Post 9/11 War Stories: Between Therapy and Critique

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Abstract

Veterans struggle with the significance and moral effects of war, namely reconciling fighting wars of occupation ostensibly for Iraqi freedom or 9/11 retaliation. Therapeutic approaches to war trauma often use narrative as a technique for recovery and social integration. However, the method also gives rise to moral tensions that are not necessarily psychological problems, but *moral injuries.* How is the remedy for war trauma dependent upon narrative reflection? What psychological damage occurs when action, for instance killing, is considered inadequate, wrong, or misguided? When does that remedy give rise to a philosophical discussion about moral injuries of war? Distinguishing these spheres grants access to paradoxes generated by the asymmetric demand for soldier narratives. How does the demand for stories in therapy intertwine with the American market for soldier narratives? How does re-envisioning soldier narratives through moral injury repurpose them as access points for national conversation? To approach these questions, I surveyed psychological literature on combat trauma and narrative theory that engages both morality and the challenge of self-integration including Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, Paul Eakin's *Living Autobiographically*, and Phil Klay's *Redeployment*.

Introduction

The narratives US soldiers tell about their war zone experiences lend themselves to therapeutic and critical examination. These narratives shape part of the conversation surrounding investigation into the morality of the US led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan when analyzed simultaneously from therapeutic perspectives, narrative genre perspectives, and public discussions. Stemming from the therapeutic PTSD model of reliving war trauma in a safe, structured environment through narration, soldier narratives facilitate discussion about war trauma, moral complications, and dilemmas in revealing war crimes when viewed through distinct lenses on intimate and national levels.

Paradoxes abound when considering the war narratives born from US soldier participation in Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11 through the separate lenses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury, and witnessing and/or committing war crimes. One such paradox is the displacement of occupation narratives when using the moral injury or PTSD models as the ethical framework for exploring soldier stories. The market demand for soldier

narratives in the United States remains constant, especially in the wake of its post 9/11 wars. Yet, the demand is asymmetric—prioritizing the narratives of soldiers over those of noncombatants affected by each war.

The aim of this research project was to investigate how recovery techniques involving narrative reflection posed by the PTSD model illuminated moral qualms within US soldiers. From there, I determined to resolve how the moral injury model attempts to encapsulate the moral trauma that the PTSD model misses. What are the strengths of the moral injury framework in examining soldier narratives, and what are the shortcomings in utilizing it as an ethical framework? If inadequate, what lens should be used to bolster moral injury, and/or replace it, as a means of interpreting all war narratives ethically?

Methodology

To examine the relationships and questions posed by the moral injury framework I developed an interdisciplinary model. The aim of this model is to understand how soldier narratives are produced from a joint demand, therapeutic recovery and ethical examination, to assist soldiers through the PTSD healing process by telling heroic stories and how the emerging model for moral injury came to the fore. It also investigates how both models may operate as an ethical framework for interpreting war narratives. However, my research also aims to investigate any deficiencies in doing so.

My research model grounds itself in the model and recovery techniques for combat trauma posed by Judith Herman and the developing framework researchers, such as Shira Maguen and Brett Litz, have devised for moral injury. It also employs a humanistic approach proposed by Paul Ricoeur's *philosophical anthropology* and Immanuel Kant's *practical philosophy* as a means to explain differences in individual moralities and reflections upon morality. The premise is that *bios*, where a person's life is located in space and time, and *logos*, a person's ability to use reason to grasp universal concepts, create a disproportion in the human experience. This disproportion masks the *self* from the individual—making it impossible for someone's self to be fully apparent to them. This same gap distinguishes people from one another, accounting for individual personalities, and the capacity to perform good, evil, and moral reflection (Ricoeur, xvi).

How does the service member or veteran incorporate the morally injurious event into their identity without it dominating their personality? I turned to Antonio Damasio and Paul Eakin as a means to understand narration engaged in self-integration. Both were instrumental in cultivating an understanding of self-narration and the act of reconstructing memory to form a narrative identity. Both posit that this reconstruction is culturally linked, meaning that we draw on the resources of the cultures we inhabit to specify how we ought to behave in certain circumstances (Eakin 22). Gillian Whitlock likewise contributed to a holistic comprehension of how soldier narratives, particularly memoir, operate and appease the market for which they are published. She claims "when texts coincide with warfare, the uses to which they are put are called into question," as well as "Popular fiction and nonfiction alike are caught up in the mechanisms of the marketplace, they are conscious of their readers and determined to please them" (Whitlock 94, 95). From Whitlock's perspective, soldier narratives are being used for a purpose and that readers in the American marketplace are equally responsible for the proliferation of war stories as are the authors who pen them.

