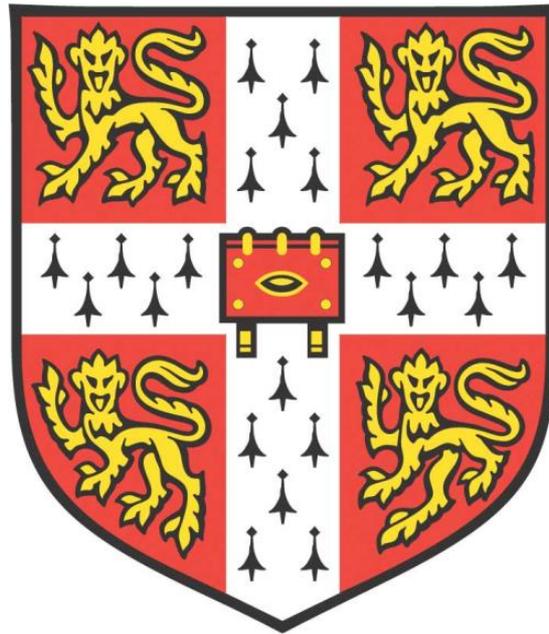


Posthuman War: Race, Gender, Technology, and the Making of U.S. Military  
Futures



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Politics and International Studies Degree Committee.

## **Abstract**

### **“Posthuman War: Race, Gender, Technology, and the Making of U.S. Military Futures”**

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This dissertation investigates drone warfare, the production of Special Operations Forces, and innovations in the medical treatment of war-related trauma, drawing these together to propose they may be read as indicative of a larger military “Posthuman Project” that is driving technological developments and practice in the U.S. military. Through a critical race theory and feminist war studies framework, it addresses this military posthumanity as a fantasy vision of future invulnerability, total knowledge, and control that is inseparable from fantasies of white supremacy that are built into the foundations of U.S. empire. It argues that in this context, the posthuman as well as the human remain exclusionary political categories that have their sense made through processes of gendering and racialization, in spite of military discourses of technologically-driven neutrality and progress away from human fallibility. In the course of examining the three case studies, this work finds that the state wields the categories of human and posthuman as tools to justify and naturalize empire and war-waging, and in so doing it justifies and naturalizes race and gender as tools of oppression. This reveals, ultimately, the malleability of these categories, and demonstrates the extent to which harnessing this malleability is a primary way of making state power itself seem necessary and inevitable. This work seeks to contribute to recent discussions about how race and gender produce warfare, and likewise have their sense made through acts of war and the development and deployment of advanced technologies. Similarly, drawing on lessons about the violence of the “human” from Black feminist thought, it seeks to suggest to critical scholars ways of thinking about the posthuman and war that do not lose sight of the inherent violence of these categories.

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## Introduction

The future of warfare is not human. It will be the domain of weapons systems that act autonomously, bodies so enhanced and transformed by technology they might no longer be recognizable, and result in ethical conundrums we can only guess at now. It will move at unthinkable speeds, but be more precise than ever before. Imagining a scene from this future, journalist Nick Turse drew on research and development from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and Pentagon planning for a future of global urban warfare. He outlines a vision that in recent years has proliferated across popular publications and in government projections:

As tiny UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] blanket an impoverished neighborhood, a squad of special-ops Spidermen and Geko warriors will crawl and slither up apartment-building walls, while teams of robots are simultaneously hopping through first floor windows, and Terminator-Human teams are kicking down front doors to capture an enemy drug kingpin. Nearby “angry crowds” of politically-minded youth will be engaged by heavily-armed tele-operated SWORDS Talon robots [“a small, all-terrain tracked vehicle” that can be equipped with weaponry], while a few up-armored cyborg troops, at a safe distance, fire their loitering smart grenades at a gathering crowd of armed slum-dwellers who believe themselves well hidden and protected in nearby alleyways. (Turse 2007)

According to reporting from 2019, every branch of the U.S. military is seeking to harness technology that might enable what is projected as “a faster, more precise, less human kind of warfare” (Fryer-Biggs 2019). A near future of inevitable human enhancement, increasingly autonomous warfare, and unprecedented, technologically-driven precision is regularly presupposed in U.S. military thought, and moreover, is used to justify the developing technologies and practices that seem poised make it happen. In response to concerns about a potential dehumanization of warfare<sup>1</sup>, U.S. Department of Defense personnel frequently insist that despite the apparent trajectory and speed of military technological development, humanity will remain “in the loop”. That is, human beings will remain ultimately in charge of and guide the machinery of war, effectively limiting any autonomous action (Groll 2019; Freedberg, Jr. and Clark 2016). Any applications of technology to the human body are more about maintaining human performance, personnel have claimed, than enhancing it per se (Schachtman 2007; Falconer 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Much popular media coverage has sensationalized military enhancement and technological developments with reference to super soldiers, “killer robots” and the *Terminator* film series. See, for instance, Hanlon 2011, “‘Super soldiers’: The quest for the ultimate human killing machine”; Gault 2019, “Here’s the Pentagon’s Terrifying Plan for Cyborg Supersoldiers”; Grady 2016, “Selva: Pentagon Working Through ‘Terminator Conundrum’ for Future Weapons”; Fryer-Biggs 2019, “Coming Soon to a Battlefield: Robots That Can Kill”.

However, the assumption that war in the future will involve, and indeed *require*, moving beyond the limitation and capability associated with a generalized humanity of the present sometimes looms behind military forecasting, and sometimes, increasingly, is stated outright. “Guided munitions and advanced weaponry” will be widely used in wars of the future, according to former Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work. “We should just assume that is the case. If we’re wrong, so much the better. If we’re right, we’d better be prepared for it. And this proliferation of precision will continue because we see it continuing today” (Pellerin 2015). Contradicting claims made about military technologies merely maintaining human ability, DARPA, the Pentagon’s leading research and development agency, has a “mission” that has been described as to “free the mind from the limitations of even *healthy* bodies” (Gross 2018). According to Michael Goldblatt, formerly of DARPA’s Defense Sciences Office, “The future was a scary place, the more we looked at it. We wanted to learn the capabilities of nature before others taught them to us” (Schachtman 2007). Because the human body remains “one of the weakest links in armed conflicts,” military training alone “can only do so much,” Patrick Lin, professor and ethics consultant for DARPA, writes. “What’s needed is an upgrade to the basic human condition” (Lin 2012).

In these visions of the future, the human body unenhanced, and therefore unprotected, by military technology becomes a site of anxieties about national security and the capability of national agents. Enhancement becomes framed as a necessity – a rational reaction to what is projected by the U.S. military as inevitable. To fail to move beyond the human in an age of war waged “at machine speed” risks having human bodies become an “impediment” to national security, Robert Work suggests (Fryer-Biggs 2019). Speaking at a 2019 National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence conference, Lieutenant General John Shanahan predicted, “We are going to be shocked by the speed, the chaos, the bloodiness, and the friction of a future fight in which this will be maybe playing in microseconds at times. How do we envision that fight happening? It has to be algorithm against algorithm” (C-SPAN 2019). The merely-human body stands no chance against that which exceeds human capability, and security demands not only anticipation of this moment, but that it be preempted through the preparation of technologies and bodies<sup>2</sup>. At the

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<sup>2</sup> Also significant to this landscape is the way that U.S. academia has plainly been called upon to assist with this preparation. John Shanahan, at this conference recorded by C-SPAN in 2019, invoked a “shared sense of responsibility about our AI future, a shared vision about the importance of trust and transparency. Our national security depends on it,” and made an appeal to those skeptical about working with the Department of Defense: “Public-private partnerships are the very essence of America’s success as a nation” (C-SPAN 2019). The National Security Council on AI’s first report to Congress states even more plainly that workers in academia and the private sector must “reconceive their responsibilities for the health of our democracy and the security of our nation” (Johnson 2019).

same time as war is imagined to involve the human less and less while calling for that which exceeds the human, as discussions to come will demonstrate, the human remains the foundational stepping off point for these visions of the future.

This dissertation proposes that a fantasy figure of the posthuman is manifest in much recent technological development and practice of the U.S. military, and that a fantasy of technologically-enabled posthumanity can be understood to guide such developments. These developments have in turn contributed to the construction of a highly particular and exclusionary notion of the posthuman that is tethered to these military developments and state violence. In order to capture the more general direction that military development has taken in the years since 9/11 and the security state's entrenchment, as well as read the case studies covered in the five central chapters into a longer historical and political context, this dissertation argues there is an overarching U.S. military Posthuman Project that is constituted by recent and slated near-future developments in technology and practice. These developments include, but are not limited to, those examined in this dissertation: drone warfare; the production and use of Special Operations Forces; and the development and deployment of military medical technologies. I argue that a through-line found in these developments and practice is a commitment to the possibility that certain U.S. subjects might eventually, with the right technologies in the right hands, overcome perceived limitations of the merely-human body. In this fantasy, the human body is eventually so exceeded that the result may be the production of subjects who are no longer human, but who have become *posthuman* through their alteration, enhancement, and enmeshment with military technologies. The idea, in summary, is about total control over oneself and one's environment, in the service of the U.S. state. Geoffrey Ling, former Founding Director of the Biological Technologies Office (BTO) at DARPA, explained this military vision of the future in a way that captures the sense of moral imperative that this work will show pervades the Posthuman Project, and in the process of doing so, invokes a universalized humanity that this work will show underlies the Project to form its basis. Connecting clinical medical experience to his own experience of the battlefield, Ling reports asking himself, "How can I liberate mankind from the limitations of the body?" (Gross 2018)

In order to ask about the posthuman of the Posthuman Project, I argue that its foundational category, the human, must be interrogated as well. This dissertation asks after the constitution of the Posthuman Project and, through this, ultimately the constitution of U.S. state power, with an emphasis especially on military power. It asks: How does U.S. state power configure and work through the category of the human? How is the posthuman configured in the military vision of

the future, and to what end? In what ways, and to what ends, are the human and posthuman shaped by race and gender? And in what ways, and to what ends, are the workings of U.S. military technologies, and their deployments, shaped by race and gender? I ultimately argue that the categories of human and posthuman are deeply malleable, and yet durable, and that these qualities are key to how and why they have been crucial to the exercise and justification of U.S. power. I identify them as tools of extraction deployed in ways that shift depending on context, in order to maintain and expand U.S. state power, and to justify any actions taken in service of these ends.

### *Theoretical Framework and Methodology*

This dissertation converses with feminist war studies and critical military studies literature, and is interested especially in recent theorizing around technology, the body, race, and gender in a context of U.S. military violence and imperialism. Scholars in these traditions have provided valuable insights into the workings of political, including military, violences and have moved discussions forward from accounts that might occlude the depth and extent of military intervention globally by focusing on the less spectacular and more insidious forms of control and regulation of bodies and subjectivity. Such scholars have found these to be vital and foundational to military and U.S. state power (Howell 2015; 2017; Wilcox 2015a; 2017; Enloe 2014; Wool 2015; Terry 2009; Belkin 2012). However, despite its interest in the logics, epistemologies, and investments both material and ideological that directly enable and naturalize U.S. military power and empire, this literature has been marked by some significant absences that constrain a thorough feminist critique of state violence. More specifically, the literatures have engaged inadequately with some of the most foundational forms of violence, in large part because discussions of race have been mostly absent from critiques. In spite of work that considers in detail how race is produced by, and works through, war-waging (Singh 2017; Kapadia 2018; 2019), and how crucial race is to the very foundations of the U.S. nation-state and its military and security apparatuses (Kaplan 2005a; 2005b; Rodriguez 2011; Smallwood 2007), these lessons have not often been picked up by critical feminist scholars.

Because of its interests in such questions and in the potential for critical feminist work that incorporates how race shapes gendered subjectivity, embodiment, war-waging, and the construction of the nation-state, this dissertation's theoretical framework is built through critical feminist war studies, and critical race theory. As explored in more detail below, Black feminist scholarship has provided vital lessons in how such schools of thought can be brought together to

think historically about power dynamics and institutions of the present, and challenge categories that are often taken for granted. As such, Black feminist scholarship that has focused on the human as a violent category (for instance, in works by Saidiya Hartman (1997); Zakiyyah Jackson (2013); and Alexander Weheliye (2014a)), and the need to think about the role of space and place in the construction of not only humanity, but race and gender as categories themselves (as in the work of Katherine McKittrick (2006; 2011) and Hortense Spillers (1987)) have been foundational and guiding to this work.

In order to unpick the fantasy of the military posthuman, this work brings a variety of sources into this framework, including official government documentation and commissioned reports; press releases and public relations information; journalistic reporting; and first-hand accounts from people involved in the technological development and practice examined. Guided by the critical feminist theoretical framework, and interested in the ways that a posthuman fantasy becomes naturalized in the military establishment, this dissertation finds value in the discourses that can be examined in these sources.

The approach to race and gender in this dissertation, as relational and contingent (more on this below), and ultimately products of and productive of a particular social order, guides the reading of the sources in question. The concern of this dissertation, in the tradition of critical feminist work, lies ultimately with power and its exercise; in discourses related to security, the nation-state, and military developments and practice, my reading throughout is attentive to context, and how these discourses both function within, and help to produce this particular context. There is naturalizing and legitimizing work done, for instance, in military sources that can be read as taking for granted the presence of eternal threat, while the specifics of this threat may be left ambiguous, in a move which allows for a flexible exercise of U.S. power that I indicate throughout is hugely important to the constitution of the U.S. In many cases, discourses surrounding the development of military technologies speak plainly to assumptions that war itself is facing fundamental change. These assumptions, in my reading, set conditions of possibility, and provide justification for material and ideological investment in the development of the military technologies examined in chapters to come. As well, first hand and journalistic accounts prove especially useful in examination of Special Operations Forces, given the secrecy often surrounding their deployment, and their training.

Below, I discuss at greater length some of the concepts that guide and are of primary interest to this dissertation. I build on work done by critical feminist theorists and critical race theory in order to delineate my readings of these core concepts. The articulations of these concepts below form the groundwork for the arguments I make in chapters to come.

### *Human*

As mentioned above, some Black feminist scholarship has taken a much more forensic approach to understanding violence and its very foundations in a U.S. context, which provides a pathway to examining more fully how the U.S. military functions, and to what ends. Work done by Sylvia Wynter deeply interrogating how “human” works as a political category born of, and firmly embedded in, highly particular sets of Western socio-political relations has been picked up and expanded on by a number of scholars writing recently (Jackson 2013; 2020; Weheliye 2014a; McKittrick 2006). Her work and theirs guides and inspires the theoretical approach taken in this dissertation. Notions of humanity, inhumanity, and posthumanity are crucial to the conduct of warfare, and how it is made to seem at times inevitable, necessary, or natural. Such concepts can be used in powerful ways to provide justification for military violence, expansion, and control, and to enable and naturalize exclusion and hierarchizing violence, as chapters to follow will demonstrate. Most critical feminist scholarship on war and its technologies have left such categories unexcavated and unexamined. This dissertation proceeds from Sylvia Wynter’s insight that “human” is “representatively linked” to a figure that can be encapsulated as “Man”. This figure, she argues, emerged initially as “Man1” from “the theological order of knowledge” of medieval Europe, and transformed over time into “Man2,” “a figure based on the Western bourgeoisie’s model of being human” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 9-10). “Man” is “inflected by powerful knowledge systems and origin stories” that purport to explain “who/what we are”. Crucially for this dissertation,

These systems and stories produce the lived and racialized categories of the rational and irrational, the selected and dysselected, the haves and have-nots as asymmetrical naturalized racial-sexual human groupings that are specific to time, place, and personhood yet signal the processes through which the empirical and experiential lives of *all* humans are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation. (*ibid.*, 10)

In Wynter’s reading, Man has become overrepresented as “human” to the extent that to be human is (at least) usually understood as to be Man. As summarized in the work of Alexander Weheliye, “Man represents the western configuration of the human as synonymous with the

heteromasculine, white, propertied, and liberal subject that renders all those who do not conform to these characteristics as exploitable nonhumans...” (2014a, 135). This figure has formed a basis for global structures that ultimately, then, compel homogenization, an idea which will be returned to at length throughout the dissertation. Human, then, in a context such as the U.S.’s examined in this dissertation, is a category of exclusion, and this dissertation uses it – unless otherwise made clear – to indicate the Man formation theorized by Wynter. This human is also, as chapters to follow contend, and as suggested in Weheliye’s summation, a category of extraction. U.S. state apparatuses reproduce and deploy this notion of what it is to be human in order to justify assigning differential value to people along lines of race and gender, and to justify and naturalize various extractive practices that fuel and enable continuing military violence and expansion. However, key to the way that the human as a justificatory tool works is that it is, in the military approach to it, inherently malleable: military technological development and interventions are predicated on both human as a political category and the purported discrete human body’s material as *almost* infinitely malleable and manipulable with the right technology in the right hands. This alleged malleability becomes an important way of constructing a fantasy of posthumanity that is available only to some.

### *Posthuman*

Insights from Wynter about human-as-Man form a stepping off point for this dissertation, and figure directly into how this work approaches the posthuman. Firstly, it is important to note, given the conversations in which this dissertation is situated, that the posthuman engaged with throughout is not the posthuman theorized, for instance, in the well-known work by Rosi Braidotti (2013), and is not the same as that which is employed as a critical tool investigating bodily entanglement with technology and co-constitution in the work of, for instance, Donna Haraway (1991). The primary configuration of the posthuman that this work is concerned with is that which figures in ways both implicit and explicit in U.S. military discourses, and which also figures in very similar ways in the thought of transhumanists and others who could be called technoliberal. As explained in brief by Allen Porter, “The core of transhumanism is to encourage the use of biotransformative technologies in order to ‘enhance’ the human organism, with the ultimate aim being to modify the human organism so radically as to ‘overcome fundamental human limitations’ (Transhumanist FAQ 2016) and thereby the ‘human’ as such. In other words, to use transhumanist terminology, their fundamental goal is to become ‘posthuman’” (Porter 2017, 238)<sup>3</sup>. This goal and

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<sup>3</sup> Elke Schwarz has a relevant and very helpful discussion of the differences between what she calls “critical posthumanism” and “transhumanism,” which both fall under the umbrella of posthumanist discourse (2017, 29-32).

the driving ideology of enhancement and transcendence are built off of what American Studies scholar Joel Dinerstein characterizes as “underlying cultural beliefs in technological determinism” (2006, 570). Atanasoki and Vora’s formulation of technoliberalism, which draws attention to the ideological underpinnings of transhumanism and calls to those underlying beliefs in technological determinism, is as “the ideology that technology advances human freedom and postracial futurity by asserting a postlabor world in which racial difference, along with all human social difference, is transcended” (2019, 28).

This posthuman, then, is a fantasized figure that is imagined to result, linearly and supposedly naturally and usually desirably, from the application of increasingly advanced technologies to the human body. While the specifics of this fantasy posthuman figure of the future may vary precisely because it is not (yet) realized, the basic contours are that this is a figure that emerges from the application and deep enmeshment of advanced technologies with the purportedly apolitical human body. The human is changed – enhanced, augmented, and enabled – to such a great extent and so fundamentally that “human” is no longer an apt description: this figure has become posthuman. As one scholar focusing on “postmodern war” has contended, “technosoldiers are the immediate precursors to posthumans,” and the rate of technological development in the present means that “genetically engineering posthuman soldiers within the next century or so seems inevitable.” Indeed, “It is overdetermined” (Gray 2003, 223). “The fragile human body,” in other words, having become so highly technologized, and so deeply enhanced, could perhaps evolve into “a silicon-based cyborg with superhuman capacities” (Dinerstein 2006, 571). Technologized subjectivity built through military machinery is imagined as potentially constructing identities “disengaged from ethnicity, gender, and all other identities that hitherto have defined our humanity”; this, too, “threatens to do away with the human subject” (Coker 2002, 405). Work such as Coker’s (2002) proceed from the assumption that while human beings have certainly been interfacing with technology for centuries if not longer, there is something exceptional about the kinds of new technologies and developments being produced by and for the military; the “symbiotic” relationship (2002, 410) found or imagined in certain developments, the development of pharmaceuticals to make war-waging easier on the human mind and body, and in general what seems unprecedentedly deep intervention into bodies and subjectivities is a source of anxiety over what it means to be human, and where the posthuman may begin. We are “in danger of dehumanizing modernity” (2002, 410).

As a last note about the figure of the posthuman being interrogated in this dissertation, and to clarify some of the basic ideas underlying developments that could be classed as pushing linearly to posthumanity, “futurist” Zoltan Istvan, who was a U.S. presidential candidate under the banner of the Transhumanist Party, offered a cogent summary: “The underlying premise of transhumanism...was that we *all* needed fixing, that we were all, by virtue of having human bodies in the first place, disabled” (O’Connell 2017, 215). This reveals in general strokes the kind of approach taken to embodiment and technology in this form of posthuman thought: that any perceived or socially produced limitations can and must be overcome through technological means, and that technological application to, and “enhancement” of, bodies is both common sense and a moral imperative. It is also projected as objectively desirable. As Justin Sanchez, the Director of DARPA’s Biological Technologies Office, once said, “The people that we are trying to help should *never* be imprisoned by their bodies. And today we can design technologies that can help liberate them from that” (Gross 2018). Such lines of argument are legible in the practices and developments of the U.S. military examined in chapters to come. This dissertation finds that attempting to achieve posthumanity through the development and deployment of military technologies becomes positioned as a moral imperative, and a necessary and commonsense response to ever-present outside threat.

At the same time as this work does not intend to delve into extended critique of critical feminist posthuman theory, this work was deeply inspired also by Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s and Alexander Weheliye’s commentary on the limits of feminist posthuman thought, and it seeks to bring some of these threads together to understand the specific U.S. military posthuman fantasy, and how the human category works in this. This is especially with an eye towards the invisibility of human as a category of control and extraction in feminist work so far. Jackson argues that “there is much humanity, and even humanism, that *post*humanist theory has yet to pass through” (2013, 676), indicating how the human has gone so largely unexamined and uncritiqued in such work. Indeed, as Alexander Weheliye (2002, 23) contends, “the posthuman frequently appears as little more than the white liberal subject in techno-informational disguise”; at the very least, and as this dissertation holds, for the posthuman interrogated here, the human has remained its stepping off point. Given the way that posthuman has taken for granted its foundation in the category of human despite the particularity and exclusivity of it, Jackson (2013, 673) suggests, “Perhaps the ‘post’ human is not a temporal location but a geographic one.” This suggestion is a powerful one that challenges universalizing military visions of the future that are tied to notions of linear progress and the possibility of unproblematic apolitical enhancement of, and intervention into, human bodies. It

inspired the routes that this dissertation took to embed the military posthuman fantasy firmly in a context that is tied to place, and space-making. As this dissertation will show, this posthuman fantasy is fundamentally tied to the U.S. nation-state, and its ongoing construction.

### *Race and Gender*

Important to the analysis conducted in this dissertation, and to its methodology, is a critical understanding of race and gender, and how these are produced and function in the U.S. context. Broadly, this work approaches race and gender as not only contingent political categories embedded in a highly particular socio-historical context, and likewise productive of this context, but is interested in how these function as technologies themselves. That is, drawing on the work of critical scholars who interrogate such fundamental categories of U.S. sociality, this dissertation first takes a broad view of what technology means. While much of the chapters to come focus on the advanced (and the apparently less advanced) military technology that is fantasized to push humans into a mode of being called posthuman, these are not the only technologies at work in the Posthuman Project, or in the processes contributing to the making of the U.S. nation-state. Technology is approached, to draw from the scholarship of Alexander Weheliye (2014a, 12) “in the broadest sense as the application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life or to changing and manipulating the human environment.” This dissertation understands race and gender to be tools for social ordering, hierarchizing, and control, which were clarified and cemented within a white supremacist context in ways that will be discussed in chapters to follow. As such, they function as technologies, producing subjecthood and objecthood, and social order becomes constructed along lines of race and gender. Like the categories of human and posthuman, this dissertation will demonstrate, they function as categories of extraction in the U.S. context examined, and can be shifted and adjusted in what they are meant to signify or enable, according to what will enable and justify U.S. state power. In this dissertation, this is more specifically the power of the U.S. military and its technological developments.

This dissertation, in focusing on the workings of U.S. military and state power more generally, and how this functions through the production and maintenance of racialized systems of dominance, is interested primarily in the production and deployment of whiteness as a structuring force “that takes material form as status, identity and property” (Lipsitz 2019, 42). A key facet of this, which this dissertation returns to in some form in each chapter, is the notion of the “white possessive,” which Lipsitz explains as “promot[ing] an expectation of ownership and a presumption of the

power to dominate and exclude” (*ibid.*). In concurrence, working with W.E.B. DuBois, Marilyn Lake (2009, 120) describes whiteness as “fundamentally proprietorial: an assertion of the rights to property and power.” In the U.S. context examined, this is crucial to understanding the logics underlying the acts of subjugation and domination that constitute, shore up, and drive forward U.S. technological progress and the U.S.’s global war-waging, which cannot be fully understood if divorced from longer historical context. Categories of race and gender took their shape through white settler colonial violences during the process of U.S. expansion into lands already inhabited by indigenous people (Rifkin 2011, 343; Cacho 2012), and were then deployed to justify such expansion, and the making of territory out of human bodies and lands (Johnson 2018; Opal 2018), which could then have value extracted from them. These formed some of the primary conditions of possibility for the U.S. to take shape as a nation-state; technologies developed to survey, control, and expand the U.S.’s formal boundaries across already-inhabited space both sped up this process (Kaplan 2006, 397; Dinerstein 2006) and could provide a cover of inevitability and desirability to such expansion and appropriation. This is a dynamic legible today in military deployment and production of technologies that expand the state’s reach globally.

This is a context, then, of white supremacy, and categories of race, gender, as well as the human and posthuman above, emerge out of its structure. Dylan Rodriguez defines white supremacy as “an internally complex, historically dynamic logic of social organization” (2011, 47); this notion of historical dynamism is noteworthy, and calls back to the contentions made throughout this dissertation of malleability of categories, in service ultimately of state empowerment. This dissertation’s analytical approach to race and gender grow from such contentions as Rodriguez’s regarding a shifting but powerfully structuring white supremacy, and the propositions of critical scholars such as Ann Stoler, Dorothy Roberts, Hortense Spillers, Alexander Weheliye, Zakiyyah Jackson, and others.

To begin, as Rodriguez contends, “There is no ‘race’ outside of the historical genealogies and multiple political derivations of white supremacy, and to posit race without an essential and critical engagement with its structuring white supremacist genealogies is (at the very least) a profoundly ahistorical gesture” (2011, 48). This contention is supported by historical work that is discussed throughout chapters to come, which reveal the ways that race has worked as a tool of social ordering that afforded domination by those racialized as white, and naturalized exclusionary notions of what it was to be human that were hinged to whiteness (see above regarding Wynter’s theory of Man-as-human). Race-making, to borrow a term from Nikhil Singh’s historical

examination of race and war (2017), was a function of white supremacy, in this reading. Race was and is political, made to be “a technology of dominance, system of social ordering, and modality of subject formation” (Rodriguez 2011, 48).

To complement this characterization by Rodriguez, this dissertation also works from Weheliye’s contentions regarding race and racialization. As he writes, race can be understood as “a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body” (2014a, 5). Such a characterization is instructive for its eye toward the always socially constructed and context-specific nature of race (and other categories interrogated in this dissertation), as well as for the way it does not proceed from the human body as a given. As this dissertation reveals, the recent and slated near-future technological developments and practices that partially constitute the Posthuman Project are invested in the human body as a given, something that can be discovered through application of objective technologies. Weheliye’s contentions indicate the route this dissertation takes to understand how the malleability attributed to the human body and the categories of human and posthuman by military power are themselves not simply matters of course, but produced through such technologies. In this way, as race has been a technology of extraction and subjugation, so too are the categories of human and posthuman. Furthermore, like the categories of human and posthuman, race and gender in this context have been produced themselves as malleable – they can be shifted over time and space even as they clearly remain durable and persistent categories. As Ann Laura Stoler explains, race “combine[s] ‘essentialized’ and shifting features” (Stoler 2016, 239 quoted in Peterson 2020, 182), where what is essentialized is subject to change and substitution. Different times and places see “the strategic inclusion of different attributes, of a changing constellation of features and a changing weighing of them” (Stoler 2016, 261-262, 264 quoted in Peterson 2020, 182-183). The very malleability of race and racism that characterizes it is, in Stoler’s reading, what gives the category so much power. To summarize and indicate directions taken throughout this dissertation, the malleability of the technological category of race, which lends it its power, in practice ends up as a power to produce the kinds of bodies that most smoothly in a given context may serve the power of the white supremacist state and more specifically in the cases examined throughout, justify military expansion and interventions of all kinds. Race is resilient but changeable.

To borrow again from Weheliye (2014a), part of what confers this resilience but malleability is the myriad ways that racialization occurs. He writes of “racializing assemblages” in recognition of the

way that the racialization processes do not occur through one channel, and the inherently relational nature of racialization, race-making, and the exclusionary, racialized, production of human subjects (3). This dissertation takes Weheliye's understanding of racialization as instructive, and proceeds from an interpretation of racialization as a function of power that works to "discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans [especially in investigations in chapters 3 and 5, this dissertation does not use this term, but concurs with a reading of some as made to inhabit a not fully human, but not non-human category], and nonhumans" (*ibid.*).

As discussed at length in chapter 2, this dissertation approaches and interprets gender and gendering processes in a way similar to the above interpretation of race and racialization. That is, it proceeds from an understanding of gender and gendering processes as tied to their contexts, contingent, and produced as tools of extraction and subjugation in the U.S. context examined. Gender and race work together to produce exclusions and inclusions, and justify or delegitimize power. Gender, like race, clearly has a staying power that has rendered it a coherent category and subject of analysis, but likewise – as historical and contextual analysis such as that used throughout this dissertation will show – proves malleable and manipulable according to what has served a U.S. state power built through a structure of white supremacy. In the cases examined in this dissertation, this appears most often in the service of justifying expansion of U.S. power and the extraction and appropriation of land and bodies that are used to shore up and naturalize a racialized and gendered social order. As this dissertation will show, gender is mobilized as a tool to at times exclude, and at others to violently enlist, bodies into the shoring up of a white supremacist sociality (see, for instance, Masters 2009 on the utilization of gender as a tool to cast military torture as aberrational instead of institutional), and ultimately to reiterate the human's exclusivity.

Gender is also understood to be inherently relational, following the contentions of numerous critical feminist scholars (Ahmed 2000; 2014; Butler 1993; Braidotti and Butler 1994; Schippers 2007). For instance, the masculine, otherwise projected as natural, elemental, and "pure" (especially as in chapter 4), and as objective and eligible for a perfectibility that calls to notions of "godlike" capability associated with the drone (Wilcox 2015a, 141, 145-147) cannot exist without its constitutive outside, which in a context built through a gender binary, is the feminine. Femininity and feminization function as means of social organization and hierarchization and, as in chapters 2, 3, and 4, are crucial in constituting the Posthuman Project's fantasy ideals of objective knowledge, total control, and upright, unimpeachable American masculinity. Relationality and the deep investment of the U.S. state in compelling certain relationships between

subjects and the state, its technologies, and even interpersonally, emerge as deeply important to the maintenance of the Posthuman Project (see especially chapter 5 on this topic).

This dissertation is deeply interested in examining specifically how race is used to produce gender such that gender as a category becomes reserved for whiteness. That is, as chapters throughout (but especially chapter 2) will demonstrate, following from an understanding of race and gender as hierarchizing and extractive tools, in the examples of nation formation and military violence examined, womanhood and manhood are coherent and legible when it serves state power. At other times, womanhood may seem to be rescinded, and one's gendered embodiment treated as illegible – in cases such as that of enslaved Black women forced to be wet nurses, or of the bombing of a Black middle class residential street in Philadelphia, the gendering process, whether this amounts to a rescinding or granting of legible gender, can open one up to state, and/or state-sanctioned, violence. As scholars such as Saidiya Hartman have shown, the humanization process is a violent one itself, given the human's exclusivity and whiteness even as it masquerades as a neutral and universal category (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, 189; Jackson 2016, 96). In a similar way, the gendering process, as it proceeds from and through white exclusivity, functions to violently incorporate or exclude from sociality and politics.

The workings of race, gender, racialization, and gendering processes continually make reference, then, to the context from which they come. That is, in examining for what purpose these go to work, analysis must come back to the ways that they prop up and naturalize a highly particular social order: that of the white supremacist U.S. socio-political order that has given rise to the Posthuman Project. It is no coincidence that the posthuman fantasy that drives the technological developments and practices discussed in this dissertation is also a fantasy that is “fundamentally proprietary” (Lake 2009, 120), concerned with limitless expansion, ownership, and control over bodies and spaces made territory of the United States in various ways, through the application of various technologies.

### *Fantasy*

As above, this dissertation makes frequent mention of a fantasy of posthumanity. While discussion does not engage in depth with psychoanalytic theory, this characterization is inspired by the work of Judith Butler and others who make reference to fantasy in a psychoanalytic sense. This term is mobilized throughout because it is best suited to capturing the mix of desire and future-orientation

that this dissertation reads as pervading and vital to the U.S. military's Posthuman Project. This dissertation intends to describe and analyze what is at its core "a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery)" that, as Butler writes, may "fuel the instruments of war" (2004a, 29). Further, Butler ties the state (specifically the United States) to the articulation of fantasy, in which the state institutionalizes fantasies of normativity that may not meet, in various ways, "existing social practice" (2004b, 116). Appealing to state power, or the state-sanctioned, "commits us to the fantasy of state power" to render subjects coherent (*ibid.*, 116-117). She contends that state regulations "do not always seek to order what exists, but to figure social life in certain imaginary ways" (*ibid.*, 117), and that invoking anything – in her example heterosexuality – as foundational to the nation-state is "part of the operation of power" that may ultimately "[work] in the building of a certain fantasy of state and nation" (*ibid.*, 124).

These notions of state power and fantasy resonate with how the posthuman figures implicitly and explicitly in the developments examined in this dissertation. The Posthuman Project, committed as it is to full-scale, limitless mastery and control, has as its imaginary subject the limitless and masterful posthuman. In the cases examined throughout, it is always so that what is imagined and desired does not meet, as Butler writes, "existing social practice". However, as well as being a category of extraction, posthuman is a disciplinary category. Those who become seen as eligible for posthumanity are rewarded socio-politically, and those who are not may be subject to debilitation – within this dynamic, one may read what Butler writes regarding the appeal to state power. As seen for instance in chapters 3 and 5 most prominently, willing appeal to state power and authority over what it means to be human or posthuman performs a double function of shoring up that state power and authority – reifying the fantasy of state power and coherence – and may simultaneously render one eligible for this fantasized posthumanity, meaning one may reap the rewards of an affirmative relationship with the state. Furthermore, as the historical examination of the roots of this technologically driven fantasy of expansion and control may attest to, invoking a kind of posthuman destiny as foundational to the United States has certainly contributed to "building of a certain fantasy of state and nation" (*ibid.*, 124). In short, this fantasy of state and nation is a fantasy of eventually-inevitable posthumanity that can be achieved with the right technologies in the right hands.

*Chapter Summaries and Dissertation Plan*

This dissertation proceeds through five central chapters that present and analyze recent technological developments and practices in which the Posthuman Project can be found at work. The cases in the chapters are linked in that, moreover, they give the Posthuman Project its shape; they shore up and naturalize the fantasy of a posthuman future in which the U.S. state figures as limitless and justified in whatever actions it may take. Although it has been overlooked in critical feminist studies so far, the central chapters show that the cases analyzed have their sense made through the human and posthuman as fundamentally exclusionary categories of extraction that can be manipulated by the U.S. to its own ends.

Chapter 1 focuses on the imaginaries of the drone in order to take a first step into demonstrating how the Posthuman Project works through fantasy and imagination. The drone is configured as a superhuman subject that offers more-than-human capability to those who choose to opt in. Presented even in critical feminist scholarship as a posthuman actor in itself, the drone both is used to signal and is understood to bring about posthuman warfare. The ubiquitous production through official and scholastic discourses of the drone and drone warfare as pointing the way towards a technologically-advanced and “less human” warfare has been projected as either dangerous, or safer for everyone. This chapter finds, though, that even in scholarship that is critical of claims made about drone warfare’s precision and safety, there is a risk of reifying the drone as a politically neutral object, and obscuring the racialization and gendering processes that have made both the drone as a weapon and drone warfare itself possible.

