



Resilience

Militaries and Militarization

Edited by

Joanna Bourke · Robin May Schott

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Joanna Bourke
Department of History, Classics
& Archaeology
Birkbeck, University of London
London, UK

Robin May Schott
Peace and Violence Unit
Danish Institute for
International Studies
Copenhagen, Denmark

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Joanna Bourke is Professor of History at the Department of History, Classics & Archaeology at Birkbeck, University of London. She is also a Fellow of the British Academy, the Gresham Professor of Rhetoric, and the Principal Investigator for the interdisciplinary Wellcome Trust project SHaME (Sexual Harms and Medical Encounters), which explores medical and psychiatric aspects of sexual violence globally. She has written extensively on the cultural history of modern warfare, including works such as *War and Art* (2017), *Wounding the World* (2014), and *An Intimate History of Killing* (2000)—the latter receiving awards from both the Wolfson Trust and Fraenkel Foundation. In 2022, she published *Disgrace: Global Reflections on Sexual Violence*.

Susan Carruthers is Professor of US and International History at the Department of History, University of Warwick. She holds numerous publications on the U.S. in a global perspective, war, and the ways in which individuals and societies have made sense of conflict and its consequences. These include *Dear John* (2022) and *The Good Occupation* (2016), which was shortlisted for the 2017 PEN Hessel-Tiltman Prize. She is a frequent contributor to journals such as *American Quarterly*, *Diplomatic History*, and the *Journal of American History* and has made several appearances in public media programs reviewing books and films. She is also considered an expert in postwar British imperial history and decolonization.

Johannes Lang is Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies. He has a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Copenhagen and has written widely on the relation between psycho-

logical knowledge and perceptions of war and its consequences. He is leading “The New Psychology of War” project, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark (2017–2022), in which he, through personal interviews with central figures in American civil and military psychology, explores how the psychological approach to war and trauma has changed since the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Peter Leese is a Principal Investigator at the Center of Excellence for Culture and the Mind, University of Copenhagen. His research began in the cultural and social history of Great Britain and has more recently expanded towards comparative and transcultural perspectives on historical trauma, migration, as well as the psychological and cultural aftereffects of violent conflict. He is methodologically engaged in oral history, narrative analysis, and the use of visual sources, including film and photography, for purposes of historical inquiry. His research articles and essay reviews have appeared in various journals including *Critical Military Studies*, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, and *Metascience*. His book-length publications include edited collections such as *Experience and Narrative in Europe After World War II* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Languages of Trauma* (2021) as well as collaborative studies, anthologies, and monographs, among them *Shell Shock* (Palgrave, 2014) and *Migrant Representations* (2022).

Ruth Leys is Academy Professor and Henry Wiesenfeld Professor Emerita of the Humanities in the Department of Comparative Thought and Literature, at Johns Hopkins University. Trained in the physio- and psychological sciences, her research concerns the history of the human sciences with a special focus on the genealogy of the neurosciences, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry. She holds an impressive record of publications on these topics such as *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000); *From Guilt to Shame* (2007); *The Ascent of Affect* (2017); and *Newborn Imitation: The Stakes of a Controversy* (2020). She is also the editor, with Rand B. Evans, of the correspondence between the key figures in twentieth-century American psychiatry and psychology, Adolf Meyer and Edward Bradford Titchener, *Defining American Psychology: The Correspondence Between Adolf Meyer and Edward B. Titchener* (1990). She is presently working on a book on the history of experimental and theoretical approaches to the study of priming and automaticity from the post-World War II period to the present.

Sarah Naumes is a doctoral candidate (ABD) in the Department of Politics at York University in Canada. She has published on narrative and autoethnography, including co-authoring *The Sublime of the Political* (2021). Her work appears in leading journals such as *Millennium* and *Journal of Narrative Politics* where she explores the ways that narrative and autoethnography can open International Relations scholarship to novel lines of inquiry. Her doctoral research looks at the U.S.-based Global Assessment Tool in relation to the ways that pain and trauma are experienced and theorized by veterans. She is employed as a program coordinator at the University of California, Merced, where she works with a large, transdisciplinary team to facilitate socially impactful research about our shared water future.

