

Introduction

When it comes to war and the people touched by it, there are always stories involved, myths to be forged, biographies to be exalted, and absences to be sutured over. These are stories that leave some killing and dying overstuffed with meaning, and neglect other killers and other dead altogether. In these stories, war's productive and destructive violence—the empowerment, construction, and shaping of the soldier, his wearing down, injury, and death, and the terrorizing, maiming, and extermination of civilians—is the exception rather than the rule. All the harm that comes with war is cast as tragedy or side effect, as something that should not have happened. The ostensible necessity of violence gets chalked up to a kind of facile metaphysics in which the roots of war are reduced to platitudes about greed, primordial aversions, hunger for power, and “human nature.”

At the time of this writing, four years after I sat with Dime in his apartment, the war in Iraq is nominally over. The country continues to be rocked by sectarian violence, but the United States' massive occupying force—all of it—is on its way out. Many of these troops are being sent to Afghanistan, even though the Obama administration announced in June 2011 that all US troops would be withdrawn from there by the end of 2014. These apparent conclusions further enforce the sense that war is an exception that pops up occasionally and with discreet eventfulness before drawing neatly to a close. But things continue despite this appearance of an end: war persists in

the lives, bodies, and social worlds it has touched, and the enduring structural conditions from which war necessarily arises guarantee that these most recently ravaged lives, bodies, and worlds will not be the last.

In contrast to this seeming finitude, this book begins in the middle of things, before a reassuring story can knit itself closed around an uncertain aftermath—a reassuring story of the sort that even Dime himself is aspiring and failing to tell. Indeed, the impetus for this book comes from a frustration that in spite of the surfeit of ready-made narratives, the language available to help us understand what is happening here is rather impoverished. It is no wonder that Dime runs out of words. He is not the only one grasping for them. There is no end to the unexamined things we think we already know about war: that violence is an instrument that can be directed to clear goals and precise outcomes, or that it is only chaos; that its impacts can be known, understood, measured, and communicated, or that they can never be known; that a war is definitively “about” something, or that it is “meaningless”; and that war makes heroes out of people, or that it turns them into monsters. Any one of these things may be true in one or another instance, but none of them is a good explanation for everything, or even for Dime’s simple appeal. So it may be useful here to place such notions to the side. These platitudes and their all-encompassing intellectual equivalents reveal little about what is going on in the middle of things.

Soldiers are not the only people who do violence in war, or the only people to whom violence is done. In fact, it is civilians, including many children, not soldiers or other combatants, who make up the vast majority of modern war dead. In World War I they were 15 percent of the total. In World War II they were 65 percent. In the wars of the 1990s and 2000s, civilians make up as much as 90 percent of the casualties.¹ Despite this horrific disproportion, soldiers remain in many ways at the center of war—of war’s production and the discourses that make sense of war. War happens to civilians by accident, or so we assume, at least. With soldiers, however, there is a certain frankness: we know that for them, violence is happening *on purpose*, and happening, whether we like it or not, in the name of upholding norms that we depend on and take for granted. Attending

closely to soldiers' experiences reveals the ways that war is not at all an exceptional condition, that soldiers—and we as civilians—are always already in the middle of it and its unfinished present. Precisely because of this vexing contradiction, this present can be tough to get a purchase on.

For most of the war and at the time of this writing, Fort Hood was home to two full combat divisions, the First Cavalry and Fourth Infantry Divisions, as well as the Thirteenth Sustainment Command, Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, and numerous smaller expeditionary units.² Most of these units followed some version of the Army's grueling rotational schedule: twelve-month tours frequently extended to fifteen months, separated by twelve months of "dwell time" back in Texas. Portions of these respites at home were inevitably consumed with weeks of predeployment field training for the next tour.³ With this schedule, going off to war was often less a one-time event than a repeated shuttling between home and Iraq. Even for soldiers who did not deploy or who may have ended up serving just one tour, the sense of indefinitely ongoing movement and the uncertainty that came with it loomed over everything, just as it did for military families and the entire community. I remember my surprise when a friend who was waiting impatiently to learn when her husband, a career infantry noncommissioned officer (NCO), would return from his third deployment casually mentioned that he already expected orders to deploy again a year later.

It can be difficult to even begin addressing the normalcy of this sort of situation when so many accounts of war remain bound by the conceit that war violence is something that happens by accident or as a last resort, or that it is best spoken about in terms of cruelty, pathology, moral and ethical failure, and illegality. In liberal democracies, the power to kill and expose, to cause others to die or to keep them from death, is treated as an exceptional prerogative, whether those others are foreign enemies, civilians on the battlefield, or the soldiers we send to fight. Instances in which the rules protecting life are suspended or abandoned are generally regarded as atrocities, as scenes of scandal and evil that lie safely in the past, or that represent nightmarish backslidings in the steady progress of history. In this category we might place Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, internment camps, wars of colonial dominion, police brutality and extrajudicial

execution, migrant detention and deportation, slavery, torture, and the Holocaust.

