

Sleeping soldiers: On sleep and war

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sdi**Helen M Kinsella** 

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Abstract

In this article, I explore sleep specifically as a weapon of war, as a logistic of war, and as a metaphor for conscience in war. In proposing the capacity to sleep as a measure of the effects of strategies of war, and to recalibrate understandings of intimacy and vulnerability in war, I highlight the distinct effects of war on all its denizens. I make no claim for sameness among their experiences – far from it. And yet, at the same time, I wish to draw attention to what this exploratory essay also conveys, namely, the possibility for a sort of what Judith Butler terms ‘sensate democracy’ in the experience of sleeplessness, exposing a counterintuitive commonality among those deemed friends and enemies. Such a focus brings to the fore that which Simone Weil so powerfully articulated – that violence and force destroy those who wield them and those who are subject to them, potentially reducing each to something less than human, rendering them ‘brothers in the same misery’. Far from facilitating or structuring a relativistic moral equivalence, this potential solidarity provides a form and a measure that, in turn, make way for an analysis of distinct relations of power.

Keywords

Conflict, critical theory, gender, human security, violence, war

‘In war death is brought . . . to what *for the moment* exists completely. . . . In war the reality of the time that separates a being from its death . . . is recognized.’ (Levinas, 1969: 224)

Introduction

Characterized almost from its inception as an ‘infinite’ or ‘forever’ war, the US-led war on terror has since confirmed its duration, while also becoming increasingly global in its scope – an ‘everywhere’ war (Gregory, 2011). Yet this nomenclature distracts from the very immediate and local ways in which this war is fought, and the intimacies of time and space upon which its prosecution relies. The accounting of this war, in the trillions spent, bombs detonated, civilians killed, combatant deaths, families displaced, children traumatized, and countries devastated, with its focus on

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statistics and its sometimes explicit, but seemingly always implicit, oppositional categorizations of friend/enemy and combatant/civilian, also distances and dulls the impact of the war. The US-led war on terror became a counterinsurgency war – the latter of which is explicitly premised on hearth and home, kin and kith – and, as such, turned on immediate and intimate proximity to win hearts and minds. Counterinsurgent warfare has always been quotidian, intrusive, and constant. Derek Gregory (2015: 40) cautions that even as it (still) ‘becomes tempting to think of the wars waged by advanced militaries as “surgical”, even – a bizarre conjunction – body-less . . . for all their liquid violence, today’s wars are still shaped and even confounded by the multiple, acutely material environments through which they are fought and which they, in their turn, re-shape’ (see also Dillon and Reid, 2009; Sylvester, 2013; Wilcox, 2015).

Those material environments, crucially, are both embodied and sensual – the taste, touch, smell, and sounds of war compose the experiences of war, informing what Santanu Das (2005: 7) limns as the ‘perilous intimacy’ of war. Conducting an ‘anthropology’ of the senses, which draws on and contributes to what Gregory (2015) termed a ‘corpography’ of war, scholars have examined acoustic violence and bombardment (Cusick and Joseph, 2011; Daughtry, 2015), touch as ‘the ground of both testimony and trauma’ (Das, 2005: 227), manipulation and experiences of thirst and hunger (Collingham, 2017; Saunders and Cornish, 2017), and ‘the smells of battle, the tastes of sieges’ (Smith, 2015: 4) to grasp how war enlists the senses and self both in and in excess of any simple identification of war-fighting.

Explorations of the intimacies, the somatic, and the senses of war have also long been the purview of feminist scholars of war. Sylvester (2013: 670) points out that ‘war is ours because war knows gender intimately’. The ways in which war is waged, as well as the way in which it is made ‘known’, are mediated through the senses and the feelings, as well as the structures and relations of embodiment that cannot be disassociated from notions and materializations of gender. Both war and gender function as an ‘unmaker of truths’, and our grasp of each is performative, speculative, but no less vitally and, often, precariously embodied (Dyvik, 2017; Kinsella, 2011). If war and gender understood as such are also mutually constitutive and generative, inexhaustible in their meanings, it becomes less convincing that it is possible ‘to say something fundamental about what war is’ (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 134). Rather, as these scholars of the embodiments and sensorium of war demonstrate, by displacing the fundamental ‘ontological primacy of fighting’, which even in its non-instrumental sense is haunted by phallogocentrism, distinct and disruptive accounts of war-making and ‘making sense’ of war are possible (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 134). It is in recognizing this that the editors of this special issue call for ‘an empirical account of war organized by sensuous experience’ (Bousquet et al., 2020: 112)

Contributing to this scholarship, and sharpening its attention to the phenomenology of war, I argue that it is through the capacity to sleep – the dreams and nightmares sleep occasions, its relation to the body and to the soul, its interruptions by trauma and sometimes its failure to be interrupted by conscience, its categorization as a military logistic, and its manipulation as a weapon – that we can further apprehend the vastitude of war. Night raids ensure that no one, combatant or civilian, may find a haven in sleep. Drones may suggest a geographical distance, but the information on their targets comes from constant and immediate surveillance of individuals in every manifestation of daily life, and a strike can take place within minutes. Sleep becomes impossible with the sound of the drones nearby, always reminding of an imminent threat and a seemingly inevitable encounter with death. For those detained and tortured in the global war on terror, ‘no sleep was allowed’ (Slahi and Siems, 2017: 268). Indeed, sleep, the desire for it, the ways of it, and the lack of it, striate the strategic discussion of war, whether as a ‘force multiplier’, evidence of distress, or potential threat.¹