Chapter 2 takes hold of these lessons to examine at length how the drone is used, and its connection to the production of space. With the 2010 Uruzgan, Afghanistan massacre as its way in, the chapter argues that the racialization of space is necessary to understanding how even deadly mistakes made in the prosecution of drone warfare become smoothed over, and more generally, in understanding how some people become constructed as natural targets for the drone’s gaze and for strikes, or become protected from state violence. Situating these arguments historically, the chapter thinks through the production of nation space within the official boundaries of the United States, and outside of them, finding race-making not only fundamental to how space has been produced and understood, but to the construction of gender. It argues that in a U.S. context, the racialization of space has been primary, shaping how gender and the gendered body are read – these dynamics made the Uruzgan massacre and aftermath possible.

Chapter 3 introduces Special Operations Forces (SOF) through their initial production in the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training program. SERE is heavily mythologized and exceptionalized itself, a program of “stress inoculation” that subjects SOF candidates to realistic and highly medicalized prisoner of war and torture scenarios. Though officially meant to offer candidates the tools to resist torture they may be subjected to in case of capture by enemy forces, SERE is also a program of human experimentation, and much of its legitimization comes through association with the U.S. medical establishment, and the data that it produces about the human body. In the course of examining the SERE program, this chapter begins to follow the ways in which SOF personnel become constructed as exceptional among already exceptionalized military personnel, and the ways in which the willing submission to state authority and control by these candidates performs a validating and empowering function for U.S. military power. By focusing in on the differences and similarities found between the limited torture undergone by SOF candidates, and the indefinite detention and torture undergone by people genuinely held captive by the U.S. at Guantánamo Bay, this chapter begins to identify the racialization of bodies and spaces, and the U.S. manipulation of the categories of human and posthuman, as fundamentally important to the exceptionalization of SOF.

Chapter 4 proceeds to consider SOF exceptionality after training, and how the malleability of human and posthuman figure into this exceptionalization. It takes recent cases of well-publicized criminal behavior – including murder – by SOF personnel as a way into asking how it is that SOF occupy the exceptional place they do in spite of so much evidence that challenges the representation of them as quiet professionals. The chapter finds that SOF occupy the exceptional place they do because of the vital work they are used to do in shoring up and legitimizing U.S. state power. By situating SOF’s relationship to the U.S. nation-state in historical context, the chapter argues that the variable production of SOF as animal, as human, and as superhuman, is done through race-making practices that are vital to understanding how animalization, or construction of SOF as at times “less than human,” does not necessarily mean degradation. The case of SOF demonstrates how the malleability of human as a category means it is a powerful tool of U.S. power. SOF, who are constructed as occupying paradoxical spaces in service of U.S. empire, by extension constitute a powerful tool of the Posthuman Project.

Chapter 5 focuses in on malleability, identifying two forms that it examines together: the malleability of the human and posthuman categories, as explored throughout the dissertation, and

the *limited* malleability of the material of the human body. This chapter finds that both of these, which are mutually productive, provide space for the Posthuman Project, and are used as tools of its justification. The chapter focuses on recent developments in military medical technologies, and how such technologies are, or are not, used. It finds that the racialized and gendered political category of the human is crucial in determining who may be found worthy of medical intervention and capacitated with medical protection and enhancement, and that this humanization is perhaps best understood to result from the embodiment of particular, state-sanctioned relationships. Running alongside this, however, is the malleability of the material of the body itself, which is figured in the Posthuman Fantasy as malleable, but to a point. This point, in the military fantasy of posthumanity, is undefined but imagined to be detectable through the application of technology to the body. Most crucially, it is used to indicate that some people can never be eligible for posthumanity by virtue of some fixed “truth” to their bodies. The chapter turns from cases of soldiers capacitated following injury, to those debilitated and neglected medically, to the case of the Marshall Islands as a space of debility, but also intensive military medical intervention. These cases altogether reiterate that human and posthuman function for the sake of U.S. extraction and accumulation, and that the scientific and medical, though ostensibly objective, are enlisted in providing cover for U.S. empire and contribute to projection of U.S. empire as inevitable and desirable for this techno-scientific development. These cases reiterate, as well, how human and posthuman have been developed in a U.S. context indelibly tethered to racialized space, and themselves are used to reproduce such spaces globally.

This dissertation concludes with thoughts on how these ideas could be further developed with more attention to the geographic and historical. It reiterates how the posthuman fantasy, and the U.S. military’s Posthuman Project, are built on an unexcavated bedrock of race, and the categories of gender produced through race, and the necessity for critical feminist scholars to think not only through embodiment and gender, but to think of race as a primary factor in the making of the human. It finally argues that the malleability inherent to categories such as human and posthuman within the U.S. context, and as they circulate in military fantasies of a posthuman future, is because these categories are tools of extraction. They are used to justify and naturalize the changeable ways that the U.S. and its institutions may assign differential value to human bodies and subjects, and extract this value in different ways. They are applied and made malleable in order, therefore, to justify and naturalize the exercise and expansion of U.S. power globally, regardless of what forms this exercise may take.

## Chapter 1: Drone Imaginaries and Unmanned Warfare

### *Introduction*



**Dwell. Detect. Destroy.**

Remotely operated aircraft systems produced by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems are routinely operated over world trouble spots. With the persistence and precision capability to detect, identify, track, and even strike time-sensitive targets instantly, U.S. Air Force MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reapers fly missions beyond the capabilities of manned aircraft.

The multi-mission MQ-9 Reaper, equipped with electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) streaming day and night video, Lynx Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), and weapons, provides unparalleled support to ground forces.

***A cost-effective force multiplier in every sense. Not only operational, but indispensable.***

 **GENERAL ATOMICS  
AERONAUTICAL**

©2010 General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. [www.ga-asi.com](http://www.ga-asi.com) Leading The Situational Awareness Revolution

Positioned over what plain white text suggests is a desert “trouble spot,” the MQ-9 Reaper drone in General Atomics Aeronautical Systems’ 2010 graphic advertisement promises to “Dwell. Detect. Destroy.” It is uniquely capable of doing so because of technological specifications that take it “beyond the capabilities of manned aircraft,” the advertisement claims, and plays on popular beliefs about “smart” weaponry: the drone itself has a characteristic “persistence” necessary to carry out these missions that are beyond human capability, and the ability to “detect” what can be missed by human eyes. Its ability to “dwell” in spaces temporally and geographically out of human reach – suggested in the apparently inhospitable expanse of bare, mountainous, grayish desert below the drone – is of primary importance. While the text touts the drone’s potential as support for “ground forces,” it makes stronger claims about the drone’s indispensability as a “force-multiplier in every sense,” necessary for the conduct of operations that cannot afford to be limited by human (in)capability, fatigue, and limited vision. With invulnerability, objectivity, and control sold as intrinsic to the drone, the advertisement projects the drone as the measure of capability, setting a standard for what can and, more importantly, *should* be done by a state invested in not only protecting its “forces,” but in waging truly “smart” warfare that can ensure the protection of those who should be protected. Superior data-collection, intelligence-production, and surveillance capabilities are tools vital to making this happen: they are purported to refine the scope of warfare down to the level of the known and targeted individual, at the same time as they enable the U.S. to widen the scope of known and surveilled territory.

The advertisement frames drone capabilities as something that human operators, and military apparatuses more broadly, can opt into, or borrow from the drone. Using the drone becomes necessary to enhancement of human capability, and to the conduct of smart warfare, given the way it is portrayed as a singular tool with intrinsic qualities that can be borrowed and utilized in a clean, “intelligent” way. Seeming to offer by itself the “full-spectrum dominance” over all the battlespaces charted out, for instance, in the Department of Defense’s “Joint Vision 2020” document (National Defense University 2000), this drone blurs the boundaries between states, human and machine, past and present, and foreign and domestic in a vision of hyper-mobile future warfare that stretches well beyond 2020. But the drone also entangles – and is entangled with – human bodies, minds, and feelings in a “machinery of war” that is more political, contingent, and less stable than popular discourse and advertisements such as the above would hold. Representations that silo the drone off from a wider environment in order to make claims about the intrinsic objectivity and control that are characteristic of the drone and which may be borrowed from it, elide the physical and emotional enmeshment of all of those entangled in various ways in

the “kill chain” – from drone operators, to those “detected and destroyed” through this smart warfare, to the broader populace and scholars for whom the logic of drone and allegedly posthuman warfare has become part of the everyday.

The drone, how it is used, and especially what it is used to represent, as a supposed indicator and consequence of the more-than-human quality of U.S. warfare, constitutes a key component of the “Posthuman Project,” and is the focus of this chapter. ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) work conducted by drone is itself enmeshed in long histories of race- and gender-making that have enabled an exclusionary notion of the human to take hold and drive the reproduction of patriarchal white social order, and serve to reiterate notions of national coherence in the face of ever-present outside threat. Reading these histories in the present, I argue in this chapter that the posthuman of the “Posthuman Project” is produced through fantasies about the drone’s intrinsic power and more-than-human capability. I demonstrate that as a partial effect of its purportedly inherent future-orientation, the drone functions as a tool that continuously reinscribes and, crucially, naturalizes the human and posthuman as violent categories of exclusion and control. The effect of this becomes an order of security in which any measure taken to secure U.S. state authority over territory may be justified.

The other part of this picture, and a conversation this chapter seeks to contribute to, lies in critical feminist work done on the drone, its representations, and where it intersects in various ways with the idea of the posthuman. Critical feminist work on the drone and the posthuman, which has understood the drone as an assemblage and has read it as deeply shaped by and always shaping its particular context, has pushed scholarship into deeper critique of the politics of the drone and drone warfare. Guided by such critique but finding in these much space for an extension of race as well as gender analysis, this chapter engages with the work done by scholars such as Chamayou, Daggett, Gregory, and Wilcox to examine the ways that the drone is constructed as offering or allowing superhuman capabilities, and to argue that feminist literature must consider the fundamentally raced and gendered ontology and epistemology of the drone. To fail to do so carries a number of risks. It risks reiterating, naturalizing, and giving ideological and scholarly cover to discourses that frame the drone as an inevitable product of technologically advanced warfare, and risks doing the same for discourses that construct technologized warfare as apolitical, which is a project often fueled by the idea of objective data that may promise to defang warfare more generally. It misses the ways in which the drone’s gaze is inherently imperial, meaning that expansive U.S. drone warfare – and, more generally, surveillance by drone – might be characterized

as less violent than it is. This carries implications for challenges to the U.S.'s warfare more broadly, especially as this war-waging continues to shift with the development of new technologies and means of control that trend towards the allegedly "precise," lighter footprint, and less easily visible.

Similarly, it risks reinforcing ideas and fantasies about the posthuman as, like the drone, an inevitable outcome of advanced technologies. Perhaps even more crucially, however, it risks reinforcing the posthuman as an aspirational ideal indicating that through the use of technology and the apparent blocking off of human vulnerability by technological means, there can be a "moving beyond" categories such as race and gender, and ultimately beyond the human. This leaves the violent and constraining politics of the human category undisturbed and unchallenged, and elides the necessity of war-waging, whether heavily technologized or not, to the constitution of both "human" and "posthuman". It ultimately risks misunderstanding how deeply vital to modern warfare race and gender have been and remain. This chapter aims to begin an intervention into such literatures in the interest of highlighting such risks, and suggesting ways they may be avoided.

*Building "the Situational Awareness Revolution"*

The drone, or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), and drone warfare, a term frequently used to capture the use of drones for strikes as well as ISR, figures large in the popular imagination of modern warfare, and in the U.S. military's speculation about the directions the warfare of the future is heading. Much of the attention paid to drone warfare since the post-9/11 uptick in their use has focused on the distance from which drones may be operated, with purportedly little to no risk to the drone's "pilot" and the wider assemblage that enables these operations. The rise of "precision warfare" conducted via drone, and the surveillance and concomitant projection of state power over vast spaces driven by the machinic capabilities of these purportedly "unmanned" systems, constitute key elements of the U.S. military's "Posthuman Project". The presumed presence of drones above targeted areas alone, regardless of their visibility from the ground, has been recognized to effect significant material change. Operations conducted transnationally and with dubious legality disrupt and reshape life patterns and targeted populations' – and drone operators' – modes of interacting with the environment (Amnesty International 2013; Coll 2014), and demonstrate little regard on the part of the United States for certain national boundaries or state sovereignty. In this way, state military power operates in apparently deterritorializing ways, and

state-aligned bodies have seemed, through use of these technologies, to eschew the vulnerabilities and technical limitations attendant with more “traditional” forms of warfare.

In 2016, funding for drones reached \$3 billion, and the number of drones owned by the Pentagon has exponentially increased since the year 2000 (Shaw 2016, 8). According to the Department of Defense, the U.S. defense budget request for fiscal year 2019 “revers[es] years of decline and unpredictable funding” by providing for a \$160 billion defense spending boost (U.S. DoD 2018). Noteworthy in this is the enormous increase of over \$2 billion from the previous year – that is, from \$7.5 billion to \$9.39 billion – that is set aside for “unmanned systems and associated technologies,” including 3,447 “air, ground, and sea drones” (Gettinger 2018, 1). As well as indicating serious military interest in procuring new UAVs, the FY 2019 request form reveals a strong investment in expanding research into and development of greater autonomy in weapons systems and more effective artificial intelligence, which is officially justified as in the interests of “maintain[ing] advantages over increasingly capable adversaries and competitors” (Work 2017, 1). DARPA’s “Aircraft and Vehicle IntegrAted Team” (AVIATE) program, a component of this renewed investment in the “unmanned,” is leading research into the integration of air and ground systems for the purpose of developing an “advanced capability Unmanned Air System (UAS) that is an organic extension of tactical ground vehicles” (DARPA 2018, 168), and is intended to push the boundaries of machine autonomy. The Reaper drone remains, as in years past, “the single largest drone budget item,” and \$43 million of the FY 2019 budget request is intended for “Special Operations Command [SOCOM] procurement and research funding for specialized payloads” (*ibid.*, 4).

Fast-growing ISR capabilities have required strong ties and indeed enmeshment with commercial, “civilian” entities in which lie the majority of expertise in machine learning. This has effected a noticeable blurring of long-held popular distinctions between the “military” and the “civilian”. Noteworthy in recent months for the attention it has drawn not just to nominally civilian corporation Google’s direct involvement in “the business of war,” but also to the DoD’s reliance on “public-private teamwork” (Peniston 2017) for such advances in drone-related development (Shane and Wakabayashi 2018; Conger and Cameron 2018; Pellerin 2017a), has been the public resistance of over 3,000 Google employees to the company’s involvement with Project Maven, a DoD initiative that saw artificial intelligence and machine learning research mobilized to improve analysis of drone video footage (Deahl 2018; Shane and Wakabayashi 2018). Project Maven, which made use of an “Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team” (Work 2017, 1; Pellerin 2017a) and

was considered the “pathfinder AI initiative for the DoD” (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2018, 1), would see its own program funding rise by 81% in FY 2019, to “over \$100 million” (Gettinger 2018, 1). As part of a modernization push by the DoD, funding has been allocated, too, for the procurement of 3,070 small drone systems. These smaller and more agile drone systems’ capabilities are likewise ISR-focused, centering around increasing the situational awareness of forces on the ground (and perhaps under the water as well, as in DARPA’s Ghost Fleet project (Gettinger 2018, 9)). These small drone and swarm systems are, like Project Maven, intended to make direct use of recent advances in civilian, commercial technological developments (Gettinger 2018, 3).

The budget request for 2019 promises to “preserve peace through strength” (Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller) 2018). As suggested in the General Atomics advertisement above, this is figured as the strength of military technological intelligence and capability that exceeds human limitation, subjectivity, and the capacity for error associated with these. The U.S. military and national security apparatus is invested materially and ideologically, then, in notions that drones may dwell where humans cannot; detect what human senses alone might not perceive; destroy targets with unprecedented precision; afford the U.S. state a likewise unprecedented ability to “know” any wider terrain; and even pre-empt threats before they emerge. However, in light of the apparently imprecise ways in which drones have been used and the disruption and devastation visited on the communities of targeted people for whom the drone can instead symbolize the constant threat of death (Amnesty International 2013; Hijazi et al 2017), the narrative of “surgical, sensitive, and scrupulous” drone warfare (Gregory 2012, 188) and the promise of an objective power to “detect” and “destroy” has been met with much skepticism<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, work done situating genealogies of the drone itself, and the wars waged through this technology, within a long and ongoing history of imperial reshaping, mapping, and controlling of spaces – aerial and otherwise (Kaplan 2006, 397) – points to the coloniality of this form of war that is often considered new (Gregory 2012).

The U.S. military relationship with air and space, which an examination of the drone and its imaginary can begin to reveal, has been built from and through particular linked histories of appropriation, exploitation, and genocide that blur the boundaries and binaries carved out by state

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance see Kilcullen, D. and Exum, A. (2009) “Death From Above, Outrage From Down Below,” *New York Times*; Rogers, J. (2017) “Drone Warfare: The Death of Precision,” *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*; Cavallaro, J. and Sonnenberg, S. (2012) “Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan,” Stanford Law School/New York University.

discourses between foreign and domestic, and war and peace. On one fundamental level, “the territoriality of the United States is composed out of lands to which Indigenous nations did and do assert claims” (Rifkin 2011, 343); to deny these claims and make basic assertions about the need to secure the United States as a nation state requires mobilization and institutionalization of hierarchizing processes that continuously reinscribe Man as the measure of what it means to be human. A key way in which this has been done is through uses of technologies and/of expansion – including now, the drone. Such technologies serve to “generate a specific sense of distance and space” (ibid.) that, due to their association with and production through techno-scientific processes, may come to be understood as objective, and aligned with progress and civilization. The white settler colonization of the North American continent and the production of a malleable “frontier”<sup>5</sup> germane to naturalizing and justifying expansionist violence required technological, and technologically-enabled, expansion “over unprecedented distances” (Kern 1983, 240 quoted in Kaplan 2006, 397). The construction of the white American nation state occurred with technology and rapidly expanding technological networks as the glue holding the nation together; technological development enabled the reproduction and cementation of this nation state and its constitutive social order at the same time as the nation state formed the context in which these developments could be framed as progressive, desirable, and necessary. The production of modernity itself rests on a presupposition and fantasy of perpetual expansion and guarding against perpetual threat, and entitlement to resources and bodies. Broadly speaking, the right of some to accumulation and extraction. This fantasy, as following sections and the next chapter will show, is legible in projections of the drone’s ISR capabilities as objective, theoretically free from limitation (Kaplan 2006; Wilcox 2015a), and pushing warfare and the state-aligned subject eventually, inevitably, into the posthuman.

Especially because drone warfare has been narrativized as “new” and is tied to technologies of massive data collection and uninterrupted surveillance, it has also often been associated with scientific, impartial objectivity (the camera does not lie). As a form of warfare, it is framed explicitly and implicitly as in some sense “discovered” through, or growing naturally out of, the use of this technology. Likewise, targets on the ground become “discovered” through the turning onto them of the drone’s objective lenses. These discourses suggest, as above, a continued trafficking by the military and state in notions of inevitable or “destined” progress that can occur through the use of advanced technologies and surveillance. The result of these discourses is not just attempted disavowal of subjectivity and the still-embodied nature of this “new” warfare that requires for its

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<sup>5</sup> For more discussion of the frontier, see chapter 4 on SOF deployments.

smooth operation a deep enmeshment of human bodies and minds (Wilcox 2017, 2015a; Masters 2018), but a disavowal of the embeddedness of this warfare in histories of the violent production of subjects and objects that set the conditions for warfare's – and the U.S. state's – possibility. Posthumanity becomes produced and claimed by the state through such assumptions and fantasies of deterritorialization, technological advancement and potentially unlimited expansion.

### *Drone Imaginaries*

So are humans becoming the weakest link in war? ... In the not too distant future, robots may be able to evaluate the consequences of their own actions. That empathy and compassion will be beyond them will hardly matter since both will be offset – or so we are assured – by what really counts: consistency of behaviour. Robots will not have prejudices. The reduction of inhumanity will balance the loss of humanity. (Coker 2013)

Coker's speculations above are typical of those made by military and military-affiliated personnel. DARPA has long worried over the inherent weaknesses of the human body, finding this to demand technological intervention and enhancement (Tether 2003, 12). The potential, and desire, for technologically-enabled limitlessness runs through work that addresses technological developments by the U.S. military. In conversation with *The Atlantic*, Geoffrey Ling, formerly of DARPA's Biological Technologies Office, spoke to the future-orientation that defines such developments:

“Let's say I gave you a third arm,” and then a fourth arm—so, two additional hands, he said. “You would be more capable; you would do more things, right?” And if you could control four hands as seamlessly as you're controlling your current two hands, he continued, “you would actually be doing double the amount of work that you would normally do. It's as simple as that. You're increasing your productivity to do whatever you want to do.” I started to picture his vision—working with four arms, four hands—and asked, “Where does it end?” “It won't ever end,” Ling said. “I mean, it will constantly get better and better—” (Gross 2018)

The more-than-human technologies developed and deployed by the U.S. military are understood to be inherently enabling for the subjects they are applied to, and for the U.S. military and state themselves. The fantasy at work in Ling's vision of constant improvement, for instance, is of limitlessness directly enabled by commitment to this vision by the military, which then becomes positioned as itself a capacitating institution. Crucially, as well, developments such as those referred to by Ling are frequently discussed in terms of their broader applicability – indeed, the military applications even in cases of technologies developed by the DoD are downplayed. “Enhancing the senses to gain superior advantage,” for instance, is quickly portrayed as merely “to do with

increasing a human's capability" (*ibid.*). A human will get "better and better" – capacitated with this military technology and "upgraded" (Lin 2012).

The drone, too, is fantasized to do this – to upgrade the human by conferring its inherent capabilities, and to upgrade war, and security, more generally. It capacitates actors with "godlike" abilities that enable more intervention over and into more spaces than ever before. And it makes war safer and more precise (Robinson et al 2014, 2; Hayden 2016). As Coker claims, robots, and machinery more broadly, do not have prejudices. The drone has become configured in much defense thought as encapsulating the ideal of superhuman capability without the weaknesses deemed inherent to the universalized human body. As former CIA director Michael Hayden framed it, "...the targeted killing program has been the most precise and effective application of firepower in the history of armed conflict. ... Unmanned aerial vehicles carrying precision weapons and guided by powerful intelligence offer a proportional and discriminating response when response is necessary" (Hayden 2016). The weaponry itself is again inscribed with more-than-human properties in Hayden's description. It offers a singular response to an otherwise messy political situation that seems itself to transcend the merely human nature of politics, and the whole "history of armed conflict".

The fantasy of objective perception – which enables the work done by allegedly precise weapons systems, and is both produced by and helps to produce the "powerful intelligence" mentioned by Hayden – is central to production of the drone imaginary, and builds up the military posthuman fantasy, which itself is built around a fantasy of technologically-enabled objectivity. The unblinking view from above, as the General Atomics advertisement suggests, allows the drone to collapse time and space in unprecedented ways. Because of the way that this collapsing happens through the production of data about targeted populations and spaces well outside the bounds of what human capability and earlier technologies have allowed, the fantasy suggests that such collapsing can be understood as essentially a breaking down of the previously obfuscated and mystified into their constitutive parts. Drone surveillance has famously supplied the U.S. military with such an abundance of information about surveilled spaces and people that analysts struggle to keep up with the processing labor required. When more more-than-human technology is proposed, as it often is, as the solution to this problem (in this case, the solution could be the application of "computer vision" to the data generated by drone surveillance) (Erwin 2014; Defense Industry Daily 2010), the drone's supposedly inherent capabilities and its use for such mass surveillance and targeting feature in the discussion as a matter of course.

In the course of this, the drone becomes reiterated as itself indicating what qualities may constitute being posthuman, instead of merely human. While the human subject remains involved in target assessment and analysis, this is at times presented as primarily a result of the current limitations to technology or, notably, what technology is presently “allowed to do”. Decisions about the use of force, according to Lieutenant Colonel Brendan Harris speaking to the *New York Times*, because they involve interpretation of sometimes unclear footage, are still best left to “the eyeball and the human brain” (Drew 2010). Throughout such assessment of the overloading of the U.S. military with drone-provided information to the point that analysts may be “drowning in data” (*ibid.*), however, the drone itself maintains unquestioned position: if it was unrestrained, the implication in these assessments goes, the real limitlessness and power of the drone would overwhelm human capacity.

Writing in 2004, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld summarized a conception of the U.S. in/and the world that has since become entrenched by the U.S. security state, and which the purported posthumanity of the drone reifies and stabilizes. Rumsfeld chastised then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers and Doug Feith, described as one of the architects of the Iraq War (Roth 2013), for using the phrase “preparation of the battlespace”. He argued, “In the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism], the entire world is the ‘battlespace’ in the old sense...” (Rumsfeld 2004) Likewise, as the *The 9/11 Commission Report* claimed, “the American homeland is the planet” – and this expansive homeland is facing threats that may emerge with unprecedented speed, with the potential for unprecedented destruction (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004, 362). The fantasy of limitless threat makes the demand for limitless response and immediately prefigures what this dissertation has theorized is the military posthuman of the Posthuman Project. In the specific case of drone warfare, the drone itself becomes configured as a necessary response to threat that is no longer bound to any one space, because of its inherent expansive surveillant and data production capabilities, strike potential, and imagined limitless mobility. This is a response that tethers the drone to the posthuman fantasy, and reinscribes its supposedly inherent capabilities as posthuman.

The drone’s imagined objective perception and ability to transgress national and geographical boundaries is highlighted best through consideration of the range of spaces in which it has been used by the U.S. This use powerfully reinforces the fantasy of limitlessness and technologically-enabled capability that motivates the Posthuman Project, and reiterates again what may constitute

being posthuman. It also performs a recursive function, shoring up the fantasy of the drone as a technology extraneous to politics, as it may appear bound not to any one place or another, and not bound necessarily even to war. From the beginning of President Obama's first term in office in 2008, up to the end of his second term in 2017, the U.S. conducted 563 airstrikes, "largely by drones," in Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan (Purkiss and Serle 2017). From January to April 2020 alone, in a context of escalating U.S. involvement in East Africa (Turse 2020b; Turse et al 2020), the U.S. conducted 39 drone strikes in Somalia (Eviatar 2020) nominally against the al-Shabaab group, but has directly killed upwards of 139 civilians since 2007 in the course of these operations (Turse 2020b). The 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force provides the umbrella under which these operations take place, and through which the U.S. may target "al-Qaeda-linked militants" unrestrained by geography (Watson and Peniston 2018; Keating 2018).

The use of drones domestically, within the bounds of the United States, makes up the other piece of this fantasy of limitlessness. Drones have been used by the Department of Homeland Security, created after 9/11, to patrol the U.S.-Canada border (McBride 2020). More media attention has lately been paid to the use of drones – including the Predator B drone – to surveil the U.S.'s border with Mexico (Ghaffary 2020; Schulz and del Bosque 2018; Fussell 2019; Shankland 2019; Boyce 2015), and the blurring of military technologies into those of policing. Expansive drone surveillance functions, according to activist Mana Azarmi, to extend the border, at least as far as the 100 miles inland that Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) may conduct stops and searches (Fussell 2019). State surveillance via drone frequently passes into Mexican territory as well, however, as found in recent cases with Texas' Department of Public Safety (Schultz and del Bosque 2018). Such uses of the drone arguably "make borders immaterial" (Fussell 2019), but drones are also used well inside the official boundaries of the U.S., raising more questions about how to conceive of this border, as this border is shifted by and for U.S. state power. In early summer of 2020, a CBP drone was found preparing to surveil protesters in Minneapolis, following the police murder of George Floyd (Koebler et al 2020), with indications of cooperation between federal authorities and local police (Stanley 2020). Soon after, as protests picked up across the U.S., DHS was confirmed to have "deployed helicopters, airplanes and drones over 15 cities," "logging at least 270 hours of surveillance" (Kanno-Youngs 2020).

The drone imaginary is built through the ways it is alleged to be exceptional, an agent of and for a future of unbound, more-than-human warfare that may offer to the warfighter its own inherent objectivity and limitlessness. The fantasy of the drone's ability to discover threat wherever it might

be is fueled by the deployments touched on above. Drones may become associated with more ambiguous, and for that more powerful, “security” instead of *only* war, as they are increasingly used outside of recognized war zones. The attachment of drones to security projects instead of only war-waging may help bolster the fantasies of their objective perception. Their border crossings and use outside of declared war zones likewise may reinforce not only the fantasy of a posthuman technologically-enabled limitlessness, but the notion of the American homeland as the planet, in an act that directly capacitates expansive future projections of U.S. force not tied to any one geopolitical location.

Breaking into this imaginary, Tyler Wall helpfully identifies the allegedly “spectacular” drone as instead “firmly situated within already existing ‘ordinary’ architectures of security, policing, war, and surveillance, such as patrols, helicopters, CCTV, stakeouts, checkpoints, raids, and forms of violence, as well as the political economies of racial differentiation” (2016, 1123). This summary is useful in suggesting how the posthuman and Posthuman Projects themselves may be understood: as tools of and for U.S. state power, which draw much force from such imaginaries as the drone described above, and which are built through fully grounded dynamics that have produced a particular social order that is neither inevitable nor natural.

Reading the drive to a full-spectrum military dominance as built out of the bedrock of the United States and its production of nation space, this chapter next examines the ways in which the categories and hierarchizing through which drone warfare and the Posthuman Project take shape are always already rooted in race-making and gendering processes. Claims by some scholars regarding a new individuation of warfare being driven by increasingly “precise” technologies and weaponry are complicated by an approach that takes this into account. New technologies and practice have surely enabled a significant expansion of warfare and its attendant surveillance and attempts at control of both large populations and individuals. However, the history of the United States and its military apparatuses, not least because they emerged through the making of malleable territory out of land and human bodies, points to shifting but nevertheless unbroken lineages of violent logics that indicate that the underlying processes of white supremacy have never been disrupted, and, importantly, that “new” forms of warfare may shore up and naturalize these in the production of targets both “legitimate” and “illegitimate”. The picture, in this view, is less of a new and truly individuated warfare, but of a continuing large-scale generalization of place and people carried out through the drone’s gaze and military data-production, all enabled and driven

by the construction of race and gender, and the assigning of these in ways that produce valued or devalued lives.

*Drone Surveillance and Individual Histories*

Much has been made of the slogans circulating around armed drones such as the Predator and the Reaper. These promise, for example, to “put warheads on foreheads” (Gregory 2017, 27; 2015; 2012; Mulrine 2008), in reference to the drone’s use as a tool of “personalized killing” (Freedman 2017, 242). This is framed, as before, as due to the drone’s own inherent ability to “dwell” above battlespaces long enough to ensure operators gather enough intelligence to carry out the state’s aims in a precise way. The “dwelling, detecting, and destroying” is marked by, and indeed seems to necessitate, an apparently new intimacy with targeted individuals and areas. This is afforded by the drone’s “persistent stare” (Mulrine 2008) and ability to gather objective data. Affording the military apparatus the ability to detect threat before it can become harm, the use of drones for this kind of predictive, algorithmical, and “clean” warfare secures the entire military assemblage as well as the state that deploys it through its operation. By setting this up in opposition to relatively “low-tech” indiscriminate bombing, the drone and the apparatus behind it become characterized as progressive, “civilized,” and arguably *civilizing* elements of the new technologized warfare conducted by the United States. “Drone warfare” and all that it entails becomes the natural, and indeed necessary, choice for a civilized nation that must wage rational war. In this view, the fact that warfare has become “individuated” – in which warheads are aimed at the foreheads of legitimate targets that are detected through the use of objective, data-gathering machines – signals progress as well, and signals a technologized step toward leaving behind human subjectivity and its capacity for error.

The particular uses of the drone by the United States, however, and the drone’s effects as far as the production of territory and populations point to the exclusionary specificities of the subjects, objects, and targets in play, revealing race-making and gendering as inherent to the process of war-waging via drone. “Individuation” of warfare, by raising the specter of modernity’s “individual,” not only makes too much of the technical precision of the process of targeting and the machine itself, but, more importantly, rests on presumptions about gender, race, the body, and geopolitics more broadly that finally have the effect of “flattening” who is captured by the drone’s lens in order to bring them in line with these presumptions – making them “legible” and disciplined into

modernity's register<sup>6</sup>, and enlisting them to perform, in turn, a ratification of the technology and its uses.

While the increased targeting of individual bodies (for instance through the processes leading to so-called “signature strikes”) might be used to point to a turn away from acting on and through spaces, the Posthuman Project is deeply enmeshed and invested in territorialization, even as it is built off of a fantasy of deterritorialization. The mapping out of territories and populations to be known and managed marks an attempt to continuously construct a figurative and more literal “frontier” that works as a seemingly-natural and inevitable divide between inside and outside, civilized and savage, white and black. However, further examination reveals this to be a complex and contradictory process that is deeply invested both in myths of stark, fixed natural differences and in the highly malleable and – with the right technology in the right hands – manipulable. The formation of expansionist ideology and materiality in U.S. history, and its key place in the construction of the U.S. military and the white nation-state itself, echo in the way that the drone and its ISR capabilities now extend U.S. power over both nominally foreign and domestic spaces. In the course of flattening, regulating, and constructing territories emptied of futurity – totally antithetical to the posthuman of the Posthuman Project – these spaces may be manipulated to shore up the troubled borders of U.S. empire and subjecthood.<sup>7</sup>

The individual – which in this case includes both the targeted and targeter of drone warfare – is widely understood to be key to the uniqueness of the drone's ISR operations in history. Advanced technology that can “dwell” and “detect” on behalf of human operators has enabled a narrowing of the battlespace to the “intimate” and fully known, and appears to have moved warfare away from blunt force and wide-scale destruction and into something more in keeping with the mores of modern civilization. To particularize the history of the United States and of “modernity” itself, however, the context within which these operations are carried out and in which the posthuman category has been formulated, means unearthing power dynamics often covered over by heavily technologized warfare. It means drawing attention to the ways that this warfare and its presuppositions in fact reproduce violences that were foundational to the establishment of the United States, and which emerge as likewise foundational to techno-scientific warfare.

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<sup>6</sup> For discussion on the notion of legibility and illegibility that informs my use of the term here, see Butler, J. (2004) *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* and (2009) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*

<sup>7</sup> The next chapter investigates the production of space in drone warfare at length.

The formation of the individual human here is the starting point for critique because the presumptions of it remain in much critical work, and mean critique is constrained from the beginning in addressing the extent of the violence done by drone warfare. The individual human took shape as modernity's active subject, the doer and driver of progress as well as its product, and the holder of property and rationality that first marked this individual as eligible for "civilization". Sylvia Wynter's Man formulation captures this highly particular "genre" of humanity that has since lived on as the dominant measure of what it is to be human, and as a universalized stand-in for "human being" despite its historical particularity and hierarchizing exclusivity (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 10; Weheliye 2014a, 139 n.3). 18<sup>th</sup> century European race science reflected, naturalized, and lent scientific legitimacy to the presumption of white male universality, a universality built up through the very process of race- and gender-making. This occurred, for instance, through global studies by European researchers of race, involving measurement of men's skulls (Schiebinger 1993, 148). The growing scientific study of women, on the other hand, revolved around "sexual traits," in which "the middle-class [western] European female" was constructed as a "paragon of piety and purity" and of natural complementarity to the European man (*ibid.*, 159). This provided scientific justification for a privileging of European men's reason, gaze, ideas and categories-construction that set the conditions of possibility for an "Enlightened" masculine human subject to come into being. An effect of this was a simultaneous production of an "outside," which could be deliberately harnessed to shape the contours of the inside. As above, the complementary western European woman performed part of this function for the European man.