With the model in place, I selected an array of soldier narratives ranging from first-hand accounts of combat (*Lone Survivor*), a third person non-fiction chronicling the struggles of soldiers attempting to reassimilate to non-combat life (*Thank You for Your Service*), a collection of short stories (*Redeployment*), well-known narratives that surfaced via the media (Abu Ghraib atrocities and Sgt. Joseph Darby), and a novel translated from Arabic to English as a counter example to the all-soldier perspective that comprises popular post 9/11 literature (*The Corpse Washer*).

PTSD Model for Recovery

In her study of combat trauma and recovery techniques, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman tells us that the foundational component for recovery is reconstructing and reflecting upon the traumatic incident in full detail with the associated emotions intact. The aim of the technique is to integrate the trauma into the soldier or veteran's self—devaluing the importance of the traumatic event until the story becomes a memory like other memories (195). Paramount to this exercise is the establishment of safety. "The acutely traumatized person needs a safe refuge. Finding and securing that refuge is the immediate task of crisis intervention" (Herman 162). Without a supportive therapeutic relationship, the soldier's rendition of the trauma will prove to be a useless exercise.

Often times, in the context of US soldiers returning from wars in either Iraq or Afghanistan, or both, the memory of the traumatic incident is fragmented or distorted. The act of narrating the traumatic instance serves as a means of structuring the story linearly. In turn, the story the veteran or soldier conveys becomes the event itself. "This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). Reconstruction inevitably lends itself to reflection. It is precisely this continuous cycling of reconstructing memories into narrative and reflecting upon those narratives that is narrative identity. As Oliver Sacks states, "It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative,' and that this narrative *is* us, our identities" (Sacks 110). This is evident in modern soldier narratives, too, as seen in Phil Klay's collection of short stories, *Redeployment*, when a narrator states, "…I'd told him that if he gave this girl his story, it wouldn't be his anymore…your story *is* you" (Klay 225).

The Diagnostic Statistical Manual V defines the trigger for post-traumatic stress disorder as "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation" (309.81). Furthermore, the manual states that the exposure must arise from witnessing the trauma, direct experience, repeated exposure, or learning that the traumatic incident happened to a close friend or family member. For soldiers, examples of such triggers may include witnessing explosions, hearing gunshots, seeing a close friend injured or killed, etc. The model encompasses soldiers who have experienced fear-induced trauma and the infringement the memory of it has on assimilating to non-combat environments. However, as the number of returning post 9/11 veterans with mental wounds increased, their stories illuminated a gap in the model. Take the following passage from David Finkel's *Thank You for Your Service* for instance:

> 'And it really hit me when I saw my first baby come in burned' is what the medic is saying. He is no longer reading, just talking, surely a step toward habituation. 'Dipped in boiling water and skin sloughing off,' he says. 'And you know what? I got to the point where I started carrying extra fucking medical supplies. I got to the point where I started feeling kind of sorry for them. I started feeling sorry that we're sitting there fucking

beating these people and it's just like that fucking baby. We're just using them, like they're fucking nothing. Like they're not even human. And you get to a point…'

And now he is shaking and sobbing in an otherwise silent room until one of the other soldiers comes to his rescue. (62)

In the passage, it is arguable that the medic relating the story has a moral quandary once confronted with the suffering of a non-soldier referent. His narration takes place in a Veteran's psychiatric facility and employs Herman's model for trauma recovery. Notice, however, how the relationship between the medic and the baby is established. The medic, the soldier "I" protagonist is introduced to *his* first baby. The passage inserts the narrator into the context of war relative to the pain experienced by a non-combatant. It is the infant's suffering, not the medic's fear that is the impetus for alterations in the medic's behavior. The emotions that the medic feels, as he makes discernible through his narration, act as his reflective evaluation of the event itself. The moral tension the medic has in regard to his interaction with the baby is not encapsulated by the PTSD model because the trauma is not life threatening for the medic, but does contain moral and ethical implications. This is indicative that there are circumstances which give rise to symptoms mimicking those in PTSD, but are provoked by a non-fear based catalyst.