In proposing the capacity to sleep as a measure of the effects of war, and to recalibrate understandings of intimacy and vulnerability in war, I highlight the distinct effects of war on its denizens. I make no claim for sameness among their experiences – far from it. And yet, at the same time, I wish to draw attention to what this exploratory essay also conveys, namely, the possibility for a biopolitical solidarity or a sort of ‘sensate democracy’ in the experience of sleeplessness, exposing a counterintuitive commonality among those deemed friends and enemies (Butler, 2012). Such a focus brings to the fore that which Simone Weil so powerfully articulated – that violence and force destroy those who wield them and those are subject to them, potentially reducing each to something less than human, rendering them ‘brothers in the same misery’ (Weil, 2005: 31; Kinsella, 2014). Tracing this commonality further destabilizes conventional distinctions of war, but such a tracing always remains profoundly inflected by Judith Butler’s notation that ‘equal vulnerability does not imply radical substitutability’ (Butler, 2016: xvii; see also Barkawi and Brighton, 2011; Kinsella, 2011). Far from facilitating or structuring a relativistic moral equivalence, this potential solidarity provides a form and a measure that, in turn, make way for an analysis of distinct relations of power. Accordingly, this article insists that we ask, *Who is allowed and able to sleep in war?* In this way, it follows Stoler’s (2006: 13) call to not ‘turn away from structures of dominance but relocate their conditions of possibility and relations’.² Although I cannot do it full justice in this exploratory iteration, in brute terms I want to understand how an observation such as this – ‘the pleasure of watching my kids sleep peacefully is no longer possible’ – functions as an indictment of violence at once unbearably common and devastatingly singular, articulated in almost exact form by US soldiers, Afghan civilians, survivors of US torture, and those who must live under drones (Abu Saif, 2015: 29).

Historically, scholars, writers, poets, and artists engage sleep, metaphorical and literal, to come to terms with the operation and ethics of political rule, the consequences of not remaining awake and alert, and the tragedies of violence that may ensue – as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* most evocatively conveys. As we learn from Richard Tuck (2015), Hobbes’s metaphor of the sleeping sovereign provided a way of thinking about a certain form of democratic rule, while, as Jehangir Malegam (2013) delineates, medieval clerics invoked the ‘sleep of the behemoth’ to caution against false understandings of peace. It is worth observing that domestic explanations of the attacks of 11 September 2001 were similarly couched in terms of being asleep, quiescent and unaware, while Osama bin Laden framed the same attacks as evidence that ‘we are free men who don’t sleep under oppression’ (*Al Jazeera*, 2004). Stuart Hall’s suggestion (taken up by Wendy Brown) to configure politics through the ‘logic of dreamwork’ indexes sleep and dreaming to the formulation of political orders, pointing to what dreaming can convey about the seemingly ineffable, imaginative, not fully known complexity of desires and attachments that constitute the world (Brown, 2006: 690).

More recently, gathered under the term ‘critical sleep studies’, cultural and biomedical investigations of sleep are proliferating in both the humanities and the sciences (Reiss, 2013: 6). Cultural histories document the political imbrications of sleep, and the attendant alterations in the interpretations and meaning given to dreams and nightmares, to argue for analyzing sleep, its dreams and its nightmares, as fundamentally reflective of the ‘ubiquitous contestations’ and formations of social order and practice (Koslofsky, 2011: 282). Biomedical histories document the trajectories of sleep research, pinpointing technological advances in brain and REM neuroimaging that enabled sleep and dreams to become objects of scientific study. Sleep is necessary for acts of learning and formation and consolidation of memories, but the function of dreaming is yet to be secured – to say nothing of the meanings of dreams themselves. However, researchers are converging on agreement that dreams in all their vividness are a form of consciousness, a model of the ‘temporality of human consciousness’, and that, accordingly, sleep and dreams are fundamental to human development, comprehension, and imagination (Stewart, 2013: 28). Significantly, the two histories converge in

their attention to the emergence of pathologies of sleep and the biomedicalization and regulation of sleep in the service of a capital economy (Ekirch, 2005; Koslofsky, 2011; Kroker, 2007; Kroll-Smith and Gunter, 2005; Reiss, 2013; Wolf-Meyer, 2012).³

In this article, I build on these insights into the relations of sleep to political orders and the meaning of what it is to be human to amplify the configurations of sleep, the dreams and nightmares it facilitates, and war. I explore sleep specifically as a weapon of war, as a logistic of war, and as a metaphor for conscience in war. I introduce these elements through a short reading of Henri Cole's poem *Sleeping Soldiers*, which offers a conceptual framing of sleep, dreams, and war. Drawing on this framing, I analyze Tim Hetherington's photos of US soldiers taken in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley. Hetherington, who was killed in Misrata on 20 April 2011, was embedded with the Second Platoon of Battle Company of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade over the course of 2007–2008. He, along with Sebastian Junger, also directed and produced *Restrepo* (2010), the Oscar-nominated documentary of the platoon, from which Hetherington pulls footage for his own short video, which I turn to in the last section of the article. Like Cole's poem, Hetherington's photography and video are also entitled *Sleeping Soldiers*.

What my readings of Cole's poem and Hetherington's photos and video underscore is that sleep is both a material need and a metaphor, a means of conceptualizing relations of body/soul/mind and of individuals/society, and a deeply political and ethical concept and practice. Further, sleep, and the dreams and nightmares it enables, tantalizingly entangles with questions of consciousness, conscience, judgment, and reason, while also offering a 'glimpse of something incognito' that both resonates with and subverts our notions of the intimacies, embodiments, effects, and affects of war (Carson, 2006: 20). Likewise, the focus on US soldiers herein is not to make commensurate all experiences of war and its violence or to proffer a hierarchy of experiences; rather, it is to illuminate precisely that which challenges, as much as it might also resonate with or subvert, such hierarchical orders of understanding. The multiple overlapping registers of violence illuminated by an attention to sleep, its dreams and nightmares, as traced through the experiences of one platoon, capture how sleep as a weapon, a logistic, and evidence of conscience striates the operation of war's violence.

'Grow old'

The poet Henri Cole (2011) was moved to write by a photo of five sleeping soldiers, collapsed and worn, curled and spooned around each other in the heat of the day, and in the exhaustion of war. The first lines: 'Grow old. Buy a house. Have a baby. Love someone.' How to interpret such lines? Hopes? Expectations? Dreams? The quotidian phrasing invites a sense of identification and agreement, a shared sense of what may be both desired and achieved. Yet the arrangement of these lines, in which the sequence of an ordinary life is seemingly reversed – as to love someone is more often the start and not the end – also signals the pathos, or the prophecies, of the present and future, for those who are asleep are also those who may not grow old. After all, as Cole observes, 'sometimes there are substitutions'.