But states—even liberal democracies—parcel out legitimate violence on a daily basis, making real the force of law by doing what law prohibits others from doing. This book argues that these and other forms of violence wrought or abetted by states and other sovereigns are fundamental to the exercise of power over human beings rather than regrettable exceptions to enlightened ideals.⁴ Violence waged in the name of protecting innocent life—like the “war on terror,” the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and various other US military interventions—also inevitably involves subjecting human lives to a cost-benefit analysis. Even in so-called just wars, anything is ultimately permissible in the name of necessity (Asad 1996, 2007). How many of “them” can be allowed to die in the effort to protect “us,” or furnish “their” freedom and well-being? What are we willing to demand of “our” own in the name of protecting “our” security? Whether they are spoken aloud or not, these questions are being asked, and they are answered with efficacious violence.⁵ As citizens of states whose “just” law is necessarily enforced by violence, we cannot shirk our own responsibility for this violence and the lives it touches.

If war entails deciding what lives are worth, not just incidentally but deliberately, this suggests a more complex story about what the soldier does for war and what war does to the soldier. It is a story in which, per Dime’s appeal, even if it is impossible that nothing is left out, we must suspend our assumptions about the difference between intended goals and side effects. It is a story in which all the effects of war violence inhabit the same plane, as in this observation by journalist Evan Wright (2004, 30) of the allied invading force entering Iraq in March 2003.

Though at the small-unit level all I see is friction among the moving parts—Marines shouting at other vehicles to get out of the way, guys jumping out to hurriedly piss by the side of the road, people taking wrong turns—the machine works. It will roll across 580 kilometers to Baghdad. It will knock down buildings, smash cars and tanks, put holes in people, shred limbs, cut children apart. There’s no denying it. For certain tasks, the machine put together in this desert is a very good one.

The way Wright tells the story makes a point of not assigning different levels of intentionality or moral value to these certain tasks. There are narratives that tell us how we should understand the things that this machine—ultimately our machine—does. Some of war’s effects are necessary and worthy, we think, and others are abhorrent and avoidable. In a similar fashion, we might understand Dime’s service to have a straightforward value and meaning to which his pain and discontent are a mere sidebar or a mark of tragic valor. We might open the newspaper to read human-interest stories describing the “necessary sacrifice” of injured or exhausted soldiers, or anxious and suffering military families, as if such things were only secondary to war’s larger purpose, whatever that may be.

But the machine that Wright so vividly portrays, the same machine that is responsible for both sustaining and endangering soldiers’ lives, does not distinguish in this way in the present tense of war making: rule and exception are a backward-looking projection on a welter of indiscriminant effects. To cast any unwanted excesses of war’s violence as second order, peripheral, or “collateral” to its “necessary” violence is not only to misunderstand war but also to conspire in a confusion of its means and ends. In this confusion, the instrumental destruction of life recedes from view, and the abstracted goals and principles ostensibly at stake in the conflict are all that can be seen.⁶ The machine that does the injuring at the center of war cannot be “fixed” because it already works perfectly. Nor can it easily be turned off. The typical mythological narratives of war do not recognize this and embrace only the story of how things are meant to happen, either in glorious validation or tragic breakdown.

But war can be rendered without recourse to retrospective narrativization, and the people producing its violence can appear as complex and conflicted persons rather than caricatured tragic heroes or anxiety-provoking victims. In such an account, the civilian citizens of liberal democracies, though they rarely experience war violence firsthand, may find themselves entangled in an uncomfortable complicity with and responsibility for the violence done to as well as endured by soldiers, violence that serves the norms with which persons outside war are accustomed to living. It is the story that Dime suggested when he commanded me to “tell the fuckin’ truth,” when he enjoined, “Just give us” It is a story in which violence *makes*

the social, the rules, the nations, and the people, rather than simply corrupting, undermining, or destroying these things. It is a story that helps show how Dime ended up where he is. It is a story in which war does not simply find its way from some foreign elsewhere as an exceptional and intrusive menace but instead comes at human life from all sides, destructively and productively, to color even the deepest layers of what normalcy is or could be. It is story about war sitting with you at home in your living room or bed, in the touch of a familiar person, in your bones and muscles and brain, and in your feelings and dreams.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CONDITION