However, Schiebinger's examinations of the history of gendered science point toward the primary place of race in this production of the "modern" and its subject. For those studying human physiology and difference, "the male body dominated studies of race" as the general "default," and "the European body dominated studies of sex." Meanwhile, the new "valorized womanhood/gentle motherhood" formation "applied only to Europeans" (*ibid.*, 160). With "females in general...considered a sexual subset of their race" in this construction of gender, non-European women were set in a place outside of not only "the ideal," but were made illegible in the western European coding of gender. Within this history, which still shapes understandings of science itself, technological development, gender, race, and what it is to be human (Hoffman et al 2016; Roeder 2019; Alsan and Wanamaker 2018; Noble 2018), femaleness and non-whiteness figure as paradoxically coherent and incoherent outsides to a coherent and cohesive "inside" of white maleness, with its intrinsic rationality, power, and perfectibility. This imaginary perfectible

figure, rooted in white supremacy and intrinsically invested in the subjugation of other forms of knowledge and ways of being, is most cogently captured in Wynter's Man formulation, and forms the base and jumping off point for the posthuman.

Understanding drone warfare to enable an individualizing, and in every sense more targeted, approach to conducting warfare both plays into the myths of "precision" that circulate in drone- and autonomous warfare-related discourse, and serves to obscure greater structural effects and dynamics at play in the ISR work done by drones, down to the process of targeting. The individual is only targeted, and the drone's gaze only works, through structuring violences that condition military actions firstly, and decisions made about drone warfare more specifically. These violences, I argue, work to strip away individuality both in the over-exposing<sup>8</sup> of those targeted, and the mobilization of racializing and gendering assemblages that flatten particularity to favor the algorithmic pre-configurations of what comes through the lens. This serves to construct boundaries that lend the United States, the military, and whiteness a seeming coherence, legitimated by scientific processes that masquerade as objective. The drone's capability of "dwelling" in the sky above targeted regions is touted to mean that not only does it enable the collection of intimate knowledge about geographic areas, but about targeted populations, their movements, relationships, and habits. This striking mix of very "broad" and very "deep" knowledge produced about a particular space appears to signal that with the kind of surveillance enabled by the drone, warfare has become increasingly predictive as well as "individuated": that the individual body, tracked by the "persistent stare" (Mulrine 2008) and "totally known" (Wilcox 2015a, 147) by the military apparatus can become the target of precise, "intelligent" strikes. To follow the logic of this framing, the individual remains the ultimate target even in the case of "broad" surveillance, as this data collection is intended to better understand, predict, and intercept the targeted individual who is produced through this surveillance as a threat. Gregoire Chamayou (2015) describes this warfare as essentially a "preventive manhunt," in which, crucially, the technical precision of a strike is not the greatest issue at hand. Instead, the greater importance lies in the targeting itself, and in decisions about who to cast the surveillant net over (143).

Given the weight held by popular and official claims about the increasing precision of warfare and the apparently new intimacy afforded by the drone's persistent gaze, recent critical work such as Chamayou's takes seriously the impacts of drone ISR on the individual, and in producing an individual along with a wider environment. But emphasizing the making of individuals to be

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<sup>8</sup> For discussion of racializing over-exposure, see Browne (2015), *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*.

targeted, and indeed making claims about a new individuation of warfare, risks eliding the racializing and gendering processes involved in this, and undervaluing how deeply structuring race and gender themselves truly are, and how intrinsic to the work done with the drone. It risks, in short, fetishizing the drone, the operators, and the targets of drone warfare, siloing them off from the socio-political processes through which they emerge at all, and may even come to be understood as natural and inevitable. Critical work on the drone-as-semblage helps direct the conversation away from some of these pitfalls. To recognize the drone as a *racializing* assemblage (Weheliye 2014a) goes further in capturing the drone-as-historical-artifact. But greater attention to context that does not stop at the history of the use of drones or individual targeting specifically, and a more critical look at the posthuman figure itself, may push this analysis of drone violence further. In seeking to do this, this chapter next conducts a critique of some of the better known recent critical work on the drone, highlighting the way that fantasies of white supremacy, if left unchallenged and unexcavated, may not only shape and drive the way that drone ISR is conducted, but limit the analyses of feminist work and constrain feminist imaginations of liberation.

### *The Drone in Context and Scholarship*

Contrary to claims made about the drone's place as a singular tool capable of superhuman or inhuman(e) technological feats, the drone is always already embedded in a particular context. The lens of the drone understood as *a priori* structuring what it will be turned on reflects this contextualizing analysis, and draws attention to the particularity of the machine and its uses, and, more broadly, points to the importance of understanding "war as a social practice" (Masters 2018, 365). For instance, Chamayou places the drone and its borderless "predation" in a long history of manhunts, and calls the drone "the weapon of an amnesiac postcolonial violence" (2015, 95). He argues that this technology has now drastically changed the post-9/11 landscape of warfare by shifting the paradigm to one of antiterrorism instead of counterinsurgency; in effect, the paradigm is shifted to one that is "individual-centered" and fundamentally about "policing and security" (*ibid.*, 67-69), in ways that indicate "nonstrategic" thought and the "abandon[ment of] any real analysis of the roots of hostility and its own effects upon it" (*ibid.*, 69). Using drones has made war radically asymmetrical and ended any hope of reciprocity in warfare by placing drone operators so far away both figuratively and literally from the bloody realities of warfare. Chamayou suggests that this undermines the configuration of the soldier as it had taken shape within a context of "traditional" warfare, and has led to a "crisis in military ethos" and anxiety over what constitutes "warrior virtue" (*ibid.*, 99, 100).

For Chamayou to occupy analysis with concern over what constitutes military ethos, “warrior virtue,” and heroism, however, leads to an analysis that, in spite of its interest in the drone’s place in the history of warfare, pays inadequate attention to the socio-political construction of the drone itself, the inextricable embeddedness of human bodies in the drone assemblage, and the warfare that it is used to wage. Chamayou’s historical analysis sits in tension with what he claims implicitly and explicitly that “the drone” itself is doing, for instance in radically altering the way that soldiers see themselves, and in its alteration of the wider landscape of warfare. This analysis ultimately positions “the drone” as a singular tool extraneous to its context, nearly super-imposed on a battle space from outside, in a way not dissimilar to the drone of the General Atomics advertisement. This drone features as an inhuman(e) super-object (or perhaps even super-subject) bearing beyond-human capabilities that the soldier opts into, and by doing so is either made “more than human,” or re-configured in such a way that notions such as soldiering and warfare, allegedly previously coherent, are now destroyed.

While Chamayou’s critique pays little explicit mind to gender’s, or race’s, place in the reconfiguration he theorizes, recent critical feminist work emphasizes gender and gendering processes in the context of drone warfare. Some similar problems arise within the analyses, however, leading to work that arguably provides ideological and scholarly cover for the kind of raced and gendered violences carried out with the drone. Cara Daggett’s 2015 analysis of the body of the drone proceeds from the popular contention that drone warfare is “unmanned” in order to make claims that the drone may offer a possible new “queer” “disorientation” of presumed-stable categories of being, gender, and warfare. The analysis, like other critical work that takes gender seriously and interrogates war as a social practice, does helpfully “reveal the constructed, contingent, fluid and contested nature of hegemonic subject positions in high-tech warfare” (Masters 2018, 364). Daggett calls the drone a “genderqueer body” that is “illegible” within binary frames of femininity vs. masculinity, intimacy vs. distance, human vs. machine (2015, 362-364). This analysis draws attention to power relations missing in Chamayou’s historical examination of the drone and hunting/killing from a distance, and points toward a key feature of the Posthuman Project itself, which is examined in more detail in chapters to come: the way that certain relationships and forms of relationality – interpersonal, as well as between people and technology, and people and the U.S. state – come to be encouraged and ratified by the state, as they shore up its power and constitutive hierarchies. However, Daggett’s analysis stops short of fully recognizing violent structural dynamics, or at least giving them meaningful consideration. She argues that the

“genderqueer body” of the drone in fact offers some “strategic hope” (Daggett 2015, 363) that warfare and gender (race, while briefly mentioned, does not meaningfully feature in the analysis) might be queered or reoriented to such an extent that the politics of the drone might eventually become a liberatory politics. This bears similarities to feminist analyses of the posthuman that theorize it as a potentially hopeful figure because it blurs boundaries between human and machine and nature and culture, and because it is a figure that can highlight the relationality between the masculinist, bounded subject and the wider environment that shapes it, and which it shapes (e.g., Haraway 1984).

However, both of these theories – of the drone and of the posthuman –, like Chamayou’s analyses, do not account for structural context to the extent that the conclusions drawn do appear to be those of only “blinker hope” (Daggett 2015, 363). Most noticeably in the drone’s case, this analysis appears to overlook the destruction, regulation and objectification of always-violently racialized and gendered bodies, and the expansion of imperial power that the drone was built by and for. Situating the drone and the wider drone assemblage in context – the colonial context of mastery of space that Chamayou (2015), Kaplan (2006), and Gregory (2012) recognize – necessarily pulls attention to the dynamics the drone is meant to, and does, reproduce and maintain. While the body and subjectivity are constituted by technology (Wilcox 2015a, 137) and in this case constituted by drone technology that can in some ways disorient and disturb taken-for-granted hierarchies and categorizations, this remains a co-constitution. The bodies and ideas integrated into the machinery of war – the drone assemblage – are integrated into machinery that is still not “unhinged” from the “hegemonic articulations of power and knowledge” that they represent and fortify (Masters 2005, 129; see also Jackson 2015, 217). Recent work that interrogates the drone’s “gaze” and the act of targeting and knowledge production about “threat” demonstrates this: the production of a “killable” population or target occurs through a gaze and framework of knowledge that is unavoidably raced and gendered, and racializing and gendering for the targeted as well as those directing the drone and doing the targeting (Wilcox 2017). Bodies and subjectivities are likewise not “unhinged” from these articulations of power and knowledge. While they may struggle with the meaning of “heroism,” “soldiering,” or what it means to be a man, the people involved at any level in the drone assemblage remain produced by and through the violences and exclusions that likewise produce the socio-political milieu in which “posthumanity” and “killing from a distance” become seen as ideal, and indeed a moral necessity.

This draws analytic attention to the posthuman as it is configured in the work of some critical feminist scholars. This posthuman, with its blurry/blurring boundaries, its “always-becoming” and deep entanglement with the environment around it, is used in some scholarship to describe drone operators and those involved in the drone assemblage (Wilcox 2015a), in recognition of how deeply embedded – physically, mentally, and emotionally – those involved are. This recognition usefully puts to rest the fantasy of “unmanned” warfare, as it accounts for the ongoing necessity of human bodies and subjectivity for the production of the drone itself, materially and as a cultural object, and for the prosecution of drone warfare. It likewise challenges claims made by scholars such as Chamayou about the “individuation” of warfare, which presumes discrete bodies in space acting upon each other. It claims instead the non-extraneousness of any body, or the drone, from the environment, from nature, culture, gender, and race. This posthuman theory works to undo the fantasy of the binary and the singular and, when used along with analyses that take into account racializing processes and race-making, move the discussion more firmly into territory that allows for examination of the violence done even in cases of apparent “disorientation,” as Daggett terms it. Taking relationality and the sociality of warfare and the posthuman seriously means recognizing the “disoriented” or “emasculated” drone operator as nevertheless an agent of violence, and product and producer of raced and gendered violence that continues to fabricate a white supremacist social order. The politics of drone warfare are not a politics of hope unless one proceeds from the point of view that the broader Posthuman Project is also a potentially liberatory one. Because this Project, drone warfare, and the posthuman as mobilized in feminist literature above all are rooted in or find their jumping off points in the human as Man – in this unexcavated, violent configuration –, these might appear at best to offer hope of liberation only to some. Meanwhile, they certainly reiterate and reinforce the dynamics and social order that make life livable only within very particular “frames” and foreclose upon any number of other ways of living (Butler 2004, 2009).

### *Conclusion*

The drone imaginary, and vision of a posthuman future of military invulnerability and total control over bodies, space, and time is built through the fantasy of ever-present outside threat to the infrastructures of whiteness, an ever-expanding and changeable nation space, and the human, race, and gender as regulating concepts in themselves. The fantasy of the military posthuman, then, should be understood as a fantasy of contradictorily expanding and contracting racialized and gendered threat that is destined to be tamed, known, and controlled by a white, masculine, and

imperial state uniquely suited to Reason and authority. The drone is used in ways that moreover do not only racialize and gender subjects, but continuously reproduce the categories of gender and race that undergird white fantasies of “total surveillance in the interests of management” (Wilcox 2015a, 147), through which the United States comes into being as coherent at all.

While representations of the drone in U.S. government discourses are crucial in projecting the fantasy of unmanned, remote warfare, and some scholarly critiques may also contribute to the fetishization of the drone, these discourses only partially render this fantasy. The production of the Posthuman Project and its constitutive categories, human and posthuman, occurs, as suggested above, through a targeting process. But more so than the individualizing process that Chamayou, for instance, theorizes, this is a siting process. As the Posthuman Project is deeply invested in territorialization (which may appear, through technologies such as the drone, as deterritorialization), and as the drone itself emerges out of its particular geopolitical context, the production of space is vital to how the drone becomes a crystallization of power, and how drone warfare works to reproduce categories of human and posthuman. The following chapter examines drone warfare as space-making.

## Chapter 2: Killing Space

### *Introduction*

*“In order for history to take place, it takes place.”* – George Lipsitz (2014, 227)

This chapter examines space as it is produced by and for the drone through an interpretation of an already widely-interpreted incident: the Uruzgan, Afghanistan massacre of February 2010. Three vehicles surveilled for hours via Predator drone as they traveled first generally toward, and later away, from a U.S. special operations “A-team” on the ground were alleged by operators in Nevada to be carrying only insurgents – “military-age men” – that posed an imminent threat to the team (Cloud 2011; Filkins 2010). Despite indications that analysts had pointed out children visible in the convoy (Filkins 2010), drone operators’ own interpretation of the event that overrode any doubt about taking lethal action was that the convoy and the people in the vehicles could only be in the area precisely because U.S. forces were in the area.

As the convoy drove away from the team’s position, the drone operators eagerly prepared to shoot individuals who might run from the helicopter attack that came shortly before 9:00 that morning. The attack resulted in the death of 23 Afghan civilians who made up the passengers of the targeted vehicles, a result directly enabled by the drone surveillance that continued over the scene even after it became clear the passengers had posed no threat to ground forces (Cloud 2011)<sup>9</sup>. This chapter revisits this massacre by drawing on the lessons of the previous chapter, and foregrounds how making and naturalizing race and gender is a crucial function of the drone assemblage. This occurs during, and enables, a process of producing “killable” targets on a ground that has been *a priori* constructed through a process of territorialization as a legitimate target for the drone’s gaze: this territorialization works to produce this space as, effectively, the very source material for the “killable”. The drone is widely understood as a tool that collapses time and space through its expansive “gaze,”<sup>10</sup> and through relationships to these that are engendered in drone operators and others in the kill chain, in a continuation of historical trends in aerial war-waging.<sup>11</sup> As critical literature has argued at multiple points as well (Kaplan 2018; Kindervater 2016; Bousquet 2018; Gregory 2014b; Wall 2016), drone warfare has amplified a trend already long present in U.S.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Derek Gregory’s detailed 2020 blog posts on the subject; also Wilcox 2017; Cloud 2014; Gregory 2012.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Caren Kaplan (2018) *Aerial Aftermaths* and Derek Gregory (2014b) “Lines of Descent”.

warfare: the narrowing down more often of targeting to individuals, and more mobile targets, rather than static ones like places, through use of increasingly advanced technologies that enable greater precision.

However, the racialization of space itself vitally contributes to the making possible of such deadly outcomes. In the name of the preemption that drives the tracking of individuals and days-long hovering over potential targets, the drone is used to construct a massified targetable area of always-imminent threat. Marking out targetable space through the drone assemblage lends coherence and acceptability ultimately even to “mistakes” such as the Uruzgan massacre, in which the drone operators’ initial excuse for confirming civilians as “combatants” – that there was “no way to tell from here” the gender and age of the people who had been followed in their vehicles – avoids bigger questions about the politics that led to such a possibility. The relationship between gender, race, and the production of space is vital to the sense-making of the Posthuman Project broadly, and specifically here to how and why the drone has become the tool and emblem it has. Scholarship that ties the drone to an ostensibly newly atomized form of warfare, emphasizing a new individualization of warfare enabled by drone and other advanced technologies risks eliding, not dissimilarly from the drone operators themselves, what politics of space directly make possible these outcomes.

This chapter argues that space and the wider environment must already be constructed as racialized and gendered in order to make acceptable all kinds of drone violence, including the “mistaken”; that contrary to scholarship focusing on individualization, spaces remain necessary targets that enable the possibility of putting “warheads on foreheads”; and that this serves to naturalize ways of seeing and “knowing” that help to keep intact white supremacy and constitutive fantasies of technologically-ratified objectivity and inevitability. All of these dynamics provide groundwork for the military’s Posthuman Project, because the supposedly natural and inevitable nature of posthumanity that may be attained through integration with advanced technology is a crucial part of what makes the Project compelling as a goal and explanatory tool for U.S. empire.

As this chapter suggests, the production of racialized and gendered space specifically by and for the drone also speaks to the investment of the Posthuman Project in national expansion and security, mediated and naturalized through the mobilization and construction of advanced technology. As this Project, and the categories interrogated here, such as human, posthuman, interior and exterior, security and insecurity, are never fixed, but instead are contradictory, mutually

productive, and fundamentally contingent, space must also be examined as contested ideological and physical terrain. The relationship between gender and race is examined and clarified below in order to demonstrate the way that space has functioned to produce the targetable and killable inside the official bounds of the United States, as well as outside, and to highlight this as fundamentally technological. Categories of gender and race, and the exclusionary configuration of the human have their roots in particular configurations of space, and historically have had their sense made through space, that is, through different spatializations of gendered and racialized subjects. Race-making, gendering, and the marking out of “human” and “non-human” subjects through spatializing practices were vital to the material and ideological production of the structures and power of the United States, and a pillar of the United States’ and its “rightful” subjects’ sense-making. Reading gender as historically and presently a tool of racial domination, and space as from the beginning constructed through formations of race and gender, reveals that there is more happening in cases like the Uruzgan massacre than a mobilization of gendered assumptions and/or racializing processes that complement and work alongside each other to produce targets. Instead and more precisely, this case – in the operators’ techno-mediated and affect-driven judgments based primarily on information gathered from the drone’s surveillance systems – not only demonstrates how embodied supposedly unmanned warfare is, as critical scholars have claimed, but it can reveal the crucial role race plays in producing gender, and how the raced history of gender and space in the U.S. context allowed the actions and judgements of the drone operators to be considered sensical – even if wrong in the end.

The drone and its purportedly limitless vision, and the algorithmic decisions made in drone warfare that are enabled, constructed, and reviewed by human bodies occur in the ways they do because they are spatial, embedded in a context riven through with values that masquerade as universal. Technologies such as the drone reflect and further entrench and seem to naturalize exclusionary configurations of the human and posthuman, because of the way that technology functions and what it represents in the military context, and broader U.S. context.

The political production of the nation space of the United States and, in particular, the key role of the fantasy of the “frontier” and national borders as manipulable and flexible are echoed in the current production of space via drone, and are examined below. Just as the U.S. required race, gender, and a restricted notion of the human in order to take shape in ways both cohesive and malleable, so too do the new frontiers produced through and indeed *for* the drone’s gaze. Historically, the American frontier – its boundaries as well as the practice of it (Grandin 2019, 41-

42) – has served as a means of, and resulted from, sorting and categorizing bodies as risky, less risky, and non-risky, or as assimilable/domesticatable, or not (Puar 2007, 47) through technologies including those of race and gender. The production of nation has been a project of territorialization of not just land, but of bodies (McKittrick 2006, 44-45, 123), through the process of which not just the nation-state and its human – or posthuman – subject comes to be known, but what does not belong, and the non-human, comes to be known as well. Or rather, these have knowledge produced about them; the “knowing” and implication that there is an ongoing discovery of threat remains an illusion, and a crucial part of the fantasy of techno-scientific objectivity. The mapping out, surveilling, and controlling of territory in present-day drone wars repeats this colonial process: in the making-territory of the bodies and spaces “captured” by drone vision, the posthuman seems to come into view. Building this particular imperial world vision, the drone effects a contradictory incorporation – capturing – and expulsion of racialized people as it lethally reiterates the racialization and gendering of space itself. The technologically-mediated and fortified naturalization and projection of techno-imperial inevitability ultimately extends to the concept of the posthuman itself. The state’s technological advancement, change, and power take on a sheen of inevitability – indeed “destiny” – in this military posthuman frame. But perhaps more importantly, posthumanity comes to be seen as a moral imperative, necessary for technological progress, not least because this is claimed to be universal human advancement.

Looking through this framework at Uruzgan reveals that the “world vision” of the Posthuman Project, with its emphasis on limitlessness, remains rooted in the dynamics that were always alive in the land that was made territory of the United States – territory that military actions and practice work to extend beyond the formal boundaries of the state. Within the literature critical of drone warfare, approaches like Ian Shaw’s, which propose a “more-than-human” nature of technologies such as the drone (2016, 39) and conclude with warnings about atomizing technologies impeding political possibility (165-167, 171), and Chamayou’s (2014), with its focus on individualization, risk eliding the politics of race, gender, and the human that structure and drive the production and construction of technologies like the drone, including the fantasies of the drone’s ability to effect a collapse of time and space that facilitates preemptive warfare. They likewise miss the way that spaces have been and remain a primary tool of sense-making for, and a primary target for, US imperialism and the production of the posthuman, as these are never divorced from race-making and gendering processes. With behaviors, subjectivity, race, and gender always spatially oriented and situational (Ahmed 2018, 384), space matters enormously and fundamentally. The dividing up of space through the drone’s gaze in this case, but through the martial gaze and lens of imminent

threat more generally, directly enables what Chamayou and Shaw identify as a move toward individualized warfare, and enables the demarcating of targets and targeters. Further to this, and bringing the nominally “foreign” and “domestic” together, there is more evidence of this found in the way that even the “homeland,” a notion intended to evoke belonging and a sense of unity, is divided up into racialized space that is used to justify and drive practices of domination and extraction (Byrd et al 2018; Ansfield 2015, 133). To demonstrate the above, this chapter works systematically through the relationship between race and gender, between these and the production of space, and then returns to how the drone figures into this as a vital piece of the Posthuman Project, with the Uruzgan massacre as its focal point.

*Race → Gender*

In the transcript of the drone operators’ discussion leading up to, during, and following the massacre, one aspect that has drawn the attention of critical scholars (Wilcox 2017; Gregory 2020a, b, c; Kindervater 2017) is the uncertainty evident in those surveilling the convoy as it moves towards and away from the location of the U.S. special forces, but also the eagerness to call in a strike. Taking their cue from the special forces who shortly after 5:00 indicated “intent...to destroy the vehicles and personnel” (Cloud 2011) because of their relatively close proximity and because the vehicles met up from different locations, the drone assemblage coheres around the goal of positively identifying a threat coming from the convoy that would justify a strike. There is debate about the “killability” of the convoy passengers, and the convoy as a legitimate target. At 5:15, a Predator pilot and camera operator debate whether they can see a rifle in one of the vehicles, whether it is something else, or even just a warm spot: “Can’t really tell right now, but it does look like an object,” the camera operator says. In response, the drone pilot says, “I was hoping we could make a rifle out.” When screeners in Florida providing extra eyes on the situation relay to the drone pilot and camera operator the presence of “one or more children in the group,” both react with frustration. “Why didn’t he say ‘possible’ child? Why are they so quick to call kids but not to call a rifle.” The camera operator responds, “I really doubt that children call. Man, I really ... hate that.” When the convoy begins driving away from the ground forces’ location, it is interpreted as an attempt to flank them. An Army officer, according to this same investigation (Cloud 2011), would later describe the perspective of those involved in the massacre this way: “We all had it in our head, ‘Hey, why do you have 20 military age males at 5 a.m. collecting each other?’ ... There can be only one reason, and that’s because we’ve put [U.S. troops] in the area.” For their part, the special operations troops in question indicated to the drone crew via radio that they wanted the

convoy to come as close as possible in anticipation of the helicopter attack – “We want to take out the whole lot of them.”

The attack process’ clear reliance on subjective judgment and assumption on the part of those involved at all levels in the assemblage, or “kill chain,” does much to reveal technological objectivity, or greater accuracy supplied by advanced technology, as fantasy. It also, as asserted by scholars such as Lauren Wilcox (2017; 2015a; 2015b), reveals how the drone assemblage acts through and on bodies, and requires bodies to take its own shape. This is contra popular ideas about drone warfare as “disembodied” and essentially “placeless,” as claims about the drone’s limitlessness and ability to collapse time and space might suggest. Far from an “abstract, purely technical exercise” (Gregory 2014, 42), drone warfare, as legible in the case of Uruzgan, traffics in the desires and presumptions of the people embedded in the kill chain. The drone, Sabeen Ahmed writes, “has become the paradigmatic weapon of preventive warfare, serving as a tool of both surveillance and execution, identification and elimination” (2018, 396). The desire of the drone operators to preempt attack by authorizing an attack by U.S. forces themselves despite uncertain evidence that the convoy passengers posed an imminent threat was a decisive factor in the massacre. Regardless of how advanced recent surveillance technology is, feminist critiques of the drone assemblage point to the basic, persistent requirement for human subjectivity in drone warfare, from the literal ground up, in judging targets as legitimate or illegitimate, killable or not. As Cloud’s 2011 investigation notes, some involved in the massacre were eventually disciplined, more training was instated, and the massacre was blamed on “misreading” of the situation.

The “misreading” of convoy passengers and whether they constituted a threat was motivated, however, and legible in the clear desire expressed by operators to identify them as an imminent threat. The “reading” of bodies happens, as Wilcox (2017) explains, in order to produce legitimate targets and legitimate violence – it does this through “construction of certain bodies as threatening,” not necessarily based on information gathered about them (as information decisively pointing to the passengers as a threat never existed), but more due to “a desire to make bodies into what we already know they must be.” This “algorithmic” targeting happens as it does, and drone warfare more generally has taken the shape it does, because of “affective relationships” that work to corporealize threat (21, 22); desired evidence of the existence of threat is picked out, and evidence to the contrary is screened out (23).

The relationship between gender and race in this case, which speaks to the investments of drone warfare, is visible throughout the incident in the ways that those acting in the drone assemblage discuss, debate, and manage uncertainty and their desire to positively identify a target that can be “taken out” by the U.S. military. As they “read” the convoy passengers at 7:30, debate ensues about the age of the children that screeners had spotted among the group and, even more tellingly, about who can be considered a child. Following the massacre, investigating officer Major-General Timothy McHale was told repeatedly that “age had a different meaning in Afghanistan,” and “that the definitions of adolescent ‘for Americans versus Afghans are completely different’” (Gregory 2020a, 2020c). During this investigation, Lieutenant Colonel Petit, battalion commander at Kandahar’s Special Operations Task Force-South, revealed more about how people were “read” by U.S. forces, both in the context of this massacre and more generally. Relying on “civilian” designation meant little, as Gregory (2020b) notes in his summary: “the Taliban are civilians too” in the interpretation of many in the military. Petit clarifies this (*ibid.* n78): regardless of whether the passengers were men, women, or children, they could still be “a threat to us” or could indeed be “innocent noncombatant civilians”. Both women and children are often considered less of a threat in military contexts (as indicated by the ubiquitous “military age male” target), but logic like the above and justifications for a “different” way of looking and judging Afghan people in this situation suggest the primary place of race in the gendered and gendering calculations made by those in the kill chain. The “feeling” and desire so heavily leaned upon by the crew in order to make determinations about threat, and later to legitimize lethal actions taken, are ratified because the drone assemblage and advanced technology is so central to the “preventive military paradigm” (Ahmed 2018, 383), and because in the world of embodied relations here, those who can claim incorporation into and affiliation with the military assemblage experience a kind of “protection” denied to the women and children racialized as threats.<sup>12</sup>

As feminist scholars have long contended, war and gender mutually construct each other (de Volo 2018; Khalili 2011; Masters 2005; Goldstein 2001). Specifically, drone warfare produces targets on the ground in part through a gendering process the complexity of which has led to discussions about the “unmanning,” or possible emasculation of, military actors who were traditionally and popularly understood to be, if anything, hypermasculine. As touched upon in the previous chapter, Chamayou (2015) is among those more recent scholars of warfare who have considered the effect of the drone on conceptions of heroism, where this has long been linked to masculine traits and

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<sup>12</sup> For discussion on the military and “protection” of women, see e.g., Young, I.M. (2003), “The Logic of Masculinist Protection”.

masculinized virtues seemingly at odds with the distanced, techno-mediated mode of war enabled by the drone (99-100). What the transcripts from the day of the Uruzgan massacre and the investigation that followed it demonstrate, however, is that the categories of gender and the gendering process take their shape from and through race and racializing processes. The acceptability of an overtly “affective dimension” to this massacre, of the drone crew’s desire to identify a target, their frustration, and the avoidance of responsibility for their “mistake” – “*No way to tell from here.*” – hinges on the status of the targeted as always already occupying a racialized space of threat (more on this below), and hinges on the status of operators and others in the kill chain as affiliated with, in affirmative relationship with, advanced technology, the military apparatus, and the U.S. nation state. All of these are constructed, in the fantasy of the Posthuman Project, as unmarked by race. In this, they are constructed as white subjects,<sup>13</sup> and thereby authorized to determine, categorize, appropriate, and capture. This maintains and reproduces the material and ideological territory – including the very categories of gender and race themselves – out of which the Posthuman Project makes its sense.

Within the U.S. social order, gender, and the constructions of family and territory that shore it up, are inherently raced. The territory of the U.S. has from the beginning, and in ways crucial to expansion and the ratification of state violence, had its boundaries shaped and policed through this racialized and racializing gender. Some of these ideas were raised in the introduction to this dissertation. In order to expand upon these, however, and demonstrate that race is not only always tethered to gender in the U.S. context, but is the prism through which gender as a category is produced, understood, and acted upon by state power, I walk through a few examples of U.S. state and institutional violences that established and reiterated this, identifying the continuities that made possible the Uruzgan massacre and its justifications. “Territory” must be understood broadly as it is used to describe what moves the state to violence, including geographical spaces as well as bodies, the appropriation of which contribute to expansion. Historian Pamela Haag theorizes that the production of the supposedly empty, un-humaned New World destined for colonization, conquest, and territorialization required a “blurr[ing] of settler into soldier” (2016, 179). The martial character of the United States and its subjects extends, in this reading, far back to the earliest conditions that made possible the United States itself, with this fluid and expansionist figure standing in for the state and its might, and with his use of force against those who could not or would not be assimilated or domesticated, ratified.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See the discussion in the introduction for more on this.

<sup>14</sup> The violent history of white settler colonialism in what would become North America supports this. See, for instance, Grandin (2019), especially chapters 1 and 2, on the appeal to destiny and inevitability to justify colonial

Accumulation of land, wealth, and other resources intended for the United States and its subjects occurred through a mobilization of and investment in whiteness and notions of binary masculinity and femininity, which were constructed against categories of indigeneity and blackness, and fostered a particular relationship with technology and ideas of technological progress that became strongly linked to white expansionism, modernity and economic growth (Dinerstein 2006; Nelson 2002).<sup>15</sup> These linkages and categories, as they took their shape through settler colonial violences (Cacho 2012; Inwood and Bonds 2017), were deployed to justify expansion and the making-territory out of land and human beings (Opal 2018; Johnson 2018) and the concentration of wealth and power that in turn spurred deepening cultural investment in and naturalization of the hierarchies necessary to maintain such a system. The conditions of possibility for the United States and the force exerted to shore it and its borders up, then, relied upon an exclusionary and contradictory notion of what it was to count as human, in which some – those aligned with whiteness, masculinity, and the state – were imagined as mobile, decision-making, and agential, and others were fantasized as otherwise: as non-existent, dubiously agential, or indeed requiring the intervention of the United States’ agents.<sup>16</sup>

Whiteness, masculinity, and femininity in this early context were outcomes of race-making, and likewise could then be turned to produce and reinforce racial hierarchies. “Homeland” and a “sense of at-homeness,” even where white settlers pushed into “frontier” spaces decidedly outside the official boundaries of the United States, was constructed through the circulation of discourses of savagery and civilization, the nation and the foreign. Amy Kaplan’s (2005a) work examining Manifest Destiny ideology and the “cult of domesticity” in 1830-1850 compellingly points to the function of the gendered domestic in carving out and bounding a sense of the “nation as home” (25). The primary place of race in this nation-making process, however, may be read in her discussion of “domesticity” as it circulated in ways that “efface[d] all traces of violence conquest”: “Domesticity...refers not to a static condition, but to a process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien. ‘Domestic’ in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the conditions of domesticity often become marker that distinguish civilization from savagery.” (*ibid.*) Gender was configured in ways that reflected and

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expansion; Stephanson (1996), chapter 1, for more on the appeal to the inevitability of expansion and necessity of white control over racialized indigenous and Black populations; Dunbar-Ortiz (2018) chapter 1 on the early creation of settler militias and the arming of the white population; Kendi (2016), chapters 3-5.

<sup>15</sup> See also Atanasoski and Vora’s (2019) discussion of “technoliberalism,” pp.13-14.

<sup>16</sup> As Amy Kaplan notes, military intervention in the context of the Mexican-American War was framed as “good housekeeping” (2005a, 27) – discourses of domesticity and the home took on an overtly violent and imperial sheen.

justified violent expansion and appropriation, and construct spaces as known and controlled. White settler women's subjectivities were built through the empire and the home – women's "empire of affections" and "her empire of home" reiterated the logics of hierarchy and domination making westward expansion possible, and likewise effected a demarcation of what it was to be a white woman or white man in a white social order. Womanhood was constructed in such a way that it could, and should, be spread across the continent, but also as simultaneously confined to the interior. This kind of contradictory existence necessitated and legitimized the masculinized constant vigilance against racialized others that might trouble boundaries and dynamics vital to this national construction, even as it required this ever-present threat to make its own sense. The interior, private, and feminine were constructed as cohesive and strong, dominating their own space – civilized and a civilizing force in the areas to which it was spread through white masculinized force – but nonetheless under risk of constant attack by racialized outsiders from within and without the changing borders. The making of the nation and its "rightful" gendered subjects were inherently bound up with this non-white "outside" and its attendant uncertainty and risk of threat. That is, it was bound up with race-making.<sup>17</sup>

Unique to the North American colonies beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was "the assignment of hereditary force, by which captive Africans could only ever give birth to future slaves" (Singh 2017, 77). This arrangement necessarily depended upon the reproductive capabilities of enslaved Black people and in particular Black women. The troubled nature of the association of womanhood and femininity with child-bearing for enslaved women, however, demonstrates the malleability – for and by whiteness – of categories of gender and the dichotomies that disciplined white settler-colonial society. The slave-holding household itself might function, despite its association with the private feminine sphere, as a site of commerce that upheld femininity as a property of whiteness, and Blackness as fungible and public, something other than masculine or feminine entirely, but which nevertheless gave the masculine and feminine its shape. The transactions made frequently by white women arranging for enslaved Black wet nurses to care for white children demonstrated this. The demand for "intimate labor" (Jones-Rogers 2019, 102) rested on a fraught and precarious feminization of Black women who were produced in these transactions as simultaneously public and private property that helped to produce the white household and the feminized sphere of care. The ultimate effect of this was an assertion of the white fantasy of ownership over racialized Black

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<sup>17</sup> As touched on in the introduction, Singh's 2017 work on race-making and war-making in U.S. history is instructive here. In his words, "The socially created artifact of racism, race is a fungible assemblage rather than a coherent, preconstituted entity" (2017, xv). Racial differentiation provided groundwork and lines through which claims to belonging, ownership, and subjectivity, among many other things, could be claimed.

property that “cannot easily reside within white gendered dichotomies” (McKittrick 2006, 47), precisely because these dichotomies were produced through a white framework to work for a white social order.

Despite any uneasy residence within such dichotomies, slaveholding society leaned upon Black enslaved people to articulate what and who was imagined to naturally reside within the boundaries blurred by enslaved people. Reflecting the significance of enslaved Black people to the production of patriarchal white sociality built off of a gendered sense of ownership and control, three things were commonly stated as “necessary to beginning a family: a wife, a house, and a slave to work in it” (Johnson 2013, 193). Challenging long-held assumptions about the rarity of white households using enslaved Black women as wet nurses, Jones-Rogers’ research into the practice in non-elite white Southern households from the early to mid-1800s, with attention paid to testimonies of formerly enslaved people, suggests that this was a fairly widespread practice during a period of immense economic growth and cementing of social order (Jones-Rogers 2019, 102-103, 105; Johnson 2013, 4-9). The “intimacy” of this labor itself was troubled. The families and children of women forced to act as wet nurses bore the suffering of this practice as well, in severed relationships between enslaved mothers and children, poor nutrition, the trauma borne of sexual assault, and the invisibilization of Black mothers’ grief over the loss of children (Jones-Rogers 2019, 106-108, 120-122). This reflected and violently reinforced security, familial intimacy, and bodily care as properties of whiteness.

