on the places and ways military uniforms are made, see Emery Jr.'s "Anthony Gemma Asks Why U.S. Military Uniforms are made in China." *Politifact*, 2 September 2012. <http://www.politifact.com/rhode-island/statements/2012/sep/02/anthony-gemma/anthony-gemma-asks-why-us-military-uniforms-are-made/>. Accessed 20 August 2017.

<sup>128</sup> See Brophy and Hladki, following Ien Ang.

<sup>129</sup> Chen is referencing Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

<sup>130</sup> I understand remembrance and cessation of happening from Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" and "On the Concept of History." See Benjamin's "Critique of Violence." *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. And Benjamin's "On the Concept of History." *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*. Trns by: Edmund Jephcott and Others. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> I also consider "echo," "reverberation," and "rhythm" in relation to Kierkegaard's divine in *Fear and Trembling*.

<sup>132</sup> See Candiotti and Polk's report: "Witness: Military Intelligence led Abu Ghraib abuse." CNN, 30 August 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/08/30/prisoner.abuse/index.html>. Accessed 28 April 2015.

<sup>133</sup> My use of "affirmative" references Werner Hamacher's "Affirmative, Strike." *The Cardozo Law Review*, New York, NY: Yeshiva University, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 1991, pp. 1132 – 1157.

<sup>134</sup> This dismissal continued throughout Davis time with the military. See Elizabeth Williamson's "Witness to Abuse Trying to be Heard: Interrogators Responsible, Ex-Soldier Says." *The Washington Post*. 20 August 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17135-2004Aug19.html>. Accessed 24 August 2016.

<sup>135</sup> See Hirsch's "Vulnerable Times." *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Edited by Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. pp. 76-96

<sup>136</sup> In the years following the Abu Ghraib scandal, Davis became a spokesperson of sorts for Iraq veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after participating in torture, specifically. Davis primary message was that PTSD can form after participation in torture as well as combat, and that the tremendous guilt and horror over what veterans witness and do can have similarly destructive effects. See Justine Sharrock's "'We Live With Ghosts and Demons': Soldiers Who Took Part in Torture Suffer from Severe PTSD." *AlterNet*. 21 July 2010. [https://www.alternet.org/story/147605/%22we\\_live\\_with\\_ghosts\\_and\\_demons%22%3A\\_soldiers\\_who\\_took\\_part\\_in\\_torture\\_suffer\\_from\\_severe\\_pt\\_sd](https://www.alternet.org/story/147605/%22we_live_with_ghosts_and_demons%22%3A_soldiers_who_took_part_in_torture_suffer_from_severe_pt_sd). Accessed 24 February 2015.

<sup>137</sup> As outlined by Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>138</sup> Fanon was a veteran. For example, he served with the French forces against Nazi Germany during World War II. While in the military, he "noticed that French women avoided black soldiers who were sacrificing their lives to save them" (Sardar viii). See Ziauddin Sardar's "Forward to the 2008 Edition" of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Markmann. London, Pluto Press, 2008.

<sup>139</sup> McCotter was not technically in Iraq during the torture in Abu Ghraib; he left the country before the first post-invasion prisoner entered Abu Ghraib. See also Fox Butterfield's "The Struggle for Iraq: Prisoners; Mistreatment of Prisoners is Called Routine in U.S." *The New York Times*, 8 May 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/08/world/struggle-for-iraq-prisoners-mistreatment-prisoners-called-routine-us.html>. Accessed 24 February 2015 and Jesse Fruhwirth's "Private Prisons are Shameful and Prison Profiteers Should not be Community Leaders!" National Prison Divestment Campaign, *Prison Watch Network*. 6 December 2012. <https://prisonwatchnetwork.org/category/lane-mccotter/>. Accessed 24 February 2015.

<sup>140</sup> There are a number of debates surrounding the topic of the afterlife of slavery. For example, Ruth Wilson Gilmore states: "Argument against easy linkage between mass incarceration and slavery: Ruth Wilson Gilmore: "Since half the people locked up are not, or not obviously, descendants of racial chattel slavery, the problem demands a different explanation and therefore different politics. This does not mean that the lineage of abolition extending through chattel slavery is not robust enough to form at least part of the platform for ending mass incarceration in general. However, as it stands, to achieve significance, the uncritical extension of a partial past to explain a different present demands a sentimental political assertion that depends on the figure of a laboring victim whose narrative arc — whose structure of feeling — is fixed, and therefore susceptible to rehabilitation — or expungement — into relative innocence. The turn to innocence frightens in its desperate effort to replenish the void left by various assaults, calculated and cynical, on universalism on the one hand and rights on the other." This dissertation does not enter but rather references these debates. See Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence." *Futures of Black Radicalism*, Edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin. New York, NY: Verso, 2017.

<sup>141</sup> put note about pipeline

<sup>142</sup> From Lugones's "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. Vol. 25, No. 4, Fall 2010, pp. 742 – 759.

<sup>143</sup> Lugones's definition of the "coloniality of power" follows Walter Mignolo's foundational text *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. See Mignolo's *Local Histories*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>144</sup> (qtd in Lugones 751). According to Lugones, Mignolo never gives us a set definition of the colonial difference.

<sup>145</sup> (qtd. in Lugones 752)

<sup>146</sup> He builds from Kierkegaard, for whom this relation to the infinite is fundamental to a relation of love between two reconstituting beings as well. Kierkegaard describes love between people as mediated through God: “man-God-man.” (qtd. in Critchley 248).

<sup>147</sup> The protons and neutrons move farther into the electron cloud, faster from the nucleus. See Jim Lucas’s “What Is Infrared?” *Live Science*. 26 March 2015. <https://www.livescience.com/50260-infrared-radiation.html>. Accessed 5 December 2016.

<sup>148</sup> See Jeff Tyson’s “How Night Vision Works.” *HowStuffWorks*. <http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/gadgets/high-tech-gadgets/nightvision1.htm>. Accessed 17 July 2017.

<sup>149</sup> See Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

<sup>150</sup> See also Fred Moten’s *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

<sup>151</sup> See Edelman’s *No Future*.

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