This book, then, proceeds from the unique and exemplary position, the exceptional status and bodily experience, of the soldier. The human body, what Marcel Mauss (2006, 83) dubbed “man’s first and most natural instrument,” is perhaps the most taken-for-granted and essential piece of equipment in the day-to-day labors of war making. The body’s unruly matter is war’s most necessary and most necessarily expendable raw material. While many analyses of US war violence have emphasized the technologically facilitated withdrawal of American bodies from combat zones in favor of air strikes, smart bombs, remotely piloted drones, and privately contracted fighting forces (Virilio 1989; Baudrillard 1995; Singer 2003, 2009), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could not carry on without the physical presence of tens of thousands of such bodies. Even outside of combat, soldiering is a distinctly bodily undertaking, involving the disciplining, monitoring, and cultivating of the body, the tedious chores of mandatory exercise, or physical training (PT), marching, lifting heavy loads, being compelled to wakefulness at any hour of the day or night, and so on.

The physical depredations and mortal threat of combat cannot be separated from the system of bodily discipline that produces the soldier in the first place—his training, reflexes, skills, and capacities—and the system of maintenance and care that manages, evaluates and conserves the integrity of the soldier’s body, both in the immediate

wake of violence and over the long term. A soldier's lacerations, broken bones, and TBI from an IED blast are the result of more than just that bomb exploding in that time and place. They are the product of the strategy and tactics that placed the soldier in the target area and the protective gear that kept the soldier alive and in so doing subjected him to injuries that he would not otherwise have lived to endure. The significance of these injuries is shaped by how they are recognized, diagnosed, and treated; by the Army's judgment about whether the soldier can still do his job and is therefore still useful; and by a family's ability to care for and live with a loved one who is in pain, impaired, or altered. The spectacular violence of a foreign battlefield and the routinized violence of the military apparatus bleed by various, complex routes into one another and into the everyday lives of soldiers and those close to them. There is not just the violence of meeting the enemy to consider: how that violence is anticipated, accommodated, forestalled, or aggravated by the Army itself, the lives that surround that violence, the prerogatives that drive it, and the discourses that make it intelligible all determine the sum and shape of living in and with war.

The soldier is at once the agent, instrument, and object of state violence. He is simultaneously protected from and exposed to power's manifold dominion over life and death by both the circumstances of war and the institution he serves. The soldier is coerced and empowered by discipline—discipline that, as Michel Foucault (1979) writes, renders a docile body productive by subjecting it to countless minute and technical compulsions. The soldier is permitted to go outside the law—to kill—in the name of upholding the law, under conditions closely circumscribed by the law. In this respect the soldier *is* the sovereign, “he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt 1985, 5), on when life can be taken, even though he acts only as the final point of articulation for the vast armature through which this authority over life is vested.⁷ At the same time, the soldier is expected to place himself in harm's way; it is acceptable for him to be injured or killed. The soldier in this respect falls into the category that Giorgio Agamben (1998, 83) deems *homo sacer*: human life that is outside the law and therefore can be killed.⁸ And finally, the soldier is the subject of extensive measures to protect and maintain life, to keep him alive and able to continue working, fighting and killing effectively. Through

means ranging from the armor and medical technologies that make previously fatal injuries survivable, to the psychiatric counseling, medication, and community services that are meant to ameliorate the impact of deployment and combat on soldiers' mental and emotional well-being, to the economic subsidies that provide housing, health care, and even employment and education for the soldier and his spouse and children, the soldier is a biopolitical subject not merely kept from dying but also made to live (Foucault 2003, 241).

In liberal democracies, and by extension any place where the conventionalized idea of humans as rights-bearing actors holds sway, personhood is unquestioningly rooted in the fantasy of an autonomous, self-sovereign individual who can reasonably expect to live free of coercion and injury. Of course none of us lives without others, and none of us lives immune to the world around us. But the fantasy that we could or do has profound implications, chiefly in its power to obscure the many coercions and injuries that ostensibly "free" human life endures and the way that those often highly unequal coercions are part of what empowers any such "freedom" in the first place. The soldier challenges this fantasy in an especially acute fashion, as he is perpetually subject to the will of others while exposed to bodily harm in ways that are utterly transparent, rationalized, and legitimate. The soldier's very particular condition raises broad questions about the limits of personhood. Who are these beings on whom so much inhumanity can be visited and of whom so much inhumanity may be anxiously expected? Who are we who share a nation, a world, and a sense of common humanity with them? And what are the circumstances that make it all possible and normalize it into a taken-for-granted invisibility that nevertheless seethes with feeling?