Robin May Schott is Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies. She has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Yale University and works in the fields of gender studies, ethics, and political theory with a special focus on sexual violence in conflict and peacetime. She co-directs (with Johannes Lang) the project “The New Psychology of War,” funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. Her recent publications include “War and Terrorism” (*The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy*, 2021); “The ‘Burqa Bans’ and Superficial Politics” (*Law, Cultural Studies and the ‘Burqa Ban’* 2021); and “Arendt, Natality, and the Refugee Crisis” (*Methodological Reflections on Women’s Contribution and Influence in the History of Philosophy*, 2020). Her edited volumes include *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment* (2010) and *Feminist Philosophy and the Problem of Evil* (2007), and her monographs include *Discovering Feminist Philosophy* (2003).

Nancy Sherman is a distinguished University Professor at Georgetown University and Faculty Affiliate at Georgetown Law’s Center on National Security and the Law. A *New York Times* notable author, her publications include *Stoic Wisdom*, *The Afterwar*, *The Untold War* (a *New York Times* editors’ pick), *Stoic Warriors*, *Making a Necessity of Virtue*, *The Fabric of Character*, and over 100 articles and essays. An ethicist with research training in psychoanalysis and a Ph.D. from Harvard in ancient philosophy, Sherman lectures worldwide on ethics, the emotions, moral injury, and resilience. The Inaugural Distinguished Chair of Ethics at the United States Naval Academy, she has advised the U.S. military on moral injury and suicide prevention. A popular guest on podcasts, she has received honors and awards for her work from the Guggenheim Foundation, the

American Philosophical Society, the Wilson Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, and others. She is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Joanna Bourke and Robin May Schott

Resilience: Militaries and Militarization is animated by the belief that sustained analyses of the armed forces are central to understanding everyday life and politics. We seek to critique the complex roles played by military institutions and ideologies in both generating and mirroring contemporary values. To achieve this, the research project, ‘the New Psychology of War’ at the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen, established a forum to debate these issues. They invited an interdisciplinary group of researchers from philosophy, social and cultural history, and the history of science to reflect on the proliferation of ‘resilience-speech’ in twentieth- and twenty-first-century military discourses in the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, and continental Europe.

J. Bourke

Department of History, Classics & Archaeology, Birkbeck, University of London,
London, UK

e-mail: j.bourke@bbk.ac.uk

R. M. Schott (✉)

Peace and Violence Unit, Danish Institute for International Studies,
Copenhagen, Denmark

e-mail: rms@diis.dk

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In all these settings, talk of ‘resilience’ was transformed by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. on 11 September 2001. Daily routines were shattered by this world-historical event. Generations of Americans and European civilians who had not lived through wars nor had their intimate lives directly affected by military service tended to think of violent, world-changing events as belonging to the past or to other people. What happens when calamitous events disrupt everydayness and become part of the present, even for those whose families and friends are not most closely touched by destruction and death? What frames of reference help make sense of and navigate these unknown experiences? Are established concepts adequate or do they need to be reinterpreted or replaced altogether?

These questions surfaced in the aftermath of 9/11, when experts found themselves struggling to grapple with the crisis and its potential implications for mass trauma. As George A. Bonanno, professor of psychology at Columbia University, recalls, following 9/11, the US government prepared for mass trauma amongst those who directly witnessed the terrorist attacks as well as amongst the millions of viewers who saw the spectacle of the attacks endlessly repeated on news broadcasts. But mass trauma did not follow (see Johannes Lang’s article for a detailed discussion of these debates). Bonanno argued that instead of suffering Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as government officials had expected, most survivors proved to be resilient. They did not need to ‘recover’ from trauma. Depending on their social, biological, physiological, and psychological resources, Bonanno found that most people returned to normal fairly quickly. While Bonanno’s work on resilience emerged from his study of grief, Martin Seligman’s approach from positive psychology subsequently became the dominant understanding of resilience post 9/11. At this juncture, resilience moved from a debate in ecology, economics, and psychology to becoming a central feature of national security.