Cole writes that a 'historical torque pulls us away' from moments of what might otherwise be that ordinary life captured so evocatively in the concepts of kin and continuance, such as growing old, buying a house, having a baby, and loving someone. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969: 21) postulates that 'violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity', and, while I would argue that violence consists of both, he draws our attention to the ways in which violence literally severs and distorts relationships of life and recognition that originate in and allow for multiplicity, and creates war as totality.⁴ As in Cole's poem, Levinas (1969: 21) rues how war casts 'into movement beings hitherto anchored in their identity'. This

‘order of war’, as Levinas names it, subtends the order of living (as captured by Cole’s poem), as it is one ‘from which no one can keep his distance’ (Levinas, 1969: 21). War as ‘somehow fugitive and omnipresent’ is epitomized and embodied by the US soldier who, two years after his return from Iraq, shared that ‘every day for the rest of my life I will wake up in the morning listening for the generators and weapons being readied for the day’s patrols’ (Favret, 2010: 4; Dao, 2010). War overturns, or torques, the mundane yet munificent arrangements and characteristic sequence of an ordinary life. Thus, ‘sometimes there are substitutions’ to the dreams of growing old in an ordinary life.

For Cole, the physicality, the weariness and depletion that creates a cradle of embrace for the sleeping soldiers, their ‘knees tucked into their chests, arms touching one another’, suggests another way in which war, while fully embodied, is also fugitive and omnipresent. It is not only how war exhausts the body, but also its weight on the soul that is like a ‘scissored out black cameo’. The interplay of body and soul, of violence and embrace, is revealed when the soldiers are sleeping after ‘operations South’, for what does sleep reveal but the potential of dreams, the wondrous thousand and one nights of the epic *Arabian Nights* conjured by the ‘oriental carpet’ upon which the soldiers rest. On this ‘oriental carpet’, the soldiers may dream of riotous assaults or of mowing the lawn, of dread and delight. The possibility of death is no less brute for them than it was for the fabled storyteller sentenced to die in the morning after her tale was done, sharpening the poignancy of each moment spent in anticipation. This image orients us towards the difficulties of capturing the effects war has upon the self and the self in relation to others, the forms of ‘perilous intimacy’ that Das identifies, while also signaling the military orientalism that suffuses wars. Cole’s poem depicts war, its embodiment, effects and affect, in complex and subtle ways by invoking the Greek gods of sleep and death, the brothers Hypnos and Thanatos, through his own twinning of sleep with the disruption or death of an ordinary life and the dreams that accompany it. Tim Hetherington’s photos of sleeping soldiers are another aperture into sleep – its dreams and nightmares – and war.⁵ The soldiers at sleep as imagined by Cole and photographed by Hetherington foreground ‘the body of the soldier as a medium of sensory experience and as a body at risk’ (Burgoyne and Rositzka, 2015: 32), highlighting the radical vulnerability and intimacy of sleep.⁶

Sleeping Soldiers

There are 12 of these photos that Hetherington exhibited separately from his other work, although some do appear in the book *Infidel* (Hetherington, 2010), which accompanied his and Junger’s film *Restrepo*. Hetherington also produced a video, entitled *Sleeping Soldiers*, which juxtaposes the photos of the sleeping soldiers with scenes from the documentary, along with remixed and new audio, which I address in the last section of this article.⁷ According to Hetherington, the photos and the film are about dispelling assumptions of what is being shown and what is seen, challenging the ‘ideological conditions of visibility’ (Kennedy, 2016: 180).⁸ He warns against what ‘we are used to seeing’, namely, ‘soldiers as cardboard cut-outs’, interchangeably heroic or villainous ciphers (quoted in Sharp, 2010).⁹

Hetherington’s photos of sleeping soldiers disrupt the conventional indexicality of soldiers and war. These are no presentations of whom or what we might imagine the soldiers and war to be. Rather, the soldiers are disconcertingly fragile and exposed. The photos depict the men asleep, a few fully clothed, some nearly naked, some snug under their blankets, and others not. Talismans of home surround them – copies of *Playboy*, Louis L’Amour paperback Westerns, wedding rings, special pillows and blankets. A few still don headlamps, red bulbs only, ready to see into the dark without being seen in turn, denoting their vulnerability to the night and to what goes there.

Watches are worn by almost all, registering the time of day and the duration of deployment: ‘if you sleep twelve hours a day it’s only a seven-month deployment, one soldier explained’ (Junger,

2010: 81). Since deployment and death are inextricable, the watches of these men at sleep mark their literal and figurative life, tracking the minutes of any act that could potentially be their last. After all, ‘pretty much everyone in this valley died when they least expected it’ (Junger, 2010: 57).

The beauty of each portrait is reminiscent of classical sculpture in the physicality and languor of the men, and yet the wooden slats and rudimentary cots also evoke a funeral pyre, with men at rest as if sarcophagi of wood. In this confusion of chronological time, where the men at rest seem to foretell their own deaths, they also remind of their early years as the boys they once were, cuddled and tucked into bed at night. Hetherington (2010: 15) cues this in his observation that ‘they always look so tough, but when they’re asleep they look like little boys. They look the way their mothers probably remember them.’

To look at the soldiers as little boys under the benevolence of their mothers (which is itself a fantasy of maternal warmth) suggests that the continuance that Cole’s poem introduces – ‘grow old, buy a house, have a baby, love someone’ – is still a potential. Maybe it is also to suggest that, as little boys often are, these soldiers are caught unawares in a situation not entirely of their making. These are boys, after all, not quite yet fully adult, who – perhaps paradoxically – are both ‘of risk’ and ‘at risk’, in potential need of protection rather than those who provide protection (see also Stoler, 2018). At the same time, in these photos, this obvious metonym of mothers and children as the canonical icons of innocence and vulnerability distorts and blurs, for it is impossible to forget the particular war in which these soldiers fight. And indeed this metonym fails sufficiently so that it should make us question the sedimented presumptions of innocence and vulnerability that underlie both the photos and that metonym. For in whose interest is it to sacralize them, to reify them, to render them in fantasied terms, or to eroticize them (Ticktin, 2017)?