VULNERABILITY AND LIVED AFFECTS OF WAR

Soldiers' bodies are not end points for power but rather places in which it abides and transforms, "relays" through which it moves on to other bodies and still others.⁹ If this ethnography has a single object, it is this: the entailments of living in and with bodies that are instruments and objects of violence. War does not simply shape,

shepherd, and injure bodies, or mold and undermine psyches in a unidirectional fashion. Through countless contradictory and incomplete processes, war excites bodies, cultivates capacities, gives value to things, provokes subjective interpretations of surprising behaviors, and forms connections. As bodies “come up against” circumstances beyond their control, like war, those circumstances unleash affects in them—shared, heterogeneous responses directly related to the world in which those bodies find themselves (Butler 2009, 39).¹⁰ Affect means many things to many people. This book treats it as a relational medium of bodily and psychic feeling that resides intertwined with structures of power and social organization as both their product and their object.¹¹ Affect describes what the social “feels like” in individuals and structures, senses and emotions, and desires and reasons without having to privilege any one of these things over the others.

From this perspective, the space of intense institutional subjection that soldiers occupy is not a final analysis, just as the soldier’s body is not the place where power begins or ends, even if it is especially visible there—as it is with Dime in his upright posture, his high-and-tight haircut, his uniform with patches and badges that attest to his combat experience, and perhaps above all his injuries. The soldier’s exceptional position is a stepping-off point for understanding the affective currents and exchanges in which soldiers are enmeshed: the *lived affects of war*. Soldiers are caught in the middle of some of the most restrictive, overdetermining, and glaringly vulgar power structures that it is possible to conceive of. But simply to describe these structures is not to describe the bodily and emotional impacts and excesses that such structures inevitably create—to describe these structures is not to describe soldiers’ lives. The structure of power framing war moves by lateral and incidental routes—not just an through IED or an insurgent’s bullet, but in a nightmare, a cold sweat, a doctor’s suspicion, a lover’s incomprehension, or a bureaucrat’s obstinacy—to take shape in affects: in leaps, increments, sedimented layers, and sudden upheavals nestled among other concerns, stresses, and relations.

The soldier goes to war, and labors hard at it for months and months, perhaps in a job where he never even takes a shot at an enemy combatant. At the end of it, though things may seem to have

changed strategically or politically for better or worse wherever he was, the war typically has been neither won nor lost. Indeed, even as politicians and the civilian public debate the “end” of the war, the soldier returning home may already be anticipating his return to it. Soldiers’ lives in the midst of war thus resemble less a continuous forward movement of “decisions” over life and death than a messy temporality of harm and survival without a clear beginning or end, something like what Lauren Berlant (2007) calls “slow death.” The forces that shape people’s lives in the community surrounding Fort Hood unfold in ways that are episodic, slow, or stuck.¹² In the case of someone like Dime, who is alive but obscurely injured, on his way out of the Army but still infuriatingly subject to its discipline, forever changed both psychically and somatically, war injures or even kills slowly. Dime’s labor is waiting—waiting to find out what was wrong with him, waiting for the last hangover of pharmaceutical withdrawal and side effects to wear off, and waiting for the Army to let him go.

Employing affect to ask these broad questions about what war feels like casts a wider net than one of the more familiar categories by which we understand the lingering effects of violence: *trauma*. From the Greek for “wound,” the word connotes shock and injury, and in common usage describes both a distressing event and the long-term psychic disorder provoked by such distress. The idea has attained the status of common sense, and trauma so dominates the understanding of suffering as to make it essentially coterminous with the contemporary moral economy (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, 9). A vast theoretical literature explores both the possibilities and pitfalls of trauma as a category of analysis, but here I want to mention just a few limiting assumptions.¹³

Trauma posits a clear, linear, causal link between present suffering and a specific past event. It emphasizes individual psychic experience, and insists that such an experience requires verification, description, and elaboration. These features (as chapter 3 will analyze in depth) make it difficult for reified notions of trauma to address experiences that are collective, chronic, generalized, or obscure in their origins. This is especially the case when trauma is medicalized. PTSD has become a sort of catchall by which military medicine, the military as a whole, and the civilian public understand the various, contradictory entailments of living with violence. The full significance of this present

range of understandings, and how they intersect with PTSD's institutional and diagnostic reification, are only just beginning to be explored.¹⁴ But treating trauma uncritically can obscure more than it reveals.

Affects, on the other hand, present themselves as nothing more or less than self-evident feelings. They do not presume a single origin, or an orderly chain of causes and effects. They are not secreted away in repressed memories or the unconscious but rather are there in the moment, in the body, even if they are hard to name. While trauma focuses on bringing occluded subjective experiences to light, much of what preoccupies people in military communities concerns this uncertain present. In my fieldwork, I found the rubric of trauma unhelpful in attempting to grasp what war does to and for people. Dime's story, along with those of others recounted in this book, reveals that the terror and anxiety of war—along with many of the pleasures and satisfactions associated with it—do not stem solely from single, discrete events. Dime's outlook arose instead from the condition of existing for long periods of time and in various modes of exposure in harm's way.