At this time, as well, medical experiments and in particular obstetric and gynecological interventions were developed using enslaved Black women’s bodies as testing grounds for what would later come to be understood as a public good. Most famously, the future “father of modern gynecology,” J. Marion Sims, developed his surgical techniques for vesico-vaginal fistulas on young enslaved Black women without administration of anesthesia (Fett 2002, 151-152). Contemporary theories of the hyper-sensitivity of white women contrasted against the lack of sensitivity – physical and otherwise – of Black people (Fett 2002, 152; Schwartz 2006, 167; Jones-Rogers 2019, 105, 120-121) made up a context wherein both these medical experiments and the enforcement of wet nursing could appear to be more or less harmless and in keeping with the protection of white womanhood against pain, suffering, and hardship. The marking out of gender *for* whiteness, and as a property of it in the sense of something inherent to whiteness, but also that which could at times be granted to those racialized as non-white in order to serve a purpose, became in these

cases institutionalized and made to seem necessary for the advancement of medical technology and knowledge, as in the case of J. Marion Sims.<sup>18</sup>

As the above examples reveal, gender is inherently racialized within the U.S. social order. While the family and home are more commonly recognized as built around a gendered order, these too emerge through this prism of race. The racialization of space served to construct spaces that mandated protection for its subjects (for instance, white women in white Southern households above), while necessitating the unprotected and fungible outside; constructing a “frontier” full of potential threat to white social order could mean the construction of lines marking a threatening outside that were nevertheless fully internal to the nation state’s jurisdiction. The case of the 1985 MOVE police bombing in Philadelphia highlights this racializing move, and brings the discussion back to technologies of war, and a long history of targeting and bombing. It also points toward the importance of space in the construction of legitimate targets, which is explored at greater length below.

The Philadelphia police were infamous by 1985 for the brutality meted out against Black residents (Demby 2015). On May 13<sup>th</sup> of that year, they dropped from a helicopter what was described as a “makeshift bomb” onto the house at 6221 Osage Avenue following a long police stand-off with the radical Black “back-to-nature group” (Fox 2013) MOVE. The house, in a middle-class majority Black neighborhood, was described as having been turned into a compound by the group, and prior to the bombing, police had estimated about 6 adults “and possibly as many as 12 children inside” (Demby 2015). The explosion caused the house to catch fire, which was left to burn wild for hours on the orders of the police commissioner (*ibid.*). By the time firefighters had finally put the fire out near midnight, the fire had spread down the block, destroying 61 houses, leaving homeless 251 people, and killing 11 MOVE members, including 5 children (Dickson 2002, 7). The bombing and massive destruction of residential streets in a major American city was described by an area resident as “like Vietnam” (Stevens 1985), and “like war,” by the mayor who had authorized the bomb drop (Dickson 2002, 7).

That the neighborhood was middle class and full of families did not save it from spectacular violence and the fire that was left to spread. Nor did the known presence of children and women in the MOVE house itself. This bombing of a residence starkly reiterates how gendered notions

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<sup>18</sup> Regarding ongoing debate over J. Marion Sims’ place in history and the tendency of the medical establishment to defend him, see, e.g., Zhang 2018.

of protection take their shape in the long context surveyed here through race foremost. In the construction of the nation-state at the frontier; in the development of U.S. social order and wealth through and by racialized Black women's bodies and the production of anti-Blackness; and in the dialog of the drone crew and ground forces involved in the Uruzgan massacre, threads run through that speak to the function and form of categories such as woman and child. These cases reveal these social categories as malleable, and more crucially reveal them to be a function of race. A key outcome of this, as before, is that U.S. race-making processes have reserved womanhood and childhood – innocence and protectability – for whiteness, where these categories are produced and reproduced according to what serves a white state and institutional power.

In all of the above cases the racialization of space plays a primary role in setting the conditions of possibility for such configurations of gender and race, and the violence used to uphold them. Being “at home” and in place; being a child; or being a woman do not emerge except through particular relationships with particular spaces, which are never divorced from racialization and gendering processes. Categories associated with domesticity, protection, and innocence – here, womanhood and childhood – are a function of race and space, which are inextricable from each other, and which, eventually, the drone is used as a tool to violently realize and reinforce. The following section expands on how space and race interact in the U.S. in ways that facilitate and enable the execution of drone warfare.

*Race → Gender → Space*

Space in the United States was never, to borrow Walter Johnson's (2013, 243) characterization, “an accomplished fact,” but instead remained “an ongoing project...a landscape being fiercely cleared in a counterinsurgency campaign to which there could be no end.” The dynamics underpinning the constructions of gender that drove early ideological and material production in the United States are similar. In her germinal 1987 work, Hortense Spillers theorizes the conditions of theft, enslavement, and profound violence that enabled the “New World,” arguing that one of those things lost in this process for those stolen, enslaved, and with their connections severed, is that “the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific” (67). Gender, in this reading, became unattendant with racialized Black bodies for the purpose of national production, and later the securing and maintenance of this. It could, however, like humanity, be “granted” at will by whiteness, as a “violent imposition and appropriation” (Jackson 2020, 3; see also Hartman 1997) of bodies into

the categories most convenient to white power. Blackness, Jackson writes, is a “prop” required “in order to erect whiteness: to define its own limits and to designate humanity as an achievement...” (*ibid.*, 4). This indicates a continuous reiteration of those things that divide and demarcate whiteness from Blackness, and more generally from being non-white – it indicates that this, too, has been and remains an ongoing project. The production of space is one crucial way, often overlooked in critical literature on the drone, that this occurs, and it feeds on a history of race making and racialization specific and fundamental to the United States, its coherence, and institutions – the assemblages that produce it. Johnson’s claim that the clearing out and making of nation space was “a counterinsurgency campaign to which there could be no end” speaks to critiques of drone warfare, and this dissertation’s own arguments, that identify it as a major component in endless warfare that thrives on and indeed requires the imagination of ever-present threat. As suggested above, and as expanded upon below, preemption itself functions as a racializing technology, given the ways it proceeds from presumptions about the location of threat – whether this is in certain bodies, or in certain spaces – and who and what is to be protected. The racialized production of space further interrogated below is inextricable from this in the context of the U.S.’s drone wars, and their justification.

The intercorporeality of bodies and their environments, the situatedness and situationality of how bodies are spatially oriented, is a way in to understanding how this works. Miller (2017) argues that preemption and “preemptive governance” “operates on and through the racialized body imbued with perceived terrorist threat,” and that “terrorist threat is imagined temporally as a heritable trait” that is found inherent to some bodies (115). While her investigation is specifically focused on constructions of Muslim men in the United States, these dynamics are in play in the construction of legitimate and illegitimate targets of violence both within and outside of the borders of the United States. A similar process to the one described by Miller (note this is not completely identical, considering the differences in how people are racialized – that is, what race “means” in different places and between “races”) occurs in the racialization of, for instance, the people killed and wounded in the MOVE bombing, the Black women subjected to medical experimentation, and the indigenous people violently removed from land that would be made United States territory. Historical research demonstrates that the production of this territory was not a matter of course, but required tense negotiation and management of contradiction that encouraged and eventually helped to solidify racial and gender hierarchies that made up building blocks of the U.S. social order (Pierce 2016; Kaplan 2005a; Grandin 2019; Cacho 2012). These hierarchies, foundational to the coherence of the United States and its institutions, were policed,

with categories of gender and race and the embodiment of these regulated through military, medical, and police intervention. To produce the nation, including who does and does not belong, however, requires a co-construction of rightful “nation space”; the nation becomes “fleshed out *as place and person*” that requires, as above with Blackness constructed by and for whiteness, “an *antagonistic space* that reaffirms the stability of the ‘national’ or ‘home’ space in order to sustain itself” [italics in original] (Ahmed 2018, 392, 394).

The construction of national home space, as scholarship such as Kaplan’s (2005a) confirms, relied on a number of bounding categories drawn up, the contingent contours of which could also be shifted, made malleable in order to incorporate or exclude. While these malleable boundaries worked to legitimize the making-territory out of land and bodies, the environment and land itself was racialized in order to naturalize colonialism and the violence that proved necessary to carve out a white nation on already-inhabited land. Environment, for example, became used to argue for supposedly natural hierarchies; space was used “not only to explain and naturalize human beings’ subordination; it was and continues to be central to engineering some of the most violent forms of exploitation. The violences of sovereignty were executed,” Lisa Cacho writes in her historical examination of social death, “by manipulating and reinscribing space” (2012, 73). This manipulation and reinscription of space is vital to the way that targets become made, and how space itself remains a target in supposedly individualized warfare (more on this in the following section). The marking, reinscription, of space as racialized, because this is bound up with threat in the national imaginary, legitimizes interventions of all kinds in the name of national security, and more fundamentally, legitimizes the continued reproduction of the nation itself, as this is imagined to be a zone that is safe, stable, civilized, and civilizing.

Inwood and Bonds’ examination of the 2017 takeover by militia members of the Malheur Wildlife Reserve in Oregon provides more historical context for thinking through the relationship between race and space in the United States.<sup>19</sup> The property regimes that propelled and were used to justify expansionism, genocide, and appropriation by white settlers, and specifically the white supremacist ideologies that were to frame these as both inevitable and desirable, Inwood and Bonds argue, “emerge[d] from the socio-spatial context of Native American genocide and dispossession and

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<sup>19</sup> This investigation is significant for its identification of the relationship between whiteness, the military, and policing, as well, in which white men performing a rugged masculinity understood to be traditionally American – and in particular Western American – seem to claim legitimacy both through their use of armed rebellion against federal government overreach, and through a performance of military manhood often associated with the U.S. military, perhaps especially with Special Operations Forces.

slavery.” Drawing on Cheryl Harris’ foundational work on whiteness and property, they argue that property and race were in fact contingent, given how vital propertization was to the construction and maintenance of white supremacy and the socio-political relations that constituted (and continue to constitute) whiteness. A white supremacist social order conferred property rights to people racialized as white, constructed enslaved Black people as objects and capital, and violently disregarded indigenous claims to land and resources (2017, 257). This suggests that the capacity to legitimately construct and exist in space was, and remains, structurally reserved for whiteness, and concurs with Cacho’s historical analysis: “Only white people could define property ownership” (2012, 24). As well, given discourses of civilization and savagery; contemporary ideologies of Manifest Destiny (Pierce 2016; Hixson 2013, chapter 5); beliefs about the inevitable disappearance of indigenous people (Brantlinger 2003, chapter 3; Hixson 2013, 85)<sup>20</sup>; and of *terra nullius*<sup>21</sup>, it suggests again a linkage between whiteness and futurity that is also always linked to advancing technology that enables expansion. This is a picture that suggests, with the backing of alleged scientific objectivity, that those racialized as non-white perhaps inevitably lack a future, or must be “domesticated” by the white nation-state in order to claim a future. Self-actualization, self-ownership, and one’s own definition of self – in short, “the possessive individualism of Man” (Weheliye 2014a, 10) – in this way also remain properties of whiteness.

Taking ownership and control over space was linked, in the development of the nation, with “freedom, progress and national destiny under God” (Hixson 2013, 7). As indicated above, with these values and capacities tied to whiteness, whiteness becomes tied to freedom and progress, while these are also intimately tied to development of technologies. Before returning to the drone crew involved in the Uruzgan massacre, to draw some final conclusions about the fundamentality of the racialization of space to making legitimate (and illegitimate) violence and war, I return to the examples that were raised above to highlight gender’s production through the prism of race. In the cases of both the making of “frontier,” and of the MOVE bombing, the ostensible fact of the non-whiteness of these spaces made way for some seemingly risky moves to be taken in the name of whiteness and its supremacy. That is, the pushing into land racialized as non-white – as

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion about the enduring belief in inevitable and even “natural” disappearance in the United States and the epistemological violence that makes this possible, see e.g., Michael Wilcox’s 2010 “Marketing conquest and the vanishing Indian,” a response to Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs and Steel* and *Collapse*.

<sup>21</sup> Some debate could be had as to whether or not the term *terra nullius* is appropriate to use in the North American/United States context as it’s normally associated with white settler colonization of Australia. While official British policy prior to the American Revolution recognized Indigenous nations’ lands (Grandin 2019, 17-23; Banner 2005, 95), and early U.S. policy officially did so as well (Grandin 2019, 25-27), in the actual practice of the state itself and of U.S. settlers who continuously pushed further into non-U.S. lands, native people and their lands were treated effectively as non-existent, and the lands open to white settlement.

savage and uncivilized – and the claiming and incorporation of the non-white into the developing white nation-state could threaten to undo the coherence and cohesiveness of the nation, and to trouble lines drawn between masculinities and femininities, home and “alien” spaces, war and peace. The “fact” of Blackness on Osage Avenue, Philadelphia, marked another situation in which war – ostensibly for “over there” – was “allowed” to come home from Vietnam. This massacre and the violent making and taking of frontier territory point to the slipperiness between here and there that many feminist scholars have worked through, revealing it as not so sharp a delineation as some might presume. It also reveals that race-making is war-making, and war-making is race-making – that the nation space and the “outside” targeted space are porous as well as malleable and produced through martial relations that are always already raced. The “fact” of Blackness in the MOVE building and Osage Avenue, as it was allowed to burn for hours, foreclosed upon the possibility of home and family and the safety ascribed to these, and instead the entire space became imbued with threat. It became, to borrow Ahmed’s (2018) description in paraphrase, the source material for future threat. In this, it projected violent state intervention as necessary, and performed the same function for the continued criminalization and regulation of Blackness, against whiteness. This extends, of course, to the criminalization of Black space, against white space (Singh 2017, 70; McKittrick 2010, 116-117).

The risky, violent moves taken to uphold white supremacist social orders, then, appear less risky when this racialization of space is taken into account. To call back to earlier analysis, the body is both formed by and understood to form the space in which it exists; body and space are intimately interlinked, and this has been fundamental to the construction of the white supremacist social order and its human, and later posthuman, subject. Frontier lands, prior to their being made into territory or settled by white colonists, were constructed as spaces of waste, uninhabitable and savage. To draw on Bench Ansfield’s analysis of how certain urban spaces are marked out as racialized and uninhabitable, both the “frontier” and Osage Avenue were constructed in their non-whiteness as “ontologically uninhabited” spaces that were taken to “define and be defined by the antihumans who [were] located in or mapped to them” (2015, 135). Meanwhile, in contrast, with womanhood, family, home and safety reserved for whiteness, the frontier home and “security” actions taken by the state shore up whiteness and simultaneously reify threat as racialized, and inherently tied to targeted spaces. “Logics of containment and erasure” (Ansfield 2015, 136) then guide action taken against such spaces and their inhabitants. These are logics easily legible in the razing of the neighborhood, and in genocide meted out against indigenous people through both

spectacular and more “slow” violence and death-making (Puar 2017, 1) (for instance, in the violence that made the reservation system in the continental United States).

Returning to the cases of enslaved Black women forced to be wet nurses for white families and subjects of medical experimentation brings these threads together, and points to another aspect of the making of whiteness that is crucial to this chapter’s reading of the Uruzgan massacre. Not only the labor of Black women, but the process of making *territory* and *property* of Black women and their labors in chattel slavery, was vital in the building up of national wealth, nationhood, and in concretizing the agential white human figure and his control of space. This was feminized labor by women nevertheless excluded from the category of womanhood, and imagined to be unrooted, both “placeless” (McKittrick 2006, 45) and fundamentally *of* uninhabitable spaces (Ansfield 2015), in ways positioned as qualitatively subordinate to the mobile and agential white subject. Saidiya Hartman (1997) and Zakiyyah Jackson (2020), as suggested above, have especially usefully theorized the violence of the human category as it could be temporarily imposed upon enslaved people as a tool for extracting value and labor in the form of actions, affect, and behavior often reserved for whiteness. Part of what ostensibly made this possible was the differential reading of the interiority of subjects. In the white supremacist social order, true interiority was the reserve of whiteness. There existed an imagined emptiness not only of the land that was to be made U.S. territory, as suggested above, but also of the bodies stolen and used, which could conveniently be made to justify such violence, control, and appropriation. Following Hartman, humanity “granted” to an enslaved person was a form of, and attempt by, white will to violently insert itself into the emptied mind of the racialized Black “other” (1997, 17-22). The reading of Black women as property, un-humaned and un-gendered, *of* the uninhabitable, but by and *for* whiteness, smooths over tensions in the using of enslaved Black women for medical research into reproductive injuries and as wet nurses, while the reservation of interiority for whiteness works to justify the pain inflicted.

The racialization of space and the construction of un-humaned, “defiled geographies” (Ansfield 2015, 135) and spaces of danger that produce non-human subjects, then, perform a fundamental role in making the United States’ territory and institutions what they are, with the capacity to perform the security acts they do. In the case of the projection of U.S. power, control, and ways of seeing through drone warfare, the fundamentally racialized nature of the hegemonic human category that prefigures the posthuman of the Posthuman Project ratifies, but also from the beginning sets the conditions for and naturalizes the targeting and killing process and preemptive

warfare more generally. This final section returns to drone warfare and the Uruzgan massacre specifically to detail this as it echoes in the logics underpinning the targeting process, and the military's and drone crew's own reactions to the massacre.

*Race → Gender → Space → Drone*

In the course of justifying the Department of Defense's FY 2017 budget request, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford summarized an idea that motivates some advocacy for drone warfare: that U.S. troops should not be sent "into a fair fight" and should be guaranteed resources that allow for overwhelming "depth, flexibility, readiness, and responsiveness" (Garamone 2016). According to Dunford, it is in large part by the power of technology that this can be achieved. A number of presumptions key to understanding the logic of the Posthuman Project are implicit not just in discourse such as that found in the General Atomics advertisement examined in the previous chapter, but in calls such as Dunford's for "full-spectrum readiness" (Garamone 2017) and overwhelming deterrent capabilities. Firstly, this is about the undisputed existence of ever-present and ever-emerging threat. It is also about the power of military might – and in this specific case, the drone – to collapse time, space, and bodies into totally controllable, territorialized, and known commodities that can be broken down to pieces of data, or sets of behaviors that come to appear as objective pieces of information. More fundamentally, it is about space itself, and an outlook expressed explicitly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that identifies any space in which threat is imagined to emerge as "America's defensive frontier". This means, practically, that really "there is no frontier," to borrow Markus Gunneflo's cogent summation (2016, 184; refer also again to National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 2004, 362; Rumsfeld 2004). The "homeland" can be projected anywhere, justifying, and justified by, military action. Altogether this suggests a view of the individual and space that is malleable, like the human and posthuman, and can be manipulated and reorganized to serve the workings of the state, and used to naturalize visions of the future that see U.S. will and might projected over time and space without end.

Preemptive warfare conducted via drone relies itself on an implicit argument that the nation space is under threat, necessitating a constant future orientation and martial footing. In the process, it reifies, among other things, the idea of a cohesive "human" core. With such constructions being made always against that which exists "outside," this makes a simultaneous argument about the non-human and that which otherwise does not belong. In this particular situation of preemptive

warfare, with the non-human and “outside” setting the conditions for prediction, preemption and futurity, just how fundamental processes of race-making and gendering are to drone warfare is further revealed in examining how projection into the future and prediction takes place. As explained above, these processes are always already working through space to produce the subjects and objects of violence.

Returning to Uruzgan, the errors made by the drone crew in targeting and authorizing a strike on a convoy full of civilians were documented and admitted to by the U.S. military. Throughout the transcript of the hours-long incident, crew members wish for evidence pointing to the convoy as an imminent threat. The drone pilot repeatedly reports seeing “tactical movement” coming from the civilians of the convoy. When it drives away from the special forces’ position, the drone crew sees the convoy attempting to “flank” them. Derek Gregory (2020b) describes the dynamic at play as an “areal essentialism,” in which those making analyses of the scene from above lean on pre-existing ideas about what is “normal” for civilians and the area. Decisions made about targeting and whether or not to attack depended on the biases and feelings of the bodies making up the drone assemblage. Among other things and crucially, in the course of the later investigation, the area was commented on as a known “bad area,” and Gregory suggests that in this context, “normal” civilian behavior, whatever this might mean to the crew making interpretations, became the burden of the targeted civilians to perform (*ibid.*). As discussed above, because the space in which the civilians were moving was already racialized as a space of threat to begin with, arguably to behave “like” a civilian was already a possibility foreclosed upon from the start – potentially impossible for the civilians of the convoy, produced as they were through the space of threat.

The other facet of this is the drone crew itself, however. Their judgments, predictions, and circumscribed analyses seem to remain legitimate within the framework of the drone assemblage, excused and justified even after grave error was acknowledged. This, too, must be understood as made possible through a fundamental racialization and gendering of space, and bolstered by the association of advanced technologies and state institutions with whiteness and masculinity. If, as contended in the previous chapter, the drone, in its persistent surveillant and “dwelling” capacities, is used to produce an encompassed and captured space “below,” this space can be understood as a racialized space of ever-present threat. The other side of this is the space fantasized as “above,” the space of the drone assemblage and posthuman possibility. The subjects of this space are those which the previous chapter described as “eligible” for posthumanity. While it masquerades as an

objective product of civilization's technological progress, this space is coded in line with whiteness, with the qualities of ownership, control, objectivity, and futurity proposed as inherent to it.

By way of making acceptable the explicit wishing, wondering, confusion, and excuse-making of the drone crew, this fantasy constructs interiority as the domain of whiteness, against that which inherently is said to lack this. As in the always-affective and relational construction of spaces, "the field of emotions creates the effect of interior and exterior, as well as the very concepts of 'the psychic' and 'the social' as dependent on the effect of interior and exterior, respectively" (Atanasoski and Vora 2019, 132). The fantasized divisions constitutive of drone warfare and its subjects and objects of violence depend on spaces likewise imagined to be cleanly divided, but always at risk of having their boundaries blurred and thereby necessitating constant regulatory vigilance. These dynamics, however, which reach back to the constructions of race, gender, and space described throughout this chapter, are those that pave the way for, for instance, the investigation made into the Uruzgan massacre to proceed as it did. As mentioned above, official responses included calls for more training for those in the kill chain, and "reprimands" and "admonishments" (CNN Wire Staff 2010; Cloud 2011). This implies, at least, that the affective responses of the crew were not per se considered an issue, and leaves fantasies of the drone as conferring extra-human capability intact. It is that that also provides another "layer" of protection for those in the drone assemblage, because of the longstanding association of advanced technology with US progress, expansion, and wealth, and because of the emblematic drone's purported special objectivity and powers crucial to national security.

Their association with national security and space both understood as objective and inevitable – and therefore, in the US context, aligned with whiteness – ratified the preemptive moves made by the drone crew. Meanwhile, the construction of the space of threat on the ground below worked to mark people as legitimate targets ultimately regardless of civilian status and before they even appeared on the map, and later served to smooth over reactions against deadly military error and presumption. Preemption, as it happens in these two facets of drone warfare, works itself as a tool of racialization and gendering, in that it helps to produce spaces of threat through a pulling together of past (e.g., in this case, predictions made about the convoy's future movements and threat status were in part due to and justified by the troops' past experiences in this "bad area"), present, and future in order to construct a future totally known and controlled, in this fantasy, by the drone. Productive contradictions inhere: conveniently and precariously, the space of threat is both brought inside and kept outside of the U.S. "homeland" through the use of the drone and

the colonizing dynamics recapitulated in its use. Similarly, the projection of the targeted as always potentially and imminently out of control is a key part of this fantasy, justifying as it does the constant vigilance, national security projects, and the posthuman, as a protective moral imperative. This is the creation of what Sabeen Ahmed calls “an indefinite field of virtual threat” (2018, 383), in which any moves by the state can be justified, and in which the affective responses of a crew involved in security by default become positioned as more legitimate than the details of what happens and who is who in the “defiled geography” below. As Andrea Miller summarizes, preemption in this context means that “desire, intent, and imagination are transformed from private and internalized spaces into actionable realms of surveillance, policing, and military intervention” (2017, 129). With legitimate interiority the reserve of whiteness, preemptive action becomes by and for whiteness, a form of regulation that reiterates the political categories and hierarchies of existence that make it possible.

### *Conclusion*

Achille Mbembe’s description of colonial occupation helpfully and cogently highlights how space is always working with and through race. The dynamics and movements by and for sovereignty that he enumerates below are legible in the nation-making and subjectivating violences examined throughout this chapter.

*Colonial occupation* itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries. These imaginaries gave meaning to the enactment of differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty. Space was therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carried with it. Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood. (Mbembe 2003, 25-26)

As demonstrated throughout, the production of space, bodies, and subjects is an always already raced and gendered one, where race plays a fundamental role in producing gender that is legible within U.S. white supremacy’s social order. Further, the drone, though emblematic of a purportedly new, “unmanned,” and especially advanced warfare, relies itself fundamentally upon the human and non-human, and likewise upon an imagination of racialized spaces of threat and security to set the conditions of its possibility. It plays a vital role in reproducing these spaces, and

making them seem natural and inevitable, thereby performing a crucial function in the production and propping up of the greater Posthuman Project. Hierarchizing divisions between the non-human and human are actively required for this system to make sense, built as it is upon divisions of space enacted, as in the examples shown above, through appropriation, imposition of certain modes of being, and violent regulation and exercises of control.

The next chapter focuses on the production of those who may seem to firmly inhabit humanity, and who are frequently subject to aerial protection via the drone: Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel. The production of SOF personnel as exceptional national subjects in service of the Posthuman Project, this next chapter and the following chapter will demonstrate, hinges on the malleability of categories such as those identified in this chapter. The hierarchizing divisions made between the non-human and human are shiftable, and ultimately, as the next chapter shows, can be set to work through medicalized technologies in ways that justify actions including torture that are taken in the name of security. Exceptionalized SOF personnel and their production as variably human, less than human, and more than human, become a powerful tool that speaks for U.S. state power and its authority to define categories of humanity, posthumanity, gender, and race.

### Chapter 3: SERE and the Making of Exceptionalized Special Operations Forces

#### *Introduction*

Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel occupy a high place in military and wider social hierarchies. Both inside and outside the United States, they are associated with dangerous and clandestine operations framed as critical to national security; Navy SEALs were famously responsible for the execution of Osama bin Laden in 2011, and the 2019 death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi occurred during a raid carried out by the Army's Delta Force (Walcott 2019; Maher 2019). In recent years marked by the drawdown of conventional troops, SOF have arguably become "the face of the American military in foreign hot spots" (Vanden Brook 2015). As of 2018, SOF were found operating in around 149 countries across the globe (Turse 2018). Along with more well-known units such as Delta Force and the Navy SEALs, the "special operations" designation broadly encompasses the Marine Raiders and Army Green Berets along with "special operations capable" forces. The operations carried out by these, and the discourses of exceptionality, violence, and otherness surrounding these are crucial to their construction, and to the construction of the wider U.S. military landscape. This chapter's subject is the training that produces them, out of which grows such notions of their exceptional otherness that both exceeds and is subordinate to the category of human.

Like the operations undertaken by SOF, the grueling training programs undertaken by those who would become SOF personnel are heavily mythologized in civilian and military social spheres (Murphy 2012; Balestrieri 2019; Smith 2019).<sup>22</sup> Those who manage not to "wash out" of physically and emotionally arduous schools such as BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training), Ranger School, or the Pararescue's two year-long "pipeline" course are widely considered some of the best trained and most exceptional among the already exceptionalized (Picano et al 2012, 50-69; Whitworth 2008; Millar and Tidy 2017, 142). The bodies and subjectivities of SOF personnel are produced to be tools themselves, weapons and potentially non-human, but also potentially posthuman, conduits of state power. They are authorized to conduct themselves within spaces of

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<sup>22</sup> There are a number of articles written, usually humorously, about SERE specifically that address common myths and rumors about the school. These include, for example, that SERE instructors are "allowed to break one bone in your body" during the training, that instructees return from training "broken" and/or with PTSD, and that the instructor cadre use "crazy torture techniques" on students (Quora 2017; see also: <https://www.reddit.com/r/army/comments/8fk03k/ser/>).

insecurity in ways that are unique within the wider military body. Prior to this, however, the training of SOF candidates is a key element in the exceptionalization process. This training constitutes violent disciplining of body and subjectivity that is itself understood to be exceptional within the wider military. It lays groundwork for construction of the paradoxical space through which SOF personnel are produced, and which is the focus of the following chapter. Specifically here, this chapter examines the work done in the SERE (*Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape*) school to produce operators who are figured as uniquely eligible for a military posthumanity, and a state that is justified in executing its Posthuman Project.

In spite of a fantasy image – and violently imposed ideal – of a cohesive, stable and usually, stereotypically, “hypermasculine” military body (Belkin 2012; Millar and Tidy 2017; Whitworth 2008, 111-114; Thomas 2017), the U.S. military’s relationship with the feminine and what has been constructed as, broadly, “outside” or alien to this body is more troubled and troubling to this picture: military masculinities and “the existential identity of the military as part of war” are produced instead through their very instability, and always already in relation to the “feminine constitutive other” (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005, 35). As in the construction of the nation-state, any seeming “boundedness” or dichotomy takes shape in relation to and in touch with something “other,” requiring “some-body or some-where to not-be in order for it to be.” A familiar space of belonging and identification necessarily “requires that which is strange in order to be” (Ahmed 2000, 99). In defiance of hard delineations between the military and civilian, masculine and feminine, war and peace, this chapter follows such critical ideas to read these as instead imbricated within, and vital to the continuous production of, each other. The gender and war connection may be read as a relation of (im)possibility (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005, 29-30) in which a constant re-negotiation of relations is required, in recognition of the ways in which speaking of masculinity and the military means speaking of concepts that only *seem* to be coherent, natural, and stable.

Distinctly military masculinities, aligned with conventionally masculinized values of protectiveness, rationality, discipline, invulnerability, and “hardness” (Belkin 2012; Whitworth 2008, 114; Kronsell and Svedberg 2012; Fick 2005, 15), like more “conventional” masculinities, constitute a fantasy ideal that, if strived for and seeming to be embodied, may yield social rewards within contexts in which they are assigned high value. Military masculinities have been prized in the U.S. context due to their particular close relationship with power and the use of force generally, but more specifically in their relationship to the state and its power to enact justified, rational, and ceremonialized violence in the name of its own security and/or the security of subjects aligned with it. What sets

the exceptionalized masculine subjectivities and embodiments of SOF personnel apart from more “conventional” military masculinities has manifested in, among other things but perhaps most notoriously here, a long-standing resistance to the inclusion of women within SOF ranks in the interest of maintaining the integrity of a “special” identity and culture.

Gender is fundamental to the construction of the U.S. state and military more broadly, as preceding chapters have discussed, but masculinity – and in particular forms of masculinity proposed to be especially un-feminine, and “pure” – has been used to construct SOF specifically as special and unassailable. In the context of a broader push by the U.S. military to diversify and open itself to the participation of women and other minoritized groups, SOF has stood out in its heavy resistance. This has often been discussed with sympathy and regret towards the impending loss of all-male spaces, and with anxiety about the implications for male physical and mental superiority that had up to this point gone largely unchallenged (Vagianos 2015; Michaels 2016; Baldor 2016). Beyond this, however, commentary suggested that while bringing women into the wider military body was not necessarily objectionable, bringing women into the special forces threatened an elemental masculinity that was not only natural to SOF, but vital to its especial cohesion and mission-readiness (Goldstein 2018, 393). As the idea went, in a unique space that had been brought into strict alignment with state power in part through the total casting-off of feminized vulnerability and “softness” (Pin-Fat and Stern 2005, 28), women’s inclusion threatened the very existence of these “special” operations.

Also working to set SOF apart, and examined further below, has been their construction as both non-human and more-than-human by virtue of a voluntary abnegation of self to the state’s power and will, for the sake of the U.S.’s security projects. This is a willingness to be dehumanized that goes beyond what shapes “conventional” troops, according to the discourse surrounding storied training programs such as SERE. Those who are to belong to the military body at large must “perform solidarity and allegiance” in accordance with a “common end or purpose” (Ahmed 2014, 126-127). But the “purpose” of SOF, especially in the years since 9/11, has been increasingly tightly and prominently bound up with the will of a future-oriented state aiming for a boundless military posthumanity. While this “purpose” will be further explored in the following chapter, the training process of SOF candidates, which I read as a vital process of linked exceptionalization and subjugation, is explored below. Intrinsicly involved in this training is a racializing process that helps to produce a fantasy of what it is to be American and un-American. This chapter focuses in on the racialization of space, specifically of the space of the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo

Bay, to demonstrate how the SOF exceptionalization process is not only inherently relational and reliant on a constitutive outside, but how race-making functions to crystallize and naturalize who may and may not become eligible for posthumanity.

Officially, the SERE school offers a defensive program intended to teach students to “survive, evade, resist, and escape” imprisonment and interrogation by enemy forces. It has, however, attained a near mythical status based on rumors (Balestrieri 2019) and realities (Committee on Armed Services (SASC) 2008, xiii, xvii, 27-31; Kaye 2010; Dimoulas et al 2007) of harrowing training. In effect, this has reinforced beliefs and seemed to justify investments in the exceptional status of those who successfully graduate, and for whom its course of simulated imprisonment and torture scenarios is designed: “elite” personnel and those at high risk of capture. This includes SOF candidates, who are required to graduate from the school’s highest and most secretive “Level C” training (Prados 2015, 173; Morris 2009; Vaughan 2012, 52). The school’s approach is based on theories of “stress inoculation” – that military personnel may be conditioned through realistic, but strictly medically controlled, training to withstand real detention and torture (Doran et al 2012, 309-311; SASC 2008, 123; Otterman 2007, 99). According to the “father” of the SERE program, Army Major and former POW James Nicholas Rowe, the school’s goal was to enable students to survive alone behind enemy lines; to evade capture; to resist both “soft” and “hard” interrogations; and, as referenced in the school’s own motto, to “return home with honor” (Vaughan 2012, 160). Consequently, a key, basic portion of the training lies in the U.S. military’s Code of Conduct, which is meant to provide for candidates a roadmap for how and how not to behave in case of captivity and torture (Balestrieri 2019; Carroll 2014).

SERE’s restricted Level C training is of particular interest in this chapter, as it is prerequisite training for those who would become SOF personnel. In late 2014, following the release of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program* (also widely known as the “torture report”), this Level’s prisoner of war and torture simulations garnered a good deal of attention. In this document, the euphemistically termed “enhanced interrogation” techniques used against prisoners at CIA black sites around the world were revealed to have been developed by former SERE psychologists John “Bruce” Jessen and James Mitchell, who “reverse-engineered” the resistance techniques they had originally taught at SERE (Mayer 2009, 157; Otterman 2007, 129-130). Level C is the training level especially subject to rumors and allegations by former students of near-death experiences and consequent post-traumatic stress disorder (Morris 2009; Balestrieri 2019); because of this Level in particular, the

SERE school has been described as both “the most important school the Navy will ever send you to” (Carroll 2014), and a school that should not exist (Morris 2009). SOF candidates are made to undergo interrogation techniques SERE instructors and students alike would understand as techniques of torture, however carefully medicalized they are. These have included sleep deprivation, sound torture, stress positions, sexual humiliation, denigration of deeply held values and beliefs, subjection to extreme cold, threats of sexual assault and rape, forced nudity, and up until recently, waterboarding (Otterman 2007, 104-105; Morris 2009; Schulberg 2018; SASC 2008, xiii-xiv, 8-10). Said one graduate, “While I was in the school, I lived like an animal” (Morris 2009).