Interestingly, this line of Hetherington’s is consistently misquoted to read ‘they look the way their mothers probably *see* them’, rather than ‘*remember* them’. But there is a difference between seeing and remembering – and the change in temporality matters. We must be careful not to elide the images’ force as ‘memory and prophesy’ (Favret, 2010: 49). These are boys who are already memorialized; the photos are *memento mori*, for even as the soldiers are still alive they must also be remembered because they are no longer as they once were. These soldiers are no longer (and perhaps never or not always were) as they appear. As one soldier shared, ‘I have only been here for four months and I can’t believe how messed up I am’ (Junger, 2010: 40). Recognizing the degree of his transfiguration, when home on leave another instructed his mother to ‘only wake him up by touching his ankle and saying his last name. That was how he got woken up for guard duty; anything else might mean they were getting overrun’ (Junger, 2010: 40).¹⁰ Whatever innocence as boys they might have once had, the soldiers they have become no longer possess it, and it is perhaps only their loved ones who may remember if it existed. After all, getting overrun was not just an offhand concern. It was the guiding concern of all the men in the Second Platoon, who spent hours imagining how such an attack would unfold based on other attacks on bases nearby. Located in the Korengal Valley, colloquially known as the Valley of Death, a place that ‘could alter your mind in terrible and irreversible ways’, Restrepo was ‘one of the most exposed outposts’ in all of Afghanistan (Junger, 2010: 173).

‘Sleep presupposes that fear of night has been conquered but night is the wilderness of fears.’ (Nancy, 2009: 37)

The Korengal is about 20 or so miles from the Pakistani border and was one of the epicenters of the war in 2007–2008 when Hetherington’s photos were taken. Over 70% of US ordnance was dropped there, a fifth of all US combat took place in the valley, and the casualty rate of killed or wounded of Battle Company, of which Second Platoon was part, was about 25%.¹¹ Named after a beloved

medic Juan Restrepo, who died early in Second Platoon's deployment, Outpost Restrepo (already a memorial) was purposefully situated to draw fire away from the main base on the floor of the valley. And it did. Second Platoon was in more than 400 firefights during its 15-month deployment, the record being 13 in one day. Right before the photos were taken, Junger, who was with Hetherington, remembers thinking 'this was pretty much hell on earth . . . [E]very man out there was nearly killed, and every man out there had lost a friend' (Hetherington, 2010: 16). And yet, even when it is not hyperbole to say that death kept watch, almost every man would sleep.

How did they sleep? During the day, the men were occupied throughout the outpost, with guards responsible for surveying the terrain. Most prosaically, because the generators were off by 8 p.m., the men were in their bunks and the only ones awake were those on guard duty, peering through thermal-imaging devices and keeping track of the terrain and any movement towards a breach: guarding against an enemy who 'moved like ghosts around the mountains and (could) fight all day long on a swallow of water and a handful of nuts' (Junger, 2010: 170). Junger (2010: 164) ruminated on 'how very close to the experience of childhood it is to be watched over by others while you slowly float off to sleep'.

The evocation of the landscape of childhood once again suggests that we are lacking (and indeed we are) other constructs with which to adequately portray the vulnerability of grown men and the vulnerability of soldiers. To capture what is 'pure and honest' in the soldiers' relationships, as both Junger and Hetherington wish to do, they call upon the tropes of childhood and maternity to illuminate this vulnerability and the resulting intimacy of these men whose ferocity and love for each other enable them to sleep. This is the bond that anthropologist Ken MacLeish (2013: 162) also calls upon when he speaks of the 'the solidarity of army life, this intimacy and sense of kin-like dependence honed by the close proximity of death'. As one soldier in the platoon, Cortez, explained, 'Why would I throw myself on a grenade? Because I actually love my brothers. I mean it is a brotherhood. So just being able to save their life – have them live their life – that is rewarding' (Junger, 2010: 246).¹² The men would die for each other, ensure the continuance of each other, which means they can sleep under the care of each other – so much so that falling asleep on guard was a breaking of that sacred pact that 'shall be punished, if the offense is committed in time of war, by death or such other punishment as a court-martial may direct'.¹³

Sleep, in this analysis, is an expression of brotherhood, of trust, and of discipline among these men who are, let us not forget, also those who fight in the name of US national security.¹⁴ The soldiers pulling guard to allow these soldiers of the Second Platoon to sleep are also the soldiers who allow those at a remove to sleep, to believe themselves safe in possessions and property. Indeed, does recognition of the vulnerability of these sleeping soldiers incite an instinctive wince of fear for them, and also for those who are put at risk? The outpost may be overrun, and there may be another attack on US soil, but these soldiers sleep knowing that others do not. What emerges from this consideration, however, is precisely the question of who are the others who do not sleep, those who must remain awake or be awakened? *Who is allowed or able to sleep?*

Not those who must suffer on the sound and sights of the drones 24 hours a day. Not the tortured inmates of detention sites where, even now, detainees are 'precluded' from sleeping more than four hours a day, and for whom 'sleep management' was/is a euphemism for sleep deprivation for up to 72 hours.¹⁵ Nor is sleep available to Afghans who suffered night raids on a daily basis, justified as the linchpin of special forces operations and intelligence. It is also not the province of those Afghan families who are subject to massacres in the night by soldiers such as Robert Bales, who, in 2012, left his base, not once, but twice, while all others slept, committing the deadliest massacre known since My Lai, killing 16 Afghans, 8 of whom were children, woken from sleep.¹⁶ One Afghan survivor discloses: 'I dream a lot of that night . . . how he comes to our house and pushes the door in

and enters our home. How he runs after us and screams. And everything in my dream is a mess (see Lela Ahmadzai's [2012] documentary interviews, 'Silent Night').

The seemingly infinite capacity for violence justified in the name of self-defense, in which torture, drones, and massacres are figured as logical responses to the putative threat posed by 'ghosts' who 'were out there, moving around at night, *doing something*' (Bales quoted in Vaughan, 2015, emphasis in original), is no recent development. Likewise, Bales's own mode of explanation, which informs his current petition for pardon, produces the difference of 'these guys' and 'us/you', taken, in turn, to verify his actions. He entreats: 'I was so angry at these guys [the men who owned the homes] for putting their families in harm's way like that. . . . You wouldn't have terrorists running to your house, bleeding. You wouldn't have people run to your house for aid, where you have your wife and children sleeping' (quoted in Vaughan, 2015). It is a mode of address that enlists 'you' to his side to confirm his displacement of blame from himself to 'these guys', subsequently naturalizing the massacre as the only possible choice. This solicitation of complicity and normalization of his violence is neither new nor surprising, but the force of its appeal and of its accomplishments remains.