To capture this condition, I turn not to trauma but rather to an adjacent concept: *vulnerability*. Vulnerability does not demand a before and after, or the exception of a disrupted psyche. It signals a condition that is ongoing or even permanent: the always precarious and susceptible nature of the human organism itself. Judith Butler (2004) suggests in her extensive meditation on the topic that this variable and relational bodily susceptibility is what defines human beings' relationships to power as well as their intimacies, attachments, and desires. War constitutes one extreme of that relationship. Beneath the historical, material, and political "causes" and the ideological discourses that surround any war lie the brute facts of the assault on human life. Killed and wounded bodies are the foundation on which the political and ideological aims of war are materialized (Scarry 1987). While this notion is something that those of us who experience war secondhand may struggle to remind ourselves of, it is a basic feature of military life, not just for soldiers, but for whole communities. Vulnerability points to the inescapably collective nature of bodily harm. It spreads outward from the soldier to the persons and institutions linked to him in the form a sense of risk and endangerment, as a sort

of productive contamination that is less a strain on or disruption of attachment than it is the stuff of attachment itself.

Focusing on the vulnerability of soldiers and their families and communities allows us to ask what is involved in recognizing the harm done to those whose job it is to produce war on the nation's behalf. Soldiers and their families are iconic national avatars, and the losses they experience are valorized and fetishized in media representations and political discourse. At the same time, the people I met during my fieldwork frequently insisted that so much of the actual harm they experienced was rendered invisible in myriad ways—in the public agora, but also in the form of injuries undiagnosed by doctors, work insufficiently compensated for by institutions, or difficult experiences opaque to loved ones. Turning the logic of vulnerability to the exceptional spaces of routinized war making highlights the ways that war violence exists not just in the relationships between states or populations but within them as well. It shows the violence that lies within our own relationship to those who produce violence on our behalf, within our own links to each other and the structures that sustain us.

THE ARMY AND THE SITUATION OF INEQUALITY

The Army is but one of many overlapping and wide-ranging systems of ordered and ordering violence—systems that unify human beings into masses and populations, divide them into types, kinds, and specimens, and distribute worthiness, extract value, and wreak violence accordingly. These systems work through ideology, common sense, language, stories, desire and disgust, the regulation of space and bodies, and almost always with law and reason as their accomplice and infrastructure. They have names that are more or less useful depending on the circumstances, persons, and forces involved or the audience one wishes to hail: empire, capital, patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, militarism, ableism, and many others. These things shape the Army and the wider civilian world in which it is enfolded, and they are altered, challenged, and reproduced as they travel back and forth between the two. Such systems are incidentally

or deliberately exploited by the Army for institutional purposes, and appear as problems that interfere with institutional imperatives. They structure people's differential exposure to the violence of war, whether as soldier or civilian, American or foreign. And by framing the status, worthiness, and very humanity of the people who are killing and being killed, they shade all deeper notions of what war means and what it is for.

This book is not about what different categories of personhood—such as gender, sexuality, race, nation, and class—do in the military in any straightforward way. But the distinct constellation of bodily and affective life that is my object only makes sense in the context of a broader situation of overlapping and intersecting inequalities—a situation that all these lines of difference are irreducibly part of. In the specificity of my focus, I do not possess the authority to speak to all of these things systematically or comprehensively. But many others have marked out and mapped aspects of this ground already, and continue to do so. Therefore, to provide a fuller frame for the chapters that follow, it is important to say a few things here about that ground.

The Army is a profoundly gendered institution that places men and women, and masculinity and femininity (to the exclusion of other configurations of gender), in compulsory intimacy with and highly structured opposition to one another. The Army, the profession of soldiering, and the making of war are all ostensibly masculine domains. They encourage and rely on connotatively manly practices, traits, and dispositions, including physical discipline, mastery over one's own sensitivity to pain and discomfort, and the suppression of care and empathy in order to be able to command and inflict violence (Buck-Morss 1992; Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo 2002; Mosse 1996). This physical and emotional hardness is one of the key features distinguishing soldiers from civilians' feminized "softness" and sentimentality (Lutz 2001, Ricks 1997), both in soldiers' own discourse and in public and political culture. In various ways, militaries also depend on and institutionalize the reproduction of largely male military labor by a vast array of female household, service, and sexual labor—often in ways strongly inflected by violence (Lutz 2001, 2009; Enloe 2000)—and the modern US Army has for almost a century served as a sort of social laboratory for state experiments in the regulation of normative heterosexuality (Canaday 2009).