Moral Injury Framework Emerges from PTSD Model

The technique of narrating war zone experiences has proven to be of therapeutic value for US veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the narration technique that the PTSD model employs demonstrates the ethical and moral challenges service members are confronted with in war that are not necessarily captured by the PTSD framework. As a result, research psychologists proposed that the symptoms that soldiers encounter are not always psychological conflicts, but *moral injuries*. Thus a new framework materialized from PTSD that attempts to act as the moral interjection within a soldier narrative.

The moral injury framework maintains that the service member's symptoms such as anguish, shame, etc., are indications of an intact conscience about expectations of moral conduct; the dissonance between what is experienced and a moral belief system is evidence that the moral belief system itself is still intact (Litz et al, 698). There is a gap between expectations of moral conduct and the disappointment soldiers have when those expectations are not met. A fundamental assumption within the framework is that issues of morality demand individual attention, distinct from PTSD and adjustment disorders. Researchers justify the need for the new model by noting that scant focus has been concentrated on the lasting moral conflict trauma in the clinical science community, in favor of attending to the impact of life-threatening trauma. Even so, the intervention strategies apply the same therapeutic approach as does PTSD in the realm of emotional narration of the morally injurious event. When comparing soldier narratives viewed through the PTSD framework and the moral injury framework, the most glaring difference is the necessity of a non-soldier referent present in moral injury.

For US veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, moral injury has been defined as performing, allowing, witnessing, or learning about acts that deeply transgress moral beliefs and expectations (Litz et al, 698). What the preliminary definition discounts is a sphere of personal ethical responsibility; it engages soldier discontent but evades questions about moral injury when war atrocities are committed by soldiers *intentionally*. The definition instead opts to explore trauma soldiers endure that stems from morally ambiguous combat situations. Among the list of combat

environment events highly correlated to moral injury include killing, learning about amoral behaviors perpetrated by others, witnessing intense human suffering and cruelty, exposure to dead bodies, etc. Again, symptoms indicative of moral injury, shame, guilt, withdrawal, etc. parallel those of PTSD. The impact of soldier's actions upon non-soldier referents is the distinction.

Reconsider the passage from *Thank You for Your Service* and the relationship between the medic and the baby. Moral injury establishes its importance by representing a relationship between a combatant and a non-soldier subject, both in literature and narrative reflection. Within the text, the medic can evaluate his personal moral objections and speculation in relation to the non-combatant referent, the baby. Coincidentally, within the moral injury framework, the passage also operates as an inquiry into the morality of the wars in general for the reader. If US soldiers are proxies for American action, then it is arguable to state that American non-combatants who supported both wars may likewise feel their own moral injury. In that light, moral injury creates a space for conversation about the morality of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and delineates the dual purposes soldier narratives may serve.

Dual Purposes of Soldier Narratives

Consider Marcus Luttrell's memoir *Lone Survivor* as an example. The book is a first-hand account, narrated by Luttrell, of a Navy SEAL combat operation in Afghanistan. The mission was a failure; all US combatants involved, save for Luttrell, were killed in action. Throughout the course of the text, Luttrell persistently works to venerate his fallen comrades while concurrently expressing his anguish over losing them. Arguably, Luttrell's relation of his story may function therapeutically, allowing him to overcome the trauma of his experience, and his trauma of survival or "survivor's guilt", via Herman's trauma recovery model.

Retrospectively, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may have been incited by the 9/11 atrocities, but have proven to be largely unrelated to them. The war stories centered on soldier experience may act as victories for the American public in two wars that have provided comparatively little. The soldier narratives *themselves* are the victory that would otherwise be absent, providing tangible evidence of US troops' heroism. Gillian Whitlock tells us that memoirs are conscious of their markets and determined to please their readers (Whitlock, 95). The moral injury framework allows us to interpret Luttrell's story as a tool for restoring American national patriotism which has been wounded by two wars that have arguably paid few dividends, but have come at an enormous price.

However, there is a complication in regarding soldier narratives as tales of victorious heroism and as texts by which we can analyze the moral injury framework. What moral belief system would consider stories comprised of killing and warfare as valiant? Moreover, how would that belief system impede an ethical evaluation, as opposed to a strictly moral one, of both war narratives and the wars themselves?