However, over and against this mode of address, there also exists a distinct formulation of accountability that actively resists the binaries (us vs. them) so coarsely put by Bales, which underlie and inform war, as means of discerning and responding to the violence of war. Put another way, in addition to a reallocation of blame and the denaturalization of massacre is the potential, in Levinas's terms, to recognize war as an 'order from which no one can keep his distance' and to trace how, drawing from Weil, 'every war employs arms that turn against those who wield them' (Levinas, 1969: 22). Butler distills: 'to try to allocate death to others and reserve life for oneself is to fail to understand the *life of the one is bound to the life of the other* and certain obligations emerge' (Butler, 2016: xxx, emphasis added). For as much as it might incite recoil and revulsion to consider, what is revealed in 'operations South' is that sleep is not even truly available to those soldiers Hetherington's photos depict. What would it mean if an apprehension of the violence of war was capacious and nuanced enough to register, *to distinguish*, and still bear witness to each experience? In the next sections, I offer an initial exploration.

'Dreamworlds are displaced expressions of this world in a world of their own.' (Dolbear et al., 2016: xx)

Like Bales, the soldiers that Hetherington photographed were not fresh to combat. The previous posting was so brutal 'and things were so bad there that half the company was on psychiatric meds by the time they got home' (Junger, 2007). What Junger's conversations with these soldiers reveal is their inability to sleep without the aid of sleeping pills, and other drugs, which they took to 'keep from jerking awake at night from imaginary gunfire' and to prevent being beset by combat nightmares (Junger, 2010: 72). The night Bales committed the massacre, he had taken handfuls of over-the-counter sleeping pills: 'You gotta understand, man, I probably hadn't slept since Wednesday. I just wanted to sleep that night' (Vaughan, 2015). Some took meds to ensure that they would sleep without dreaming: 'I would prefer to not sleep and not dream about it,' said one soldier who witnessed the death of his friend (Junger, 2010: 106). The men whom Hetherington captured asleep are not sleeping soundly, pastorally or naturally, if they are able to sleep at all.

Those at Restrepo supposedly got 'an enormous amount of psychiatric oversight from the battalion shrink', but whether that oversight was therapeutic in any sense aside from prescribing medication is unclear.¹⁷ Soldiers at Restrepo were routinely given 180 days or more of medications. And, while exact percentages vary, a 2010 report from the Department of Defense Pharmacoeconomic

Center stated that, in 2008–2009, ‘20 percent of the 1.1 million active-duty troops surveyed, were taking some form of psychotropic drugs – antidepressants, antipsychotics, sedative hypnotics or other controlled substances’ (Brewin, 2011). This included Seroquel, a potent antipsychotic that was prescribed off label to treat insomnia, nightmares, and general trauma until it was taken off the formulary in 2010.¹⁸ And there was also mefloquine, a malaria medication whose effects include insomnia and nightmares, providing ‘the unwelcome glimpses’ into the psyche of all who took it (Junger, 2010: 220).¹⁹

At the same time as these soldiers are struggling to guard their sleep, the US military is attempting to make it obsolete. Ensuring the vigilance and alertness of its troops has long been a crucial component of the USA’s military strategy. As historian Alan Derickson (2013: 2) documents, ‘U.S. military leaders and their civilian advisors have attacked drowsiness on the battlefield with an armamentarium comprised of punitive measures, administrative practices, chemical stimulants, and other sleep countermeasures.’ The US military wants its soldiers awake and cognizant for extended periods of time, independent of any diurnal schedule or circadian rhythms, always ready and able for protracted engagement. The sleeping soldier is a liability and a risk, undermining the US military’s capacity for 24/7 operations. Sleep becomes ‘an uncompromising interruption’ into the pace of war and, as such, is treated as a vestigial remnant (Crary, 2013: 10).

Certainly, stimulants – from caffeine to methamphetamines, both prescribed and otherwise – have long been used to maintain focus and concentration (Howell, 2012; Kamienski, 2016).²⁰ But, now, there are drugs (known as eugeroics) that can achieve that goal without the side-effects associated with the former drugs – though not without all side-effects. Modafinil, for example, has been promoted as a drug that ‘enhances’ vigilance, improves visual and mental acuity, and refines the average soldier’s concentration. ‘Modafinil is a novel wake-promoting agent that is pharmacologically different from those of amphetamine and methylphenidate, the two classical psychostimulants. Its exact mode of action remains unclear’ (Sheng et al., 2013). In 2001, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) announced its goal to ‘create’ a soldier who would be able to fight seven days a week, and by 2003 modafinil was part of the approved military supplies for both Army and Air Force in Afghanistan. DARPA is now seeking a ‘sleep gene’ that will make possible a genetic modification of the need for sleep. In 2008, a defense consultant explained the logic that still governs today: ‘Suppose a human could be engineered who slept for the same amount of time as a giraffe (1.9 hours per night). . . . An adversary would need an approximately 40 percent increase in the troop level to compensate for this advantage’ (quoted in Derickson, 2013: 17). An axiomatic assumption, as the director of DARPA’s Defense Sciences Office Michael Goldblatt noted in 2002, is that ‘soldiers having no physical, physiological, or cognitive limitations will be key to survival and operational dominance in the future’ (quoted in Malet, 2016: 65).²¹ The effort to create the ‘super soldier’ has not only been taken up through the development of the sleep gene and the use of pharmaceuticals, but is also now folded into DARPA’s new ‘biochronicity’ program that seeks to modulate biological functions – the ‘internal clock’, so to speak – to manage the ‘effect of time in and on human physiology’ (Maron, 2017; see also DARPA, n.d.). Christian Macedonia, head of DARPA’S program explained: ‘what makes DARPA’s program unique are both the approach it is taking and the scales. Chronobiology generally works at circadian, or 24-hour timescales. We are aiming to understand clocking from milliseconds to decades. . . . We do not want to just observe biological timing, but rather predict biological timing (quoted in Klotz, 2012).