Women constitute approximately 13 percent of active duty US soldiers, however.¹⁵ Combat arms military occupational specialties (MOS) remain closed to women.¹⁶ Yet in the current strategic environments in Afghanistan and Iraq, the distinction between combat and noncombat functions is increasingly blurred. Women soldiers—including many whom I met during my fieldwork—are routinely in the line of fire and even drawn on as a tactical resource precisely because of their gender, despite the fact that current US Department of Defense protocols make it difficult to formally recognize some of the labors performed and risks taken by military women.¹⁷ This situation poses both analytic and terminological problems for any effort to speak of the Army as a generalizable mass. The challenge is compounded because many of the women soldiers I met were deeply invested in the masculine homosociality of Army corporate culture. They often both espoused the desire to be treated as equals by their male peers and professed the same negative stereotypes of (other) women soldiers—“females,” in military argot—that I heard from many male soldiers: that they were disruptive of good order, relied on their femininity as a crutch, and were generally less capable. “I hate females so much,” Dana, an engineer, told me. Although she ended up in the Army, Dana had originally wanted to join the Marines because they were even more disciplined and hard core. These disavowals and self-exceptions also complicate any effort to generalize about a sense of sorority among women soldiers, and to insist throughout this analysis on particularizing all experiences of women soldiers would be essentially to except them altogether from the masculine homosociality of soldiering—a sociality they firmly aver.¹⁸

The male Army spouse is in some ways an even more obscure and slippery category, for while the woman soldier can be figured (correctly or not) as a feminist trailblazer, I am unaware of any celebratory equivalent for the Army husband. On several occasions, informants in each role (soldier and spouse) and of both sexes remarked on the “emasculatation” felt by men who were the husbands or boyfriends of deployed women soldiers. The infrastructure set up by the Army to support soldiers’ spouses, primarily via organizations called family readiness groups (FRGs), is both connotatively and demographically feminine. So just as women can be made and make themselves masculine through their affiliation with the Army, men

can make themselves and be made to feel feminized by their peripheral or proxy attachment to the institution.

In the Army, it is thus possible to observe the unmooring of masculinity from men (Halberstam 1998), see it taken on by women, and see its opposite foisted on men. It is an environment in which the aggressive reproduction of straightness (Canaday 2009)—due in no small part to its very aggressiveness—gives rise to highly visible queerings of heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner 2002; Serlin 2003). These things happen not just in the inversion posed by the woman soldier but also in the “manly” independence that military wives take on in their husbands’ absence, or the increasingly “feminized” peacekeeping and caretaking roles that soldiers are asked to play in contemporary military interventions (Lutz 2001). And this is all without even engaging the highly vulnerable queerness of non-heterosexual soldiers themselves, or the twinned homophobia and homoeroticism of military culture (Belkin 2001). This simultaneous unmooring and retrenchment also happens, in a far darker and more violent form, in the fratri-sexual assaults visited on women soldiers by their male comrades, or what the Army calls “blue-on-blue” rapes (Benedict 2007, 2010; Goodman 2009; Moffett and Herdy 2004).¹⁹ Just as heteronormativity extends throughout and beyond the boundaries of the Army as a fraught but banal totalizing field (as described in some depth in chapter 4), so too does it spiral in on itself to make targets of those who are most vulnerable within the institution.

Some of these gendered dynamics are hinted at or addressed outright at various junctures throughout the book, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. Though there is still far more that could be said about, for instance, the ways that conventionally gendered roles and heteronormative assumptions structure access to military housing, medical and educational benefits for soldiers’ partners and children, or how civilian and military narratives of rape and victimhood parallel or contradict one another, the foreign policy fortunes of the United States will continue to change the gendered image of the soldier. A range of new ethnographic work on militaries in the United States and elsewhere addresses these and many other questions about how gender and sexuality intersect with war violence, military institutions, and soldierly identity.²⁰

Because the overwhelming proportion of soldiers are male, I choose not to switch evenhandedly between masculine and feminine pronouns, or resort to “he or she” and “his or her” when referring to them. Such a move might import a misplaced sense of gender equivalence into Army homosociality. A similar equanimity in referring to spouses would also be misleading. So throughout the book I use the gender-connotative but still gender-neutral terms soldier and spouse, and when invoking these terms as the names of generic figures, I use masculine pronouns for the former and feminine ones for the latter. In cases where I am speaking about specific individuals, I always refer to their actual gender. My intention with this approach is that within the makeup of my unscientifically representative assortment of anecdotes and quotations taken from an unscientifically representative sample of informants, the smattering of gendered exceptions will convey some hint of how such exceptions—exceptions that nearly always cling fast to the rule—make themselves felt in real life.

