

63. From Metaphor to Proxy: Military Knowledge, Battlefields and Waring Epistemologies (Workshop)

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"Understanding and empathy will be important weapons of war" wrote in the Armed Forces Journal Major General R. Scale (2006). As an author of counterinsurgency doctrine, his words substantiate E. Scary (1987) who had argued the enterprise of cruelty and waring are served in a landscape of feelings. This landscape has been saturated by an emerging mode of 'military knowledge' that unsettles the borders of what we classically knew as battlefields. The new war machine has moved out of battlefields of military operation and decision rooms, while being embedded and contested in microcosms of everyday life, its language, materiality, affects and ecologies. From 'dog fights', in Carl Schmitt's word, to 'military role playing' and 'mock villages' for training soldiers, military knowledge has ensconced our lives in a diorama of war. This panel discusses how military knowledge configures societies around notions of adversaries and allies, losses and winnings, sanctions and agreements. These military tropes are simulated and fabricated in cultural translations to resemble new wars, from cold war idioms to war on terror and proxy.

We ask what constitutes Scary's landscape of feeling at the intersection of military knowledge and biopolitics in a waring world. How far does the history of entanglements between militarism, culture and human sciences underline critique in anthropology? This is to help understanding how emotionality binds to orientalism and surrealism. We are interested in papers that engage (a) with extended environments of war, (b) with socio-political actors who fall on the shadows of waring; such as scientists, engineers and operators of drones, who act without ever stepping into the heat of action, animals who become waring components, non-operational combatants and finally the very anthropologist who studies waring epistemologies.

Keynote by Nomi Stone, University of Texas Dallas

Contesting Knowledge in Mock Middle Eastern Villages

How is knowledge produced and contested within the extended battlefield? In this paper, I explore the epistemological and affective labors outsourced to cultural

role-players employed by the U.S. military as embodied repositories of Middle East knowledge. Drawing on fieldwork across the United States, this study focuses on the largely unexamined ethnographic spaces of U.S. military pre-deployment simulations in mock Middle Eastern villages. I focus on Iraqis who first worked for the U.S. military in Iraq as interpreters and then as role-players within pre-deployment simulations in the United States. Employed in the post 9-11 “Cultural Turn” to enact exemplars of their cultures, but ejected to the peripheries as traitors by their own countrymen and as potential spies by American soldiers, these interstitial individuals negotiate complex injuries and claims for recognition. Through a close examination of the wartime labors of these individuals, I examine the fraught contradictions and costs of militarizing wartime “Others” as sources of knowledge and feeling within spaces of Empire. Moving between military logics, fantasies, and epistemologies — and the lifeworlds, subjectivities, and forms of knowing of the human beings harnessed in wartime, I zoom in on a simulation called “The Crying Room,” where female role-players repetitively weep over the notional death of a child for training soldiers.

Surrealism and Orientalism

Georg Stauth, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

What might tie Orientalism and Surrealism together? A set of elective affinities between absurdities of arabesque and landscape paintings coopted and revoked in the pictorial discourse of war on terror and the rise of ISIS? This paper traces this question in an imaginary sojourn with a group of young painters to Tunisia in 1914. It presents a genealogical vignette of an actualized pictorial reservoir, a terra incognita focusing on symbolic empowerment from WWI onward. Surrealism is dealt here as an allegorical entity that undergirds political formations, make-believe spaces and cultural knowledges of war. I argue for another politics of Orientalism which is not scrutinized by Edward Said and his fellow historiographies: The revolution of surrealism in Orientalist terms as the “real” exclusivist mode of empire politics.

In 2014 while I had stopped teaching and refused participating in conferences on “Islam and Modernity”, organized by my colleagues, I came across the 1986 exhibition’s catalogue of the paintings by young surrealists from their 1914 trip to Tunisia. From there I found the 1921 book on “Kairouan” by Wilhelm Hausentein and Max Ernst, republished incidentally in 2014. It anchored deep in tracing concepts of the artistic imagination of surrealism and the magic of the Orient. Following “Kairouan” and Max Ernst, I remain today with this blundered reservoir of the symbolic conversions of Surrealism and Orientalism, in their designing

power of warring the foes of modernity in the Middle East and elsewhere: “the not so welcome neighbors”.

Dogs of War: Hysteric piety and expressions of militancy among Shia volunteer militias

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The scholarship discussing Shia militancy and martyrdom among Shias decidedly refers to the battle of Karbala (7th Century CE) to argue that Shias remain inspired by the martyrdom of Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad Prophet. They suggest his sacrifice teaches a model of ‘militant piety’ (Hegland 1998, Flakerud 2010, Hatina 2014). Although the scholarship overlooks how modes of lamenting, mourning and expressing sorrow for Hussain inform some Shias’ assumption and recognition of martyrdom, they develop what I call ‘hysteric piety’ to prove themselves martyrdom-worthy. By way of ethnography of laments amongst Shia volunteer militants who join the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, I argue that militancy is not an expression of religiosity, but it is an expression of hysteric piety. These militants lament for Hussain by calling themselves ‘dogs’ who submit to the majesty of his sacrifice to become worthy of martyrdom. This mode of lamenting turns complicated since dogs are seen as impure, and they are disliked among practising Muslims. I unpack the idea of becoming-animal in connection with modes of lament to explain how hysteric piety informs choices to join militias and find life through death. I propose such a conceptual trajectory to highlight war and conflicts occur not in battles but take an ecology of happenings.