It goes without saying, of course, that as a result military needs are merged with corporeal needs, such that the capacity to sleep is now organized and structured with war in mind. And we can note an infinite regress, a biopolitical solidarity when the experience of the completely sleepless soldier becomes (is rooted in) a distorted homologue of the experience of the torture victim

whom CIA torturers kept awake against all precepts of international law and justified doing so by reference to the sleep patterns of US special forces.²²

Thus, to comprehend the vulnerability of these soldiers requires exploration of the US military's use of sleep as a tactic of war, illuminating its reach not just to the 'enemy' population but also in very different ways and according to very different modalities to US soldiers. This is where the maternal gaze or childhood naturalism evoked by Hetherington and Junger, with its false sacralization, can distract us from tracing the ways in which these soldiers are already the object of the gaze of military science, of military biopolitics, for whom they are a problem to be solved. The discipline, structure, and obedience, the conformity demanded for the waging of war and, most significantly, for its victory, necessarily incorporate sleep into their purview.

When the human body is seen as a dimension of a military or corporate machine, and sleep becomes simply a matter of military logistics – that which identifies the human as the 'weakest link in the system' – it cannot be held that sleep is the preserve of the individual, nor will it any longer elicit memories of pastoral or organic restoration and calm. What is presumed to be 'natural' is revealed as uncannily 'unnatural', and what may once have denoted respite now denotes regulation. Crary (2013: 10) posits that 'sleep is an irrational and intolerable affirmation that there might be limits to the compatibility of living beings with the allegedly irresistible force of modernization', but certainly the experience of these soldiers with their sleep, its dreams and nightmares, leads us to the same conclusion about war, namely, 'sleep is an irrational and intolerable affirmation that there might be limits to the compatibility of living beings with the allegedly irresistible force' of war. After all, a classic symptom of post-traumatic stress is an inability to sleep (Finley, 2011; Wool, 2015).

The difficulty of sleep and denial of its import is not solely a philosophical conundrum (not that it ever solely was). One of the signature injuries of both Afghanistan and Iraq combatants and civilians is post-traumatic stress (an ironic choice of term if ever there was one),²³ whose symptoms, according to the Mayo Clinic (n.d.), 'include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the [triggering] event'. Approximately 20–30% of (about two million) US soldiers have returned with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).²⁴ In his recounting of soldiers returning with PTSD, David Finkel (2013: 44) hears from one who desperately 'wants to bring his dreaming under control', fruitlessly seeking help from any source. Others took 'sleeping pills to fall asleep and another kind of pill to get back to sleep' when waking in terror from dreams they could describe as about the war' (Finkel, 2013: 40).²⁵ The soldiers of the Second Platoon, too, dreamt of combat long after its cessation: 'weird illogical combat sequences that don't always end badly and are soaked in dread' (Junger, 2010: 6).

Yet we cannot understand sleep as purely pharmaceutical, to be managed by 'anti-nightmare' medicines, without at least contending with the knowledge that, since the early Greek philosophers, the capacity to sleep, with its dreams and its nightmares, has never been self-identical with a solely natural or physiological function. Rather, the capacity to sleep has functioned both figuratively and literally as a means of conceptualizing the interior relations of body/soul/mind and the exterior relations of individuals and society. Dreams are a literal and figurative means of contemplating what it means to be conscious, what it means to be moral, what it means to be alive, and what it means to act when, in fact, we are confronted daily with the necessity and uncertainty of the meaning of our actions. What do we make of Aristotle's notation of sleep as an expression of the soul's transport through the body, as Cole also imagined in some way? Dreams, Aristotle believed, were less absolute or distinct forms of sense-perception; in other words, dreams present 'blurred images' of the world during which veracity succumbs to imagination, unlike waking, when reason bests imagination. Dreams are distinct from the 'external' world of reality and yet made of that world and its stimuli. Dreams appear as 'presentations . . . analogous to the forms reflected in water' (Aristotle, 1957: 385).

That dreams and nightmares were potentially diagnostic, possible sources of self-knowledge – be they understood as revelatory prophecy or therapy – is to be found in the Hippocratic tradition and is, of course, the insight upon which Freud built his theories. Freud (2010: 510) believed dreams to be a ‘particular form of thinking made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep’. Or, as one present-day researcher put it, ‘figuring out what memory means, rather than recording events, is the brain’s mission at night’ (Rock, 2004: 100). Dreams are also guardians of sleep, preventing it from becoming deadly in its totality. Dreams and nightmare can also be seen as a form of resistance to the management of sleep, and as denoting the limits of what humanity can absorb. Freud (2010: 560, 564) wrote that in the interpretation of dreams we have been ‘obliged to build our way out into the dark’, to grasp the ‘residues’ of daytime life that disturb our sleep. I propose that Hetherington’s video provides a form of negotiation of just such an obligation.

‘Dreams have started wars, and wars, from the very earliest times, have determined the propriety and impropriety – indeed, the range – of dreams.’ (Benjamin, 2005: 3)

Exhibited along with his photos, Hetherington’s five-minute video from 2009 is no simple ‘rhapsody of images’, as Freud might have it. An attempt to bear witness, the video is another medium through which Hetherington discharged what he understood as his ‘responsibility to live as closely as possible to [the soldiers] and what happened to them’ (quoted in Martin, 2008). The video is revelatory and surreal; it splices scenes of two Afghan children and an elder, of the Second Platoon in battle, and of helicopters and blood. These images are superimposed over the photos of the sleeping soldiers, and the sound of battle, of grief and despair, of casual conversation, of interpreters and mortar fire, tracks the specific sortie that led to the death of one of the soldiers. The haunting last lines, ‘it’s not your fault, it’s not your fault,’ are barely discernible from within a cacophony of voices, Afghan and American. This video is not unlike a psychoanalytic account of trauma, or a dream with no narrative coherence. It seems to represent the aching loss of both self and comprehension, evoking the liminality of a dream world in its multiple interpretations and the difficulty of extricating meaning from death: ‘Shut up! Shut up!’ – a soldier’s lament upon learning of another’s death – follows seconds after we hear Hetherington’s voice reminiscing, ‘I like homemade food.’