A similar paradox of difference and uniformity exists with race. The Army’s role as social laboratory also includes an institutional antiracist ideology and history of racial integration that predates the civil rights movement by more than a decade (Moskos and Butler 1997). Some external assessments and testimony from soldiers themselves suggest that equality of opportunity and powerful sanctions against discrimination are significant parts of what makes the military attractive, rewarding work for many servicemembers of color (Hawkins 2005). Historically, the Army has promoted African Americans and Latinos to senior positions at significantly higher rates than the private sector. The contemporary trope of the military as a crucible that forges camaraderie out of racial, ethnic, class, and geographic diversity is at least as old as 1950s’ World War II genre films. Military service is a symbolic badge of national belonging and sometimes a real pathway to residency or citizenship for both documented and undocumented immigrants.²¹

It would be a mistake, however, to regard these factors—and others, like the proportional overrepresentation of African Americans in the ranks (Office of Army Demographics 2010)—as existing apart from the structures of inequality that limit the opportunities of racial minorities in the civilian world and thereby make military work more

attractive (Lutz 2001, 242). Consider the compounded alienation and marginalization to which many nonwhite soldiers have found themselves subject as they fight in the service of a state that marginalizes them. Examples range from Muhammad Ali's and Malcolm X's famous declamations of the Vietnam War, to debates between white and black radicalized Vietnam veterans about their shared but unequal experiences (Winterfilm Collective 1972), to the instances in 2011 of Asian American soldiers apparently driven to suicide while deployed in Afghanistan in the wake of racially motivated hazing.²² Recent and not-so-recent events testify to the persistence of the dehumanizing racial avarice that elements of US military culture direct toward foreign others: from the invocation of putative "Arab sensitivities" to justify prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, to video released in January 2012 showing US Marines urinating on the corpses of Taliban fighters, to the widespread use of epithets like "haji," "raghead," and "sand nigger" to refer to Iraqis and Afghans (Hedges and Al-Arian 2009). The military's boosters would claim that these are residual exceptions to the institution's status as a sort of vanguard of racial equality and temperate multiculturalism—a vanguard that the rest of the country simply has not caught up to yet. Its critics see it as cynically exploiting the economic precarity of nonwhites while cultivating, in true imperial fashion, the hatred toward racial others at home and abroad that facilitates the taking of life and the domination of populations. For the present analysis, the most salient point may be something more fundamental that inheres in all these positions: questions of racial difference are inevitably entangled in the unequal distribution of harm, exposure, responsibility, and authority—in the Army as in so many other settings.

The Army's doctrine of color-blindness outlaws explicit expressions of prejudice and avarice, but naturally it doesn't automatically change people's minds. As Catherine Lutz (2001, 23) writes, people bring racial identities and antipathies with them when they enter the Army, and don't necessarily lose them when they get there. But just as in US liberalism more generally, Army policies make race and racism into entities that can be easily identified and policed, subsuming them into an institutional economy of good order and discipline without their content or practice ever having to be unpacked. Most striking at the ethnographic level is the manifest tension between

demographic diversity and institutional antiracist ideology, on the one hand, and imported attitudes and everyday practices of racial affiliation and distinction, on the other hand, as when a white soldier assured me with complete confidence, “There is zero tolerance for racism in the Army,” even as he and I sat chatting in an office with several other white soldiers while a group of exclusively black soldiers were gathered in the next room.

Race is not a single unitary factor here; instead it snaps into significance in daily life in manifold “racial situations” (Hartigan 1999). The combination of racial diversity with the compulsory proximity and intimacy to which Army life subjects soldiers and those close to them means that interracial friendships, romances, marriages, and kinlike soldierly solidarities abound. In my experience, racial epithets were bandied about in ways that could be read variously as signs of macho solidarity, an embarrassing breach of decorum, or hostility veiled thinly or not at all. I heard some white soldiers casually utter slurs or invoke stereotypes when superiors or nonwhite soldiers weren’t around, but they clearly knew that to do so in mixed company would be a blatant provocation to animus or disciplinary sanction. Racialized notions of otherness—sometimes as debased, and at other times as exotic or redeemed—were commonly invoked by soldiers of all races and ethnicities in descriptions of Iraq and Iraqis, but frequently triangulated through self-consciously US-centric ideas of difference. As with gender and sexuality, the Army is a site where norms of racial difference are actively challenged in certain arenas and implicitly exploited or reproduced in others, almost always under the broader imperative to produce an effective fighting force.