RESILIENCE: PSYCHOLOGY AND SECURITY

The use of the word ‘resilience’ can be traced back to the early seventeenth century, and it is derived from the Latin *resiliere*, meaning to jump back, recoil, or rebound. From the 1830s it was used to describe the human ability to endure and recover from adversity. But this etymology does not suffice as a definition, and scholars debate whether resilience has a fixed definition or not. If it does, what features are to be highlighted? If the

definition changes according to context—and most scholars acknowledge that it is context-dependent—is this pliability a weakness or an advantage? It could be a weakness if it proves to be an empty catchword with little scientific or political merit. It could be a strength if its openness and ambiguity allow for translation of the concept across disciplines and provides openness to new forms of knowledge.

Whether scholars argue for the merits or demerits of the term ‘resilience’, they tend to agree that it is multi-faceted: critics employ it from a number of different fields, political positions, and values. One version of resilience is that it should be viewed as a ‘set of dynamic assemblages that draw on values and ideologies, discourses and policies’ (Smirnova et al. 2021), highlighting the complex components and variations in the way resilience is used. While the term ‘resilience’ had already found its way into psychology by the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the context of studying children who were considered high-risk (Lang article), it gained prominence through Seligman’s work and his campaign to shift the focus of psychology from illness to health.

Since 9/11, *resilience has been securitized*. The terrorist attacks put the issue of how populations responded to the violence as a central concern for governance. Resilience was adopted by policy makers, government officials, and military leaders, across a wide range of areas, from local preparedness for disaster management to instructing first-responders and to training military service personnel and their families. At the same time as the securitization of the psychological use of resilience, there was a *psychologizing of security*. In President Obama’s 2010 National Security Strategy document, the resilience of individuals and communities is a political keyword and is repeated a year later, where the goals of national preparedness are defined as ‘strengthening the security and resilience of the United States through systematic preparation for the threats that pose the greatest risk to the security of the Nation, including acts of terrorism, cyber-attacks, pandemics, and catastrophic natural diseases’ (cited in Brunner and Amrami 2019, 232). In 2012, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued a report, *Crisis Response and Disaster Resilience 2030: Forging Strategic Action in the Age of Uncertainty*. The report envisioned a future in which public and private partnerships would be the mainstay of communities that adopt a ‘culture of resilience’ to provide basic services before and after disasters (Brunner and Amrami 2019, 232). The US Department of Health and Human Services continued to put resilience as central, noting that at the core of a resilient nation are

prepared individuals who are ‘aware of potential risks, understand where they can turn for help, know what their personal responsibilities are, and are willing to help their neighbors and community leaders’ (cited in Brunner and Amrami 2019, 232–234).

RESILIENCE, SOCIAL IMAGINARIES, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

The concept of resilience has broad appeal. Under Seligman, the positive psychology’s version of resilience draws an analogy between physical strength and mental strength, both of which can be trained like a muscle (Koch 2019, 217). This approach puts adequate preparation for crisis and future progress wholly within the domain of human control, offering an appealing and accessible vision of progress. After the twentieth century’s two World Wars, the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and environmental collapse, the promise that progress is inevitable offers a comforting and reassuring vision of the future (Koch 2019, 229).

The appeal of resilience has also made its way into the *social imaginary*, understood as the fundamental concepts and metaphors used by people to make sense of their social existence, inner life, norms, and past and future. Social imaginaries are closely linked to both emotional states and the social practices in which they are embodied (Brunner and Amrami 2019, 220). In the US, conditions that made it possible for the concept of resilience to make its way into the social imaginary draw on a specific historical context. From the second half of the nineteenth century, this included an American spiritual tradition that extolled positive powers within the mind. The mental hygiene movement in the early twentieth century also emphasized specific causative factors that determined mental and emotional states. It extolled the belief that, with efficient practices of prevention and education, people could shift the focus from cure to prevention. This approach was individualized in Norman Vincent Peale’s 1952 bestseller, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which argued that individuals could enhance their mental health by learning the right way to think. Fifty years later, Seligman made a similar claim, advocating his view that ‘positive’ human traits could be studied, measured, fostered, and used to enhance the well-being of individuals and communities (Brunner and Amrami 2019, 227). Due to his work, the turn to resilience became increasingly dominant in scientific

work in psychology.¹ It was this scientific turn that provided positive psychology with a legitimacy that later enabled Seligman to pitch his program to the US military. This specific US context, with an American spiritual tradition focusing on the positive power within the mind, the scientific claims of positive psychology, together with the political events of 9/11 and the massive media dissemination and repetition because of advances in global media technologies, are some of the conditions for the movement of resilience from margin to center in post-9/11 America (Brunner and Amrami 2019, 231).

