

SUSAN BROOKS THISTLETHWAITE

Women's Bodies as Battlefield

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON WOMEN

“Reverend Thistlethwaite makes an important contribution to the current debate on the wars we are waging and how they affect violence against women.”

—JIMMY CARTER, 39TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE CARTER CENTER



Women's Bodies as Battlefield

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#OccupytheBible: What Jesus Really Said (and Did) about Money and Power. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Interfaith Just Peacemaking: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

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Women's Bodies as Battlefield

Christian Theology and the Global War on Women

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

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Introduction

Rapists are the “shock troops of patriarchy” and batterers are the army of occupation.

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

All day long, all night long, every day and every night, the bodies of women and girls are turned into battlefields. Their bodies are penetrated against their will; they are burned, maimed, bruised, slapped, kicked, threatened with weapons, confined, beaten with fists or objects, shot, and knifed; their bones are broken; and they lose limbs, sight, hearing, pregnancies, and their sense of personal and physical integrity. They are terrorized and they are killed.

This is what battlefields in war are like. Bodies are damaged, flesh is ripped apart, and minds and lives destroyed. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque shocked Europe out of its heroic delusions about war with an unrelenting portrait of men locked in trench warfare over a destroyed landscape. The battlefield in this novel is central—a gore-filled, body-destroying wasteland: “Haie strikes his spade into the neck of a gigantic Frenchman and throws the first hand-grenade; we duck behind a breastwork for a few seconds, then the straight bit of trench ahead of us is empty. The next throw wizzes obliquely over the cover and clears a passage; as we run past we toss handfuls down into the dug-outs, the earth shudders, it crashes, smokes and groans, we stumble over slippery lumps of flesh, over yielding bodies; I fall into an open belly on which lies a clear, new officer’s cap.”¹

“Slippery lumps of flesh” and “yielding bodies” that are torn open are what battlefields make of bodies.

Torn flesh and yielding bodies also can describe the experience of rape for women. In 1984, Sherry Kurtz was a brand-new recruit sent to Germany by the US military. She was gang raped by her “brothers in arms”:

“Do you want a beer?” he asked. “Sure” I replied. The next thing I knew is I was waking up. (I know now something had to be in that beer.) I felt like I was dreaming, only I felt hands on me. I felt touching, and I felt a guy on my back. I knew from the pain that I felt what he was doing to me. He was sodomizing me, and he wasn’t the only one to do that. I remember he used one arm to just flip me over; I kept my eyes closed trying to figure out why this was happening. I was in a fog, I knew and felt what was going on, but I had no strength to stop it . . .

Finally, I opened my eyes because I had to see. I was trying to get my arms free, I couldn’t free them. I felt like [there] were bugs crawling on me and something was sitting

on my body. I felt like I could get no air. I remember thinking "I have a headache and feel very fragile at this time. I see one on each arm, and leg, I feel as though I might throw up. I can feel this one inside me and I see faces like in a fog. I don't know all of them, but I have seen them."²²

It is important to understand the War on Women from the perspective of the body as battlefield because that is where we can actually see the carnage and acknowledge the pain. The damage to the body is an undeniable fact of violence; so too are the threats of violence that are carried not only in the mind but also in physical changes due to stress. The fact of the physical effects of violence on women's bodies, however, is aggressively hidden, qualified, reframed, reorganized, catalogued, excused, and ultimately authorized. This is how such a monumental amount of carnage continues almost unabated with very little public outcry or sustained efforts to stop it. To prevent and reduce violence in the War on Women, and indeed to prevent and reduce the violence of war, the facts of physical injury and death on these related battlefields must be exposed and seen in all their reality. This is a crucial starting place.

Seeing Violence against Women

One way to actually begin to see the violence perpetrated against women's bodies is through a health-crisis model.

The advantage of the "health-crisis" model is that it is backed up by statistical analysis. The World Health Organization (WHO), for example, has issued a comprehensive, multicountry report on the incidence of violence against women worldwide.³ WHO has concluded that 35 percent of women around the world, or more than one in three women and girls aged 15 and above, experience sexual or physical violence at least once in their lives. WHO found that such violence is most commonly at the hands of an intimate partner; in fact, 30 percent of women globally are shown to be victims of domestic violence.

