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Publisher Routledge

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## The Communication Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713456253>

### Review Essay: Militarized Media at War and Home

Carrie A. Rentschler <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Online Publication Date: 01 July 2006

**To cite this Article** Rentschler, Carrie A.(2006)'Review Essay: Militarized Media at War and Home',The Communication Review,9:2,143 – 154

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/10714420600663336

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10714420600663336>

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## REVIEW ESSAY: MILITARIZED MEDIA AT WAR AND HOME

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Allan, S., & Zelizer, B. (Eds.). (2004). *Reporting war: Journalism in wartime*. London: Routledge (referred to in the review as *RW*).

Artz, L., & Kamalipour, Y. R. (Eds.). (2005). *Bring 'em on: Media and politics in the Iraq War*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield (referred to as *BEO*).

Hoskins, A. (2005). *Televising war: From Vietnam to Iraq*. London: Continuum (referred to as *TW*).

Mirzoeff, N. (2005). *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and global visual culture*. London: Routledge (referred to as *WB*).

Thussu, D. K. & Freeman, D. (Eds.). (2004). *War and the media*. London: Sage Publications (referred to as *WM*).

Carrie A. Rentschler  
Department of Art History and Communication Studies,  
McGill University,  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

As anthropologist Cynthia Enloe (2004) argues, to understand how cultures become militarized requires “feminist curiosity” about the formal institutional strategies and informal cultures of decision-making that make militarization and its institutions of gendered and sexed power, possible. Militarization, she argues, is the process through which social practice becomes defined by or dependent upon the military for its meaning and value—values that privilege social hierarchy, aggressive bodily conduct, and hegemonic forms of masculinity (p. 219). Many social practices can be militarized. Enloe’s own work examines the gendered militarization of familial relations, the dress of female soldiers, the organization of

Address correspondence to Carrie A. Rentschler, McGill University, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, 853 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, QC H3A 2T6, Canada. E-mail: [carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca](mailto:carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca)

laundry labor, commercial products such as cans of soup, tourist zones, the sex industry, and gun manufacturing. Wielding feminist-minded curiosity to their transformations signifies that one attends to their historical and material organization through the lens of gender rather than attributing them to “tradition,” “nature,” “custom,” or “sexual difference.” While my own interests lie in feminist engagements with militarized practices, Enloe points to a particularly useful method for thinking about the war-like conditions of culture from a communications perspective as well. She argues for a critical engagement with the archives of militarization, the artifacts, and documents—budgets, rule books, informal and formal guidelines for soldiers and their wives, and so on—which evidence the strategies that go into militarization and the possibilities for their disruption (Enloe, 2000, pp. 34, 289).

This review examines several recent books in light of Enloe’s prescription to examine the documentary evidence of militarized culture. The books examined here do so, primarily, from within media corporations and the interpretive cultures of war journalism, sites around which the field is particularly well situated. The sheer number of books, articles, and special journal issues being published on media and war is an encouraging sign, too, that cultural studies, journalism studies scholars, and political economists recognize the importance of thinking politically, together, about news and popular culture of war in the current moment, across their theoretical and methodological differences. Several of the books admittedly draw on the unique strengths of journalism studies more so than other approaches. This is especially the case with the anthologies, which pay special attention to the strategies journalists and other media producers use to represent war and the institutional investments that help guide their decision-making. Others, like Mizroeff, tackle the visual culture of war through theories of spectacle and geography, while Hoskins’ *Televising War* draws from the coffers of cultural memory studies and photography to situate television news of the U.S. invasions of Iraq in terms of its structural failures to produce lasting memory of war. All of the texts discussed here subscribe to the assertion that cultural practices are, and remain to be, the terrain on which militarism and war are defined, legitimated and put into practice, reinforcing Michael Bromley’s assertion that “the battlefield is the media” (in *RW*). The anthologies include essays by political economists, journalism scholars, scholars of political communication and PR, media studies, and cultural studies scholars, critics of visual culture and journalists to collectively examine the ways media institutions shape the political terrain of militarization. The multi-voicity of these texts make them particularly valuable course resources on media and war and references for scholars seeking current examples of critical thinking on the topic.