Question of Religion in Moral Injury Framework and Just War Theory

While the framework proposed for moral injury does not exclusively apply religious principles, there is an undercurrent of religious commitment in military service. Analyze Article VI of the United States Military Code of Conduct:

> I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, <u>responsible for my actions</u>, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. <u>I will trust in my God</u> and in the United States of America. (*Federal Register* 53)

The Code of Conduct is not official law, but a US Department of Defense implemented ethical guide for service members should act while in combat, especially when faced with capture and ascribed Prisoner of War status. However, the article instructs the soldier to trust in their God—a suggestion that raises questions about the military, a secular institution, being guided by religious principles. Consider the following passage from Phil Klay's collection of short stories, *Redeployment*:

> 'If you killed somebody,' he said, 'that means you're going to hell.'

> Marines had asked me about that before, so I thought I had an answer. 'Killing is a serious thing,' I said, 'no doubt about that. And...'

> 'I mean'—Rodriguez looked away, down at the candy—'somebody you're not supposed to.'

> That brought me up short. At first I didn't understand what he was talking about, though I suppose it should have been obvious. 'You're not responsible for Fujita's death...'

> 'That's not what I'm talking about,' Rodriguez snapped, eyes back on me, angry. 'I mean, not Marines. I mean, out in the city.' He took a breath. 'And, if other people did it too, when you're out there, and you don't stop them. Do you go to hell, too?' (139)

Why invoke hell? Rodriguez acknowledges the non-soldier referent as 'people you're not supposed to kill.' Yet, he does not appear fixated on the welfare of the implied deaths of the non-soldier subjects, but on the ramifications of not only perpetrating the killing, but facilitating it. Applying the moral injury framework to the passage demonstrates that the focal point of the model is the moral transgression felt by the protagonist without a necessity for accountability, even when confronted with alleged war crimes. What is the chaplain's ethical responsibility after this passage?

As the short story continues, the chaplain does attempt to take action through the proper channels of the chain-of-command. He is met with stifled results from higher military authorities exemplified by the response the chaplain received from his superior, Major Eklund. "'You think Lieutenant Colonel Fehr will ever become Colonel Fehr if he tells higher, 'Hey, we think we did some war crimes'?'" (Klay 144). If the military chain-of-command is ineffective or stymies investigations of accountability, then there is no viable infrastructure in immediate reality by which we can explore ethical accountability in this context. Perhaps, then, the invocation of hell and a religious line of thought in general serves as an ethical framework which the soldier believes is inescapable. However, the explanation may be more profound after considering the Christian ideologies deeply entrenched in rationales provided for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At a Palestinian-Israeli peace summit in Egypt during 2003, former US President George W. Bush publicly stated that he was on a divine mission regarding the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (MacAskill, par. 1). Reportedly, Bush stated "I am driven with a mission from God. God would tell me, 'George, go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan.' And I did. And then God would tell me, 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did" (MacAskill, par. 2). The irony of these statements is that they strongly resemble, if not mimic, jihadist rhetoric that likewise employs divine instruction as a means to rationalize violent intervention. The former President's sentiments echo another long-standing tradition embedded in Christian thought: Just War Theory (JWT).

According to Robert Meagher, the foundation of JWT does not exist in religious texts i.e. the New Testament, but in the Roman Empire's adoption of Christianity as the state's official religion (Meagher xv). The theory allowed the Romans to reshape previously accepted theories about war and killing by differentiating 'killing' from murder so long as killer's intentions are to do the will of God. It legitimizes state violence under the guise of a convenient differentiation between murder, a defiance of God's will, and necessary killing 'for God and country' (Meagher xix).

Paramount to comprehension of JWT is the respect in which it reveres WWII. To Europeans and Americans, WWII is the definitive proof needed to vindicate war as a morally justified course of action. The irony is that WWII brought about an unprecedented level of military forces indiscriminately massacring civilians. "Every war is just from the perspective of those waging it, and every killer is a hero, to the side they are on" (Meagher xv). JWT constrains the space for critical examination of war, specifically here the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If the secular governing body is commanding the US military from a religious standpoint, then there can be no moral injury done unto service members because the aims of the war are just. This is one of several observable complications in utilizing moral injury as an overarching ethical framework.

Difference between Morals and Ethics

"A man is moral if he conforms to the established practices and customs of the group in which he is. He is *ethical* if he voluntarily obligates himself to live in the light of an ideal good" (Weiss 381).