What Hetherington’s video captures is the phenomenology of sleep, portraying the specific ‘vulnerability of sleep [that] is not that of the properly conscious subject’ (Fuller, 2018: 77).²⁶ Open-ended and reflective, sleep, with its dreams and nightmares, illuminates possibilities that ramify in infinite directions. Bearing its own histories and interpretation, ontological and etymological, both literally and metaphorically, sleep summons questions of conscience, of judgment, and of the psyche and the soul. Dreams and nightmares, in particular, signal the inescapably unreasonable, no longer believed to be prophetic or divine, but still bearing the trace of madness and fear.

But dreams and nightmares are also signs of ambivalence, of ambiguity, of, as Freud had it, unfulfilled wishes and traumatic neurosis. To reduce sleep to a scalar or one-dimensional physical quality is to repress sleep’s ontological and epistemological import and to evade the upended topologies of dreams that respect no conventions of the day. The root uninterpretability of the dream suggests the necessary, and necessarily humbling, limits of our own knowledge and reason. Dreams introduce doubt – doubt as to the veracity of the experience, of the distinction of wakefulness and sleeping, and the capacity to reason or judge about what occurs,²⁷ especially when life becomes too difficult to bear: ‘I wish I knew which ones were the memories and which were the dreams,’ says Jeff, returned from the Afghan war. ‘Sometimes, I don’t know.’²⁸

This is a reminder that what we grasp of war may also be hallucinatory, allusive, elusive and hypnotic, a saturated tale within a tale, for while the video reflects both Hetherington's own process, it also opens up and orients to the soldiers' saturation in the very cadences of war, and of the costs to those sleeping soldiers whose dreams of the meaning of their war will not let them sleep soundly. Dreaming is a particular marking of time. War is a particular marking of time (Dudziak, 2012). War to be thought of intimately in and as a dream. This is the doubling effect of the photos and the video, both of which document that which persists: 'While I slept that summer, the war came to me in my dreams and showed me its sole purpose: to go on, only to go on' (Powers, 2012: 3–4). Therefore, to take notice of what is most vulnerable in these men is not to ratify the fantasies of vulnerability that are nationalistic and security-oriented, for it, in the last analysis, precludes us mourning them alongside others.²⁹ For if sleep is necessary for memories and dreams are a 'powerful form of imagination' (Nir and Tononi, 2010: 97), as sleep researchers hold, then it is thinkable that these soldiers remain caught in the unending presence and present of violence – a context in which there is uncertainty about the past and seemingly little possibility of the future, the unceasing disruption of an ordinary life, as Cole's poem captures.

When violent intrusions destroy the interplay of social and political elements essential to the capacity to sleep, annihilating material and affective spaces in which it is possible to find rest and repose and that allow reverie vital to thought and to action, no one sleeps soundly. Through the analysis of sleep, and the dreams and nightmares it enables, and the tracking of its use as a weapon, its management as a logistic, and its presentation as both metaphor and embodiment of conscience, sleep is revealed as an indispensable condition of/for humanity. Thus, although all may now 'be in a world without a lullaby' (Nancy, 2009: 39), the words of the child who survived Bales's rampage – 'I was awake and I was afraid' (Ahmadzai, 2012) – must ramify distinctly in a valence of violence that should include *but cannot take its measure from* US soldiers. Such an approach should not prohibit condemnation of violence such as Bales's massacre, nor should it be used to offer false equivalences or substitutions. Rather, it amplifies the reach and relationships of violence to highlight its myriad and unequal forms and effects on, as Weil (1978: 5) put it, the 'human being as such'. Thus, I have offered here that tracing who is allowed and able to sleep can continue to orient us toward an approach to war capacious and nuanced enough *to register, to distinguish, and to bear witness* to its comprehensive violence.


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Notes

1. A brief (and surprisingly common) description captures this well: 'We ensure victory on future battlefields by learning to maximize individual and unit performance effectiveness through the use of sleep logistics and degrading the enemy's ability to fight by . . . denying him the ability to rest' (Doheny, 2004: xxv).