Allan and Zelizer's anthology *Reporting War* is an especially well-defined collection of essays, focusing as it does on the "tensions, contradictions, and contingencies that shape the journalist's role in wartime" across different sites of war from the 1990s to the present (2004, p. 12). Organized into three parts, "War in the 21st Century," "Bearing Witness," and "Reporting the Iraq War," Allan and Zelizer's own chapters (the former on the culture of distance reproduced through online news reporting of the 2003 Iraq War, the latter on the conventionalization of news photography of war) and that of their contributors interrogate transformations in war journalism and some of the relatively unchanged habits of its primary practitioners. Liebes and Kamph's "The PR of Terror" brilliantly analyzes changing news practices that have turned "terrorist" figures such as Osama bin Laden into "soft-news" celebrities in melodramatic interview genres of terrorism news—genres that, they argue, collapse the distinction between terrorists and victims through the emotional, and therapeutically framed life narratives of the young terrorist. Susan Moeller's chapter cogently pries open the moral language of the war on terrorism, a piece I intend to teach alongside Susan Sontag's "Regarding the Torture of Others" (2004, see works cited). Richard Keeble's refusal to denote the 2003 Iraq invasion as a "war," instead referring to it as a myth of heroic war, further complicates the linguistic construction of militarized realities. The language of war, Keeble argues, is used to legitimate the Iraq invasion through what he documents as the overproduction and economic fears of the military industrial complex—which needs the myth of heroic war in order to justify the overexpanded capacity of defense industries.

In addition to the quality and strength of their contributions, Allan and Zelizer's text is admirable, too, for the ways it has been carefully defined and marketed as a *journalism* studies reader. The other anthologies, while heavy on news analysis, however, are marketed as media texts, where "media" refers primarily to a set of *informational* and *propagandistic* practices in news and television (see Todd Gitlin (2001) for a critique of the term "media" as a reference to news and television; see Heise (2002) and Meyrowitz (1993) for more theoretical treatments of the signifier "media" in the field). The problem, according to one contributor to *War and the Media*, is that "comprehending the politics of entertainment . . . still generally seems to matter more as a buttress to the theoretical needs of media scholarship on news-gathering" (Burston (2004, p. 165) in *WM*)—where news is still the medium "that matters." A text like Jeffords and Rabinovitz (1994), for instance, brought questions of war and militarism into television studies. *Bring 'Em On* and *War in the Media* could more accurately be described as readers in journalism studies, with the exception of a few chapters, such as Burston's, that open up the category of "media" to include, for instance, video gaming. My point is not to dismiss

news analysis, but to question the ways in which news continues to be privileged as a site of analysis for thinking about war and militarization in the media to the detriment, at times, of other sites of analysis. These anthologies, in fact, represent outstanding forms of news analysis, such as Robert Jensen's fantastic political critique of journalistic patriotism through the figure of Dan Rather and his repeated expressions of patriotic sentiment post-9/11—an outspoken anchor who Jensen argues expresses a completely conventional position on reportorial nationalism within U.S. journalism.

Some chapters privilege propaganda models of communication that undertheorize publics and media audiences. In *Bring 'Em On*, several authors present the largely unquestioned assertion that media war propaganda led to the manufacture of public consent, either by marginalizing dissent (e.g., Artz, Gasher, Kellner, and Jensen), or by drawing upon racist and imperialist stereotypes (e.g., Merskin, Hart, and Hassenchal). Lee Artz, for instance, warns that “spectator culture (of which video games are only a small part) provides fertile ground for public relations and propaganda campaigns. . . . A culture of consumption and spectatorship encourages a reflectively passive citizenry, which may be aroused for patriotic purposes as necessary” (pp. 7 and 9 in *BEO*). Several chapters demonstrate how alive propaganda theory is in the field. Some, like Artz, approach propaganda as entertainment messages that defuse people's ability to think politically, drawing on the claim that entertainment can function more persuasively as propaganda because its images and sounds, unlike the authoritative claims of newsmakers, defuse one's critical capacities because they do not look or feel like propaganda messages. Claims such as “popular culture may have replaced religion as the opiate of the people” and “mass popular culture provides pleasure for millions, but at a cost to their political awareness” (Artz, p. 15 in *BEO*), thus, place the capacity to be entertained into stark opposition with the capacity for political thought. Other authors directly challenge this portrayal of passive, depoliticized media publics by examining independent media centers and online deliberation as sites for dissenting opinion on the 2003 war in Iraq (e.g., Brooten's examination of the Independent Media Center movement in *BEO*), Patricia Aufderheide's analysis of the “journalistic informal sector” online, or Bruce Williams' research into online deliberations about the Iraq War across a spectrum of political websites (in *WM*). Williams' analysis of right-wing and racist right-wing sites, for instance, nicely demystifies “Right” and “Left” as ideologically unified positions, a point he illustrates through a variety of chatroom deliberations (the most interesting of which are on the neo-Nazi sites he studied).