Given their mandate on health, it is unsurprising that WHO researchers call these horrifying statistics a "global public health problem that affects approximately one-third of women globally."⁴ The negative health effects are well documented, and there are recommendations for health-system changes as part of an overall strategy to combat violence against women. These are practical and provide a crucial way that societies can confront this alarming rate of violence against women.

The WHO report gives a baseline calculus of the enormity of the incidence of violence against women and shows that this is a world crisis, and indeed a world health crisis. But statistical analysis and the health-crisis framework are not enough. They do not get at what drives this massive problem, nor is the "health-crisis" model compelling enough to break through to public consciousness.

Personal stories are more compelling than public-health statistics, though actual data are important to ultimately crafting a comprehensive response to the extent of violence against women.

Stories—especially in the age of new media where they can be replicated with remarkable speed and visual impact—are crucial. Personal testimony to what actually happens to women’s bodies can move people to awareness and break through the silencing. This happened following a shooting spree in Isla Vista, California, where the male shooter was discovered to have posted and filmed women-hating, racist messages, which produced a viral Twitter hashtag, #YesAllWomen. The thousands and thousands of messages posted in just a few hours after the hashtag’s creation started to give testimony to the widespread culture of violence against women and how it is so common and so accepted. The #YesAllWomen Twitter tag was framed as a furious rebuttal to the familiar “not all men” argument that deflects analysis of rape culture and redirects it to individual male behaviors.⁵ Reading the tweets provides a virtual tour of the battlefield of women’s bodies in the War on Women.

Data, like that contained in the WHO study, are important, of course, but it is crucial to confront the massive amount of violence against women at ground zero. *Ground zero* is defined here as the painful injuries to women’s bodies and the threat of this pain, even to death, that causes widespread fear. Stories begin to address this physical level. Staying with the body and what happens to the body begins to expose the gaping wounds caused by violence. The wounding of bodies, sometimes even unto death, poses an existential claim that is less easily dismissed than statistics, though the drive to dismiss, deny, minimize, or even authorize these wounds is strong.⁶

This Is My Body

The wounded, bleeding, maimed, and destroyed bodies of women are nonnegotiable; they are what they are. They are not “the body” in general but individual women’s bodies that are violated and wounded and sometimes destroyed. These are bodies that can carry the scars and memory of painful mistreatment as long as they exist. These are bodies that have been forced to endure painful injury, as Susan Brownmiller wrote, “Against Our Will.”⁷

The body is the way we exist in the world, and despite millennia of trying, Western philosophy and religion have been unable to get around that inescapable fact. Women have, for far too long, been denigrated as “the body,” identified with the problem of embodiment, and embodiment itself has been denigrated as a prison of the soul. Embodiment is not a problem; violence is the problem.

When we make the body our touchstone of what it means to be human, the body/soul dualism that has so plagued philosophy and religion, particularly in the Christian-dominated West, is profoundly challenged. The real separation is not body and soul but body and will. Force or the threat of force used on bodies is an attack on the integrity of the human person, body and soul together.

Violence thus enters into the analysis offered in this book in a primary way. Western Christian theology and the biblical and philosophical sources that have been so influential in its formation have misunderstood, misnamed, and misdirected the primary existential issue of the human condition. The primary

existential crisis of the human condition is violence, not a body/soul dualism and its attendant dualism of sin/grace. This misnaming and misdirection has led Christian theology into a profound complicity with both intimate and societal violence, where violence itself is lauded as a divinely authorized rule instead of being seen as the ultimate insult to God's work in creating human beings and the world.

The reality of women's bodies as battlefields reveals the legacies from Western philosophy and theology that support not only the War on Women but also war in general.

There are social, cultural, and religious supports that a society needs to employ in order to ensure that more than a third of women in that society can be treated violently, or threatened with violence, without mass outcry and rebellion. These social, cultural, and religious supports overlap with many of those that are necessary for societies to be willing to send the young, healthy bodies of its citizens into war, where many of them will be maimed or killed, also without mass outcry or rebellion.