2. As psychotherapist Adam Phillips (2007) observed, sleep is always a relationship of potential dominance, as 'wanting to sleep is wanting something that no one can give you, but that anyone can stop you having'.
3. What Simon J. Williams (2011) describes as a 'sleep crisis' has been subject to endless popular press, perhaps most notably promulgated by no other than Ariana Huffington. What is fascinating about this attention to sleep is that sleep has become an object of mourning, a marker of loss of innocence and pastorality, for what was never, after all, a purely 'natural sleep'. Perversely, the solutions offered to this crisis, even in the light of the desire for a 'natural' sleep, are entirely technocratic, medicalized, and individualistic: sleep apps, sleep hygiene, sleep meds. Moreover, exposing the futility of individualized responses, contemporary sleep patterns match racial and economic inequalities and, specifically, sleep's enmeshment in a maladaptive economic system in which both intensifying work and precarious work contribute to its lack.
4. Interestingly, Barkawi and Brighton (2011) overlook the specifically ethical component of Levinas's concerns with continuity. For Levinas, the totality of war threatens the continuity of beings *in relation* to each other. Totality obscures alterity, not agency, as they seem to argue. Notably, the themes of wakefulness and insomnia are significant to Levinas's formulation of being and responsibility: philosophy, he writes, calls us to an 'infinite responsibility, to an untiring wakefulness, to a total insomnia' (Levinas, 1990: 193).
5. See <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/Package/2K1HRG77RYJ8> (accessed 3 November 2019).
6. They also argue that 'the use of chiaroscuro and soft focus accentuates the sense of pathos the images communicate, reinforcing a palpable elegiac mood in which the violence of war, its grotesque waste and loss, is bracketed out in favour of the imagery of enchantment, where war becomes again poetic and metaphoric' (Burgoyne and Rositzka, 2015: 33). I disagree entirely, as I endeavor to show through my reading of the relationship of war and sleep.
7. See <https://vimeo.com/18395855> (accessed 3 November 2019).
8. Owing to space limitations, I am unable here to directly address the mediation and interpretation of war/sleep as shaped by the three different forms of representation and signification: poetry, photography, and videography. Suffice it to say that form and interpretation work together.
9. This is interesting considering that there was a cardboard cutout of a soldier with a huge phallus at the outpost. If I read Hetherington correctly, he was endeavoring to present neither a patriotic idealization nor a condemnation of US soldiers, both of which he understood to be the heuristic within which war photography was often forced. Rather, he was attempting to destabilize this very opposition. Interestingly, Hetherington referred to the photos as a kind of Trojan horse, namely, a way of portraying 'masculinity when you should be taking pictures about war' (see Haggart, 2011). The opposition he sets up between war and masculinity is actually collapsed in the photos, in part because of how he reimagines a certain interpretation of masculinity in war, namely, one that 'elevates a wakeful self-denial as a component of masculine identity' (Derickson, 2013: 3).
10. This illuminates the 'historical torque' of war to which Cole refers, in which being woken from sleep requires an elaborated security protocol, both at home and at war.
11. In a poignant recent article, C. J. Chivers (2018) and war photographer Tyler Hicks document the tragic history of the outpost.
12. The homosociality of this intimacy is drawn boldly by both Hetherington and Junger.
13. See Article 95 (10 U.S.C. 895) on p. IV-33 of *Manual for Courts-Martial United States (2019 Edition)*; available at [https://jsc.defense.gov/Portals/99/Documents/2019%20MCM%20\(Final\)%20\(20190108\).pdf?ver=2019-01-11-115724-610](https://jsc.defense.gov/Portals/99/Documents/2019%20MCM%20(Final)%20(20190108).pdf?ver=2019-01-11-115724-610) (accessed 28 November 2019).
14. Junger (2010) relates an episode in which one soldier on guard allowed the batteries in a thermal-imaging device to run down, thus exposing the entire outpost to their worst fears of an ambush and overrun. The entire outpost was held responsible, and punished collectively, for this oversight.
15. In particular, the 'use of separation must not preclude the detainee getting four hours of continuous sleep every 24 hours' (US Department of the Army, 2006: M-10).
16. 'We had Afghans [Afghan National Army soldiers] at the gate, but to be quite honest, they were asleep' (Bales quoted in Vaughan, 2015).

17. An 'Army psychiatrist's deployment kit is likely to include nine kinds of antidepressants, benzodiazepines for anxiety, four antipsychotics, two kinds of sleep aids' (Murphy, 2012).
18. 'The prescribing trends suggest that the military often uses medications in ways . . . that . . . do not comport with . . . standards of practice. Prescriptions . . . for antipsychotic drugs for active-duty troops increased 1,083 percent from 2005 to 2011; the number . . . in the civilian population increased just 22 percent from 2005 to 2011. The number of prescriptions written for potentially habit-forming anti-anxiety medications – like Valium and Klonopin – rose 713 percent between 2005 and 2011' (Friedman, 2013).
19. Robert Bales, on his fourth tour, admitted to drinking, snorting Valium, and taking other drugs when he left the base. His defense attorneys tried to reduce his sentencing by claiming mefloquine caused a psychiatric disorder, rendering him unable to govern his actions.
20. 'To automatically obtain optimal caffeine timing and doses to achieve peak alertness at the desired times', the US Army has derived a new algorithm of caffeine use (Handy, 2019; see also American Academy of Sleep Medicine, 2018).
21. 'As combat systems become more sophisticated and reliable, the major limiting factor for operational dominance in a conflict is the warfighter. . . . Eliminating the need for sleep during an operation, while maintaining the high level of both cognitive and physical performance of the individual . . . will fundamentally change current military concepts of "operational tempo"' (Mission statement of DARPA's Continuous Assisted Performance program, quoted in Garreau, 2006: 28).
22. Bush administration officials used Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape (SERE) training (used by US troops to practice withstanding interrogation and capture) as a model for, and justification of, the US use of torture and detention.
23. Now, with the incidence of families also sharing the diagnosis, it is understood as transmissible through generations. Most prosaically, if, as sleep researchers have demonstrated, sleep is a precursor for unimpeded judgment, then sleepless soldiers are indeed a risk to themselves and others. Similarly, if sleep is a prerequisite for memory consolidation and neural learning, then sleepless denizens of war are eventually denied that sort of coherency or 'closure' upon which their future living is predicated.
24. 'The veterans of these wars suffer from skeletal injury, PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury at rates higher than the veterans of other wars. More than 327,000 GWOT [Global War on Terror] veterans have been diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury. Of those veterans of the GWOT whose disability claims had been processed in 2014, the most recent year for which there are figures, about 700,000 were classified as 30 percent or more disabled' (Crawford, 2016: 15).
25. Finkel's book is replete with mentions of sleep, and of the struggles against dreams that arrive as nightmares: 'I am angry I have these dreams. I am angry they don't stop. I miss my pleasant dreams of my past' (Finkel, 2013: 56). Another soldier confessed, 'I . . . have nightmares about killing people. It just makes me feel like a monster' (Finkel, 2013: 65).
26. Jean-Luc Nancy (2009: 13) recently insisted that 'there is no phenomenology of sleep, for it shows of itself only in its disappearance, its burrowing and its concealment', and yet this is precisely what the relationship of sleep and dreams suggests. Writing at the same moment, psychiatrist and sleep researcher J. A. Hobson (2009: 812) declared 'to the humanities in general, and to psychology and philosophy in particular, the new neuroscience of dream consciousness sends an appeal for more detailed attention to phenomenology'. In 2017, research on neural correlates of conscious experiences during sleep was hailed as being as significant as the discovery of REM owing to its identification of the signature of the dreaming brain, which demonstrated that 'dreaming may constitute a valuable model for the study of consciousness' (Siclari et al., 2017: 877).
27. After all, as Descartes most famously pointed out, the very capacity to sleep introduces doubt: doubt as to whether we are dreaming or not.
28. See Strauss (2015). Or, as another soldier wrote, 'I was sitting in Applebee's with my wife when she asked me what I was thinking about. All I could say was my thoughts revolved around one thought: What if I was dead and just did not know it?' (*New York Times*, 2010).
29. I thank Adam Sitze for this phrasing.

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