Finally, class too operates in complex ways both structurally and at the level of everyday practice. The Army offers an escape from class disadvantages, and at the same time depends on them to make recruits available and help retain soldiers. As Erin Finley (2011, 15) points out, “Joining up may represent a choice from among limited options,” for “even in an all-volunteer force, some volunteers are more voluntary than others.” The highly dependent local economies spawned by military bases—historically dominated by low-wage, low-skill service sector work, high-risk, low-security contracting, and predatory lenders and retailers—reproduce or even exacerbate existing class inequities. Some people in Killeen spoke resentfully

of the Army's dominance of the local economy and observed that the lack of alternative prospects amounted to "breeding soldiers," as one friend put it. Junior soldiers with large families or other financial burdens sometimes found their wages insufficient to make ends meet, or keep out of poverty or cycles of compounding debt. Those same wages, though, placed other soldiers in positions of relative privilege in the communities they came from. More than once, when I asked enlisted soldiers of various ranks about what misconceptions they thought civilians had of them, they answered, "That we have a lot of money."

And there is a lot of money. Truly massive quantities of cash flow into military towns—six billion dollars of direct and indirect annual input into the local economy, in the case of Fort Hood and Killeen (Fort Hood Public Affairs Office 2009). Most surprising of all may be the fact that steady increases in military pay and benefits over the last decade combined with the rise of high-paying flexible contract labor have, in the current economic decline, made military communities some of the wealthiest cities in the United States. In 2009, Killeen was more prosperous than Austin, Texas, the state capital, home to a large university and a booming tech sector (Cauchon 2010). Yet as early as 2009, the Army had also begun to cut recruitment and reenlistment bonuses, and planned reductions in force size will soon change the fortunes of military communities again.

As with other categories through which prevailing situations of inequality become apparent, I have allowed class to lie flat against the broader contours of the analysis in order to show its operation across a range of domains. It is highlighted especially in the discussion of distinction and stereotype in chapter 1, and when I explore debt, worth, and expenditure in chapter 5.

METHOD AND ORGANIZATION

One of the effects of the excessive taxonomizing of war is a profusion of geographic, experiential, and discursive domains within which violence can be safely compartmentalized and isolated from other aspects of life.²³ My arrangement here is an attempt to decompartmenten-

talize the everyday imponderabilia of war. Soldiers may be utterly subjected to a system of extreme control and discipline, but their experience is neither reducible to nor extricable from that system. It is instead something formed in relation, and with all sorts of other elements drawn in. What I have tried to do here is identify those elements and relations empirically and express them ethnographically. I do so without direct recourse to some of the more familiar categories and metrics offered by policy, political economy, social justice, medicine, and public culture. But I hope that this work will have something to say to all these domains, for like them, it is concerned with rules and the condition of bodies, the unequal distribution of suffering, and the way that harm is experienced, represented, and recognized.

The chapters are organized around broad themes that emerged from my informants' words, actions, and experiences, and that capture the impacts of war across diverse arenas of everyday life. These themes are, by design, wide-ranging, porous, and extensible. They operate as fields within which it is possible to carve out distinctions between things that might otherwise seem identical and posit connections between things that appear remote from one another. As chapter 1 seeks to address in some depth, war and military life abound with unitary explanations that are invoked, disavowed, and then invoked again by the people whose experiences they are meant to describe. The nervous tension of these theoretical and ethnographic features suggests an object of analysis that is not a coherent whole but instead a multiplicity of tendencies and possibilities grounded in the stuff of everyday life. Over the course of this book, this object is assembled not through the revelation or ordering of things by already-established measures but rather by the generative, promiscuous *connections* that arose from the words and lives of the people I spoke to (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6).²⁴

The first chapter, "A Site of Exception," depicts the setting for this work and the "exceptional" ambiguity of the Army's presence in everyday life—as something that is experienced as natural, but also constantly commented on and critiqued by the people who live with it. Chapter 2, "Heat, Weight, Metal, Gore, Exposure," analyzes the corporeal "feelings" that soldiers associate with being in Iraq in harm's way, and the particular bodily sensibilities engendered by the

natural and material environment that soldiers find themselves in. The third chapter, “Being Stuck and Other Problems in the Reproduction of Life,” looks at how vulnerability to violence takes intimate form through technology, time, medicine, and structures of institutional support. “Vicissitudes of Love,” chapter 4, takes on the overlapping, conflicting forms of kinship and intimacy that exist between and among soldiers, spouses, and the Army as a whole. And chapter 5, “War Economy,” examines the simultaneously bodily, economic, affective, and ideological modes of obligation and exchange that color many aspects of Army life, and that serve as a language of critique through which soldiers negotiate the various sorts of value attached to their labor. A postscript, “So-called Resiliency,” briefly discusses the November 2009 shooting at Fort Hood and the rash of suicides there in September 2010 against the backdrop of the chronic strains that the community has endured over the past nine years.