The Western biblical, philosophical, and theological legacies that provide these supports for both the War on Women and war in general are the desire for power, hierarchical authority structures, and contempt for the body. Moreover, it will be shown in this argument that war and violence against women not only have some of the same social, cultural, and religious roots, but these roots are also mutually reinforcing. War is a model for violence against women; the widespread acceptance of violence against women is a template for war.

The body as injured, in pain, and killed is the starting place. This volume, therefore, attempts to focus the gaze on what happens to the bodies of women in the War on Women, and to bodies in war, and to show how these are related and also how they are different. Really seeing the injury to bodies is an attempt to expose, by comparison, all the ways that the injuring of women's bodies in the War on Women, and the injuring of bodies, civilian and combatant, that happen in war, are ignored, sidelined, justified, and even celebrated. It is also specifically a way to keep focusing on the injuries to bodies to empower a movement to resist this in all its forms.

It is crucial to actually work to witness to this injuring in the War on Women and in war because, while these forms of violence are everywhere, strong social, cultural, religious, and economic forces conspire to hide them.

But physicality cannot be the only starting point. There is a real risk that if we witness to all these forms of violence equally, we will not actually see the very different forces that act so that certain bodies are made available to certain forms of violence in certain ways and at certain times. The book is an attempt to stay with the injuring of bodies but not collapse "the body" or "women's bodies" into one abstraction.

"Critical physicality" is a term of my own invention, and I use it to describe the method I am attempting to employ in this book. The term "critical physicality" is partly related to the work of Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* and especially to Scarry's unrelenting focus on the irreducibility of bodily pain.⁸ Whatever else we may say about the War on Women, and

about war, it is undeniable that pain is caused to the living body. That is a profound existential starting point, as bodies that are not alive cannot feel pain. Life itself is at stake when violence is done to the physical body.

It is important, however, to employ critical theory at every step of this analysis; hence the modifier “critical” is used along with physicality. All bodies are not equally accessible for injury, and the method used in this book employs critical theory to keep that fact in view. Different women’s contexts matter immensely when we try to join together to create a movement to stop violence against women. Thus, while it is important to say #YesAllWomen by virtue of being female, at risk in the War on Women, we must also say “#YesAllWomenDifferently.”⁹ If we do not think and act on the premise of #YesAllWomenDifferently, the solidarity so needed for movement building to prevent and reduce violence is not created; it is destroyed.

Bodies have races, sexual orientations, sizes, reproductive organs, religious and cultural meanings, and social locations within states and economies. These must not be ignored even as physicality itself is the focus. Critical physicality must adopt a position outside the regular mechanisms that essentialize the body in order to actually witness to the multiple violations of bodies.¹⁰ Liberation feminism, Womanism, queer theory, and postcolonialism in particular are crucial to displacing the vast amount of injury and death of women from within the power structure of dominance and submission where it has been normalized and to place it outside.¹¹ Then, injuring women’s bodies and injuring bodies in war, even to death, can be seen as beyond the confines of “normal.” Even further, how the normal is constructed from the various mechanisms of domination can perhaps be seen.

Gender and sexual orientation, as they function in Western culture, are constructed as relationships of power in dominance and subordination. The unequal social relations that are produced, maintained, policed, and punished if transgressed must be the focus of critical theory. Theory reveals that heterosexuality is compulsory and thus must be a crucial framing device for examining violence against women, even as the very category of “women” as defined by heteronormative patriarchy must be constantly highlighted and challenged as an oppressive construct.

Race and racism must not be reduced to individual “prejudices” best addressed through “dialogue” and “inclusion,” but as a major part of the way Western societies have developed law, economics, politics, and religion and anchored them in racism. Critical race theory provides a way into the critical consciousness needed to expose this at the foundations.

Critical scholarship also demands an acknowledgment of the scholar’s own context. I am a white, middle-class, female academic. I have been a domestic violence counselor, and I continue to be a volunteer advocate to end violence against women. When I was a sophomore in my high school, many friends who had already graduated began to come back in body bags from Vietnam. I became a peace activist. Peace activism led me to the Civil Rights movement and the recognition that racism fueled both the war in Vietnam and the violence against African Americans at home.