The social imaginary of resilience has, moreover, become deeply entrenched in what Benedict Anderson has called *imagined communities*. For Anderson, nationalism is paradoxical: It is a modern phenomenon and yet in the eyes of the adherents has ancient roots; it is expected to be a universal phenomenon so that everyone ‘has’ a nationality and yet is always concrete in its manifestations; it is politically powerful yet philosophically weak. The nation is an imagined political community, he argues, because members will never know most of their fellow-members—however small the nation—yet they have an image of something shared. The notion of imagined communities acknowledges that there is an element of invention in this notion of communion but discards the idea that there are true and false communities. Communities according to Anderson are distinguished not by whether they are true or false, but by the ‘style in which they are imagined’ (Anderson 1983/1991). The response to 9/11 became central to the style for imagining community in the US post-9/11, and resilience came to figure prominently in this response. The tragic attacks were mobilized to mark the limits and contours of the national community. As George W. Bush said in his Address to the Nation at the joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, ‘the entire world has seen for itself the state of our union—and it is strong’. He went on to add that ‘America is successful because of the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people’ (*Washington Post*, September 20, 2001). The attacks were presented as showing the sovereign power of this community. Bush’s words, ‘either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’, presented

¹ This happened despite the fact that the scientific evaluation of Seligman’s work has been harsh. Nick Brown writes, ‘The idea that techniques that have demonstrated, at best, marginal effects in reducing depressive symptoms in school-age children could also prevent the onset of a condition that is associated with some of the most extreme situations with which humans can be confronted is a remarkable one that does not seem to be backed up by empirical evidence’ (Singal 2021).

US power as the symbol of freedom, democracy, and civilization itself. The terrorist attacks mobilized the sense of comradeship across the political and economic divides of America, with both Republicans and Democrats singing ‘God Bless America’ together on the steps of the Capital. While it was not until the 2010 National Security Strategy that the US formally recognized resilience in national doctrine, the response to 9/11 is widely viewed as bringing resilience policy into national security (Fisher et al. 2018, 1).

RESILIENCE AS A TRAVELING CONCEPT

Resilience, like many other concepts, is a *traveling concept*. As Edward Said noted in his 1983 essay, ‘Travelling Theory’, ‘Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another’ (Said 1983, 226). Traveling concepts are part of the wider issue of translation, which is basic to the cultural production of meaning and highlights the mechanisms for the transfer and distribution of knowledge (Nowicka 2015, 224). In Said’s theory, when concepts travel they are no longer dependent on the field or discourse which originally gave birth to the idea. The concept becomes a work in progress, and it changes according to the modifications exerted on it when it enters new fields. The concept also adapts to the new historical and political circumstances with which it is confronted. And in taking a new shape, it becomes a tool for interpreting a new local social reality, and thereby brings with it a new ethos (Nowicka 2015, 226). Elements of this process of transformation can be traced with resilience, which has moved originally from a discussion of ecosystems to a discussion in economics, to the context of psychology, and to security, where it has been highly contested by scholars in International Relations.