In this chapter I examine the training undertaken in SERE’s Level C by those who would become SOF personnel in order to investigate the paradoxically human and non-human space SOF occupy, and the work they are used to do by and for the state in its global Posthuman Project. The case of SOF personnel’s production as exceptional and potentially posthuman through the training-disciplining process reveals the exclusionary natures of both human and posthuman, as these categories cohere only in highly particular and unstable relationship to the U.S. state and its power. SOF become eligible for posthumanity because they *willingly* subjugate themselves to exceptional and exceptionalizing dehumanization and objectification by the state, in order to be produced as emblems and weapons of state power. In this way, through the cultivation of an affirmative relationship with the state that proceeds from this willing submission, they are brought into alignment with the state’s will. In many respects, this places SOF personnel in a highly privileged position in which they, as conduits for state power and key players in the U.S.’s security projects, become justified in any action taken (more on this in the following chapter). The contradictions of their paradoxical production as non-human – which is exemplified in the dehumanizing torture faced during SERE training – and as potentially embodying the exemplary posthuman, however, may only be smoothed over through the security actions, projects, and discourses of the state. Ultimately, then, what is really served by this unstable but enduring construction is the state’s own sovereign power to demarcate non-human, human, and posthuman.

### *SERE School*

What graduates may reveal about the SERE program’s Level C training is limited, but there are recurring themes in the personal accounts of those who have undertaken the training and who, in most cases, have since left the military (Fick 2005; Carroll 2014; Morris 2009). While much of the information provided by graduates remains unconfirmed by the U.S. military or active duty special

operators, certain details have been confirmed through multiple investigations by reporters (Mayer 2009; Otterman 2007, 102-107). Level C's "Resistance Training Laboratory" functions as a realistic "mock prisoner-of-war camp" (Balestrieri 2019) in which students apply the lessons learned in prior levels of the school, which have emphasized wilderness survival techniques and the military's Code of Conduct. The title of this level makes an initial claim to a scientific and medical legitimacy that has frequently been deployed in the face of criticism, used to justify the school's techniques and existence. Officially intended to "inoculate" students against the stress of being held in captivity, subjected to propaganda, and tortured by enemy forces (who are role-played by military personnel and/or contractors as distinctly but non-specifically "foreign," signaled with non-U.S. accents and unfamiliar uniforms (Carroll 2014; Fick 2005, 151-152)), students' experiences of isolation in captivity stand out in narrative accounts of the training program, as does the sound torture. The latter is sometimes alluded to with a kind of dark humor by graduates: the grating, looping replay over speakers of a reading of Rudyard Kipling's poem of the Boer War, "Boots" (Carroll 2014; Fick 2006, 152; Balestrieri 2019), is unforgettable, Carroll writes, for anyone who has attended the school.

One rare official representation of SERE that does little to detract from the mythologizing discourse of necessity surrounding the school comes in the form of the Air Force SERE school's promotional video, "The Perfect Edge" (2014). Using the creation of a knife as an analogue for the creation of elite SOF personnel, the two-minute video compares candidates to formless "raw iron" that, only after being put into the furnace and made to "feel the heat," shaped, and polished, may develop a "perfect edge". Personnel become "something quality" only with the investment, care, energy, money, and time of the state; lacking this, they lack the multipurpose perfection that sets them apart from other men and marks them as exceptional. The video implies that a knife is certainly not only used to kill, but when the edge is there, the potential for lethal action exists. To embody this exceptionalized, distinctly military and masculine subjectivity that is made both ready for violent action, and for violence to be done to it, becomes framed as a pragmatic virtue.

Officially, and in concurrence with former students' narrative accounts of their experiences, SERE students seem to undergo a limited, "safer" version of what prisoners in U.S. military or CIA detention do. Examination of this begins to reveal some of the dynamics underpinning the construction of SOF's paradoxical exceptionality. The medicalization of torture techniques including waterboarding, and more broadly the framing of these as carried out in scientifically precise ways, is a common theme. This medicalization provides space for instructors and

proponents of the school to evade political questions, and is arguably vital to the maintenance and reproduction of a military context within which torture conducted even in “limited” ways becomes considered acceptable, or even necessary (Wilcox 2015a, 63).

### *Scientific Bodies*

In the wake of global criticism of the U.S.’s program of “enhanced interrogation” carried out at sites such as the prison at Guantánamo Bay, associating SERE with scientific, security-minded care became vital to the legitimization of the training program. It served an important function, as well, helping to reconcile these overtly violent projections of state power with the projection of a nation-state committed to judicious, purely defensive uses of force. The notion that students are voluntarily undergoing a “limited” and carefully controlled form of torture itself works to construct the U.S. state – and the military itself – as purveyor of such science-driven care, and, for students, their volunteerism jumpstarts the exceptionalization process. The “limited” nature of the torture techniques experienced by students takes form and comes to be seen as sensical in part through a scientific data generation process that has resulted in a number of studies published on “survival training including interrogation components” (Raymond et al 2010, 21-24, 20n.13). Indeed, experimentation on students appears to be an intrinsic part of the program (Mayer 2005), and a crucial component in the making of a scientific, “safe” undertaking.<sup>23</sup>

Official documentation, testimony, and accounts from former students describe data generation occurring during the course of training itself, as medical and military personnel observe and evaluate “the effects of various interrogation techniques on US soldier-subjects” with their informed consent (Raymond et al 2010, 5, 19-20). “Systematic investigation” by scientific personnel affiliated to the school has led to the creation of “generalizable knowledge” (Dougherty 2017; Raymond et al 2010, 24), as published studies attest (Morgan et al 2000; Morgan and Hazlett 2000; Morgan et al 2001), about human reaction to the stresses of (limited) interrogation, captivity, and certain torture techniques. During especially intense portions of the captivity and torture scenarios, psychologists are at hand 24 hours a day to monitor students’ reactions, and available to step in “if students show signs of becoming mentally unstable” (Ackerman 2011). Medical and psychological “supervisors” are alleged to be present throughout, as well, frequently but discreetly

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<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, the making of SERE experimentation as scientific and safe has proved useful for apologists of the U.S. torture program that grew out of “reverse-engineered” SERE resistance tactics. Much like SERE, the “enhanced interrogation” program itself became “a regime of experimental research” featuring data generated by doctors, psychologists, and other affiliated actors (Dougherty 2017; Mayer 2005).

stepping in to monitor students' "progress" during the training, while "keeping extensive charts and records of their behavior and medical status" (Mayer 2005; SASC 2008, 4 n.22, 5 n.24, 30-31). Given the program's emphasis on "stress inoculation" and the harrowing nature of the training, unsurprisingly much of the experimentation and data generation appears to focus on reactions to intense physical and mental stress. Notably and perhaps most infamously, investigation by SERE-affiliated scientists on hormone production in the high stress environment of the SERE "captivity scenario" (Morgan et al 2000, 891), through analyses of trainees' saliva and blood (Mayer 2005), found "rapid and profound changes" in stress hormone levels "comparable to those associated with major surgery or actual combat" (Morgan et al 2000, 896; Raymond et al 2010, 21). These changes included "castrate levels of testosterone...observed within 12 hours of captivity" (Morgan et al 2000, 898).<sup>24</sup>

Of the harrowing experiences voluntarily undertaken by those who would become SOF personnel, waterboarding has been one of the more well-publicized and widely discussed in terms of its stress-inducing effects on SERE trainees. Waterboarding is likewise one of the most discussed – and indeed debated (Weiner 2007; All Things Considered 2009; Hitchens 2008) – of the "enhanced interrogation techniques" used against prisoners in U.S. custody. Former Air Force SERE psychologist Jerald Ogrisseg, whose comments on SERE training featured in the 2008 Senate Committee on Armed Services report (SASC 2008), is among those associated with the SERE school who have mobilized the medicalization of the program in its defense. According to Ogrisseg, SERE's torture leaves only "minimal" "long-term psychological effects" on students, and that waterboarding specifically, while certainly an "intense...stressor" that "broke the students' will to resist...and induced helplessness," was nevertheless not "a real and serious physical danger to students" because of the presence of medical personnel and close monitoring throughout (SASC 2008, 29-30). Waterboarding is alleged, however, to have been removed entirely from SERE school curricula in 2007 without public announcement (Schulberg 2018; SASC 2008, 31, 62n.447), following a years-long scaling back and concerns from SERE-affiliated medical personnel about students' well-being, and questions regarding the usefulness of waterboarding as a tool of resistance training (*ibid.*; SASC 2008, 22, 31).

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<sup>24</sup> The human subjects of this investigation were, according to the paper published (Morgan et al 2000, 892), "124 of 140 consecutively recruited active-duty male soldiers (age 28.8, SD = 5)." Recruitment was "conducted by the principal investigator...at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Training Center and School, Fort Bragg, North Carolina." Further, "All subjects gave written, informed consent."

While limited use of the waterboard for training was ultimately concluded to be unhelpful and unnecessary, the data generated from its use on exceptionalized military bodies directly informed the much less limited use of the waterboard on people genuinely imprisoned by the U.S. Abu Zubaydah, the first known prisoner to “disappear” into a CIA black site under dubious – and later debunked – accusations of high-level involvement with al-Qaeda and never formally charged with any crimes (SSCI 2015, 202-203, 317-319, 406; Rosenberg 2020; Pilkington 2017), is one of those whose experiences of waterboarding, among other tortures, outside of the SERE setting attests to the actual potential long-term effects of physical and psychological torture in spite of any medical oversight (Raymond et al 2010; Apuzzo et al 2016; SASC 2008). His case also draws these two non-disparate threads closely together: the former SERE psychologist James Mitchell is alleged to have personally waterboarded him in the process of “reverse-engineering” SERE resistance techniques for the U.S.’ program of “enhanced interrogation” (Barnett et al 2014; Rosenberg 2020).

Abu Zubaydah faced a different but related form of exceptionalization that constructed him in the fantasy of the security state as threateningly non-human and required to endure, as a matter of security and necessarily, any violence the state judged appropriate (or even, later, inappropriate (SASC 2008, xxiv-xxix; SSCI 2015)). The scaling back and eventual elimination of waterboarding from the SERE curriculum demonstrates how exceptionalization and suffering function differently for SERE’s temporary “prisoners” and those genuinely imprisoned by the United States, often indefinitely. At the same time, these imprisonments and tortures ultimately serve the same purpose: they place both sets of prisoners in such a relationship with the U.S. that any judgment or decision made by the U.S. about them can become legitimized, and made to seem necessary and inevitable. This reinforces the state self-representation as paternalistic, defensive caregiver adjudicating between the “correct” embodiments (and submissions, as explored below) of trainees, and the “incorrect” embodiments of prisoners such as Abu Zubaydah. As scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2007; 2008) have thoroughly explored, this correct vs. incorrect embodiment and subject/objecthood takes its form only ever through the concurrent production of race and gender. These ideas are discussed further in the following section.

This process of data production and medicalization at every step produces a scientifically legitimated state aligned with progress and the “civilized,” where civilization is marked here by the “evidence-based,” a term which makes claims to objectivity and irrefutability. It effects, as well, a reinvestment in a medico-scientific gaze and practice that is purported to turn on human bodies

neutrally, setting them in a framework in which objective “readings” of discrete bodies occur without reference to an uncertain outside world. In this space, the scientization of these military practices suggests, the truths (of danger or risk, for instance) of bodily matter and subjectivity may be discovered through the application of U.S. medical techno-power. The SERE school, having institutionalized the teaching of forms of torture and having produced knowledge about torture and its effects, now functions as a “repository of the world’s knowledge about torture” (Mayer 2009, 158). The U.S.’s medical and scientific establishments have implicitly, at least, accepted the school’s proposition of a torture that is “safe but effective” (*ibid.*). Consequently, the SERE program and the SOF candidates it helps to produce may be seen as apolitical, or rather, removed from challenging political questions, and shielded by virtue of being “scientific”. They may even be understood as a method (the SERE school) and a product (the SOF candidate) that have been “discovered” through an objective investigation into the generalized human body and its limitations.

### *Submitting to the State*

Occasionally accounts hint at aspects of SERE that are less discussed and which pose, having happened at all, a challenge to SERE’s official characterization as a pragmatic and safe program of “stress inoculation”: among these are accounts of sexual and racialized abuse. Journalistic investigations have been the primary channel through which such information reaches the public, and in which these may be read as institutionalized, rather than isolated incidents. In *American Torture*, journalist Michael Otterman documents controversies related to the treatment of SERE students stretching at least back to the 1970s, during which time *Newsweek* highlighted sexual abuse and humiliation taking place at a Navy SERE school. Rape and forced masturbation were among the allegations made by students against instructors (2007, 100). In the 1990s, the SERE school again drew public criticism: at an Air Force academy school, both male and female cadets accused instructors of assault, sexualized humiliation, and threats of rape (*ibid.*, 102-103). A Reconnaissance Marine’s account shared in Evan Wright’s 2004 work of embedded journalism, *Generation Kill*, reveals one explicit instance of the military’s instrumentalization of racial hierarchies: one Marine’s SERE “captors” had forced him, a Texan with a noticeable regional accent, into a Ku Klux Klan hood and into the role of a “slave master” pulling a Black student around on a leash (10). The Marine’s explanation for this, which is echoed in many accounts and reiterates the inevitability and sense of necessity that work to stabilize SOF and the military as institutions, was that the school was meant to do whatever it took to “break” the students – that “they’ll think of anything to fuck

you up in the head” (*ibid.*). In this case, the stabilization and naturalization goes so far as to explicitly frame racialization – and even race-making – as at times necessary. Moreover, the context of its involvement in an officially protective program of stress inoculation shifts responsibility for racial abuse and the violence done by race-making onto the un-American “other”. In this scenario it is the “captor,” but is intended in a training program to be extrapolated further, to the ever-present and uncivilized outside threat the program purports to protect against.

While the body and subjectivity of the soldier generally, as previously discussed, is produced to “signify the nation and national security” (Belkin 2012, 36), SOF personnel are shaped firstly through a valorized submission to state-controlled, “limited” torture that is ratified by the medical and scientific establishments. Exceptionalized training processes that are alleged to produce the agents vital to the projection of U.S. power across the globe project them as uniquely suited to a posthumanity that takes its own shape only through the security projects of the U.S.: SOF personnel, and this posthuman figure, are aligned with national exceptionalism, fantasies about enduring American power, and responsibility to advance civilization (Weber 1999, 4), and are made especially to stand as emblematic of surgically precise but nevertheless expansive American might. It is significant that in recent years SOF “are often the face of the American military in foreign hot spots” (Vanden Brook, 2015).

The training process of limited, medicalized torture works firstly to subjugate and construct the SOF candidate as a site of vulnerability and dependency. This is in common with military training more generally, which constitutes a total institution that is intended to “[rework] the self” (Smith 2008, 281; see also Crane-Seeber 2016, 48-49). This is an aim that can be plainly read in personal accounts of training experiences as well as in scholarship on the subject, and works in the interest of fostering group cohesion, a willingness to fight and kill, and willingness to carry out the directives of commanding officers and the state (Whitworth 2008, 111-115; MacLeish 2012, 55-56; Smith 2008, 281-283; Grossman 1996). Ultimately, it effects a willingness – and indeed, ideally, an eagerness – to submit to authority in both extreme and more routinized situations, in the process reinforcing the military and state as a legitimate authority that structures both the everyday and the more “exceptional”. Furthermore, with military life and the training process, as Belkin (2012) contends, worked through with confusing and complex paradoxes of the masculine and decidedly un-masculine, a successful and untroubled embodiment of “military masculinity” that is supposedly critical for validation and stable sense of self becomes shored up as the final result of this success (*ibid.*, 21-42, 67).

In the case of SERE's Level C training specifically, following the storyline the trainees are drawn into, the dynamic is one of a recruit's forced dependency on the captors firstly, and on the state by the end of the training. This narrative places SOF candidates into positions of feminization and racialization that follow well-established codes<sup>25</sup> that associate these with weakness, lack of control, danger, dependency, and perversion (Philipose 2007; Richter-Montpetit 2007; 2014; Khalili 2011). Crucially, this construction is made against and in contrast to the reiteration of upright, white hetero-masculinity and/or an "upright, domesticatable queerness" (Puar 2007, 47), less of the captors than of the U.S. itself. These codes are clearly malleable, revealing how the state acts to make race and gender, and seems to "allow" humanity at times while at others it may rescind humanity, in ways that serve its posthuman security project. Of the incidents of abuse and violence enacted by the U.S. military against imprisoned people, those that occurred at Abu Ghraib are among the most notorious and demonstrate the slipperiness of a number of constitutive categories of humanity.

Following the release in 2004 of photographs depicting gratuitous and sexualized torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. Military Police guards, the scale of abuse at the prison, who was to blame, and what it said about the United States became a source of anxious debate (Shane and Mazzetti 2008; Mazzetti and Shane 2009; Pugliese 2007; Puar 2005, 13-14). The U.S. military personnel depicted in the photos were shown posing with and humiliating naked prisoners, and, among many other things, were shown pulling prisoners on leashes like dogs. In the cases of both the two SOF candidates in Wright's journalistic account and of the unnamed people genuinely imprisoned and tortured by the U.S., the violence meted out by state actors followed scripts of race and gender that called back to long histories in the U.S. of racialized and racializing torture that has worked to demarcate whiteness from fungible, violable Blackness, and reserve womanhood and manhood for "correct" whiteness and the domesticatable sexuality. Scholars have pointed to echoes in the case of Abu Ghraib of the sexualized lynching of Black people by white mobs in the U.S., and how the photographs that depicted the murders became publicly circulated commodities (Philipose 2007, 1049-1053; Pugliese 2007, 262-263). These commodified pieces of torture, the results of humiliation and violence meted out with "irrefutable intentionality" (Puar 2005, 31), and then displayed in what were likewise intentional acts of photographic documentation and dissemination, reinforced socially ordering hierarchies produced through race-making and

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<sup>25</sup> See also Jasbir Puar's writings on queerness, race, gender, and state violence (2005; 2007; 2008), and Belkin (2012) on U.S. military occupation in the Philippines, especially chapter 6.

gendering processes, and fed into fantasies of white power and inevitable possession of racialized bodies.

In both cases, the (re)production of race and gender are primary outcomes that have served to reassert white supremacy and the dominance of those aligned with and ratified by state power. Any similarities, however, must be understood also to reveal the ways in which the state and its power can function only by mobilizing race and gender as naturalized concepts, and reproducing racializing and gendering processes. These processes of racialization and gendering then, as now, operate malleably depending on the context, but as products of and tools of U.S. power, they serve to naturalize it, and provide a veneer of inevitability. In the case of Abu Ghraib specifically, this occurs because of the way in which racialization becomes a way of coding some as threatening to security, non-human, and requiring the application of indefinite state control. The reiteration of race-making performances of domination and their commodification ultimately reiterates the state's coherence, as well as the Posthuman Project's own coherence and naturalization, precisely because the coherences of these are fundamentally reliant on the very processes of race- and gender-making.

There is no equation between the suffering undergone (often indefinitely) by those imprisoned by the U.S. in the name of its national security, and the delimited suffering of future SOF personnel. This nationally crucial violence does, to be sure, see neither group of people treated as “precisely human” (Wilcox 2015a, 66) in these incidents; indeed they are cast as exceptionally non-human. Furthermore, both are indeed figured during these incidents and afterward as bearing an exceptional relationship with the state: exceptionally dangerous and inhuman in their potential, and exceptional sites and cyphers for national anxiety around security, hetero-masculinity, and race that require the state's (often pre-emptive) intervention and insertion of will. However, only one group of these dehumanized people – the SOF candidates – end up apparently eligible for state-ratified posthumanity. Meanwhile, the Muslim detainee “other” in this case becomes constructed as an “untetherable” queer object of revulsion (Puar 2005, 25, 47), especially animalistic and in a state of “permanent and perpetual war” that means they are “in need of total restraint” (Butler 2004, 78). They are cast outside the bounds of “upright” and “correct” American-ness in the process of being violently brought, and held, inside of its borders.<sup>26</sup> Both prisoners and SOF candidates/personnel are constructed as inhabiting a space of the “known unknown” for the U.S.

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<sup>26</sup> For more discussion of the ways in which U.S. borders have expanded across the globe and into sites such as Guantánamo, see Miller, T. (2019) *Empire of Borders*.

public and military apparatus, a status which justifies state control, domination, and intervention, state secrecy in the name of security, and justifies the suffering – limited or otherwise – of both groups for the sake of state power.

What the above reveals about the posthuman of the Posthuman Project is its intrinsic reliance, then, on the continued production of race, gender, sexuality, the hierarchies of these, and the “correct” vs. “incorrect” modes of embodying these. However, only some are “allowed” by state power to embody the modes of these framed as correct and upright. The defining feature in this case of SERE, when examined next to genuine and unlimited captivity and torture, is the candidate’s voluntary alignment with the state’s will and technologies, and voluntary suffering for state power and for the maintenance of the violent dynamics that undergird it and its seeming coherence. While state violence may be enacted on any number of bodies inside and outside of the military setting or official state boundaries, willing submission to this violence – a willingness to situate oneself in a structurally feminized position vis a vis a state that may then take shape as unimpeachable masculine power – sets candidates apart from those who experience violent feminization and racialization against their wills, and in resistance to state power. Aligning oneself with the state and its will, and indeed accepting the insertion of the state’s will and truth into oneself (Wilcox 2015a, 61), positions the state as final authority on what and who may be said to have the capacity to be human, and posthuman.

This process is reinforced by the racialization of black site space – and specifically, the space of Guantánamo Bay. The relegation of prisoners to this liminal space – perhaps not fully American, but certainly not wholly foreign to the U.S., and always fully under U.S. control – performs its own racializing function. Amy Kaplan’s germinal “Where Is Guantánamo?” (2005b) is instructive here, as it tracks the deliberate managing of the Guantánamo Bay site by the U.S. government that constructed it as a colonial site of deniability and, ultimately, a laboratory for race-making (where this is always at the same time threat-making) and U.S. power that eventually proliferated throughout the world in the decades following 9/11. The indefinite detention experienced even by prisoners such as Abu Zubaydah who were never charged with wrongdoing demonstrates the workings of this racialized space, and how it proceeds to serve a racializing function. In the absence of any evidence of risk, the fact of imprisonment itself can become a marker of risk to the U.S. and its security. Imprisonment and indefinite detention signify the maintenance of a racialized and gendered social order; to break this, for instance by moving prisoners from Guantánamo to prisons in the U.S. mainland (Fox 2016), or simply releasing those cleared of purported crime

(media@aclu.org 2016), provokes anxiety about harm to the coherent national body. In an echo of the posthuman fantasy of invulnerability and preemption, and reflecting the circular logics that justify national security practices, in some cases, imprisonment is considered to potentially create the risk that it is supposed to first guard against (Savage et al 2011; Gjelten et al 2011). The result of these logics and the racialization of the space of sites such as Guantánamo is a bind for the imprisoned that produces racialization and construction as non-human for as long, or as short, as serves U.S. state power.

In sum, eligibility to become posthuman relies, firstly, on an eligibility for humanity, as discussed previously. This eligibility for humanity, or even to be what Puar has described as “domesticatable,” is, to follow contentions of critical scholars of race and gender, contingent, elastic, and a tool of white supremacist power in a U.S. context (Hartman 1997, 24, 35; Haley 2016, 7, 92-93; Johnson 2018). As humanity is ultimately a question of exclusive relationship and alignment with whiteness and its will, it follows that posthumanity, too, not least in the military context examined throughout this dissertation, is a category that is the reserve of state power and its intrinsic whiteness. The ability to set intention for the future and decide, a property of whiteness and masculinity historically, becomes reserved in this for those who set intentions in line with the state’s: in this case, for those who willingly submit to state power. In short, in the fantasy of the Posthuman Project, submission to state authority by those who become exceptionalized among the already exceptionalized reifies the state and its authority to produce categories of human, gender, and race, and is key in producing the *kind* of personhoods that may be eligible for posthumanity.

### *Exceptional Americans Among the Exceptional*

The narrative quality described by graduates of the school, the way in which the Level C training plays out like a full dramatic production with clearly delineated “good guys” and “bad guys,” makes clear not only some of the intended outcomes of the training, but reveals the kind of dynamics that SERE draws upon and naturalizes in the course of producing exceptionalized subjects. The end of the captivity story and the Code of Conduct that is meant to carry the SOF candidate through both practically and in terms of moral support, punctuates these points. As described in relative detail by SERE graduates David J. Morris and Ward Carroll, after the candidates’ experience of torture – in which they have likely been subjected to sleep deprivation, physical abuse, extreme cold, isolation, sound torture, and being treated like animals, among other torments

– and throughout which the successful candidate has cleaved to the behavior sanctioned in the Code of Conduct, the candidates’ rescue by SOF is staged. Following days of confinement and emotional and physical torture, Carroll (2014) writes,

Morale was low. We were sure we were never getting out of there and our lives as we knew them were over. Suddenly there was another burst of gunfire and a group of guys in cammies rappelled over the walls of the compound at various spots. They took the camp personnel into custody and announced that they were Navy SEALs. The flag of PRONA [a fictional Soviet satellite state that is home to their captors] hung against the main guard tower was replaced by the Stars and Stripes as the National Anthem played over the camp PA. There wasn't a dry eye among us as we sang along. We were Americans, and we were free again.

From the beginning of the Level C training, SOF candidates have been situated within, and expected to act as an “American” within, a setting that is made in every way to seem “non-American”. The foreignness and otherness of the setting and captors is meant to be reinforced through their use of torture, manipulation, and at times seemingly desperate tactics contrary to what it is projected a “real” American would be willing to do. In one situation described by Carroll (2014), for instance, his “captors” physically push him to step on an American flag so they can take a propagandistic photograph of him “dancing” on it. The successful graduate who will become a special operator is the candidate who has memorized and followed the Code of Conduct, in its mapping out of the “correct” and “American” way to behave and react in captivity situations. The first article of the Code begins the exceptionalization process, which is ultimately a process of engendering dependency of the SOF candidate on the state, and submission to its authority: “I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense” (*ibid.*). Following a particularly harrowing experience at the hands of his captors, Carroll describes thinking, “If I had to die, so be it.”

The sixth and final article of the Code reads, “I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.” The experience of students at the SERE school sits in the camps of both the “civilized” and “uncivilized” and pulls them together to produce exceptionality. As well, discourses of necessity and a stark differentiation drawn here, and in the SERE training itself, between the “other” and the “upright” student allow for a diffusion of any tension, and a way around questions of harm, or challenges to the self-image of the United States as above all civilized and civilizing. These allow for a demarcation to be made between a risky, desperate, feminized, and inhuman(e) “other”/ever-present outside that can be

drawn up against the ideal of a cohesive, principled, and domesticatable masculine actor who is shown what he is not through the inhumane actions of his captors. Crucially, he is shown what he must be through the actions of a paternalistic state with the prudence, control and power over temporality and spatiality to decide how and when to limit torture and captivity.

Perverse treatment and sexual assault, raced and racializing abuse, and animalization serve to mark the “other” in this scenario, which extends beyond the setting of the SERE school, as it draws on broader social dynamics and extends past the official end of training. The contours of this fantasy “other” become formed through gender and sexual perversion, race-making, and the category of non-human. The SOF candidate, the fantasy holds, becomes fundamentally set apart, while always the possibility exists for the state to call these candidates in and subject them to similar violent processes. It is the willingness of candidates to undergo such disciplining that is projected as a major key in constituting their posthuman exceptionality. In this way, “The body informs the torture, but the torture also forms the body” (Puar 2005, 19), and the successful graduate of the school is produced as he who is eligible to stand for the state’s truth, and its posthumanity. His subjectivity, which is in theory strictly aligned with that of the state itself, and his body are understood become the exceptional weapon; to follow contentions of previous chapters, his own perception, the view he turns on the world, becomes an exceptional weapon as well.

### *Conclusion*

In combination with the appropriation of the “native” and integration with a wide range of technology by SOF that is explored in the next chapter, the way that otherness and humanity are produced and play out in the SERE school reveals that the particular place of SOF in the Posthuman Project is a paradoxical one of non-humanity and otherness, and of posthumanity. Similarly to the ways in which discourses of necessity and security work to justify the brutality of the school, the necessary, the inevitable, and ideas of the natural come together to stabilize this paradoxical arrangement, and justify the work done by the state in the SERE school; the work done by graduates once they become SOF; and, crucially, construct the state as the final authority on the human, posthuman, gender, and race. The dynamic that is reiterated throughout these dehumanizing and violent processes of exceptionalization is one that positions the state as owner, controller, and judge of what “qualifies” as correctly non-human, and correctly human such that there may be the capacity to become posthuman. In the case of SERE, this manifests in who

becomes allowed to “opt into” its Posthuman Project and authorized to act on the state’s behalf as an exceptionalized – domesticatable and state-ratified, yet dangerous and “wild” in various ways – special forces operator.

The SERE school case demonstrates the way that the production of exceptionalized SOF personnel must call to the violent processes that constitute gender and race and that further constitute the United States: they are the conditions of possibility for such alleged exceptionality. Structurally, SERE works through the construction of two sites that are made to come into violent contact during the course of training: the United States’ nation space (embodied, in the end, by the successful graduate), and the degraded and degrading racialized space of the “other”. The controlled production of these spaces by the United States and its actors positions the state as an authority justified in producing knowledge about what constitutes otherness, and what constitutes its valorized opposite. However, SOF, in part because of their exceptionalized status and the kinds of violent contact they are expected to make and resist, and the state-aligned perception they graduate SERE school with, are produced through both the marked and unmarked, and become subjects of these supposedly disparate sites. Brutalized, objectified, degraded, and feminized, they are produced through a frame of non-humanity that becomes aligned with the desperate, perverse “other”; as the subjects of rescue by the United States – what is more, by some of its most exceptionalized agents –, falling back on survival techniques and a Code supplied by the United States, and graduating to stand as emblems of resistance to the savagery and violence associated with the non-American, and now, the fantasy holds, conduits for the state’s own will and perception, they come to altogether exceed the human.

The conduct of SOF outside of the SERE school expands this picture, perhaps especially in terms of the making of SOF candidate and his perception as an exceptional arguably posthuman weapon. It opens up more questions regarding the place of racialization and race-making in the making of posthumanity, and how intrinsic the production of space is to the Posthuman Project and its constitutive whiteness and masculinity.

## Chapter 4: Deploying the Exceptional

### *Introduction*

In 2017, the long-standing association of the U.S.'s Special Operations Forces with exceptionalism and boundary-pushing came violently to the front of public and official discourse. The “shadow warriors” of the Navy’s SEAL Team 6, the consummate quiet professionals celebrated for their super-human feats and the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden, America’s “best of the best” (Warren 2019, 41), had undeniably engaged in acts of inhuman brutality and “rogue behavior” (Ritchie 2019) both in and outside of war zones (Cole 2017a, 2017b). Among the sensationalistic allegations were those of murder, sexual assault, and drug smuggling and use by personnel (Ritchie 2019; Philipps 2019c; Axelrod 2019; Editorial Staff, American Military News 2019); members of SEAL Team 6 were alleged to have used specially made hatchets marked with “a Native American warrior in headdress and crossed tomahawks” to both kill suspected militants and mutilate corpses (Cole 2017a), in what would be clear war crimes. In understatement, the head of U.S. Special Operations Command, General Richard Clarke, made reference to “recent incidents” with the potential to “threaten the trust placed in us” before going on to initiate “a comprehensive review of...SOF culture and ethics” (Budryk 2019).

By far the most heavily publicized of these incidents have been those attached to the case of Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher, formerly of SEAL Team 7. Accused of shooting an unarmed child (Cole 2019) and of the “premeditated murder of a 17-year-old ISIS fighter” who was being held in U.S. captivity in 2017 (Ritchie 2019; Philipps et al 2019) among other acts, Gallagher was court martialed, but acquitted of murder charges in July of 2019. The case attracted a great deal of attention globally, not least because of U.S. President Donald Trump’s vocal support for Gallagher and multiple interventions made on his behalf (Ismay 2019; Philipps 2019c, 2019e). First, the Navy’s demotion of Gallagher for photographing himself posing with dead bodies was reversed, and two others accused of murdering civilians in Afghanistan were pardoned (Parker and Lamothe 2019; Philipps 2019c). Then, in November 2019, following a Naval disciplinary procedure set in motion by the SEAL Commander Rear Admiral Collin Green, President Trump stepped in to stop the removal of Gallagher’s coveted SEAL “Trident” pin. The force of this removal, in Gallagher’s case, would not have been where it affected his career, especially as Gallagher had intended to soon retire, but would have lay in the pin’s significance as “a tangible sign of membership in a

famously exclusive community” (Ismay 2019). Removal of the pin works to symbolically “cast out” SEALs from a tightknit community steeped in a “warrior culture that prizes honor and prestige” (Philipps 2019d), and marks them as “undeserving” of the SEAL designation (Philipps 2019e). Speaking to the *New York Times*, retired senior SEAL chief Eric Deming explained, “To have a commander remove that pin after a guy has gone through so much to earn it, it is pretty much the worst thing you could do. You are having your whole identity taken away” (Philipps 2019d).

To stage this intervention, President Trump overrode the judgment of Admiral Green – a highly unusual move, according to the Naval Postgraduate School’s Thomas Bruneau, given Green’s senior officer status (*ibid.*). The intent, according to Trump, was to get the Navy “back to business” and away from the divisive focus on Gallagher’s sensationalized case. This was a desire echoed by then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper (Watson 2019): to explain Secretary Esper’s position further, then-Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham quoted Trump, saying, “When our soldiers have to fight for our country, I want to give them the confidence to fight” (Kube and Lee 2019). Conservative media overwhelmingly supported Gallagher and shored up a position of what Fox News host Pete Hegseth described as “fidelity to the warfighter” (Philipps 2019c), in which the judgment of the men in question, and actions taken in combat zones, are given a benefit of the doubt that, like Trump’s judgment as Commander in Chief, overrides any pre-existing moral or legal strictures. The perceptions of, and decisions made by, the SOF personnel who fight are not beyond reproach entirely. However, in the process of framing the issue as one in which one either has “fidelity to the warfighter,” or does not and is therefore responsible for weakening the warfighter by eroding confidence and ability to perform, SOF are ultimately positioned as unassailable at their core. This position is clearly communicated in one of Trump’s October 2019 tweets, in which he states in reference to one of the pardoned SOF personnel, “We train our boys to be killing machines, then prosecute them when they kill!” (Trump 2019a) In this view, by putting SOF personnel on trial for the decisions they have made, one is putting the making-machine of these “boys” – that is, the whole SOF production and mobilization process – on trial. Questioning the tools through which war is waged becomes questioning the war-waging itself, a dangerous position of infidelity that threatens to weaken the entire institution and the security of the nation-state.

Questions of oversight, policing, and accountability run through the discourse surrounding the Gallagher case, and point to some of the ways in which SOF has been produced as exceptional. This exceptionality places SOF and associated personnel in a special relationship with the state

and its security projects, and ultimately works for the political and moral covering over of these. Acts of alleged brutality and the discomfort even of other SEAL operators in this case – notably in the case of colleagues who attempted at various times to report Gallagher’s suspected crimes (Ismay 2020; Philipps 2019f) – sit parallel to the construction of these operators as silent professionals akin to ghosts who are able to operate effectively, and indeed possibly at their best, with little to no oversight. Both SOF personnel and non-SOF commentators appear to struggle at times to reconcile the contradictions between warring representations of U.S. special forces; this apparent struggle to maintain the hegemony of a particular presentation and group identity is often called a “distraction” from the more important work of SEALs and the wider SOF community (Philipps, Oper Jr., and Arango 2019; Watson 2019). Blame for any such institutional instability is often pinned on the “overburdening” of operators post-9/11, which, it is argued, has led to an erosion or skewing of SOF “culture and ethics” (Ismay 2020). The fallout from the Gallagher case seems to indicate a tense relationship between near-total unaccountability and a total professional commitment to duty that would never *need* to be held accountable to those outside the SOF fold. However, it is SOF’s place in the military Posthuman Project and the discourses of exceptionality that place them there that smooth over the contradictions and tensions that have been brought to wider attention through this case. They help to construct a powerful subject that is highly malleable, and ultimately “domesticatable” (Puar 2007, 47) while seeming anything but.

More specifically, in this context of a state project of hyper-control and hyper-surveillance built up through racializing and gendering processes, SOF personnel are paradoxically constructed, and it is this that looms large in their projected exceptionality. They emerge in the framework of the Posthuman Project as non-human – animal in their brutalized “low-tech” “savagery” and appeal to a “native” American-ness, or even spectral in their status as “shadow warrior” and “invisible” – but are simultaneously constructed as something exceptionally more than human, and perhaps superhuman: the physical feats involved in the conduct of special operations, the training, and disciplinary techniques required to make it into “elite” units have all been made legendary (as covered at length in the preceding chapter).