Yet none of these commitments or social locations provides me an “innocence” from which I can take a stand without constant work, with the aid of critical theory, to expose my own immersion in the multiple sources of power, authority, and contempt for the body that are built into the very fabric of the society in which I have lived all my life. This is a given. There is no escape from our social locations, only constant effort to achieve critical consciousness and to build solidarity through complex movement building.

I work, therefore, within Euro-Atlantic culture and examine it in regard to its role in the War on Women and in war. This stance can reveal how these wars set the parameters of not only how bodies become battlefields within Western culture but also how they exercise power globally. Increasingly, the model of women’s bodies as battlefields, in particular, is coming to be the model for globalization, and the role of war and the War on Women is seen as advancing the interests of global economics.

There must always be a dynamic tension between the particulars of the social construction of bodies in Western culture and the sustained analysis of what this construction means in terms of the widespread acceptance, even valorization, of many forms of violence.

There is a further challenge and the particularities of all bodies matter immensely in meeting this challenge. All this analysis, no matter how detailed and intricate, will mean little without the movement building that is required to actually prevent and reduce both violence against women and the violence of war.

Unless we can find a way to witness to the injuring of the bodies of all women (and all women differently in a complex solidarity), and unless we can find a way to witness to the injuring of the bodies of all those in war and to probe at why war actually continues unabated, we will make no real impact.

That is in part why theories of war and peace, for example, have almost completely failed to either prevent or control war. These theories have not even been applied as an attempt to end the War on Women.

Theories of War and Peace

The goal of this volume is to examine violence against women in relationship to the models of war and peace that exist in Western thought. These models are primarily Pacifism, Just War, and Just Peace. These paradigms are potential resources in the struggle to curtail and end violence against women. Tragically, however, the analyses in this book also expose flaws within all of them when it comes to understanding the body as the primary object of war making and the body as the primary object of peacemaking. All three of these theories need to be rethought from the perspective of critical physicality, with reconstructing Just Peace a primary goal of this work.

The War on Women and war have common supports, and theories of peace and war should account for these. But the War on Women and wars between nations also have crucial differences. According to Scarry, two facts are essential to comprehending the activity that is war, “first, that the immediate activity is injuring;

second, that the immediate activity of war is a contest.” War is “reciprocal injuring where the goal is to out-injure the opponent.”¹²

When we consider women’s bodies as battlefields, the injuring of women’s bodies comes into clearer view and does pose an existential claim as noted earlier. The War on Women is a war primarily because of this embodied link: war and the War on Women are about injuring the body.

But when it comes to the second part of Scarry’s definition of war, that of contest, there is a difference. The “War on Women” is not a war between combatants engaged in mutual injuring, each side struggling to out-injure the other. It is not, then, a war between men and women, where men and women are both duly authorized combatants, it is a war *on women*, where women are categorically more like noncombatants or civilians who are being attacked. Women are not equally authorized by their societies to use violence; even when women use defensive violence in the case of attack, women are often more harshly punished than the men who beat them. “The average prison sentence for men who kill their intimate partners is 2 to 6 years. Women who kill their partners are sentenced, on average, to 15 years.”¹³ In 2012, Marissa Alexander of Jacksonville, Florida, received a 20-year prison sentence for firing warning shots against her allegedly abusive husband. The judge rejected a defense under Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” law. She told police it was to escape a brutal beating by her husband, against whom she had already taken out a protective order. Alexander had never been in trouble with the law before.¹⁴

Women’s bodies are the battlefields where violence takes place, but often the contest is not with them but rather about them. The goal of establishing control over women through violence or the threat of violence is only apparently about women; it is frequently, instead, about using the control of women in a contest with other men. Gang rape exhibits this characteristic to a great degree, where men use violence on a woman’s body to gain power and status with and over other men. There are also aspects of domestic violence and ideologies of the “head of the household” where masculinity is defined as control of women backed up by force and is thus a way to establish “maleness” vis-à-vis other men, not merely contesting with women.