One source of resilience in the early 1970s is the ecology sciences. The Canadian ecologist Crawford Holling did important work in moving away from mechanistic assertions of equilibrium which assumes that there is a balance of nature to which life will eventually return. With a ‘complexity science’ view of ecosystems, Holling sought to define a complex notion of resilience that could account for how ecosystems remain cohesive despite undergoing extreme perturbations. His notion of ‘ecological’ resilience has since become a dominant discourse in natural resource management. Holling challenged the idea that equilibrium is the goal for managing ecosystems, as the equilibrium approach glosses over unknowable and

complex interdependencies and, as such, the expectation of a stable and fixed yield in production might itself undermine the system's productivity. Better to emphasize heterogeneity, acknowledging complex interdependencies and the value of biodiversity, while recognizing our own ignorance and that future events will be unexpected. Holling's approach to resilience in resource management resonates with theories of the evolution of free market systems associated with the 'Austrian' school for economic philosophy and most famously articulated by Friedrich Hayek, recipient of the 1974 Nobel Prize for economics. Hayek argued for an epistemology of limited knowledge and uncertainty. 'I confess that I prefer true but imperfect knowledge, even if it leaves much indetermined and unpredictable, to a pretense of exact knowledge that is likely to be false' (Hayek 1974).² From this epistemic position, Hayek argued that not just economic systems, but all systems are complex, adaptive, and non-linear. For Hayek, crises are not only inevitable, but they are necessary for organized complexity, and his vision of nature projected the free market as a model for complex systems—paving the way for the reception of resilience in the contemporary policy arena (Walker and Cooper 2011, 147). When resilience emerges in discourses about emergency preparedness, crisis response, and national security, it carries over the theories of management from the earlier ecological and economic approaches from which it emerged. As public management and state planning in response to emergencies are inherently limited, one should give up the idea of an end point to emergency—with the aim that post-catastrophe reconstruction will restore the status quo—and embrace the culture of resilience with permanent adaptability through crisis. These theories of systems as based on radical uncertainty, emphasizing innovation and adaptation, mesh with a managerial mentality suited to neoliberalism.³

In its journey between ecology, economics, psychology, and security, resilience has met—as Said's notion of traveling theory suggests—both

² Hayek (1974); see also Walker and Melinda Cooper (2011, 149 and 145–150), for background for this paragraph. This worldview reminds one of Donald H. Rumsfeld's, Defense Secretary under George W. Bush, most famous comment at a press conference on 12 February 2002. Responding to a question about whether Saddam Hussein tried to supply weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups, he replied: 'There are known knowns—there are things we know we know... We also know there are known unknowns—that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also *unknown* unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know' (Zack 2021).

³ Some of this paragraph is drawn from Schott (2013, 212).

resistance and acceptance (Smirnova et al. 2021, 22–25). One strand of criticism has targeted it as replicating capitalist logic, with an unending search for growth and development in the interest of profit-making. Scholars like Evans and Reid argue that resilience thinking normalizes danger, encouraging individuals to embrace risk. Failure becomes attributed to the individual, averting criticism away from the systems which produced the problems individuals must grapple with (Evans and Reid 2014). This criticism is echoed by scholars who view resilience as the latest strategy in neoliberal governance. In transforming governing practices on the ground, many scholars in international relations argue that it shifts the responsibility of government to the citizenry, effectively depoliticizing problems that should be dealt with by local and national governments. Resilience can be a strategy for making actors comply with solutions that are unfavorable to them in disaster planning, international development, or national security.

SCIENCE/POLITICS (KNOWLEDGE/POWER)

Not only does resilience travel between different scientific fields and disciplines, but it also interacts with governmental policy processes. Resilience becomes caught up in the general dynamics between science and government, ultimately an expression of the relation between knowledge and power (Lambricht 2008, 6). During World War II and the Cold War, the close relationship between science and government helped win the war and put men on the moon. The partnership between government and science became unhinged during the Johnson's presidency during the Vietnam War. Universities turned into hotbeds of anti-war protests, and Johnson referred to student protestors as those 'little bastards' (Lambricht 2008, 7). Post 9/11 the relationship between science and politics deteriorated even more under George W. Bush, becoming highly politicized. One author accused Bush of waging a 'war on science' (Mooney 2005; cited in Lambricht 2008, 6). Entering the White House as a representative of the Religious Right with a conservative Republican support base, Bush crossed the line separating control of information and political interference. This period has been described both as a 'politicization of science'—for example, in limiting stem cell research and rejecting the Kyoto protocol—and a 'scientization of politics' (Lambricht 2008, 6; 9). Bush's management style was characterized by secrecy, speed, and top-down control, and he put Vice President Dick Cheney in charge of administrative

matters. Cheney, in turn, was known for putting the right people in the right places and trusting them ‘to make well-informed decisions that comport with his overall vision’ (Becker and Gellman 2007; cited in Lambright 2008, 10).