Alongside this is the association of SOF with advanced technologies such as the drone and specialized equipment used for ground missions, the crucial function of data production to their conduct and operations, and, as will be explored below, their production during the course of training<sup>27</sup> and operations as pure technologies and symbols themselves. This highly particular

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<sup>27</sup> See chapter 3 specifically on production through training.

construction of SOF draws upon white settler colonial fantasies of the American “native” and destined national expansion, civilization and outside threat, masculinity, belonging and ownership of land in the United States, and where these all intersect. Their particular exceptionalized configuration draws force and political power from association with American territory that they are projected as fundamentally natural to – naturally of the territory of the U.S., and natural agents of its global expansion. The association with the low-tech and high-tech as well as their apparent unique embeddedness in the making of American territory itself serve to construct a force that is justified in whatever brutality is enacted in the course of operations conducted in the name of the nation-state. Likewise, this constitutes another means through which the U.S. state itself becomes positioned as the final authority on not just gender and race, but indeed humanity and posthumanity.

This chapter is concerned with how SOF is produced after training ends as a uniquely flexible weapon in service of state “posthuman” power, and how SOF constitutes a vital piece of the Posthuman Project – a piece with growing importance, given the state’s increasing reliance on SOF across the globe. SOF personnel are regarded as exceptional among military elements that are already often viewed as exceptional; as covered in the preceding chapter, training is a crucial beginning stage of the process, but this process, which is also vital to the construction of the state and its power and borders, is ongoing and reiterative while remaining flexible. The conduct of SOF as well as how their work and embodiments are represented play important roles in making this exceptionalization appear natural, inevitable, and fundamental to national security. Within the Posthuman Project, the “low-tech” and racialized and gendered (and racializing and gendering) notions of the “savage” exist co-constitutively with the “high-tech,” superhuman, and supposedly disembodied. These come together to produce a valuable force that is granted unique protection by the U.S. state, and in turn provides a unique function shoring up a fantasy of posthumanity that may result from certain alignments with, and articulation through, military technologies. As a result, SOF are a crucial tool of white, masculine state power and its security projects of ownership, total knowledge in the interest of control, and hyper-surveillance.

### *Standard Bearers*

Military and civilian commentators frequently agree that since 9/11, SOF has been “overburdened” with missions that could ostensibly be carried out by less “specialized” military forces. This overburdening has proceeded to the point, arguably, of seeing a clandestine group

such as SEAL Team 6 turned into “a global manhunting machine” (Mazzetti et al 2015). Arguably it is this overburdening that has led to something of a crisis in the ethics and culture of SOF, exemplified in the Gallagher case and both official and public reaction to the “recent incidents” referenced by General Clarke (Budryk 2019; Axelrod 2019; Feickert 2019, 10; Ritchie 2019). Beyond merely “distracting,” public reaction and the level of interest in the Gallagher case, the SEALs, and other Special Operations Forces have been suggested to be inappropriate: trust should rest with the forces to police themselves. In the words of former Navy SEAL Jeff Eggers, “Let accountability rest at the appropriate level, and that’s how we get this right. That’s why we have commanders and senior enlisted advisers. We have to trust them with that” (Watson 2019).

In an indication of the extent to which the appropriate level of accountability lies within the SOF community, the mandated culture and ethics review of August 2019 came to an end four months later having found no “systemic ethics problem” in the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). It had, however, found some potential issues where deference to the chain of command and (confusingly) ethics were concerned (USSOCOM 2020, 4-6). One of the primary drivers, it is suggested in the document that was circulated following the review, is SOF culture that is “overly focused on employment and mission accomplishment to the detriment of leadership, discipline and accountability” (*ibid.*, 7). This comes at least partly, according to the document, as a result of a “continuous global demand for SOF capabilities” (*ibid.*, 25). Failures of SOF leadership are likewise attributed ultimately to the high and demanding tempo of SOF operations, and a culture that valorizes combat and forward deployment that is exacerbated by this (*ibid.*, 33-34). One of the more telling portions of the review document says,

From accession pipelines to their first SOF units, SOF personnel are encouraged to emulate those who have tactical deployment experience. Deployments forward, specifically to locations where combat is a possibility, are valued above all other things, and perceived as the ultimate expression of competence. In return, those who did deploy forward, specifically in some degree of combat, are held as almost an infallible standard bearer for the rest of the organization to emulate – seemingly regardless of it is a positive or negative standard. (*ibid.*, 34)

The apparent infallibility of SOF personnel who have seen and survived combat is obviously reflected in the Gallagher case, perhaps no surprise given that this review was ordered following the massive notoriety it gained. But the Gallagher case is extraordinary primarily for the public attention it has commanded, and especially for the interventions by President Trump: while the ethics and culture review declared no systemic issues in USSOCOM, and Gallagher’s former colleagues have labeled him a “toxic” and “evil” (Philipps 2019f) individual, evidence and critical scholarship point to the actually systemic nature of such abuses and brutality. These are borne out

of a context that ratifies such brutality in the moment it takes place, and shields it afterwards through discourses of security. Allegations and popular representations of U.S. SOF as akin to rogue elements within an otherwise coherent and disciplined military force are not new. While news media and longform journalism have recently brought SOF (and in particular the Navy SEALs) to much wider attention and scrutiny, SOF have long been well-known for such “infractions” as flouting military grooming standards, and pushing the bounds of recognizably “correct” military behavior and conduct (Warren 2019). This has gone some way to produce a particular aesthetic of SOF that constitutes part of, and reinforces, their mystique, suggesting operations of “sufficient importance” that basic military grooming standards no longer applied (Bonenberger and Weinstein 2019), and the limits of what “unconventional” meant could be pushed in the name of security and “the mission”.<sup>28</sup> Much of this has trafficked in notions of the “guerrilla”: the unconventional, and a readiness for and “emphasis on guerrilla warfare” was proposed in the first mission statement provided to the U.S. Army’s newly created “Special Forces” in 1952, and along with the “underground,” it constituted the meaning the U.S. military assigned to unconventional warfare itself (Livermore 2017; Goldfein 2014, xi).

The Gallagher case did present a challenge for the notion of SOF as infallible standard bearer. Perhaps especially at the time the review was announced in August 2019, and then with the attempt by leadership to remove Gallagher’s Trident pin, the stability of the exceptional place occupied by SOF in the military landscape appeared somewhat troubled, but the tensions in this case have been smoothed over in various ways. This occurred through the interventions of the Commander in Chief most notably, but also through the process of investigating SOF’s culture and ethics, and the work done by Gallagher’s former colleagues in identifying him specifically as an individual who troubles SOF and the military apparatus writ large. But SOF personnel, even those such as Gallagher, because they are understood to stand in for and be products of exceptionalized, technologized US might, must remain untouchable – even if this untouchability may appear in ways less than straightforward, or with an apparent flexibility that allows the state to simultaneously deny and claim accountability for what is labeled “rogue”. A large part of what made the smoothing over possible is the production of SOF as machinic, exceptionally superhuman/non-human “anesthetic” subjects/objects of state power. It is through this mobilization of discourses of

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<sup>28</sup> On the much lighter side of things, see, e.g., military satire website Duffel Blog’s 2013 article “Soldier Kicked Out of Special Forces Because He Can’t Grow a Beard,” available at: <http://www.duffelblog.com/2013/03/soldier-kicked-out-of-special-forces-because-he-cant-grow-a-beard>; also see Bonenberger and Weinstein’s 2019 article wherein they suggest that the development and popularization of the SOF aesthetic has led to the rise of “‘tactical’ culture,” available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/154033/american-beards-military-culture>

exceptionality that they become understood to be the “infallible standard bearer,” and then through which deference to SOF comes to be understood as a matter of security.

### *Experiencing Combat*

Not only the review document, but Gallagher’s own words<sup>29</sup> and the words of other SOF personnel speak to the key place of forward-deployment, and more importantly of having engaged in combat, to the SOF sense of legitimacy and identity. The emphasis in these accounts is largely on embodied experience; one cannot know “what it is like” without experiencing exceptionalized high-stakes combat, and carrying out these operations oneself. This begins the process of making-machine and -weapon out of SOF: in a similar dynamic to the way that torture is informed by, but also itself forms the body in question, military – and ostensibly non-military – violence is informed by and also forms the body of the exceptionalized soldier.

In light of this, the ways and means by which some of this violence takes place is worth noting. Some of the most sensationalized of the scandalous information that pushed questions of SOF culture and ethics into the mainstream debate are allegations that SOF personnel have used hatchets to kill suspected militants and mutilate corpses in areas of operation. The hatchets in question were allegedly marked with “a Native American warrior in headdress and crossed tomahawks,” and specially made for SEAL Team 6 by Daniel Winkler, a knife maker who created weapons for the 1992 film “The Last of the Mohicans” (Cole 2017a). At the same time, SOF remain also tightly linked to the technologically “advanced”; this capacity to skirt the line between apparent “civilization” and “barbarity,” and slip between the two depending on context, constitutes part of their exceptionality, and is enabled by such SOF culture and deployment practices given official review, but also the exceptionalizing processes that form SOF. This will be discussed at greater length below.

The ability to engage in combat successfully in extreme circumstances; to exercise control over one’s body, mind, the wider environment and its constituent “alien” subjects; and to be ready to carry out any kinds of violence to maintain dominance, are framed as indicating the exceptionality of SOF subjectivity. This also is arguably one of the important pieces setting SOF personnel, in their alleged posthumanity, apart from likewise allegedly posthuman drone operators: while the

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, in his guest appearance on Andy Stumpf’s “Cleared Hot” podcast ([https://clearedhot.libsyn.com/episode-112-eddie-gallagher?tdest\\_id=724304](https://clearedhot.libsyn.com/episode-112-eddie-gallagher?tdest_id=724304)).

experience of waging war via drone is anything but disembodied, persistent myths about the separation of the drone operator from “real” combat function to situate SOF personnel who have experienced combat in a different and more valorized realm. Through this, they continue to act as standard bearer for what figures as potentially the “best” way of waging and experiencing war.

*Roots in the Land*

Following the above, the situation of SOF as operating generally with unique capabilities, but also in unique relation to their surrounding environment is a major factor in their construction as exceptional, standard-bearing, and indeed posthuman. This construction arises out of imaginations of whiteness, indigeneity, property, ownership, and notions of progress crucial to the sense-making of the U.S. nation-state itself. It is enmeshed in long and ongoing white settler colonial histories that propel forward the exceptionalization of SOF, such that SOF personnel become situated even beyond the well-established exceptionality of whiteness, masculinity, and other military personnel.

The use of guerrilla and “irregular warfare” tactics by white settler-colonist and early militia groups, and the use of extreme violence to maintain and justify control over seized land, is one piece in the making of SOF exceptionalization. These settlers arguably operated as some of the earliest forms of “special forces” (Grandin 2019, 16), in a context in which the ready adoption of “irregular” ways of war marked a significant departure from forms of war-waging understood to be European (Crandall 2014, 36-37; Hixson 2013, 95).<sup>30</sup> Accounts from the 1700s describe the guerrilla tactics adopted by colonists fighting British Crown forces and indigenous people as making use of the landscape in ways unfamiliar to “conventional” European armies, for instance by staging ambushes in wooded land before retreating, in order to avoid the full-on confrontation more familiar to European warfare (Crandall 2014, 37). Notably, this departure involved the imitation of what were considered the techniques and tactics of the indigenous peoples targeted by militant settler groups and individuals. Among these groups were Rogers’ Rangers, the earliest precursor to the present-day Army Rangers, and considered by some “the nation’s first unconventional warfare specialists” (Balestrieri 2017; Hixson 2013, 51). Operating during the French and Indian War, prior to the formal foundation of the United States, its founder Robert Rogers displayed “legendary” adaptability to unfamiliar terrain that he formalized into a specialized training regimen for his Rangers. As the U.S. Army’s official website (U.S. Army 2020) claims, this

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<sup>30</sup> The notion of a distinctly American way of waging war is relevant here, features frequently in work on American warfare, and has been theorized as developing from the earliest of British colonial incursions into what would become the U.S. See John Grenier’s *The First Way of War: American Warmaking on the Frontier, 1607 – 1814*.

group became “one of the few non native units to operate effectively in inhospitable conditions”. From these early beginnings, a hallmark of the “unconventional” for U.S. SOF has been the recognition of, and instrumentalization of, one’s situation within the wider environment.

Beyond mere instrumentalization, however, the adoption of techniques and styles of war-waging attributed, whether correctly or incorrectly, to indigenous people of North America has worked to place SOF in a relationship to their areas of operation that configures them as rightfully exercising power over these environments and their populations. It ultimately constructs this as an inevitable and natural outcome. Understanding whiteness as not a simple “social identity,” but a political relation that encompasses property, among other things, holds explanatory power for the ways in which the U.S. nation-state took its form and gained ideological and material coherence and power through seizure of people and places. The work of scholars such as Inwood and Bonds (2017) and Boggs (2020) provides a way into reading the production of U.S. territory as production of whiteness precisely through the production of indigeneity that became marked for appropriation, expulsion, and extinction. “White possession” (Inwood and Bonds 2017, 255; Moreton-Robinson 2015) hinged upon indigenous dispossession in the first instance, to produce the white, properly inhabited space of modernity. Relatedly, the adoption of styles of war-waging attributed to the indigenous peoples of North America at the same time as white settlers rhetorically, and through acts of genocide, erased their presence and disavowed violence that could be called savage (Boggs 2020, 294), both reinforced whiteness as natural to the land, and reinforced notions of the land as “an empty slate” (*ibid.*) open to extraction and regulation.

The politics of “going native” (Huhndorf 2001) in the ongoing construction of the U.S. nation-state, military, and SOF specifically sit within a long and ongoing history of appropriation and territorialization of land and bodies in the production of modernity. As earlier chapters have discussed, such territorialization has propelled forward and concretized the construction of gender, race, and the category of human. In the course of these nation-making processes, the state and its forces have appealed to inevitability – of domination, of the extinction and disappearance of the “native,” and of white masculine power – to justify said processes, and their attendant violences. As touched on above, vital to this has been a particular construction of the native “savage” who threatens white civilization but is inevitably defeated by its inexorable march. Historical research demonstrates that the “savage” may even be understood as victimized by this progress and eulogized (Grandin 2019, 44-45; Brantlinger 2003; Pierce 2016, 74-75), but this practice positions whiteness, again, as inevitably overpowering, destined for dominance, and aligned with desirable,

technologized progress. It reifies the structures of white supremacy that motivate and persistently justify expansion of the nation-state, and the production of its subjects and objects. This notion of “savagery,” which takes its form through the prism of white supremacy, also crucially constitutes the idiom from which SOF borrow in order to make claim to ownership of self, and rightful dominion over the environments in which they operate.

Allegations of the brutality of SOF – the use of hatchets to mutilate corpses and to kill, the murder of unarmed civilians in war zones, for instance – have been widely met with condemnation and concern (Keller 2018), but these, along with the more prosaic actions taken by SOF that push into the unconventional and the bloody, serve to exceptionalize and “other” SOF in ways that work through the concept of the “savage”. The “savage” in the U.S. context has been deployed as a violent category of race, gender, and rule, demarcating some as “insolent” in the face of American might (Grenier 2012, 142); inherently “deviant and lawless” and therefore unprotected by the rule of law (Estes 2017a); and as possessing an essential viciousness, earthiness, and animality (Lewis 2008, 3; Deer and Murphy 2017, 714). When assigned to some, it has served to racialize and gender – to produce “killable” subjects (Wilcox 2017; see also Simpson 2014, 156) outside the bounds of the law and “national subjectivity” (Singh 2017, 34), and to produce subjects that seemed to have their lives and spaces “naturally” contract and inevitably face extinction (Huhndorf 2001, 5). “Savagery” has been both a tool to excuse violence, and is the purported cause of it, signifying destructive “outside” elements to the civilizational project and its attendant categories of gender and race, and the making and sorting of populations necessary to build these. As both cause and excuse for violence, “savagery” has been invoked to justify seizure of bodies and territory, and violent domination both within the bounds of the United States and, famously, outside of it. The fantasy is that this sits at odds with the civilization, technological progress, and right to possession of territory and self that became the domain of whiteness and white American manhood.

That SOF personnel may at times be aligned with the savage, by their own choice or in the public and wider military perceptions, works to construct a force that appears, paradoxically, both outside of modernity and the civilized, and simultaneously within it because this force yet remains aligned with the state, with its advanced war-making technologies, and the Posthuman Project’s “civilizing” mission. In another example of the capacity for this Project’s smoothing over of contradictions, SOF are granted license through the process of exceptionalization to draw together these apparently dichotomous ways of being, and to embody them in their ways of waging and experiencing war. Asked for comment on Team attitudes toward the mutilation of bodies and

other “incidents” involving Iraqi civilians, one former SEAL Team 6 leader asked, “Often we’d hear, well, they’re savages ... They don’t play by the rules, so why should we?” (Cole 2017a) The logic of this sits comfortably with the justificatory logics behind the torture meted out to aspiring SOF personnel in the SERE school and to prisoners held in US “black sites,” as discussed in the previous chapter. Drawing again on dynamics fundamental to a national and military understanding of self, however, it also echoes the “Wild West” discourses that were first transported to Vietnam and more recently to the Middle East in order to “make sense” of these wars through a discursive disciplining. The “heritage metaphor” of “Indian country,” which has been used to designate “hostile, unpacified territories in active war zones” (Silliman 2008, 237) that were also spaces destined for such pacification, worked to situate military personnel – in this reading, SOF personnel specifically – as the “cowboy” heroes of the narrative.

This relationship with savagery and more broadly with certain ideas of the “native” function as ways for SOF to claim a particular and unique relationship to the United States, its national territory, and the territory that is made of environments and populations outside the U.S.’s official boundaries. Given the exceptionalization processes at play from the beginning, this relationship further configures SOF as ratified in whatever “ownership” and dominance they might assert over territory, and by whatever means. To reiterate, this is following violent processes of racialization as well as gendering – here, the construction of some people and spaces as “savage” – that justified the creation and seizure of territory (Simpson 2014, 60) and peoples, and that marked them as non-white and intrinsically contradicting the forms of expansion that marked white civilization. The “space” of savage being – the expanding and always shifting “frontier” – in the U.S. became framed, through the myths of white destiny and native extinction (Brantlinger 2003) as naturally subject to white ownership, military might, and in need of securing.

What may be read in these processes are the ways in which SOF personnel, by virtue of their enduring alignment with the state while making explicit calls to and performances of savagery, are granted the capacity in the Posthuman Project to embody a paradoxical deep rootedness and hyper-mobility in territories over which they operate globally. This happens through their construction as exceptional, but more specifically exceptionally American: self-possessive, in touch with an elemental, masculine Americanness and the military might that that props this up, and accountable to no one save the state at its highest level of leadership. Ultimately this constitutes a making-claim to an essential, unassailable thoroughly “native” Americanness that is ratified in appropriating indigeneity (and the trappings of other cultures within areas of operations) in the

name of national security. It constitutes, as well, a ratification of the global claiming of land and bodies by SOF during the course of operations, in a reiteration of the dynamics of white settler colonialism.

### *Anesthetic Subjects*

A concept that will be returned to at length in the next chapter bears raising here, as it helps to form a picture of the kind of exceptional position inhabited by SOF, in their relationship to both the high-tech and low-tech. In 2001, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory issued a report in which affiliated scientists discussed the future of military technology and its applications to select bodies. From early on in these discussions, a guiding assumption was seized upon: that some bodies, if they lacked “certain attributes,” would never benefit from the application of even the most advanced technologies. For these researchers, their starting point in imagining to whom military technology might “prove beneficial” was the so-called “Naked Warrior” – “a warrior with no individual equipment or systems” (National Security Directorate, Oak Ridge National Laboratory 2001, 2). The projection of SOF personnel as exceptionally ready for the application of both advanced technology and the most “primitive,” exceptionally ready to embody both the civilized and uncivilized paradoxically at once, fits them into this mold of the Naked Warrior to an extent not found with other more “conventional” troops. The very flexibility that is projected as inherent to SOF personnel, and which is found inherent to the U.S. security state, is a crucial attribute meaning they are understood as such “select bodies” to whom technologies of the state can, and indeed should, be applied in the name of national security. Exceptionalized beyond the “conventional” military apparatus and personnel, SOF collectively and individually set the standard for the imagined subject eligible for the military posthumanity raised in the Project.

In addition to such flexibility, SOF’s projection as uniquely “anesthetic subjects” within the wider military body is another crucial element producing and justifying their exceptionalization, and deputization as agents of national expansionism and state power. As described by Ken MacLeish, who works with the concept of “anesthetic subjects” drawn from Buck-Morss’ 1992 work on Walter Benjamin, the apparent anesthesia attained by military personnel – e.g. an imperviousness to pain physical, mental, and emotional, and ultimately a “seal[ing] off from experience” (2012, 55) except for that which the state desires the soldier to experience – is best understood as something which must continually be worked at (*ibid.*, 56). It is an ongoing process, and, like other military masculinities, is not inhabited in any stable way. The fantasy of anesthesia though, of

untouchability and total control of oneself and environment, figures large in the Posthuman Project's figuration of the human and posthuman, and is vital in the making-coherent of SOF as exceptional.

Wider public and medico-scientific perceptions of SOF reinforce the mythology surrounding SOF, and reiterate and naturalize their exceptionalization. Studies examining physical injury among military personnel point to SOF personnel as less prone to injury than conventional forces (Ursano et al 2017; Abt et al 2014). SOF's exceptionality and the potential for significant difference is reiterated in this before the study is even done, in the separating out of SOF from the so-called "conventional". The SERE studies discussed in the previous chapter are among these that delineate SOF and their exceptionality, and, further, produce data that itself facilitates and legitimizes this exceptionalization process. These studies acknowledge the intense stressors undergone by future SOF personnel, but find no serious risks of harm to students during or after the program. The results of these were used to justify the SERE training regimen itself (SASC 2008), and in the process of doing this, they justify the resulting product: the exceptionalized special operator.

Bridging the divide between the scientific and popular where representations of SOF exceptionality are concerned, Green Beret Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Nicholas Lavery drew media attention for re-deploying to Afghanistan following an above-the-knee amputation of his leg. He is the first operator to have done this. The discourses surrounding his situation highlight an imbrication with the state's advanced and capacitating prosthetics technology, and Lavery's apparently total dedication to fulfilling his role of "protector," which he understands as intrinsic to himself (Szanişzlo 2017; CBS Boston 2019). He also appears with his visible injury to embody the anesthetic subject – and the ideal of the Naked Warrior – in a way that plays into the exceptionalization of SOF subjectivities and bodies: "Not once after his right leg shattered in Afghanistan in 2013, during a year of surgeries and the months spent learning to walk on a prosthetic leg, did Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Lavery consider settling for a medical discharge or ending his Army career behind a desk. 'I never went through a phase like that,' the 35-year-old Green Beret weapons sergeant said. 'Within a couple of minutes, I acknowledged the fact that this was my reality'" (Szanişzlo 2017).

Ultimately, because of the subjection of SOF to state power above all, SOF are configured as an anesthetic technology of and for the state to reinforce the state's own power to determine who

and what may appear to be modern and (un)civilized, and, through this, human or posthuman. They embody the exceptional and stand in for a state built on a highly flexible exercise of power because they inhabit and blur the boundaries between the savage and civilized, non-human and superhuman, dependent (upon the state) and totally self-possessed, and are both rooted and constructed as “native” to America while also embodying a hyper-mobility. In the context of the Posthuman Project, SOF become uniquely and specially situated in relation to the state, and its figuration of posthumanity. In this they become uniquely and specially eligible for the U.S. military’s technologically-enabled posthumanity.

*“A global manhunting machine”*

SOF’s area of operations has expanded rapidly across the globe since 9/11. In 2018, they were documented operating in 149 countries, with a rapidly increasing presence in Africa, and controversially operating across an expanding list of military “responsibilities” (Turse 2018; Feickert 2019; Kime 2019). SOF’s role as “a global manhunting machine” (Mazzetti et al 2015) has been met with criticism and some alarm, not least because of the incidents raised in the Gallagher case and the ensuing review of SOF culture and ethics. The allegedly “machinic” capabilities of SOF are of interest here, however. Criticism that frames SOF and their deployment as machine-like takes for granted fantasies of these deployments as precise, light-touch, and signaling progress in the conduct of war to safer, and more rational. No longer are vast armies of conventional troops being sent to act as “boots on the ground”. Instead, this fantasy goes, the option exists to deploy a force that is “swift, silent, and deadly” and constituted by “quiet professionals” who are more committed to the mission than the average soldier.

The construction of SOF as not only technologically advanced, or utilizing the latest technologies, but deeply involved in the function of these technologies as well as those constructed as “low-tech” is a final aspect of SOF’s place in the Posthuman Project. On the one hand, SOF are well-known globally for carrying out raids in the middle of the night, in Afghanistan “against suspected Taliban leaders” in what became “the signature tactic of the U.S.-led kill/capture campaign” in the country (Khan 2011). These raids involve extensive searches of private residences and trauma – and sometimes death – for families targeted (Human Rights Watch 2019). The night raids recapitulate the dynamic of ownership and rightful appropriation as the domain of the U.S. state, over and against those constructed in contrast as feminized, weak, and without control. The alleged incidents involving killing and mutilation carried out by SOF personnel with hatchets, together

with SOF's "on the ground" ownership-exerting conduct such as the night raids, begin to sketch out a picture of the way in which SOF is ratified in an appropriation of savagery and brutal actions that others, in the perspective of posthuman military power, are not allowed. It is SOF's special alignment with military power and distinctly American whiteness drawn from ledgers of white settler colonialism and a history of empire that enables this. "Geronimo" – the name of the legendary Bedonkohe Apache leader – was one of the many indigenous words used as code by Navy SEALs during the operation that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011. It was used to signal bin Laden's "killed in action" death itself (Crandall 2014, 439). In this way and through mobilization of the "elemental" and "low-tech," SOF become technologies of a U.S. sense of self. Even in moments subject to criticism and alarm, as in the case of the killings carried out with hatchets, or in Gallagher's targeting of civilians and mutilation of corpses, exceptionalized SOF are vital to the military's and state's coherence. The "native" and "savage" – wherever these appear – are framed in U.S. discourses as simultaneously threats to, and vital to, national security. That these come together in SOF, a force that is accountable to and controlled by only the highest levels of U.S. power, reveals one way in which the U.S. discursively creates the conditions in which its power and security actions become positioned as necessary.

On the other hand, but working closely with the above, there is the association of SOF with the "high-tech". Increasingly, SOF personnel are involved in data production as well as the operation of advanced technologies in the field, or they may operationalize data produced by others. In a consolidation of the intelligence-to-lethality pipeline, beginning in 2015, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) rolled out – and pushed commercial production of – portable DNA scanner technology described as "game-breaking" (Gould 2015). Often operators match DNA samples gathered in field with "a criminal database" from the U.S. (*ibid.*), potentially limiting matches that can be made, but highlighting the blurring of policing and war-waging and calling back to the way that both of these are mutually productive, and perform racializing and gendering functions. By 2019, this technology had been slimmed down for even greater portability, and was purportedly combined with facial recognition technology that allowed SOF personnel to make a positive identification at the scene of then-leader of ISIS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's death by suicide (Axe 2019). According to President Trump, "test results gave certain immediate and totally positive identification. It was him" (Trump 2019b).

On its face, this entanglement with advanced technology appears not drastically different from the productive entanglements of drone operators within the drone assemblage. However, to expand

on an earlier point, the exceptionalization of SOF versus drone operators depends largely on the way in which SOF are continually, and paradoxically, produced as dangerous and necessary to security – more specifically, non-human/savage *and* superhuman/civilized – and in this process the way in which they become tightly aligned with the will and power of the state. While they are producing data and enmeshed within technologies of a kill chain, and allegedly operating in a heavily technologized, precise, light-touch way not dissimilar from how the drone assemblage is understood to operate, what makes this exceptional, and what constructs SOF personnel as very different sites from drone operators, is the simultaneous and highly particular way SOF draws upon the constitutive contradictions of the state in order to construct its own coherence, and its particular mode of embeddedness in a long history of territorializing white U.S. masculine power. It is the body of the SOF operator that is exceptionalized – an anesthetic subject and “Naked Warrior” who bears “certain attributes” – and rendered in the fantasy of the Posthuman Project as a force of territorialization; as argued in chapter 1, in the drone imaginary, it is the drone itself – not the drone operator – that has been exceptionalized and figured as territorializing, and bearing “certain attributes” it may offer to the human subject.

SOF is configured through paradox and contradiction as an anesthetic, all-purpose weapon totally vital to U.S. national security, even when the actions of its personnel might be considered to harm security. This speaks to the fantasy of U.S. power as untouchable and to its deeply flexible exercise. It speaks to the fantasy of state and military forces – especially SOF – as ultimately possessive, self-controlled, and exercising control over what constitutes posthumanity, versus humanity, or non-humanity.

### *Conclusion*

The force of SOF, then, and their special eligibility for posthumanity comes from paradoxical production that derives from and itself serves to reproduce the productive paradoxes of the U.S. nation-state. The U.S.’s white supremacist social order has directly set the conditions for the production of military forces understood to be elite and exceptionally American – in possession and control of space designated U.S. territory both domestically and abroad. This social order and the production of space discussed above, tied to “white possession,” provides fuel for the fantasy of an exclusionary posthumanity that emerges from, and projects as valuable, submission to state power. Examining the unique position and role of SOF in the posthuman security project allows

for more insight into how flexible the exercise of U.S. power is, and how this flexibility might in fact be key to how U.S. power is operating globally.

To expand on these insights, the next chapter addresses malleability at length, focusing on military medical technologies of healing and protection. It returns to the notion of the “Naked Warrior” as fundamental to understanding the malleability of categories of human and posthuman, and the flexibility of state power addressed here and in preceding chapters.

## Chapter 5: Military Medicine and Malleability

### *Introduction*

Malleability looms large behind and within the dynamics and processes of the Posthuman Project so far described in this dissertation. This chapter addresses it at length, demonstrating how the malleability of human as a political category, and the malleability of the purportedly separate material of the human body, are vital fuel for the Project, performing crucial functions justifying and naturalizing U.S. military interventions and violence. The primary ways into this discussion below are recent, present, and (supposedly) near-future military techno-medical interventions in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, genitourinary injuries, and post-nuclear testing effects on the body. The picture of techno-medical progress conducted in the name of global security is here constructed from the U.S.'s own framing of its developments and interventions, and the experiences of the people subjected to them, or apparently neglected.

This chapter addresses two related and co-constitutive malleabilities that make the human and non-human subjects of the Posthuman Project. The first of these is the malleability of the human and posthuman as political categories, which has been discussed throughout this dissertation. The malleability of the political human and the posthuman emerge in the cases examined below as powerful tools in justification of endless war-waging and endless capacitation of future war. A result is that any action taken by the state – including killing civilians or torture, as discussed in previous chapters – can be legitimized. In spite of this malleability, the human and posthuman proceed necessarily through exclusion, and while they are not necessarily *a priori* fixed to any body, an important aspect of the categories is that they are the reserve of whiteness. As discussed in more detail elsewhere, the narrow overrepresented genre of human called Man masquerades as universal, and it is this genre that is at work in the human and posthuman of the Project. This chapter approaches human and posthuman as the reserve of whiteness for how they function as justificatory tools of state expansion, power, and violence. That is, the hierarchical political exclusions that constitute these categories are given new life via military scientific developments that proceed under cover of alleged techno-neutrality, but are really practices of race- and gender-making that are necessary to the continued production of the U.S. social order generally and the military specifically.

The exclusions inherent to these political categories come to the fore, however, in military scientific thinking that is invested in identifying aspects of the material body and space that can disqualify people from posthumanity. The second form of malleability identified in this chapter is the malleability of the material of the human body itself. As indicated above, and as earlier chapters have proposed, however, exclusion is necessary to its production, and to the production of race and gender. This idea is perhaps best expressed through the figure of the “Naked Warrior,” first introduced in chapter 5. Just as the posthuman is figured as the future of the human being in the military imagination, the “Naked Warrior” is another imagined figure that has been used to guide, and justify, military technological development and the exercise of power.

This figure, which appears by this name in a 2001 report from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, was constructed to play a significant role in guiding decisions about the application of military technologies (notably those associated with protection and enhancement) to human bodies. It is built on the convergence of purported scientific objectivity and extractive logics, and demonstrates that within the deep malleability of categories and bodies afforded the U.S. due to its advanced technologies, there is a belief in an underlying “truth” of the body that can be identified through techno-scientific intervention. This “truth” perhaps cannot, and at least *should* not, be manipulated. From an Oak Ridge National Laboratory summary:

The [research] group then took the unique approach of starting with what they called the “Naked Warrior”—a warrior with no individual equipment or systems. Their logic was that before you could add technology to a warrior, you had to have a cultural strategy. Throughout all of the deliberations, they kept coming back to the concept of the Naked Warrior. There was a consensus that if the warrior did not have certain attributes, the addition of technology would not prove beneficial (National Security Directorate, Oak Ridge National Laboratory 2001, 2).

The consensus reached that possession of “certain attributes” is fundamentally important to questions of technological enhancement implicitly reveals the military investment in the existence of the pre-discursive – and pre-technological – “truth” of the body. This is a “nature” that can be appealed to in troubling situations such as, below, a high rate of suicide among SOF members, or debility among injured veterans. It pre-empts challenge by constructing U.S. power as inevitable and natural, and based on techno-scientific discovery and development. Appealing to nature and truths of the human body that are discovered through the application of techno-scientific development, in a context in which the military is heavily associated with scientific and medical development, allows the state to argue for greater resourcing, more expansion, and more intervention. The Posthuman Project itself and the techno-medical developments explored throughout this chapter are premised on the fantasy that with right tools in the right hands, the

body and subjectivity can be *almost* endlessly intervened with, shifted, enhanced, and expanded. The *almost* lies not in any admitted limitations where state techno-power is concerned, but instead in the exclusion necessary to the Project's commitments. These exclusions emerge below, for instance, in the racialization of the space of the Marshall Islands in ways that constructed natural and inevitable experimental subjects in service of technological progress and national security. Like the posthuman, the "Naked Warrior" is built through exclusion and powerfully naturalizes it with the backing of the scientific establishment, to suggest that some people are natural candidates for posthumanity, while others can never be eligible for posthumanity. Defense programs such as SUBNETS and Focused Pharma, discussed below, seem to require that the U.S. intervene in order to manipulate the material of the (politically) human body to produce and extract certain kinds of scientific knowledge and value. These subjects are those apparently eligible for the posthumanity afforded through affirmative relationship with U.S. state power.

Malleable political humanity and posthumanity, and the malleable material of the body in the developments examined below, become aligned with scientific discovery and objectivity tethered to U.S. state power and capacity. As will be shown, the granting or rescinding of political belonging, and the identification of limitations or capacity to the body according to what serves U.S. interests is a dynamic that contributes to the construction of the U.S. as authority on the scientific, and what it means to be human and/or posthuman. This chapter explores these malleabilities together because they are linked and mutually productive, despite the military fantasy of the natural body with objective capacity or incapacity that is discovered through techno-medical tools. This chapter finds that exclusions, and any inclusion in the category of human politically and bodily, emerge through relationships that are cultivated by the U.S., in service of state power and legitimacy. As demonstrated below, these are relationships that are not only interpersonal – in ways that often shore up a future-oriented conjugal heterosexual couple as the most secure and legitimate of these –, but relationships with military medical technologies, and with the military and U.S. state itself. Ultimately, this chapter contends, these relationships are some of the most crucial aspects in delineating who may or may not be eligible for posthumanity. The conditions of possibility for these relationships, though, are set in ways that reproduce race and gender, and from the beginning may foreclose upon the possibility of some ever achieving full humanity, or posthumanity. In this, the human and posthuman are revealed as categories of value extraction, with neither, in the end, performing a fully protective or legitimizing function for the injured people in question, but instead constructed by and for the maintenance and expansion of the military power investigated throughout this dissertation.