While the War on Women and war will be treated in tandem and subject to the multiple analyses provided by critical physicality, they will not be conflated. Generalities do not help prevent or reduce violence that is so vast and so well-established in law, custom, politics, economics, and religion. When power is so diffuse, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, there must be multiple forms of resistance to address it.¹⁵

The diffusions of power and the multiple paths of resistance to them is actually the good news. While there are no easy answers or fixes for the ubiquitous role violence plays in Western society, there are multiple ways to identify and subvert it.

But in order to subvert violence, you have to actually begin to see it for what it is.

Injuries and Bodies

Chapters 1 and 2 describe what happens to bodies in war and in the War on Women. Battlefields in war are the sites of horrific injuries to those engaged in combat and to noncombatants. Twenty-first-century wars are now conducted on the bodies of more noncombatants than combatants, and as Jeremy Scahill documents in *Dirty Wars*, the whole world became a battlefield for the Bush administration, and this is now the new pattern for global conflict. The world is a battlefield, according to Scahill.¹⁶

There is a War on Women in war that is part of the chapter on war, including the extent of sexual assault in the military as well as rape in war. War, as it is conducted in many times and places, includes systemic sexual abuse. Violence against women and girls has been called *War's Dirty Secret*.¹⁷ Dirty Wars, in other words, have dirty secrets.

The War on Women is a war, and we know this because of the amount of injury and death suffered by women's bodies at the hands of others, primarily men whom they know or who are their intimate partners. This war is global and there are signs it is accelerating as women's bodies pay the price for anxieties and dislocations created by globalization. Failed or failing nation-states cannot enforce the meager laws that are designed to protect women from the War on Women, and too few states have such laws or are willing to enforce them.

Philosophy and Theology

The foundations of Western thought on the body, women's bodies, and war are taken from Greek philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) and from Christian theology (Augustine and Aquinas). Chapters 3 and 4 examine in greater depth the common roots of war and the War on Women in these crucial thinkers and examine the development of militarism and a denigration of the body and sexuality.

The Heroic and the Erotic

The massive amount of injury that both the War on Women and war entails, numbering in the millions every year, must be hidden from view to be tolerated by societies. Both the War on Women and war are hidden by being fictionalized, but in different ways. These fictionalizations are aided and abetted by aspects of Christian theological development in regard to the body, sexuality, and the use of force, but they have enormous social and cultural sources as well.

Chapter 5 examines the way war is fictionalized as heroic, and especially the conquest of the female, while Chapter 6 explores how the War on Women and war are fictionalized as erotic.

Pacifism, Just War, and Just Peace

Chapter 7 goes into more detail on the way in which Just War—a theory of war that draws on both Western philosophical and theological sources—authorizes militarism and is also a normative frame for authorizing and conducting violence against women. Major flaws in Just War theory are revealed by the way in which violence against women has so often been considered “just” in Western culture.

Pacifism and Just Peace are examined in Chapter 8. Pacifism in a historical context arises from eschatological and sectarian impulses rather than a repudiation of violence per se, though there are voices in Western philosophy and theology that do contend just that. But Pacifism has never included opposition to violence against women in a central way. A weakness of Pacifism, in a contemporary context, is the conviction by its adherents of their own “innocence” in regard to violence, and this hides actual violence against women in pacifist communities.

Just Peace was developed as a concrete set of practices that prevent or reduce violence in war and that are designed to create a sustainable peace. Just Peace was influenced, in its development, by Christian sectarian Pacifism, liberal Christian theologies, Catholic moral reasoning, and by Western understandings of human rights and international law. Yet it will be argued that so far in its development, Just Peace lacks sufficient attention to the way in which the War on Women, and the denigration of the body itself, can continue even through many of the practices of Just Peace. Just Peace also lacks a sustained analysis of power and hierarchy.

A Just Peace theology of critical physicality is proposed in Chapter 9. This is not set out as a solution, but more of an invitation to a path forward, one that does not flinch from going through the horrors of what happens to bodies on the battlefields of the War on Women and in war, one that forthrightly rejects aspects of Western philosophy and Christian theology that have so far enabled—even demanded—war and the War on Women and one that leads to deepened and expanded practices that put ending the War on Women, and war itself, at the center of the Christian theological and ethical task.