Added to this particularly troubled relationship between science and politics under George W. Bush are the more general challenges for experts who provide advice to government. One British scientist describes his experience in advising the UK Home office on its drug policy as frustrating. He complained that ‘if you said something they wanted to hear, they loved it. If not, they ignored it’. He recalls one minister stating explicitly that ‘evidence is what we look for to support our policy decisions’ (King 2016). But policymaking does not work like scientific method (Cairney 2016; cited in King 2016, 1510). As Peter Gluckman, pediatrician and chief scientific advisor to the prime minister in New Zealand, contended, ‘evidence to a policy maker is not the same as evidence to a scientist. ... Anecdote is important or probably more impressive than structured evidence to many policy makers’. Emotive photographs are more likely to stir up political action than randomized control trials. Anthony King observed that ‘decisions are based on a mixture of emotions, knowledge and shortcuts to gather evidence’ (King 2016, 1511).

RESILIENCE ENTERS THE MILITARY

The background story to the entry of resilience into the US military builds on these elements of the politicization of science in the Bush years and the interest in taking a shortcut to evidence, which is typical of many policy makers. By 2007, the US Army was facing a major mental health crisis, with the repeated and longer deployments of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, a staggering increase in PTSD (15.7 percent of deployed veterans were screened positive for PTSD compared with 6.8 percent over a lifetime in the general population), and a tragic increase of suicides amongst US soldiers (Singal 2021, 5–6). In October 2007, Col. Jill W. Chambers, a survivor of the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, was tasked with finding a solution. Her country musician husband happened to be reading Martin Seligman’s book on *Learned Optimism*, and he encouraged her to contact him, which she did. In summer of 2008, this connection led to a meeting between Seligman and General George W. Casey, Jr. chief of staff of the army (and a Cheney appointee). Casey proved to be a quick convert to the proposal that Seligman could develop a

strength-based prevention program that could build resilience and help soldiers thrive in their personal lives (Seligman 2021). Though Harvard psychologist and leading PTSD expert Richard J. McNally urged Seligman and Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum to run a pilot test—a proposal that Seligman claims he suggested at a meeting at the Pentagon in February 2009—the proposal was rejected by Casey. In Seligman’s account, Casey said ‘we are at war, General Cornum. I don’t want a pilot study. I want you to teach and measure resilience and positive psychology to the whole Army. Now. Move out, soldier’ (Seligman 2021). In another version, Seligman recounts Casey saying, ‘we’ve studied Marty’s work. They’ve published more than a dozen replications. We are satisfied with it, and we are ready to bet it will prevent depression, anxiety, and PTSD. This is not an academic exercise, and I don’t want another study. This is war, General (Cornum), I want you to roll this out to the whole Army’ (Seligman 2012; cited Singal 2021). Seligman was armed with what looked like reams of research and books, and Casey bought the idea of establishing the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program (CSF), which soon became mandatory for all soldiers. CSF’s goal of enhancing resilience and coping skills in order to thrive, instead of focusing on pathology, fit nicely with army values such as maintaining calm, self-control, and mastering challenges rather than being defeated by them (Singal 2021). In Seligman’s account, the initial response was so overwhelmingly positive that the generals sped up the rollout of the program (Seligman 2021). In other words, in the face of a massive health crisis and suicide epidemic amongst soldiers and veterans, the back story to the introduction of resilience in the military includes happenstance, anecdote, intuition, emotion, top-down decision-making, an interest in finding short-cuts for a speedy solution, and a lack of understanding of scientific evidence. The introduction of resilience through CSF also nicely created very good PR for the army.