The first portion of this chapter discusses how value is extracted from those eligible for posthumanity – in the cases below, certain soldiers and veterans – and demonstrates how this proceeds according to the dynamics of malleability and exclusion that underpin figures such as the “Naked Warrior” and the military posthuman. The soldier bodies being techno-medically intervened in are presupposed to be worthy of these kinds of intervention within their very material embodiment, but this worthiness can be rescinded. The second part of this chapter focuses in on the other side of the suggestions made by the “Naked Warrior”: the natural eligibility of some requires the existence of other classes of people who are excluded from this. As this chapter shows, despite such exclusion, those configured in this framework as non-human may nevertheless be subjected to bodily interventions in the name of science and security, revealing again the ways that the malleability of humanity and posthumanity is produced by and for U.S. state power.

### *PTSD and TBI*

A number of war-related injuries have been described as “signature” to the ongoing wars waged by the U.S., resulting from technologies and practice developed since the first Gulf War, and shifting discourses around bodily and military capability. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are heavily associated with – and in the case of TBI, arguably a “signature injury” of (Taylor et al 2012) – the wars since 9/11 in Iraq and Afghanistan. The experience of them and their treatment show that more generally, and specifically here in the case of soldiers, particular relationships and embodiments are compelled by the state in order that one might be read as a human subject eligible for posthumanity. Military personnel, having become a “weapon and a target” for injury and death (MacLeish 2012, 64), inhabit and navigate a tense space that blurs the demarcations between these supposedly strictly divorced categories, and carry the potential to throw other binaries constitutive of military and state power into disorder. The cultivation and harnessing of soldiers’ relationships to the state, their interpersonal relationships, and relationships with medical technologies, because of this, become foundational to reproducing the military and U.S. nation-state as institutions and, moreover, white institutions. This cultivation serves this protective and maintenance function for the state, and also, as another necessary part of this process, helps to produce exceptionalized subjects such as “wounded warriors” that can become powerful arguments in favor of military expansionism and technological development. The wounding, however, is presupposed as inevitable by the military and indeed, it too becomes a tool for justification of military presence and security projects. The treatment and enhancement

of bodies with such techno-medical interventions examined below finally functions to capacitate and naturalize future war.

This capacitation begins with the imagining and construction of soldiers, a charting out through what means and in what ways bodies may be produced and subjects cultivated most usefully for the Posthuman Project. Necessarily future-oriented, the resilience training offered to military personnel sets a groundwork that seeks basically to pre-empt traumatic responses costly to the U.S. military by producing people who, when faced with war and trauma assumed inevitable in such approaches, are able to rely on themselves and their support networks for help, instead of government resources, and in fact grow personally and professionally from adverse combat-related experiences. In her 2015 analysis of resilience training in the U.S. Army, Alison Howell compellingly argues that this resilience-building is a form of enhancement, and, important for this chapter's arguments, is not only gendered, but begins to reveal the centrality of relationship cultivation to the military project of endless war. The Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Program (CSF2), launched in 2009, constitutes, Howell writes, the largest psychological experiment ever conducted, with "over a million test subjects (US Army soldiers and civilians) required to participate, and military spouses encouraged to participate" (2015, 16). Renamed in 2012 to reflect the importance of family involvement in building this resilience, the program focuses on "domains of fitness" that include physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family (21). Howell writes, "The family fitness construct is highly gendered in a context wherein most soldiers are male, and wherein male soldiers are married more often than their female counterparts. Thus, a 'spouse' will most often mean a wife who is expected, through CSF2, to provide unpaid emotional and even sexual labor ... A CSF2 manual for spouses encourages them to be attentive to their spouses' needs and desires, right down to whether or not they like to 'spoon', which is helpfully explained in the manual as a 'horizontal hug' (US Army, 2011)" (*ibid.*).

Becoming a successful subject of this enhancement experiment means, then, cultivating within oneself a form of masculine embodiment compatible with the relationships identified by the Army as most conducive to security. This is national security – as these embodiments and relationships are implicitly and explicitly identified as the most enabling for the soldier subject imagined in the experiment –, and the security of one's own self and emotions. Following this, it means cultivating the interpersonal relationships, and relationships with the state and its enhancement technologies, that align one with the state's own future-orientation. The training reiterates a narrow range of state-ratified relationships that it suggests are the duty of soldiers to cultivate, or risk incapacitation,

with some kinds of interpersonal relationships, for instance, understood as offering more emotional and social protection and personal encouragement than others (AAS 10). Howell argues that the point of such training is not only responsabilizing, but enhancing soldiers and capacitating future war. This intervention before trauma, I suggest, capacitates in the same way that interventions following trauma do below, in making future war seem inevitable and positioning the U.S. and its military personnel as defensive, always already under threat that necessitates a response. Moreover, as expanded upon below, what this resilience/enhancement training helps to reveal is that humanity, and eligibility for posthumanity within the greater Posthuman Project, derives in large part through the kinds of relationships one has with the state and its power, including its technologies.

One of the outcomes that such resilience training seeks to head off is arguably the most well-recognized war injury: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, between 11-20% of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom will suffer from PTSD in a given year (VA 2018). Symptoms associated with PTSD include anxiety, hyperarousal, difficulties managing emotions – in some this might manifest as uncontrollable emotionality; in others, flatness of affect –, insomnia, nightmares, intrusive and obsessive thoughts, flashbacks, among many others. PTSD has recently been the subject of some debate as ways of waging war and constructions of masculinity shift, and new medical technologies develop. As reflected in this chapter itself, there is growing use of a discourse of injury to describe war trauma such as PTSD, including by institutions such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The push for a discourse of injury instead of disorder has come partly in recognition of the tension diagnoses such as PTSD can be in with heteronormative military masculinities that prize stoicism and self-discipline. Healthcare practitioners and military personnel have openly worried that the possibility of an “un-masculine,” pathologizing diagnosis might dissuade military personnel, especially young men, from seeking help (Smith and Whooley 2015; Jaffe 2012; MacLeish 2019, 282). Furthermore, the category has seen some opening up, as well: previous diagnoses tended to be reserved for those who had been personally present to experience the threat of injury or death, that is, “‘life-threat’ events” (Press 2018). However, allegedly remote warfare such as drone warfare has complicated definitions and demarcations, as drone operators and those involved in the kill chain thousands of miles away from the targeted area also report reactions and lingering symptoms consistent with the PTSD diagnosis (*ibid.*; McCammon 2017).

The diagnosis of PTSD has in some ways converged recently with that of TBI, particularly as brain imaging has become more frequently used in the diagnostic process of both, and interest in identifying physical causes, or physical brain functioning associated with both, has likewise increased. Most soldiers and veterans diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury will also be diagnosed with PTSD (Taylor et al 2012). Symptoms in many cases overlap to the point of making differential diagnosis difficult in clinical settings (Terry 2009, 201); the Joint Staff Surgeon, Brigadier General Paul Friedrichs, has described TBI symptoms as “fairly nonspecific” (Williams 2020), but they include loss of memory, mood changes and heightened emotions, dizziness, forgetfulness, and trouble concentrating (Callahan et al 2018). This difficulty is compounded by the fact that TBI is almost always accompanied by other injuries. TBI is associated with “sudden impact to the head” (Wool 2015, xi), either resulting from major concussion, or as a cumulative effect of many concussive incidents (which may include, for instance, exposure over a long period of time to non-injurious bomb blasts). However, military personnel remain concerned that as of 2020, there is “no objective tool for diagnosing brain injury in the field” – “advances in the laboratory” are difficult to translate onto the ground (Philipps and Gibbons-Neff 2020).

Both TBI and PTSD are described as “invisible wounds,” and as enemies inside the mind (Constantine 2011). Personal accounts of both frequently reflect guilt soldiers feel, having been injured, about the effects of this injury on others, especially the people with whom they had been in combat. Bound up in guilt and anxiety are issues of identity, the result of the relationships built with the military and “brothers in arms,” and with medical technologies. Navy Corpsman Dustin “Doc” Kirby was on duty in Iraq with a Marine company when he was shot through his face, resulting in rare life-changing injuries as well as PTSD that was diagnosed during his long recovery process back in the United States. His experience, documented by journalist C.J. Chivers, speaks to the centrality of these relationships in the making sense of one’s subjecthood and self. Shot and sent home, “Guilt stalked him. Kirby had been flown home early. He believed he had let Weapons Company down.” Unable to speak, Kirby writes, “I could never stay out of the fight. I am a warrior and I just feel like a failure. I should be there. I should be fighting still. I just wish that everyone else would get to come home” (2018, 716 [ebook]). In 2012, after he was removed from active duty due to his injuries, Kirby, already struggling to gain stability, heal, and feel at home back in the U.S., experiences a “downward slide” into alcoholism and a lack of care for himself and family. Active duty, Chivers writes, “had organized his life, coming with a regular paycheck, an apartment, and daily proximity to people who understood. It gave him a partial sense of belonging, enough to prevent complete collapse. ... He had been somebody in North Carolina [during rehabilitation

and training at Bethesda Naval Hospital and Camp Lejeune], surrounded by sailors and Marines. In Georgia, surrounded by civilians, he was no one” (2018, p.732 [e-book]). This escalates to a suicide attempt Kirby explains as relating to “his absence of a mission and sense of self-worth” (*ibid.*, 741).

Being treated for injury, needing help – in Kirby’s case from his wife early on, as well as the nurses in charge of his care – troubles the masculinized sense of capability and self-sufficiency prized in military settings and serve as a marker of military masculinity, and one’s affirmative relationship with the military (Belkin 2012) and United States. That is, the values that are alleged to make seeking help in cases of PTSD and TBI more difficult in the first place. Justin Constantine, a Marine who also suffered a gunshot wound to his face, writes regarding the struggles he has with both being home while his unit remains in Iraq, and with his new dependence on his girlfriend, Dahlia: “I knew on one level that Dahlia loved me and just wanted to help, but always in the back of my mind I was inwardly embarrassed about needing so much care. And I struggled mightily with the knowledge that I was back in the States and my Marines were still in Iraq. Like every other wounded warrior in the hospital, I just wanted to hurry up and get back to my unit” (Constantine 2011). In its investigation of military under-treatment of TBI, ProPublica outlined the experience of TBI for men coming to terms with massive changes to their mental acuity and psychological states: “A sergeant who once commanded 60 men in battle got lost in a supermarket. A soldier who once plotted sniper attacks could no longer assemble a bird house. Most of them did not want their names used, for fear of harm to their military careers” (Miller and Zwerdling 2010).

The majority of critical literature, and personal and professional accounts of what it means socio-politically to be diagnosed with and suffer from PTSD or TBI, however, neglect to consider how the production of the military is itself racialized, as is military subjecthood, and how this is reflected and reproduced in often-stated fears of emasculation and dependency such as those covered above (and also even more strikingly in cases of GU injury below). The construction of dependent, disordered, and “un-masculine” subjects who may be cut off from military community and the protection afforded those who appear to successfully meet the imaginary of ideal soldier is another construction that orders socio-political life in the U.S. while calling on, and reproducing, ongoing race-making processes. Brianne Gallagher situates combat veterans’ experiences navigating the “military-medical complex” for support for PTSD and other mental illness in a context of U.S. neoliberalism, and argues that within this context, the racialized and gendered “spectre of the underserving ‘welfare queen’ and ‘welfare fraud’ ... informs contemporary images and discourses

of veterans as underserving ‘frauds’ when they seek mental health services and disability benefits with the VA” (2016, 140). Independence is associated with whiteness, masculinity, and the personal responsibility of the liberal human subject, while welfare, she writes, has long been understood as unearned, demeaning, and stigmatizing (*ibid.*, 146-47). In this broader context, one in which as Puar writes, trauma is largely displaced “over there” in disavowal of the U.S. military’s destructive acts (2017, 90), the prospect of disability, should one receive support from the state, itself is racialized. The persistent stigma of a potential PTSD diagnosis, for instance, is worked through with notions of white self-possession and responsabilization that can be read in the resilience training; soldiers who undergo such training, according to Gallagher, “are thus trained to act like ‘reasonable’ (neo) liberal subjects, to embrace the risk and danger of their everyday lives, and even to ‘thrive’ on the chaos of military violence and embodied traumatic responses since these are opportunities for positive ‘growth’” (2016, 146). This may be understood, then, as the cultivation of relationships with military technologies and the U.S. state that produce race and gender as they produce the human subject who may be eligible for posthumanity.

The above demonstrates the tension between the racialized dependence associated with seeking the support of the state following war-related injury, and words such as those of medical practitioners who encourage such support-seeking. This constitutes another instance of what Aaron Belkin describes as the confusing double-binds that constitute military life and contradictory military masculinity (2012, 34); such tensions and contradictions supply for the U.S. and its institutions tools of control that help to reiterate the necessity of seeking to embody and practice the forms of relationality ratified by state power, and in so doing, produce obedience. In this way, race-making emerges as a social ordering process, and is revealed as vital to the maintenance of the broader military institution, and ultimately production of soldiers as malleable and manipulable subjects.

To return to the case of Dustin Kirby, Kirby makes observations that speak to the way that injuries and their treatment may carry different meanings, placing soldiers in different positions vis-à-vis other soldiers and veterans, the military, and the U.S. He understands his disfiguring facial injuries to be of a totally different kind than those suffered by celebrated wounded warriors who go on to perform in ways that project masculinity and the power of U.S. medical interventions. “He was not going to be one of those wounded vets the magazines write about, the maimed soldier who rebounds to run marathons and scuba dive. His face was broken” (*ibid.*, 704). His observation points to an ongoing process of differential valuing, and how military bodies, in their injury, are

made to mean and perform different functions for the state, an idea returned to in more detail below. Ultimately, in Chivers' account, Kirby achieves a kind of stability thanks to beginning a new relationship following his divorce, ongoing therapy, and is even invited to meet former president George W. Bush. Despite his struggles, and the stigma of seeking the support of the state, he seems to remain a valid subject for state intervention and care. It is indeed through such eventual intervention and the attention of the state that his suffering is validated, his rightful subjecthood reiterated, and his humanity more firmly secured, all while the parameters for what counts as human, and the U.S.'s own authority over this category, are reiterated. Shifting relationality and disability, as examples such as the above demonstrate, do not necessarily disqualify one from the posthumanity that sees its jumping off point as the human.

*Treating PTSD, TBI, and GU injury*

Relationships with the state and military, its actors, and interpersonal relationships, then, form a basis upon which techno-medical intervention is made to make sense, and notions of technological and human progress can develop. The relationship with the military's medical technologies and treatment regimes further help to produce the human subject eligible for posthumanity, and reproduce human as an exclusionary political category. These relationships and the forms of relationality already discussed are mutually productive and entangled, with gender, race, the body, and technology coming together to concretize in military medical technologies that purport to protect, heal, and enhance.

The guiding logics behind recent developments in neurotechnology and hopes for future military technological progress point to how particular embodiments are compelled by the U.S. in order to become the subject of such affirmative relationships, and in so doing to become eligible for posthumanity. They also proceed, prior to this, from an imagination of the material of the human body as, given the right technology in the right hands, fully knowable and deeply malleable, and separable from the socio-political. These characteristics enable and guide the technological developments examined below into the directions they take, towards attempted discovery of material, bodily causes for war trauma. Beyond this, however, these developments point toward something less malleable and indeed supposedly intrinsic and fixed underneath the malleability. This emerges, in sections to follow, as a powerful tool to justify differential valuing and different ways of using bodies, and the granting or rescinding of humanity.

DARPA, the “Pentagon’s brain” and purveyor of “dramatic new capabilities” (Jacobsen 2015, 9) introduced first in the introduction to this dissertation, is a primary driver behind recent military medical research, and the technological developments that make popular headlines. DARPA currently has a number of publicly discussed programs ongoing that target neuropsychiatric illness in military personnel, and reveal a process of using technology to locate injury firmly in the body – in the matter of the brain. This is a process that, in its trafficking in notions of medico-scientific objectivity, depoliticizes war trauma and its treatment, while at the same time providing scientific cover to the idea of military medical intervention as a tool of universal human discovery. Ultimately, this works to justify state intervention and authority over ideal or undesirable ways of being.

DARPA’s Systems-Based Neurotechnology for Emerging Therapies (SUBNETS) program “aims to improve force health by using neurotechnology as the basis for effective, informed, and precise treatments for neuropsychiatric illnesses in military Service [sic] members” affected by war (Emondi 2020). Electrodes implanted in the brain are wired to deliver “corrective electrical micro-stimulation designed to mitigate unhealthy brain activity” (Sanchez and Miranda 2019) and operate according to an idea of brains functioning not through “distinct anatomical regions of the brain,” but instead “across distributed neural systems” (outreach@darpa 2018). The program is intended to take advantage of the malleability of the brain and its systems, its neural plasticity, targeting treatment according to systems-based function in order to retrain the brain and the subject wholly into health and capacitation. The program proceeds from the assumption that soldiers and veterans suffering from neuropsychiatric illness are not being effectively treated because, according to Justin Sanchez, the head of DARPA’s Biological Technologies Office (BTO), “we have lacked a mechanistic understanding of how these illnesses manifest in the brain.” He continues, “It is extremely frustrating for patients to not know why they feel the way they do and to not be able to correct it” (outreach@darpa 2018).

Similarly, DARPA’s Focused Pharma program also aims at identifying ill health and correcting brain function by scientifically targeting the material of the body. It is intended “to develop fast-acting drugs that have lasting impact, going beyond treating the symptoms of mental illness to tackle its underlying neurochemical roots” (outreach@darpa 2019). Both Focused Pharma and SUBNETS are hinged on understandings of the medical technologies in question as neutral and apolitical in their development, and effecting outcomes that are scientifically objective, and objectively desirable. They purport to focus on the “underlying” mechanics of the brain to get at

the root cause of ill health; in doing so, they make claims about what counts and does not count as good health and ill health. A suggestion in this logic is towards the neutrality and desirability of the U.S. military, as developer and purveyor of these technologies, and driver of technological progress. These technologies promise that there exists a deep malleability and pre-discursive “truth” to the body that can and even should be discovered and manipulated by military medical authorities in the name of progress, force readiness, and security. It promises that advanced and progressive military medical technology can manipulate the body (back) into a human state in which the person in question can perhaps even be deployed again, or, at least, be returned to a productive and capacitated state. In this way it feeds into a hierarchy of ability and use, reiterating the able masculine body that can fight as a form most ideal to the nation-state. At the same time, in the medicalization and bodily systems-based approach to the effects of war trauma, these developments thoroughly strip away the political: treatment so far has been less than effective, the justifications for the above programs go, because we lack mechanistic understanding of the brain, and programs such as these will not only provide treatment, but produce universally useful knowledge about brain function. In order to make these moves that construct military medicine and its interventions as apolitical and universally desirable – as the answer to injury and not the cause of it – the baseline “healthy” and correct capacitated embodiment or bodily function must first be imagined. Treatment becomes a matter of revealing what was both always already there, and what *could* and indeed *should* be, as military R&D aims at intervening before anticipated trauma, and then enhancing and building resilience and capacity. In this process, the ideal human subject is projected, along with what he is not.

According to sources involved with their production, technologies such as the above are almost always intended to be made available not only to military personnel, but eventually to the general public. Partnerships between universities, business, and the Pentagon, which DARPA makes frequent use of (Regli 2018; Dugan and Gabriel 2013; Cox 2020; Pellerin 2017b), reveal the allegedly civilian as sites of war and its capacitation. They position the continued funding of security projects, continued heavy resourcing of the military apparatus, and expansion of state power as necessary, and desirable. The military becomes configured as having always been a driver of techno-medical progress, further cementing its authority over categories of human, non-human, and posthuman on which its security projects are built. With the medical technology bound up with national security, and soldiers – as in the examples above – used as emblems of nationally valorized embodiment and subjectivity, the constitutive outside takes its shape. The pre-emptive

and future-oriented medical technologies help to construct an unsecured, ever-present outside threat that gives the security project – specifically here, the Posthuman Project – its justification.

War trauma, including injuries such as PTSD and TBI, as scholars have argued, come out of highly particular socio-political moments (Terry 2017; Grove 2019; Bickford 2018). They are embedded in longer histories of war-waging, geopolitics, and technological development, and both reflect and reproduce the dynamics out of which they emerged. Genito-urinary injuries are perhaps one of the more striking examples of this. The treatment of men suffering these injuries provides a window into the ways that the military compels certain gendered interpersonal relationships, relationships with the state, and with medical technologies, in order to meet the exclusionary human status that can be treated, and through this become eligible for the posthumanity fantasized as the outcome of technological advance. To call back to contentions in previous chapters, “technology” in this instance is understood broadly, following Weheliye, as “the application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life or to changing and manipulating the human environment” (2014a, 12). In this case, the focus is on the psychotherapeutic work understood to be perhaps of highest importance in the military’s healing of these wounded, especially given the current limitations of physically reconstructive surgical or transplant interventions (Drury 2011, 68). The emphasis of techno-medical interventions lies in military masculine subjectivity, and how to (re)build this, and recapacitate, following injury.

Upon being hit by a bomb blast, Captain Tom Bertelsmann says, “You don’t check your face first. Ears and noses can be put back together, or you can live without them. You can even get by without legs. Trust me, the first thing you do is check is your dick” (Drury 2011, 20 [e-book]). This is a common sentiment, that genitals constitute “the important things” – this in the words of double amputee Marine Lance Corporal Michael Martinez (*ibid.*, 74). The injuries suffered that fall under the umbrella of GU – which can range from, for example, shrapnel wounds to external genitalia, to “total loss of external genitalia” (Lucas et al 2014) – are often injuries that would not have been survivable decades ago, before the advent of faster evacuation and more stabilizing in-field treatment methods (Janak et al 2017, 1). Recent developments in body armor technology, and “a shift in weapon use from predominantly high velocity rounds to explosive munitions” mean that where may have previously been deep internal injuries are now genital injuries (Balzano and Hudak 2018). As in the case of PTSD and TBI – which are frequently comorbid with GU injuries (Balzano and Hudak 2018; Howell 2017, 148) – the new forms of GU injuries seen especially since the beginning of the Iraq War have driven new technological developments premised on an

assumption of warfare that will produce such injuries in the future. In the case of GU injuries, these developments have largely been in the form of personal body armor that covers more of the pelvic area (Janak et al 2017, 5; Grady 2017; Han et al 2013).

GU injuries are widely understood to be “uniquely devastating” (Grady 2017) for the men who suffer them, impacting every aspect of life and sense of self. Robert Ursano, MD and Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at the Uniformed Services University, speaking in 2012, attempted to lay out what he called “the big umbrella” of what medical professionals knew about “combat warriors” suffering GU injury. Among his comments were these:

So what are we hearing from our warriors about this type of injury? When we talk about genital injury, particularly from the psyche side, what is it that is injured? “Who will want to be with me now?” That is a wonderful observation. It means the person has injured intimacy. How do we measure intimacy? We have a literature on intimacy. We can think about how to treat issues of intimacy. We can measure issues of intimacy. We can also think about how to restore intimacy in some and in others how to mourn the loss of intimacy. What about the lost sense of power and energy? We have a literature on the loss of sense of power and energy. It includes depression and decreased motivation. We have ways of measuring these. And of course, identity, “Who am I?” How do we measure the loss of identity? How do we intervene? Do we have a therapeutic modality? Do we have medications? Do we have targeted psychotherapies for restoring identity and other aspects of loss? What about the loss of “what can I produce?” As I was listening I was thinking of Erikson’s stages and laying out a grid of what is injured in the person. And I was also thinking about what Harry Holloway taught me from a wonderful piece of work that he did after an earthquake in Russia. The discussion led to what the community had lost. One of the things they lost was their children. But what they said was, “We lost our future.” Genital injury also has to do with something about the loss of future. It is a loss of sense of time. How has one’s time sense changed? We all confront a shortened length of time usually much later in life. If one has genital injury all of a sudden one is rocketed forward to a much older age in which one is dealing with lost productivity. How does this transition occur? Can we facilitate it in a way that is actually healthful? (Ursano 2012, 10)

This framing of GU injury as particularly devastating concurs with the views of the majority of healthcare providers featured in the literature surveyed. The range of injuries Ursano describes as associated with GU – of identity, of a sense of future, and intimacy – project attention paid holistically by the medical profession to the injured; understanding of the self and its relational construction have apparently been integrated into caregiving. At the same time, Ursano’s framing, and that of other healthcare providers and the injured themselves, reifies the fantasy that pieces of the human body might be identified and adjusted through the use of advanced and scientific techno-medical intervention. Simultaneously, as such psychotherapeutic interventions reiterate the purported objectivity of a scientific process of discovery and healing, they reflect as well as reproduce the importance of heteropatriarchal understandings of genitalia and relationality for a sense of oneself and one’s relationships with the world and others.

Much of the psychotherapeutic in these cases is geared towards regaining a sense of masculinity carved out in relation to the women in their lives, with the genitalia themselves first taken as definitive to the gendering process, and proceeding from a presumption of their legibility, prior to injury, within a framework of binary gender. After injury and following a presumed destabilization of masculine embodiment, the focus in these therapies can shift to construction and acceptance of a “new physical self” (Drury 2011, 71) that, immediately with the beginning of treatment, is constituted largely through his gendered relationships interpersonally and with the therapeutic technologies. Even in severe cases that see an absence of external genitalia, however, such interventions figure and reinforce the genitalia, in its absence or otherwise, as vital to the gendering process and a coherent masculinity, and to a coherent subject more generally. Simultaneously, they reinforce dependency on the state and its power as necessary to the production and securing of this coherent subject, and position the state as authority on the gendered body and reproductive futures. As Jennifer Terry writes, following Zoe Wool (2015), on the contradictions lived by those undergoing such intimate treatments, “Self-sufficiency was a goal of rehabilitation but was achievable only through a sustained dependency upon significant others. Intimate attachments in heterosexual conjugal couplehood, as difficult as they may have been to enact, were ‘lifelines’...” (2017, 84) Stable relationships geared towards reproduction with women are emphasized,<sup>31</sup> with the malleable material of the body subjected to therapeutic technologies to construct a “new physical self” that may yet be reproductive and in this way future-oriented, offering the promise of security against an unsettled sense of place and subjectivity.

Dr. Ali Esfandiari, psychologist, frames the difficulty of losing genitals, or suffering serious injury to them, in terms that speak to how this comes to be through the construction of masculine embodiment, the process of hierarchizing and differential valuation that sorts bodies according to how the military may use them, and the way that injury may not always mean incapacity: “Losing a limb may confer some level of status on the victims – they’re war heroes. This can speed up acceptance. Losing a penis is a private loss. A man may feel shame in sharing this secret with others – more of a sense of inadequacy and an impact on self-worth. Psychological recovery may take longer” (Drury 2011, 70). In terms of the Posthuman Project, the above may be understood along the lines of previous suggestion: that injury and disability do not themselves mean ineligibility for posthumanity. More key in determining this eligibility remains the relationship of one with the

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this, see e.g. Yasmin 2016.

state and its power (including its technological power), and part of this consists in one's mode of embodiment.

The modes of embodiment and forms of relationality emphasized and prized by therapies for GU injury, PTSD, and TBI construct and project ideal, albeit often ambiguous and contradictory, modes of embodiment. The actual eventual attainability of these ideal modes is less consequential than that the injured soldier willingly *attempt* to embody the ideal. In this way, these ideal forms operate as tools of control that reiterate posthumanity as an ultimate ideal that, aligned strictly with military techno-medical progress, necessarily follows from (attempted) adherence to state-ratified ways of being. It is worth noting that within the therapeutic situations described above and most obviously in cases of GU injury, state-ratified ways of being for those *not* in the military – for girlfriends, wives of the injured – are also delineated. These state-ratified forms of femininity operate along lines of traditional military values, for instance of loyalty, perseverance and bravery. However, they continue to reproduce hierarchized difference in the subordination of such raced and gendered embodiment to the ideal of the masculine military subject, who is projected as subordinate to none but U.S. state power and its technologies. This mode of military embodiment, disabled and yet capacitated, is carved out through willing submission to this state power and authority – in the first instance by volunteering to fight, and then by being medically treated and thus helping to push forward techno-medical progress. This submission is projected as for a greater good – national security – as both disabled and abled bodies become emblematic of military-cum-state strength and protection. This submission to authority that marks one as eligible for posthumanity does perform, to some extent, a protective function, as the subjects so far taken into analytical consideration remain aligned with state power. Although suffering, and although value is extracted from their injured bodies in order to capacitate future war, they remain legible as human in the framework of the Posthuman Project.

#### *Incapacitation and debilitation*

But what of situations in which the relationships described above, cultivated and compelled by the state and its technologies, the modes of embodiment and enhancements, seem to break down or fail? The interventions examined above take malleability as a given, based on techno-scientific discoveries about the human mind and the substance of the body. These are figured as manipulable and deeply changeable, given the right technologies in the right hands. However, apparent failures of resilience-building and failures to pre-empt “unhealthy” responses to trauma, and that some

veterans do not embody the “disabled and yet capacitated” may reveal the limits of this malleability from which military techno-medical developments and its posthuman proceed. This would seem to disrupt the fantasy of invulnerable posthumanity granted through the use of advanced and advancing military technologies, given that this fantasy relies on notions of military technologies enabling infinite possibilities and future-oriented freedom that exceeds the boundedness of the body as well as the nation-state.

In 2016, Donald Bolduc, then the Commander of Special Operations Forces in Africa, publicly spoke about his struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries following years of deployment as a Green Beret. Looking back on his attempts to de-stigmatize seeking treatment for war-related trauma, especially among Special Operations Forces who have historically resisted this as antithetical to SOF culture and identity, Bolduc paraphrased his message: “I said: ‘It has negatively affected my personal life. But I can be a better version of myself if I get help, and I want you to get help, too’” (Turse 2020a). It was, however, this outspokenness that Bolduc now feels contributed to his being pushed out of service. He retired in 2017 (*ibid.*). These statements came in the context of the 2020 release, following a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed by the *New York Times*, of the results of a report on SOF personnel who had died by suicide. The report, conducted by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) and commissioned by the Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), is based on “psychological autopsies” of 29 SOF members (all men and majority white) who had passed away between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2015 (AAS 1, 5, 30). According to the researchers, the report is intended to “generate the maximum possible amount of information about each decedent to provide an understanding of SOF suicides and to inform prevention efforts” (*ibid.* 17). It appears to be the first study done on suicide among SOF personnel (*ibid.*). Drawing on interviews conducted with the next of kin of these personnel, the report reveals that in spite of apparently changing attitudes toward mental illness, injury, and trauma, a variety of obstacles remain for those in need of help, from under-resourcing to cultural barriers such as those faced by Bolduc.

As previous chapters have demonstrated, SOF personnel occupy an exceptional place among the already exceptionalized, and are especially tightly aligned with state power and will. This can serve a protective function that in turn reinforces their exceptionality; they appear unbound by the norms, laws, and modes of being encouraged and compelled by the military in other circumstances, with other personnel. The AAS report, however, highlights an overall disproportionately high rate of suicide among SOF personnel since 2007 compared to the rest of the U.S. military (*ibid.*, 5) that

troubles the picture of untouchability usually painted of SOF personnel. The training process, itself exceptionalized and heavily mythologized, is crucial in the production of SOF as exceptionalized subjects – and objects – of U.S. state power. The SERE training program discussed previously is premised on a notion of “stress inoculation”; this central idea of the program indicates that SERE is interested in building a resilient force, and, to call back to contentions earlier in this chapter, the logic in this building of resilience through stress inoculation can also be read as a logic of enhancement. SOF personnel emerge from training and perform as tools and emblems of state power having been enhanced – and made into something special and unique – by military technological intervention.

As in the case of soldiers suffering from GU injuries, part of this intervention lies in the cultivation of “correct” relationships with the state, with technology, and other people. The AAS report highlights this, but in doing so raises questions about the protective factors of these state-ratified relationships. The report notes under a section titled “Why Suicide?” that “It was reported by many of the loved ones that there was a fear that reporting mental health issues or suicidal ideation could lead to being separated from their [the deceased SOF member’s] unit or singled out for problems” (38). One respondent to the study described it this way (39): “He often said, ‘The job I love and have committed my whole being to is creating my suicidal condition, but I’d rather die than admit to having trouble and being removed from my unit and my team.’” Further to this point, another respondent spoke to the place of the intimate, conjugal relationships fostered in this landscape of suicidality: “The role of the SOF wife is to uphold her husband’s reputation, never revealing any problems” (32). While the report is unfortunately light on comments directly from respondents, observations and remembrances such as these indicate that in some cases, it may have been the very relationships cultivated by the state in the name of posthuman eligibility that factored into suicide. This is supported by the report’s finding, in a section titled “Why Suicide at This Time?”, that a “common trigger was an event that the decedent perceived as a humiliation,” and “relationship issues, financial problems and upcoming humiliation were common factors in many of these individuals’ decision to end his life” (39). The above suggests that while humanity and eligibility for posthumanity hinge so heavily on the cultivation of particular relationships and modes of being, these relationships can also prove debilitating, and extend to deadly, troubling the posthuman’s association with total control and unboundedness. Feeling compelled to reproduce heteropatriarchal relationships built on heavily bounded understandings of what it means to be wife and husband, for instance, may close off options for seeking help in situations of suicidality. The dedication fostered among SOF personnel may end up debilitating, as personnel may return

again and again to combat despite injury to themselves (a dynamic frequently cited as a concern among all military personnel).<sup>32</sup> The cases of the SOF personnel here seem to mark out an antithesis to the fantasy of posthumanity. Given that this fantasy is about capacitation and limitlessness, this seems to disrupt the Project and appears a point at which it might break down.

The cultivation of the relationships ratified by the state and with the state clearly – and purposely, as I argue below – do not guarantee protection. This is in large part precisely because of the malleability of human and posthuman as political categories; humanity (and eligibility for posthumanity) may be imposed and granted temporarily (Hartman 1997; Weheliye 2014a), and may also be rescinded. These categories are not permanently fixed to any particular body. This malleability is key in how the state comes to produce and extract value to capacitate itself and future war: what might appear to be a failure of the state (to provide care, or to anticipate certain risks, for instance), can be used directly to argue for more technology, more capacitation, more state intervention, and more war in the name of more, and better, national security.

The debilitation seen in the cases of the SOF personnel, otherwise so often highly valorized and protected, is a feature of the Posthuman Project, a necessary part of it. Relationships with the state, the military and its personnel, and its technologies that I have described are built upon what Jasbir Puar describes as a backdrop of debility, the “terrain” of mandated extended and racializing death upon which categories of disability and ability can take their shape. Puar describes a “politics of debilitation that render some populations as definitively unworthy of health and targeted for injury” (2017, 68). This is the way, as they are rendered as “objects of un-care” (*ibid.*, 96), in which their value may be produced and extracted by the state. The SOF case is a troubling one because SOF personnel clearly are subjects of care for the U.S. and military more narrowly, all throughout their production. I have argued that SOF personnel are perhaps uniquely placed in alignment with U.S. will and power, and, by extension perhaps uniquely eligible for posthumanity. Against the backdrop of debility, moreover, this military posthuman takes fuller shape as the purported antithesis of this mandated slow death: the fantasy of it is of technologically-enabled boundlessness, hypermobility, and invulnerable life. Where debility is racializing, so is this fantasized invulnerability, which reproduces Man and his posthuman subject, and further binds it to futurity that is, as previous chapters have discussed, the reserve of whiteness. So the SOF member takes his shape through a position of powerful possessiveness, but, as indicated, the AAS

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<sup>32</sup> See Kesling 2019 about medically identifying PTSD even in “those who try to hide the effects”; also Philipps and Gibbons-Neff (2020), which makes reference specifically to soldiers not reporting TBI symptoms.

report nonetheless suggests the intensive care and intervention of the military may have factored into the deaths of the personnel in the report.