Moral injury may function as the ethical impulse, albeit a structurally limited one, within soldier narratives. It functions well as a method for individual recovery in the wake of a moral trauma, but does minimal to highlight profound ethical dilemmas which percolate from the circumstances of both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Consider the definition the preliminary framework and intervention model for moral injury provides for morals: "the personal and shared familial, cultural, societal, and legal rules for social behavior, either tacit or explicitly stated" (Litz et al, 699). From the definition it is arguable that morality functions the individual's personal disposition in regard to good and evil and/or that of the group which they inhabit. The dilemma is that its function is limited to the ends and well-being of the group; it is not applicable universally. If the Other, an individual, group, or institution, falls outside of that specific group's moral definition, then they are not considered as an intrinsic part of the framework.

The atrocities exhibited within the Abu Ghraib prison are a primary example of an ethical impulse for an idealized good that does not coincide with the moral injury framework. The

soldiers commanded that the prison's detainees were stripped naked, forced to stand in isolation for hours upon end, coerced into homoerotic positions with other prisoners, etc. Amoral action was enabled within the prison by what Phillip Zimbardo calls situationalism. Using the landmark Stanford Prison Study as an example, Zimbardo asserts that it is not that the individual soldiers were inherently evil, but that the system in which they were placed facilitated abuse and amoral actions. The soldier's responsible for the prisoners' torture were not trained for prison assignment; moreover, those same soldiers were ordered by higher officials to 'soften up' the detainees prior to interrogation in order to make them more likely to produce actionable information.

The order is a collapse of the chain-of-command military structure. When the prisoners' treatment surfaced and disseminated through the media, military officials immediately decried the abuses as the handiwork of a few 'bad apples' (Zimbardo 325). However, the 'bad apples' received the order that facilitated these atrocities to be committed and that is the failure of the chain-of-command. It is a structure that is laterally intended to mitigate unlawful orders from being conscripted and/or followed, not inspire war crimes to be committed.

While the question of the chain-of-command structure and its effectiveness in preventing violations of the Geneva Conventions and/or Rules of Engagement (ROEs) is powerful, it raises a line of inquiry into a service member's personal sphere of responsibility. Consider Article IV and, again, Article VI of the US military Code of Conduct:

> Article IV: If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the <u>lawful</u> orders of those appointed over me, and will back them up in every way.

> Article VI: I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, <u>responsible for my actions</u>, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of America. (*Federal Register* 53)

Was the soldier's responsibility to follow orders or to object to war crimes? If articles IV and VI are interpreted literally, then a soldier has no obligation to an unlawful order—one that violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Geneva Conventions, or ROEs. Article VI also implies an obligation for personal accountability. Nonetheless, "groupthink"—a way of thinking that promotes the group's consensus with the leader's, in this case military official(s)'s position or order, disinclines individual soldiers from speaking out against the commonly accepted.

When Sergeant Joseph Darby exposed the Abu Ghraib crimes to the proper military authorities in his chain-of-command—doing so with the initial promise of anonymity—his family was threatened and shunned by their community, their property had been vandalized, and they eventually went into hiding under protective military custody (Bryan, sec. 4). Arguably, Darby was acting ethically, sacrificing his family's safety, as well as his own, to cease the unlawful torture of detainees. "To be ethical they [people] must voluntarily choose and pursue an ultimate and universal good" (Weiss 382). However, this raises questions about the moral injury framework when it confronts the predicament with witnessing war crimes. Morality, again, seems to only belong to the narrator who feels morally transgressed. Where does Darby's narrative then belong? What options are left for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who feel *ethically* as opposed to morally violated when their chain-of-command is impotent?

Problems with Moral Injury framework

At a glance, the moral injury framework accounts for the moral damage done to US service members that is discounted in the fear-based model posed by PTSD. Researchers have shown that the preliminary model and intervention strategies have been well received by soldier and veteran participants (Litz, 705). The stories told by US servicemen and women have an enormous capacity to enhance our understanding of the moral ambiguities and horrors attributable to both wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it is essential to realize that the moral injury framework and intervention strategies emerged from PTSD recovery methods and is therefore reliant upon narrative reconstruction solely from a soldier's perspective.