The conclusion is called “Can I Get a Witness?” and sketches out what happens in Just Peacemaking when a critical focus on the body encounters what are called the “practice norms”—that is, the specific tenets of the theory.

The Honored Dead and Living

After the battle of Gettysburg, a defining battle of the American Civil War, the dead (especially the Confederate dead) lay for days in the sun and rain, and many were hastily shoved into mass graves. For years afterwards, dead bodies or parts of bodies would heave up in the spring from the thawing ground.

On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln gave what is arguably his most famous speech over the freshly dug graves at Gettysburg. Lincoln said that those in attendance on that day were met on a “great battlefield,” a battlefield not only of a single engagement at Gettysburg but a struggle over the very definition of the nation. This was the consecration of this battlefield, Lincoln contended, not

any words said on that day. It was “[t]he brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, [who] have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.” The cause for which they fought and died, Lincoln concluded, was to ensure that a “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”¹⁸

Lincoln believed the mass death at Gettysburg “hallowed” the ground as no dedication could do, for it was their deaths that provided the consecration. So much is true.

Yet, even in this remarkable speech, there is a flaw, a flaw we inherit as a nation. This flaw is the idea that the obscenity that is the suffering and death from violence inflicted by one human being on another can become “sacred” when cast as a “sacrifice.” The “honored dead” deserve respect, of course, but let us not delude ourselves that these deaths are sacrifices that make something as unholy as war sacred. “Government of the people, by the people and for the people” has not yet been achieved, and much of the blood spilt on the battlefield at Gettysburg has seeded continued national division, especially in regard to race. No, Gettysburg was not “hallowed” but, in following what happens to the body on battlefields, it was a mass grave resulting from mass injury and death.

The War on Women has its own battlefields—that is, the bodies of those who are killed in what is now called “femicide,” the “killing of a woman because she is a woman, the killing of a girl because she is a girl.”¹⁹ Those killed by femicide do not even get the recognition of big public speeches, and the places they are injured and buried are not made into national monuments consecrated by their deaths. Their fatal injuries are not regarded as marks of honor.

Women activists, however, have made their own memorials, as represented on the cover of this book. Crosses with the names of women who had been victims of femicide and domestic violence in Bolivia were attached to a fence as a memorial and a protest. Bolivia is considered to have the highest rate of domestic violence and femicide in Latin America.²⁰

Women’s bodies can no longer be hidden, but like the thawing bodies at Gettysburg, they are heaving up and demanding their lives be valued and their loss mourned as a vast human atrocity. They shall not indeed have died in vain if we commit ourselves to end the scourge of the War on Women. Their suffering and woundedness shall no longer be hidden, excused, or even deemed their own fault. And women around the world who live in thrall to fear and suffering inflicted on them shall too be valued, and their value made plain so that women’s bodies can no longer be a place where violence can be enacted as justified or even sacred.

And from this we will learn to study the War on Women, and war itself, no more.

Injuring in War

They were going to look at war, the red animal—war, the blood-swollen god.

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*

War fascinates because it is such a spectacle of power. War poses an existential threat to life and thus is also often equated with the power of life and death of a god, whether for good or for ill. No other human activity can loom so large in consciousness as war and yet, at the same time, be so hidden and so poorly understood.

This is by design. If war were known in full, it would be far and away more difficult for nations to wage it.

But how to know war? One way is to know the injuries to bodies that are the true goal of war. Injuries to bodies in war are war's reality.

The names given to wars, by contrast, are not real. Indeed, the unreality of the reason(s) for a war, as often represented in the name of a war, is on display in the naming. Names given to war reveal such a studied unreality that it is difficult to believe it is not deliberate. By contrast, the dead and injured bodies simply are the reality of war. They exist. While often covered up and hidden, the body count of dead and injured is real. The dead and the injured can be counted. They can be named. The name of a war, on the other hand, is about the unreality of war.