In her 2017 work, Puar touches on, but does not fully examine debilitated soldiers or veterans, and how they fit into her framework. The case described here, which is legible as the state “letting die” or even leading to death through its own care and training, may expand on her ideas. In the first instance and more generally, cases that appear as neglect and debilitation of soldiers – and even in cases such as the well-publicized underfunding and under-resourcing of the Veterans Affairs hospitals – play a special role in the Posthuman Project given the high social standing and exceptionality soldiers, and especially SOF personnel, are associated with. Similarly to how capacitated able-bodied or disabled soldiers may be used by the U.S. to justify and enable the development of more technology and capacitate future war, so too are debilitated and even deceased soldiers used. I suggest that the very high place occupied by SOF personnel can provide an especially powerful motivation and justification for U.S. state power and its expansion. It hints at a vulnerability to injury or threat among the most exceptional personnel that seems to necessitate an urgent state response: these SOF deaths may serve to justify funneling more resources to the military and security projects. This functions directly to capacitate endless war and fuels the fantasy of an invulnerable posthuman future, one which is built off of what Puar describes as war-waging that has caused debility all over the world.

In sum, the affirmative relationship of soldiers, and especially the SOF personnel in question here, with a state and military institution racialized as white, its agents, and its technologies, places them in a position where the debilitated and even the dead are useful for the state in justifying military consumption of resources and capacitation of future war. The implicit arguments for this can be summarized in three broad points. Firstly, with better technology, training, and more resources, perhaps the injury to these exceptional personnel would not have happened to begin with. Secondly, with more funding for techno-medical research and development, it is increasingly less likely that the soldiers end up in a position of debility, even if they are injured. Thirdly, with more advanced technology and more funding generally, it is possible that the ever-present outside threat that SOF personnel were mobilized against might finally be defeated. These three arguments along with the specter of SOF vulnerability constitute, ultimately, justification for an endless capacitation of war, and whatever actions the state may deem necessary for security.

These cases highlight the malleability of the categories of human and posthuman, and how these are necessarily built through race-making and gendering processes. As earlier chapters have proposed, however, and as indicated above, exclusion is necessary to their production, and to the production of race and gender. I return to the “Naked Warrior” at this point to consider the political processes of exclusion that are granted scientific cover, and may masquerade as natural and inevitable even while they are constructed as such solely for the political purposes of the U.S. This notion of the “Naked Warrior,” which proposes a material body naturally eligible for political humanity and posthumanity, provides not just a powerful tool of justification for state power that, like human and posthuman, is fundamentally about exclusion and extraction, but in this techno-medical context provides a scientifically-ratified way to carry out a sorting and hierarchizing process. It also provides a way for the U.S. to avoid responsibility for domestic debility and death. In the cases examined above, one can see how possession of “certain attributes” is perhaps more akin to embodiment of certain relationships, but that the power of this lies in its ambiguity. It is, after all, a tool to justify the maintenance and expansion of power, which itself is conducted in contingent and context-specific ways.

A last suggestion it makes is that, with more techno-medical development, more resourcing, and more deep intervention by state power into the material of the human body, those who do not meet this “Naked Warrior” ideal – who are not eligible for posthumanity, that is – can be identified. In this way, the “Naked Warrior” speaks to the existence of other classes of people excluded from this political humanity, but who may nevertheless be subjected to bodily interventions in the name of science, security, and the human.

*“A giant lab in the middle of the ocean”*

There must be more to this than incinerated trees, a cracked dome, a rising sea, a leaking nuclear waste  
with no fence, there must be more than a concrete shell that houses death.

Here is a legend of a shell. Anointed with power. Letao used this shell to turn himself into kindling for  
the first fire. He gave this fire to a small boy. The boy almost burned his entire village to the ground.

Licks of fire leapt from strands of coconut leaves from skin and bone and while the boy cried Letao  
laughed and laughed.

Here is a story of a people on fire – we pretend it is not burning all of us.

Here is a story of the ways we've been tricked, of the lies we've been told:

*It's not radioactive anymore*

*Your illnesses are normal*

*You're fine.*

*You're fine.*

My belly is a crater empty of stories and answers only questions, hard as concrete.

Who gave them this power?

Who anointed them with the power to burn?

(Excerpted from "Anointed" by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner)

The Republic of the Marshall Islands consists of a chain of over 1000 islands located near the center of the Pacific Ocean. The islands, especially the atolls of Enewetak and Bikini, were made the sites of a long-running series of nuclear tests conducted by the U.S. beginning in 1946. The island of Runit in Enewetak Atoll is famously the site of the "Runit Dome," also known as "The Tomb," a now deteriorating concrete dome constructed by the U.S. to cover over nuclear waste, irradiated items, and contaminated soil not only left from testing in the Marshall Islands, but from testing in the Nevada desert (Gerrard 2014; Rust 2019). In all, from 1946-1958, the U.S. detonated 67 nuclear weapons above, on, or in the waters surrounding the islands. 80% of all nuclear tests conducted by the U.S. during this period were conducted in the Marshall Islands (Maclellan 2017, 41-42). The largest of these test detonations, and at the time the most powerful detonation in the world, was the *Castle Bravo* shot of 1<sup>st</sup> March 1954, part of the "Operation Castle" thermonuclear test series (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2017).



The Runit Dome in Enewetak Atoll. Photo ©Carolyn Cole at *Los Angeles Times*.

Particularly since the *Bravo* shot at Bikini Atoll, military activity, research, and technological development have heavily impacted the land, water, and people within the islands and well outside of them, linking the U.S.'s imperial development of the 1800s, in the Pacific, to visions of posthuman future war that now drive military action and the Posthuman Project. Well outside the continental boundaries of the United States and declared war zones, the Marshall Islands and the people living in them have been made sites of U.S. war-making and experimentation in the name of national security and the construction of a national subject that could be eligible for posthumanity. As in the cases of soldiers and veterans finding support or neglect according to their relationship with the U.S. state and its technologies, categories, and hierarchies of meaning-making, so people remaining in the islands and those forced to leave face the results of life-changing technological interventions in the name of U.S. military and medical progress. Race, gender, humanity, and posthumanity and how these may be understood as malleable to the extent that it serves justification and naturalization of military power, and how these ordering categories may be flexibly applied to bodies and spaces guide the forms that these acts of state intervention take.

As suggested throughout this dissertation, the lingering effects of warfare stretch around the globe, confounding boundaries drawn between peace and war, or foreign and domestic, and likewise infiltrate the body at the most basic molecular level. Sites of war proliferate through the development and “proving” of military technologies, even in the apparent absence of war, driving further techno-scientific development and potentially reinforcing the useful cover of the “objectively scientific” for military power: *Bravo* and following nuclear tests created unprecedentedly massive amounts of the radioactive isotope carbon-14, producing a “bomb spike” of the isotope that spread worldwide and was ultimately found in higher levels than ever before within “practically every living thing” (Zimmer 2020) soon after the tests. The existence of this isotope in the material of living things enabled the development and later refinement of radiocarbon dating, and poses another example of the mutual imbrication of war with so much allegedly apolitical science (see, e.g., Howell 2017).

Beginning to understand how U.S. techno-medical developments came to emerge from the imperial siting of the Marshall Islands as military “proving grounds” requires consideration of the racialization of space. As previous chapters have contended, this is a vitally important factor in the production of human and posthuman subjects, as these emerge through race and gender, which likewise are always already being produced as, and alongside, territory. The racialization of space serves to enable, justify, and even encourage U.S. interventions of the kind suffered by the Marshallese people, even as the category of human appears at first troubled by the techno-scientific treatment. Ultimately, this treatment demonstrates again the powerful malleability of human as a political category, and the investment of state apparatuses in maintaining not only the malleability of the human body but, as above, the notion that there exists beneath this something fixed that can be used as another tool justifying the exclusions that “human” and “posthuman” emerge through.

Exoticizing discourses, including texts and images, produced the Marshall Islands as a site uniquely isolated, barely if at all inhabited, and “other,” and ultimately worked to legitimize U.S. interventions. These discourses produced an ideal test site in which U.S. technological power could be proved and honed, and contributed to a process of differentially valuing bodies and space along lines of race and gender, one outcome of which was the further shoring up of a white, possessive U.S. state and its subjects. Prior to nuclear testing in the 1940s, the Marshall Islands and specifically Bikini Atoll became identified as “far away” enough that testing would be safe; examining the changing representations and construction of Bikini Atoll from the 1940s to the early 2000s,

Jeffrey Davis describes a process that then began to characterize the islands as even more marginal, and moreover “worthy of nuclear destruction” (2005, 614). The “deserted isle” characterization, with heavy implications of technological and cultural backwardness – antithetical to the U.S. as it prepared to make major technological leaps – and the construction of the Atoll as a “nonplace,” a *terra nullius*, were crucial to this (*ibid.*). The people living in the atoll were projected as unworthy of concern through a race-making and gendering process. News media from the era, when focused on the Bikinians, portrayed them, against a backdrop of prominent U.S. displays of power, as “primitive, Christianized, loyal subjects, sacrificing themselves to the greater good of the United States” (*ibid.*). In this case, such a purportedly willing sacrifice in the name of U.S. technological advance and security projects functioned to further racialize and gender the people living on the islands, who were now slated to be moved off the islands prior to the first nuclear test, as decidedly not white, not American.

While the willing sacrifice of many soldiers, as examined above, might bring them closer in proximity to white state power and construct them as eligible for posthumanity by virtue of their assumed humanity, the racialization and exoticization of the land itself, I argue, heavily factors into how and why the Bikinians found no eligibility for posthumanity in spite of their sacrifice. The deserted but exotic islands that appeared in such news media appeared prominently through the use of new camera technology. Shots from above seemed to objectively capture a place un-peopled or at least not properly inhabited, and worked through the framing of the view from above to reiterate the supposed isolation of such places (DeLoughrey 2012, 174). At the same time, it was through use of such advanced technologies developed by the U.S. that these isolated places became accessible to the broader U.S. public, further reinforcing an imagined divide between the primitive islands surveilled by U.S. aerial technology, and the U.S. as developer and purveyor of technologies that could be used both to connect and to divide. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes in her examination of 1950s films made by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, “modernity is seen to be exported from the U.S. to ‘distant and primitive’ yet vitally important ‘test islands ... a giant lab in the middle of an ocean’” (*ibid.*). Tropical “island laboratories” begin to take their shape in images of military personnel enjoying the beaches, and the decimation of plant life to create more operational room (*ibid.*, 176), while the aerial views reiterated the U.S.’s total scientific knowledge of, and control over, this isolated space. In her analysis, DeLoughrey recognizes the aerial view of the islands as distinctly military, calling on and foreshadowing an ongoing history of vision and its primary place in American war-waging (*ibid.*, 175). As the view from the drone’s kill chain recapitulates colonial dynamics, and both proceeds from and reinscribes a racialization of space

that – as previous chapters argue – produces natural targets who may only sometimes be “granted” humanity, these discursive productions of the Marshall Islands performed a similar function. They enabled and legitimized nuclear testing that in some cases obliterated smaller islands completely, and created environments too toxic for people to return home to (Mosbergen 2016; Rust 2019; Maclellan 2017, 53). They helped to project U.S. techno-power in order to smooth the way for the projection of even more techno-power in the form of nuclear tests that would play a valuable function in reinforcing global U.S. military dominance during and after the Cold War (Rust 2019; DeLoughrey 2012). Throughout, and long after, these discourses legitimized and naturalized the treatment of Marshall Islanders by the U.S., and the seemingly contradictory ways in which their humanity was both recognized and denied.

Lemeyo Abon, who was fourteen years old and living on Rongelap when the *Bravo* test took place in 1954, later described the day through an interpreter: “We saw the bright light and heard a boom and we were really scared. We had no idea of what was happening. Later on something like powder came from the sky. It was raining when we went home and our parents asked ‘what happened to your hair?’ The next day our hair fell out. We looked at each other and laughed, saying ‘you look like a bald old man!’ But in our hearts we were sad” (Maclellan 2017, 40). Lijon Eknilang, who was also living on Rongelap, details what followed, after this “snow” began to fall on the islands and people began falling seriously ill:

The next day, the problems got worse. Big burns began spreading all over our legs, arms, feet, and they hurt very much. Many of us lost our hair. Of course, we did not know that the snow was radioactive. Over the weeks that followed, the fallout that our bodies exposed to caused blisters and sores. The serious internal and external exposure we received caused long-term health problems that affected my parents’ generation, my generation, and my children’s generation. During the days after Bravo, the fallout was in the air we breathed, in the fresh water we drank, and in the food we ate during the days after Bravo. We wanted to drink water very badly, so we went to the water drums. The water was changing colour, but we drank it anyway. I remember we ate some fish and drank some coconut juice, too. We remained on Rongelap for two and a half days after the fallout came. Then Americans came to evacuate my people to the American base on Kwajalein Atoll. Some of them tried to explain what was happening, but there was not enough time for us to understand, and we were very sick and couldn’t pay attention to anything. We had very high fevers and felt like we wanted to drop. We had very ill people – they could not even pay attention to their own kids. Some of us left by airplane, but most of us left on a large ship. We could not take our belongings or our animals. We did not know, when we left on March 3, 1954, that we would be leaving our homes for almost three years. (Eknilang 2003, 316)

Planning for the *Bravo* shot was long and deliberative. Some of the consequences of the shot – for instance, radioactive fallout traveling far across the Marshall Islands including across Rongelap, with deadly effects, and then around the world – seem initially to have been more accidental. However, any accident was the result of calculations of value that were made explicit during the

planning phase. Testimony from Merrill Eisenbud, former director of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Health & Safety Laboratory involved in the nuclear development speaks to this. Asked why the Marshall Islands were selected as the site of so many of the U.S.'s nuclear tests, Eisenbud replied, "Nevada would be ideal, except that, when you got up above 50 kilotons or so, you made so much bang that you would begin to break windows, crack plaster. Couldn't go much higher than that, and here they wanted to go up to multimegatons" (Fisher and Harrell 1995). Concern about proximity to human habitation within the continental U.S. is clear here, but many homes on Bikini Atoll had been purposely destroyed by the military prior to the tests taking place (DeLoughrey 2012, 176). Calculations were made in the process of authorizing the shot to go ahead despite unfavorable weather conditions, as well: the night before, the U.S. military received reports of winds heading to the east that would carry any fallout from the shot to the still-inhabited Rongelap Atoll and others (Maclellan 2017, 40-41). When this ultimately happened following the shot, military personnel were evacuated within hours; as Eknilang documents in her personal account, people living on Rongelap and other atolls remained for two days before evacuation was organized (*ibid.*, 41).

The fallout had devastating effects on the Marshallese people exposed, which persist in many cases to this day. These included major burns, miscarriages, deadly congenital birth defects, and cancers that research cautiously indicates could be attributable to high levels of radiation exposure (Brown 2014, 41-42; Zak 2015; Simon et al 2010; Nembhard et al 2019). When the people of Rongelap were told it was safe to return in 1957, they found a dramatically changed and much more dangerous island in spite of Atomic Energy Commission assurances. Staple crop foods in some cases no longer bore fruit, were totally wiped out, or caused illness (Eknilang 2003, 316). According to Eknilang, "Our staple foods had never made us ill. We brought these problems to the attention of the doctors and officials who visited us. They said we were preparing the foods incorrectly, or that we had fish poisoning. We knew what they said was impossible, because we had been preparing and surviving on these foods for centuries without suffering the problems that appeared after 1954" (*ibid.*, 316-317).

Six days following the *Bravo* shot, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission began "Project 4.1" to study the health impacts of Marshall Islanders exposed to the radioactive fallout, without the informed consent of the people that became experimental subjects (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2017; Brown 2014, 41). This decades-long project involved military and medical staff from the Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Atomic Energy Commission staff, conducting medical

experiments at times under the guise of treatment. This included “experimental surgery and injections of chromium-51, radioactive iodine, iron, zinc and carbon-14” (MacLellan 2017, 51), and the collection from island residents of “blood, tissue, bone marrow, and teeth samples” in order to “measure bioaccumulation” (DeLoughrey 2012, 177). 1956 saw people repatriated to Utrok Atoll east of Bikini Atoll, three days following a final nuclear test on the islands. Speaking at a meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission, Merrill Eisenbud communicated the logic behind the program, and continuing scientific interest in outcomes for the land and people: “...while it is true these people do not live, I would say, the way Westerners do, civilized people, it is nevertheless also true that these people are more like us than the mice” (U.S. Senate 2005, 32).

After nuclear testing ended on the islands, and years later, as people suffered from the lingering deadly effects of a contaminated environment, the U.S.’s denial of injury persisted in a number of ways. Some of this denial occurred in the form of responsabilizing and racializing discourses referred to by Marshallese poet and activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, quoted at the beginning of this section, and in the personal account of Eknilang. Eknilang writes that even those who had not been present on Rongelap for the tests began suffering ill effects on returning in 1957. Rather than reading this as speaking to the militarily poisoned environment, “Foreign doctors and other officials called those people the ‘control group,’ and we were told the sickness of that group proved our illnesses were common to all Marshallese” (2003, 317). Purportedly objective scientific discourses coming from the U.S. were in this way harnessed by the military’s scientific complex to locate and fix injury within the bodies of the people on the islands, constructing bodies that emerged as perhaps unworthy of attempts to make them healthy, but which could still provide the raw material for the U.S.’s techno-medical progress. It occurred likewise in the U.S. government’s denial of funds for cleanup of Enewetak Atoll, a denial that has its sense made through the racialization of the people of the islands, and of the space of the islands itself. In the 1970s, the Runit Dome was quickly built as a containment site for contaminated soil and irradiated items. Unknown until after the independent Republic of the Marshall Islands had been established decades later, 130 tons of irradiated soil from Nevada and soil involved in biological weapons testing were also deposited in the site (Rust 2019; Gerrard 2014). Although the U.S. committed to paying the Republic \$2.3 billion for environmental damages and further cleanup, it has paid at most around \$600 million towards this (Rust 2019). The U.S. government has justified this recently, as effects of climate change such as rising sea levels threaten to further destabilize the dome, stating that “the dome is on Marshallese land and therefore the responsibility of the Marshallese government” (Rust 2019).

The landscape examined here is one that reiterates and reproduces the malleability of the human, while carving out both this and the posthuman as categories requiring ongoing exclusion. This malleability directly enables what may seem at first glance contradictory, as the Marshallese people became subjects and objects of medical care and negligence at once. However, as demonstrated, this is a process of race-making and gendering ultimately in service of justifying and shoring up a white techno-medical interventionist subject. What appears initially as neglect was engineered in the service of ongoing intervention into the bodies of the people of the islands, in order to advance U.S. medical science that would in turn capacitate future warfare and potentially provide for the protection of national subjects. Race offered a tool through which scientific discourses could project the Marshallese people as both human enough, and not human enough, for the kind of interventions that would best serve U.S. interests, revealing this category of human to be malleable, racialized, and a tool of extraction. On the other hand, the capacitated “national subject” includes the white techno-medical interventionist subject mentioned, who is heavily implicated in the boundary- and space-making that was spectacularly undertaken via aerial technologies in order to construct inhabited spaces as uninhabited, deserted, and ideal laboratories for military technological advance. This, too, functioned as a vital race-making process that naturalized the kinds of medical interventions undertaken, or deliberately not undertaken, by the U.S.

Comments such as those by Eisenbud above likewise call to the malleability of these categories as well as the notions of scientifically-identified bodily inevitability, that is, the supposed “truth” of the body, that emerge through race. These notions also figure, for instance, in DARPA’s recent techno-medical developments examined above, and in the idea of the “Naked Warrior,” and reveal how easily these are harnessed by and for the justification of military intervention. The Marshallese people rendered into unconsenting and unknowing test subjects following irradiation could not have been considered fully human given the violating treatment and deliberate neglect they have faced. However, as Eisenbud makes clear, they were considered usefully human enough, perhaps only bodily if not politically, for the material drawn from injured bodies to be scientifically understood as analogous to that of “Westerners,” the “civilized people” he refers to. The material of these human bodies, made objects of experimentation, can usefully propel forward U.S. techno-medical advancement, informing and capacitating future war. At the same time, as accounts such as Eknilang’s reveal, this human malleability could also find a convenient stopping point in whatever the U.S. determined the “truth” of the body might be. In this case, this emerged most starkly through the locating of injury caused by military technology firmly within the body of the

Marshallese person. This racialized as it responsabilized, while allowing the U.S. to disavow the debilitation and injury it produced, and contrast its own national body with the inherently ailing body of the Marshallese “other”.

The documentation shows a willingness in some Marshall Islanders to comply with and be involved with U.S. testing in the islands, but even so, unlike SOF candidates or wounded warriors who are willing experimental subjects, there is no eligibility for posthumanity among the people of the Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islanders figure into this posthuman future not in spite of, but because of alleged inherent ailment and “primitivity,” which become scientifically cast as fixed, implicitly innate characteristics that are used to justify their exclusion. They never, then, may become aligned with posthumanity, but instead constitute a racialized raw material for progress, having been produced as sites of extraction themselves, and a constitutive outside for the imagining of this posthuman future. This is all to suggest that Man remains here the substrate inherent to this malleable human category and its posthuman, enabling both the flexibility as well as the exclusivity necessary to the categories’ reproduction. U.S. state discourses and the guiding future-oriented fantasy of Man’s technological posthuman subject both work to naturalize this contradictory, imposed, somewhat-human status for the Marshallese people, and render this not only necessary (for national security and the scientific development that will produce this security), but indeed ultimately inevitable.

Race-making and the racialization of space is crucial in the functioning of these categories, and in providing a logic in which the contradictions may further be smoothed over. The exotic, the deserted, and the natural laboratory work together and contribute to the construction of a U.S. subject (and his space) that can and should discover, manipulate, and control these for the sake of security. The production of the islands as improperly inhabited spaces that must be “managed, manipulated, and controlled” (DeLoughrey 2012, 174) for the good of U.S. security ultimately works in a similar way to the production of the space underneath the drone. With the islands discursively constructed as a natural laboratory, and as it is suggested, both discovered and then brought to Americans by way of powerful new military technologies, inhabitants may be configured as natural test subjects. In an original act of exclusion, this precludes the people living on the islands from the kind of relationships with the state that could position them as eligible for posthumanity: even (alleged) willing suffering and submission to U.S. state power must be understood through the security framework that produced the islands as natural laboratory in the first place, naturalizing a somewhat-human status for the people there.

The islands may be understood, to expand on this racialization of space, as a space of debilitation as well that serves to produce debilitated bodies. Puar (2017) describes debilitation as the backdrop to the proper capacitated categories of disabled and able-bodied, and a global situation produced through U.S. warfare in which some are rendered as “objects of un-care” (2017, 96). In a brief analysis of Iraq following the U.S.’s Wars on Terror, especially in light of the use of depleted uranium and the military targeting of medical establishments in the country, Puar writes, “racialization...is a licensing to disable, a projection of the simultaneous understanding that the racialized body is in a constant state of becoming disabled” (*ibid.*, 92). She further indicates that this situation is not one in which disability is figured as the result of “the exceptional accident” or a fully known cause – unlike in cases of those soldiers wounded in combat – which means “disability” may not be claimed as valuable, or capacitating. Instead, the situation in the Marshall Islands emerges along the lines of what she describes in Iraq (*ibid.*, 91-93). Injury and debility were located and fixed through purportedly objective U.S. scientific discourses specifically in the bodies of the Marshallese people, in an act that displaced these from the space of the United States, and reproduced the U.S. and its agents as benevolent, progressive, and capacitated. The islands continue to bear the effects of U.S. disavowal following military intervention and the making of environment and people into raw materials for technological progress and security projects. The racialization process in the Marshall Islands – and among the soldier subjects discussed above – enable this disavowal and has led to the production of debilitation that ultimately shores up “the split between the disabled subject as valuable difference and the debilitated body as degraded object” (*ibid.*, 92) that is naturally unworthy of care and resourcing. As in dynamics explored above, this serves a powerful justificatory function for the U.S.: acts of either care or neglect can be smoothly legitimized, as can any shifts that occur between these.

### *Conclusion*

The soldiers examined throughout this chapter, and the Marshall Islanders discussed above, are all subjected to U.S. military power, and value is extracted from all in ways that range from the apparently healing and helpful to the debilitating and injurious. All, however, are used to materially drive forward and capacitate future war, and perform an important ideological function in shoring up the U.S. as techno-scientific authority on what it means to be human. In all of these cases, human as well as posthuman function as categories enabling this extraction, albeit in these starkly different ways that again reveal the malleability of these categories as they are put to use by and

for state power. They also serve a controlling function, delineating certain contingent forms of relationality and embodiment as prized, while at the same time mandating that some may never hope to achieve these. These categories serve to reproduce and then naturalize processes of U.S. expansion, claiming and making territory of land and bodies, and the displacement and emplacement of people. This is in the sense, here, of the ways that Marshall Islanders have had the concept of home violently disrupted and reconfigured in ways that then produce the people as natural experimental subjects ineligible for posthumanity. It is also in the sense of how simultaneously the ongoing construction of these categories and projections of U.S. power hinge upon implicit commitment to a notion of a coherent and stable U.S. homeland that demands protection, and which those eligible for posthumanity may belong to. The making of some spaces into spaces of debilitation feeds the fantasy of white future-oriented nation space: capacitated national figures and space, broadly speaking, take form against such places and people made disposable.

Both of these cases at once set requirements for U.S. intervention, and demand that U.S. power be maintained. Such maintenance of power involves not only continued investment in technological and medical developments that make endless mobilization (or demobilization) possible, but investment in the making of bodies that continue to suffer in the name of, and from, the projection of military force. As is the case with prisoners held at Guantánamo, and the Special Operations Forces trainees who are constructed as paradoxically human, super-human, and non-human, the contours of how people are made eligible or ineligible for posthumanity come through along lines of proximity to the state's allegedly posthuman power, and the whiteness implicit in it. Eligibility for posthumanity consists in embodiments and relational practices that may shift but nevertheless "correctly" submit to and serve the needs of state power. These embodiments and relational practices ultimately naturalize race-making and gendering processes that underlie and provide structure for ongoing nation-making projects.

## Conclusions

This dissertation has theorized a Posthuman Project in order to make larger suggestions about the workings of U.S. militarism, and the exercise of U.S. power globally. I have argued throughout that fundamentally, such exercise of power and the institutions that enable and formalize it are built from and emerge out of white supremacy that has given rise to a social order in which the specific military notion of posthumanity identified in this dissertation may emerge, and come to be projected as inevitable and universally desirable. Some of the critical elements of this wider social order, and of the Posthuman Project, are the categories of human and posthuman, with the human the assumed stepping off point for a posthumanity that is fantasized as achieved through particular relationships with the U.S. state and its technologies.

Similarly to how this dissertation has approached race and gender as abiding categories foundational to the making of the U.S. social order, but nevertheless shifting and contingent, so too has it approached the categories of human and posthuman as deeply malleable, but durable. I have argued that these qualities are key to their force within the U.S. social order, and speak more generally to how U.S. power is exercised. Human and posthuman are used as tools of extraction, to justify and naturalize the changeable ways that the U.S. and its institutions may assign differential value to human bodies and subjects, and extract this value in different ways. Despite these differences, the end goal remains, I find, the same: the maintenance and expansion of U.S. power, and justification of any developments and practices used in service of this.

### *Chapter Reflections*

In chapter 1, I opened analysis with an exploration of drone imaginaries – the way the drone is thought and imagined in official U.S. government (and affiliated) discourses, through to the way that scholars have theorized and critiqued the drone and drone warfare. A key aim of this chapter was to indicate what the posthuman of the Posthuman Project is understood to constitute. That is, what capabilities and relationship with U.S. power and technology it is at times figured to have. The way that the drone is imagined is something of a consolidation of the fantasy of the posthuman, as both are suggested – even in many critical literatures – to have the power to fundamentally change the way that war is waged; to bear inherent capabilities that place them well beyond the human, including the capacity for objective perception; and to be limitless, blurring

boundaries between war and peace, pushing what is considered possible for the bodies that wage war, and pointing towards the ways in which the U.S. and its territory are, in U.S. military practice, not tied only to the space within the official borders of the United States. I argued that scholarly, official, and popular focus on a purported new individualization of warfare afforded by drone technology risks obscuring war as a social practice more generally, but also obscures the fundamental role played by space, and the wider environment, in the waging of war, and in the constitution of subjects and military technologies such as the drone.

In chapter 2, I expanded on how drone warfare can help scholars understand the ways that race, gender, and space are used to produce humanity and posthumanity in ways that benefit and justify U.S. power and practices of appropriation and extraction. I focused in firstly on the 2010 Uruzgan, Afghanistan massacre to highlight how the deployment of military technologies contributes to productions of space that directly enable and justify the racialization of human bodies in ways that construct them – and the wider environment – as legitimate targets. I drew the focus out more widely in order to show that the racialization of space has been crucial in the construction of the United States as a nation-state, and has been used outside of officially declared warfare to legitimize, and even cast as inevitable, violent exercises of U.S. power against racialized people. Throughout, I argued that gender has been used as a tool of race-making within the U.S., that in the U.S. context gender is racialized, and that one can see this dynamic come through in the Uruzgan Massacre as well as in the way that racialized Black women have been treated throughout U.S. history. One can also read this dynamic underlying the 1985 MOVE bombing in Philadelphia, an incident that pulls together the chapter's strands: major ideas were that the domestic, and home, have always been racialized in the U.S. and gendering processes have driven this; and that the racialization of space more generally sets the conditions for whether one may be seen as a legitimate target regardless of gender. Protection, innocence, womanhood, and childhood, in this chapter's argument, are the reserve of whiteness, and can be made malleable in order to justify the maintenance and expansion of white power and possession.

Chapter 3 begins a discussion of the role of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the Posthuman Project, and within and for the U.S. nation-state, by focusing in on the *Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape* (SERE) training program and specifically the program's "Level C". SOF personnel are highly exceptionalized in U.S. society, even within the military establishment, and this chapter argues that this exceptionalization process begins with this training, which is itself projected as exceptionally harrowing and difficult as much of it involves realistic prisoner of war and torture

scenarios, and which only the best of the best will succeed in. The chapter argues that the particularities of SOF exceptionality are built through an affirmative relationship with the state in which the SOF candidate's willingly undertaken suffering during the training, and their willingness to be subjugated by U.S. state power, are crucial to how and why SOF come to be seen as more exceptional than already-exceptionalized military personnel more generally. In order to clarify the dimensions of how this happens and how U.S. power is exercised along lines of race especially, the chapter also examines the torture undergone by prisoners in military custody at Guantánamo Bay, drawing on the documented links between the development of the techniques used in the U.S.'s torture program, and the torture resistance techniques taught in SERE. I find in this examination that the racialization of space is again a primary factor in the differences experienced between actual prisoners in U.S. custody and SOF candidates. I find also that the affirmative relationship with the state provides a kind of protective factor as well, and aligns the SOF candidate with state power in a way that the racialized prisoner at Guantánamo Bay cannot be. Key, though, is that both the SOF candidate and prisoner at Guantánamo Bay, in the forms of medicalized torture that they undergo, are constructed as simultaneously less than human, and exceeding the human. Control over both is constructed as vital to national security, while also speaking to the flexible power of the U.S. to subjugate and control those who will not or cannot be controlled by any other force.

Chapter 4 follows the examination of the SOF training program with analysis of what happens after training. As its way in, the chapter addresses recent scandals within the SOF community, most especially in the crimes alleged to have been committed by Eddie Gallagher, which included murder and mutilation of corpses. I argue that President Trump's intervention on Gallagher's behalf, even as some in the wider SOF community expressed anger and upset at Gallagher's actions and an ethics and culture review was instated, indicates just how important to the construction of the U.S. nation-state and its military power SOF personnel really are. I develop this argument by situating SOF in a U.S. history of territory-making and appropriation of indigeneity in order to craft a special, naturalized "belonging" to lands that have been violently seized. I argue that this dynamic is played out in the deployments of SOF globally, and much of their exceptionality may come from their construction as specially, uniquely American and deputized to act for, and expand, U.S. territory globally. An overlooked but key part of this picture and the exceptionalization process is the association of SOF with both the "high-tech" and the "low-tech". SOF are paradoxically constructed, I argue, through what is figured as uncivilized and "savage" – including their use of guerilla tactics, and hatchets to wage bloody, up-close war – and what is figured as

advanced and civilized – for instance, in their use and association with data production, DNA analysis, and facial recognition technologies, as well as with drone warfare. The result is the construction of a force that is specially eligible for posthumanity, and the chapter briefly discusses the figure of the “Naked Warrior” in order to argue that SOF personnel are imagined to fit this image more securely than most. Their eligibility in spite of their animalization and alleged “savagery” demonstrates that this eligibility is perhaps most contingent upon relationships with U.S. state power.

Chapter 5 addresses the concept of malleability at length, emphasizing the important role of the malleability of the categories of posthuman and human within the Posthuman Project and in the broader landscape of U.S. power. Using military medical technologies as the way in, I return to the figure of the “Naked Warrior” raised in the previous chapter in order to argue that in much of the thinking and practice behind how U.S. medical power is wielded, there is an apparent belief in a fixed “truth” to human bodies that should not and perhaps cannot be changed. I find that this belief is used, like notions of the human and fantasies of the posthuman, to justify differential applications of medical technologies, which may leave some debilitated while others emerge capacitated. I argue that this hinges on the relationship that one has with the U.S. state and its technologies, and that the state can be found to compel certain relationships – including interpersonal relationships – to the exclusions of others depending on what best serves state goals and the capacitation of future warfare. To demonstrate this, I focus on the treatment of traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and genito-urinary injuries to find in what circumstances, and how, injured soldiers are treated and capacitated through applications of military medical technologies. I turn the focus to situations in which soldiers and even otherwise-exceptionalized SOF personnel are not treated, are neglected, and/or left debilitated to highlight the importance of not only state-sanctioned relationships to capacitation, but also how these different pictures are ultimately, invariably, to the ends of legitimizing and propelling forward U.S. state power and its expansion. I turn to the case of the Marshall Islands to focus on the racialization of space in the production of debility, and how this serves the U.S. I argue the racialization of space in this instance has been used to capacitate future war and the development of the military medical technologies that may be applied to capacitate those with affirmative relationships with the state. In the case of the Marshall Islands, as well as in the cases of injured soldiers examined throughout the chapter, human and posthuman are malleable tools of extraction; their meanings and who they are applied to can vary, and this is according to what serves U.S. state capacitation and power above all else.

*Limitations and Future Research*

This dissertation has emphasized race and gender as fundamental tools in the making of U.S. power, and the constitutive categories of human and posthuman. While extraction has been identified as the primary purpose of these malleable tools, and the flexible exercise of U.S. power, the dissertation is limited in that there is only brief discussion of class and of capitalism more explicitly. Given the dissertation's theoretical grounding in critical feminist theories and especially Black feminist theories that are highly attentive to the making of territory and property out of bodies and land specifically for the construction of whiteness and white supremacy, future research on this topic should certainly bring in a focused and thorough critique of capitalism and its place in the production of human and posthuman subjects. The U.S. military – in particular, as discussed throughout the dissertation, DARPA – is highly invested in building partnerships with private entities (for instance, Google, and more recently Peter Thiel's Palantir) as well as public universities, and more discussion of these partnerships and who is driving forward the development of military technologies, and how, would at least provide a much fuller picture of the shapes that the military posthuman is taking, and what makes up the military fantasy of the posthuman future. As Joanna Bourke concisely puts it, "...at the individual level and in terms of global economic networks, the posthuman is a late capitalist project, requiring vast resources. It is a project that is committed to an extreme form of rationalist, technologist, and consumerist ideology. It is not able to escape from the violence of the late global capitalism because it is a product of that violence" (2014, 35). This argument is well taken, and unfortunately in my research I came too late to it. Taking such claims and thinking through them with a critical race analysis would surely prove extremely fruitful.

These ideas also open up space for thinking more thoroughly through pollution, and the way that the U.S. military and its technological developments and practices affect the entire world, but more specifically how they at last explode the long-held distinction between war and peace, or between supposedly disparate spaces. Chapter 5, in its discussion of the fallout – both literally and figuratively – from U.S. weapons testing in the Marshall Islands touched on this. However, there is much that future research could do to develop these ideas, perhaps with help from critical feminist posthumanist theory. On this subject alone, there is a good deal of critical space available for multi-disciplinary investigations of climate change, humanity and posthumanity, the malleability and indeed porosity of these categories as well as spaces, race, gender, and the

circulations of pollution, waste, and injury. There is also, importantly, much space for more sustained engagement with indigenous critique and literature that should guide such an examination. This could go part of the way toward making real what Alexander Weheliye (2014a) suggests is necessary, the provincialization of the U.S. and its power, even as this power is undeniably circulating globally with deadly effect.

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