Retrospectively, things could have been different. Seligman could have gotten angry at General Casey’s disinterest in scientific procedures; he could have refused to participate in a massive rollout of a program without carrying out a pilot study; he could have insisted on the necessity of maintaining adequate scientific procedures. Instead, he understood that ‘the Army felt that outcome studies were not a high priority in the middle of two wars’ and maintained that the army made a reasonable judgment (Seligman 2021). Alternatively, the army could have committed resources to treating PTSD, something Seligman never promised his program could prevent. Such an approach would have involved complex, long-term

collaborations with trauma experts, some of which might ultimately challenge the value of sending, and resending, young men and women to war. Instead, power trumped knowledge in this decisive intervention in military lives.

MILITARIZATION

Seligman's interactions with the US military draw attention to the militarization of the concept 'resilience'. The term 'militarization' is a highly contested one but is broadly defined by international relations scholar Cynthia Enloe as 'a step-by step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas' (Enloe 2000, 3). Although resilience and resilience training did not *originate* in military contexts (see the chapter by Lang), its military uses have become increasingly dominant. Indeed, Lang argues that resilience as a concept has become thoroughly militarized. This process arises in three complementary ways. First, 'resilience' has been militarized in the sense that the concept exerts a formidable impact on all aspects of life within the armed forces. This point is addressed in many of the chapters in this book. This form of militarization has been profoundly influenced by the US armed forces. Their role in driving the global move towards resilience is undeniable, given both its size (1.4 million personnel on active duty) and military budget (\$715 billion).

Second, 'resilience' has been militarized in the sense that the concept has become central in the way the armed forces project their public image. The resilient warfighter is central to legitimizing militarism, based on a notion of martial well-being. In this way, the mantra of resilience has provided a counterpoint to public anxieties about PTSD and the costs of war to its own personnel. This has had a depoliticizing impact on attitudes to the armed forces since it has effectively drawn attention away from the harms of armed conflict towards an emphasis on individual coping mechanisms. Indeed, political scientist Alison Howell has gone so far as to claim that the 'high tempo of deployments in the War on Terror have been made possible, in part, through the use of the psy disciplines' (Howell 2011, 4), including that of positive psychology.

Third, as society has become increasingly militarized since 9/11, the frames of meanings devised within military institutions have spread throughout society. International relations scholar Annick Wibben observes that while 'less than 1% of the US population currently serves in

the military,... much of the population accepts the profound militarization of US society that extends to toys, fashion and other consumer goods, as well as sporting events, school funding, urban planning, taxation, and more' (Wibben 2018, 141). In her book, *Wounding the World*, Joanna Bourke argues that the unacknowledged (or even noticed) levels of militarist incursions into everyday life, including the prominence of 'militainment', have effectively turned all US and British people into 'citizen-soldiers' (Bourke 2014). In relation to 'resilience' specifically, global businesses have adopted resilience programs that were devised for the Special Forces to train their staff (Daffey-Moore 2020). The permeation of militarized ideas about resilience has also emerged in relation to political responses to COVID-19. For example, the French President explicitly used martial terms when he called for a 'war' against the virus, launching 'Operation Resilience' (Opillard et al. 2020).

This has permeated thinking about national security. Precisely because of the lack of a clearly identifiable 'enemy' and the widespread acceptance of a state of permanent war ('mowing the grass' as the Israeli defense express it, a term adopted by US strategists such as the former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper in the context of counterterrorism strikes in Libya) (Inbar and Shamir 2014; Snow 2019; for a discussion, see Sterman 2021), the armed forces exert a formidable influence over 'civilian' society. Reference to resilience in the face of unknown threats has spread from military contexts to all citizens in the 'war without end'. This has led to the militarization of everyday life throughout the world. Howell explains that

The architects of military resilience are... exporting this model [of resilience] to the civilian sphere of social security, using their military experiment as 'proof of concept' of the scientific validity not only of resilience training, but also of positive psychology more generally... 'social security' cannot be held separate from inter/national security, because their domains are, in practice, imbricated. (Howell 2015, 15)

DOMINANT THEMES

Resilience: Militaries and Militarization emerged from an interdisciplinary symposium, with additional scholars later invited to contribute to this volume. The volume commences with three analyses of the long history of 'resilience-speak'. What preceded it and what is its (potential) future?