Consider the names given to America's longest war, the war in Afghanistan.¹ When the United States was preparing military action against Afghanistan following the attacks on 9/11, it was originally called "Operation Infinite Justice." Then the official name was changed to "Operation Enduring Freedom." In announcing the name change, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld "said the administration had quickly reconsidered the original name because, in the Islamic faith, such finality is considered something provided only by God." Following on President Bush's dubbing the "war on terror" a "crusade," this was apparently an attempt by the administration to avoid more Islamic backlash.² It was wholly and completely not an attempt to more realistically name the war.

Neither "Infinite Justice" nor "Enduring Freedom" means anything real. Infinite justice must be attributed to divinity, as it cannot be attributed to the activities of finite human beings. So a war named "Infinite Justice" cannot, by definition,

even exist in human history. “Enduring Freedom” is also unreal. If taken to refer to freedom for Americans, this has never completely existed for the American democratic experiment. From the genocide of Native Americans, to slavery, to Jim and Jane Crow, to the school-to-prison pipeline, and to inequality of rights for women and LGBT citizens, freedom has been partial and so cannot actually “endure” as it has not ever fully existed. If “Operation Enduring Freedom” was meant to refer to Afghanistan, however, it is even less real. As the war went on, “Enduring Freedom” retreated further and further from reality as “freedom” for the vast majority of Afghans was not attained nor did whatever actually was attained endure.

This does not matter in the naming of wars. Naming wars is an exercise in unreality for the purposes of obscuring the real goal: out-injuring the enemy in a contest for domination of territory and ideology.

All you can really know about war from the names given to war is what war is not. Probably the best example of this is the popular name given to World War I, the “War to End All Wars.” It is now a term used in derision about that war, as it was in reality the war that ended peace in Europe, and indeed in the world, for two generations. It is a war best known for the staggering death (16 million) and injury (20 million) totals. It is, in some ways, still the epitome of war as injuring.

Mapping the injuries to bodies, the death, disfigurement, and dismemberment, is a way to know war. Beyond counting, knowing the specific forms of injuring and death in war is a way to know war more deeply. It is not a way without difficulties, however, since, unless the injuries are your own, you are an observer, a witness to injury and death.

There is a profound difference between being a witness and being an observer, or even worse, a voyeur. An observer merely looks and perhaps records. It is understood to be the neutral gaze. A voyeur is an obsessive who likes to look at a sexual or violent act being performed. Voyeurism is about personal gratification; it is a profoundly selfish gaze.

Being a witness is something else. It is active. Witnessing can involve community participation. In some Christian churches, someone may cry out, “Can I get a witness?” What she or he means is, “can anybody else can give testimony to the movement of God in my life that I am sharing?” This is communion as spiritual participation.

If we wish to be witnesses to war, we must struggle for some of this communal grasping of a profound reality; in the case of church, it is grasping a spiritual reality. In the case of injury in war or the War on Women, it is grasping the physical reality, but not without critical reflection on the multiple contexts and meanings of bodies. This kind of critical reflection then can help build more complex movements to prevent and reduce violence.

Communal witnessing is not enough when it comes to the injuries to bodies. “Witness for Peace” has it right. In the 1980s, Witness for Peace (WFP) was founded by people of faith concerned about the US support of the “Contras” in Nicaragua. WFP sent thousands of Americans to that country to witness the devastating effects of US-sponsored “low-intensity warfare.” They have turned that witnessing into “changing U.S. policies and corporate practices that contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean.”²³

Witnessing in this way is part of a “praxis” to end violence. By praxis, I mean an engaged process of really seeing the complexities of injuring and death and working to change the policies and/or societal norms that give rise to the injuries and death in both the violence of war and the violence of the War on Women.⁴

In the work of movement building to end the War on Women and war itself, actually seeing injuries and death is the indispensable starting place.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust”

Prior to the nineteenth century, it was relatively rare that injuring in war could be “seen” by noncombatants unless one was an unfortunate civilian thrust into conflict or went deliberately to observe war as did the foolish citizens of Washington, DC, who decided to do some picnicking and watch the Battle of Bull Run. When the Union Army was overrun, spectators, including some Congressmen, were injured, killed, or even captured, and they ceased being spectators.⁵

Injuring in war has been depicted in narrative and art throughout human history. Vast scenes of battles cover huge swaths of walls in museums like the Louvre. These are commemorative and are closer to the “naming” of war than they are a way to observe war, and certainly they are not a way to witness to the injuring in war. Rarely, until recently, has art striven to present injury in war as it really is.