Recall the baby's suffering in *Thank You for Your* Service; think of the maltreatment of the prisoners in Abu Ghraib; remember the people Rodriguez and his compatriots were not supposed to kill in *Redeployment.* In each instance, the soldier protagonist is left to negotiate the moral trauma, but it is the non-soldier subject who endures the most acute pain and suffering. As Dr. Elliot Colla points out, in post 9/11 war narratives, as told by US soldier protagonists, "the Iraq invasion and occupation again appear as almost exclusively American events...Iraqis are largely absent from the frame...torment and pain—and humanity—belong to US soldiers rather than Iraqi civilians" (Colla, par. 3).

Consider the following passage from Sinan Antoon's novel, *The Corpse Washer*:

'I'm a taxi driver trying to make a living—I picked up this poor man—He seemed like a good and honest man. We started yapping about this miserable situation we are in and about the massacres and politics of it all—We argued a bit, but we were in agreement and were consoling each other. I had to take a leak and I asked to stop for a minute. I parked the car on the side next to the trees on al-Qanat Highway. There were choppers hovering overhead that day. Something had happened in al-Sadr City between the Americans and Mahdi Army—I'd just unzipped my pants when I heard a huge explosion—I looked back and saw that my car had become a ball of fire. I...saw an American Apache up in the air whirling—I didn't know what to do and was afraid it would fire at me too—I opened the door—I don't know how I managed to pull him out. He was in flames.' (145)

In this passage—with a non-soldier narrator protagonist—the regard in which the American soldiers are held is not that of heroic liberators, but agents of destruction. Here, torment and pain belongs to the civilians killed indiscriminately by soldierly action and not to the soldiers agonizing over their conduct.

Why are stories like Antoon's so scarce among American audiences? As Whitlock argues, "The management of testimony is almost always strategic and in the national interest" (Whitlock, 78).While rare in popular American post-9/11 literature, novels and poetry similar to Antoon's abound in Arabic. From the perspective of moral injury, the non-proliferation of occupation narratives by Iraqi and/or Afghan authors in the US market serves to prioritize the narratives of US service members over those who military occupation.

Again, soldier narratives have a large capacity to help achieve understanding of the moral ambiguities posed in the course of the two wars as well as the horrors they wrought. But by examining and circulating stories told only by U.S. soldiers, we are exploring tremendously complicated issues with a limited ethical framework that discounts occupied voices.

Conclusion and Discussion

Moral injury is not the ethical framework by which we should conduct such investigations. While therapeutically valuable for service members and veterans struggling to reintegrate themselves into non-combat life and alleviating their symptoms, it is structured around morality intrinsic to the soldier and does not aim for an overall good. Its aim is for the veteran or service member to feel acceptable in society and in their notion of their self—to get them to reject the morally injurious act while accepting the imperfect self responsible for the act (Litz 703). It does not account for the suffering endured by hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans who have lost loved ones through the course of US occupation—either as a result from moral ambiguity or intentional depravity. It is arguable that moral injury can serve as an ethical framework. However, it is limited solely to soldier narratives and evades the problematic topic of personal accountability when either witnessing or perpetrating war crimes.

What is needed is a revamped concept, one that allows for interpretation of war crimes as such and not merely moral grievances against soldiers, of moral injury as an ethical framework, or a new ethical framework altogether. This is most clearly observable when considering Sergeant Joseph Darby and the treatment to which he was subjected after revealing war crimes. Darby arguably operated ethically, voiding the groupthink within Abu Ghraib that kept the atrocities shrouded in secrecy at the expense of his own safety and comfort. He revealed the injustices through the proper channels in the chain-of-command and was vilified regardless. What incentive is there for service members who witness war crimes to report it via chain-of-command if doing so socially castigates them anyway?

There seems to be a binary opposition between soldier responsibility and committing treason. Sgt. Darby performed his military duties to the point that they remained lawful and then continued to properly engage the appropriate military authorities when revealing the war crimes committed at Abu Ghraib. It is as though Darby had committed treason even when conforming completely to military standards. Where do the spheres for treason and soldier responsibility intersect or overlap? When does the ethical imperative become renouncing the chain-of-command in the face of egregious offenses? Finally, what responsibilities do we as readers have in incorporating all war narratives, including occupied subjugation and war atrocities, into the ethical fabric and discussion of the US led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

The ethical framework by which military personnel can take action when witnessing war crimes does not seem to exist. Instead, we are left with a compromised situation where illuminating war crimes, perpetrated by the United States, is treasonous for service members regardless of whether they employ the chain-of-command or not.

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