There are classical exceptions. Leonardo da Vinci, the artist and weapons maker, gave instructions for painting a battle, and in these instructions, he insists that artists have the courage and the imagination to show war in all its ghastliness, as da Vinci instructs, “Make the conquered and beaten pale, with brows raised and knit and the skin above their brows furrowed with pain . . . and the teeth apart as with crying out in lamentation . . . Make the dead partly or entirely covered with dust . . . and let the blood be seen by its color flowing in a sinuous stream from the corpse to the dust. Others in the death agony grinding their teeth, rolling their eyes, with their fists clenched against their bodies, and the legs distorted.”⁶

The “dead partly or entirely covered with dust” represents the physical location of the battlefield and is also highly evocative of the return of dead bodies on a battlefield to the dust from which they came. The bodies of human beings are mortal, and as such, they are earthly and return to the earth. “For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” as in the book of Genesis (2:19). But the book of Job (30:19) goes much further. Far from simply attributing the suffering induced by injuries to the body to the trials of finitude, or even to deserved punishment for sin, Job protests the conditions of suffering and death for human bodies. Even more, Job attributes his plight to God: “He [God] has cast me into the mire, And I have become like dust and ashes.” It is a challenging question: whether it is ultimately God who is the author of bodies being cast into the muddy ground of mortality or whether the injury and death of bodies is, instead, an offense to God, and whether this is caused by human sin. Christian theology has argued this many ways, as we shall see in Chapter 4.

But whatever the theological view, staying with injuring bodies in war reveals that war is, at bottom, about injury and death, the damage to, and sometimes the

end of, the vitality of living human tissue. When this comes into view, war is seen and thus can actually be known for what it is.

Seeing War

The first war where injury and death was really “seen” because it was documented with the new medium of photography was the US Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln gave Matthew Brady (and his assistants who took many of the photos) unprecedented access to the battlefields and camps.⁷

A *New York Times* review of some of photographs of the war exhibited at Brady’s Manhattan Gallery a month after the Battle of Antietam testifies to the power of the images of injury and death displayed and how rare it was for people to see war this way.

[T]he dead of the battle field come to us very rarely even in dreams. We see the list in the morning paper at breakfast but dismiss its recollection with the coffee. But Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very like it . . . These pictures have a terrible distinctness. By the aid of the magnifying-glass, the very features of the slain may be distinguished. We would scarce choose to be in the gallery, when one of the women bending over them should recognize a husband, a son, or a brother in the still, lifeless lines of bodies, that lie ready for the gaping trenches.⁸

The photographs do what the lists of the dead cannot; they enable people to “see” the injury and death. Susan Sontag comments on Virginia Woolf’s powerful essay, “Why War,” a reflection on a series of photographs of war, “Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it’s like. This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does too. War tears, rends, War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*.”^{9,10}

Photographs compel us to see war because they are records of “what happened.” Even though it is now known that photographs in war have been staged and, due to the technological difficulties of the time, many in the Civil War were “stage set,” yet photos retain that sense of authenticity because they are made by shards of light from the event itself and impressed on film; in a sense, they *are* a little of the ghost of what happened. At least that physical connection was true until the digital age.

But that is not to say that artistic representation is powerless to convey injuring and death in war. Perhaps the most famous artistic interpretation of war as injury and death is Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*. Three-quarters of a century have passed since Picasso painted this nightmare come to life of the bombing of the Basque village of Guernica in northern Spain by German and Italian warplanes at the request of the Spanish Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. The black, white, and grey of the artist’s pallet has a timeless photographic quality. The movement of the painting is toward the center as a woman’s arm holds a lamp to illuminate the death and injury. This is what you need to see. All is compressed into a