This is to say that readers may be especially struck by the current centrality of propaganda theory in these anthologies, especially *Bring 'Em On* and

*War and the Media*. On the one hand, propaganda theory—perhaps best still epitomized by Walter Lippman’s theory of media manufactured stereotypes in *Public Opinion* and Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s thesis on engineered consent in *Manufacturing Consent*—defines media discourse as a strategic attempt at persuasion. German media theorist Friedrich Kittler defines this approach to war and media as an “affair of persuasion,” where media matter in so far as they represent and mediate war (Kittler 1997, p. 117). From this vantage point, propaganda theorists identify either rhetorical strategists as their objects of study or the institutional structures that legitimate official versions of reality while marginalizing other accounts. Philip Taylor, for instance, examines a recent set of military techniques in psychological operations during the 2001 “Enduring Freedom” campaign in Afghanistan, detailing how the military weaponizes ideas and “perception management” (see also Brown, Downey, and Murdoch in *WM*). Robin Brown’s “Spinning the War” looks at the internationalization of propaganda efforts and the transformation of the Bush administration’s “information instrument” in waging the war on terror: a communication “arsenal” of “military concepts of information warfare, foreign policy concepts of public diplomacy,” and public relations techniques drawn from the coffers of political electioneering (in *WM*). Couldry and Downey and Lewis and Brookes further examine the containment of dissent in British press coverage of the build-up to the Iraq invasion (in *RW*).

Elisia Cohen’s rhetorical analysis of the Bush administration’s 2002 *National Security Strategy* demonstrates how the “rhetoric of equivocation” between a preventive and pre-emptive stance masked the U.S. doctrine of pre-emptive war (in *BEO*). Sue Curry Jansen’s analysis of U.S. anti-Communist and anti-Soviet public diplomacy campaigns in 1950s Iraq and current neo-liberal U.S. satellite TV broadcasts in the Middle East demonstrates how U.S. strategies of persuasion overwhelmingly fail to convince young people that U.S. commodity culture represents political and social equality—the same young people who wear Nikes and Levis and yet recognize the limits to consumerist models of freedom in the Middle East and the U.S. (in *BEO*). Mike Gasher analyzes the ideological rhetoric of *Times* and *Newsweek* coverage leading up to the 2003 Iraq invasion. Perhaps most intriguing, however, is a tangential point he makes on gender and the militarization of human fertility. The Pentagon provided male soldiers with access to a sperm bank to insure their capacity to father children should they be severely injured or killed on the job (in *BEO*). It is precisely these kinds of military activities that might unveil further dimensions into how the military uses sexual difference to militarize the reproductive capacity of human fertility.

The most exciting and fresh work in these anthologies, however, deals directly with the question of new media practices and emergent government/

media institution relations as a means to interrogate how military ideas and images wind their way through cultural life, an approach to “propaganda” more broadly conceived (though not theorized in these texts as such) as a distributive rather than a rhetorical capacity (see Kittler 1997). Some of the authors examine new platforms for portraying war from the perspective of changing political economic relations between military institutions, the corporate sector, and emergent media production houses, such as video game animation in Silicon Valley and at Alias Wavefront in Toronto, and the German military’s use of videogaming to remilitarize its institutions while it feigned an anti-militarist stance in its refusal to participate in the US/UK invasion in Iraq, as Jonathan Burston (in *WM*) and Tanya Thomas and Fabian Virchow (in *BEO*) explore, respectively. If we think about militarization as not reducible to war itself nor “always accompanied by government-directed overt violence,” but as a force that “creeps into ordinary daily routines; it threads its way amid memos, laundry, lovemaking, and the clinking of frosted beer glasses” (Enloe, 2000, p. 3), it might be possible to conceive of militarization as dependent upon a set of transacted networks of “military infotainment” that visually traffic between satellite imagery, gaming technology, and television news (e.g., Thussu in *WM*; Hoskins, 2005; Mizroeff, 2004; see, also, Biressi and Nunn, 2004).

According to Jonathan Burston, “to define the ‘entertainment industry’ accurately, we really ought to stop relying on Hollywood as a metonym. We need to recalibrate our understanding of both the form and locus of heavy-hitting, media-transnational pop-culture power” by looking to sites such as the 1996 Department of Defense conference in Irvine that brought together defense officials, intelligence agency representatives, and animators or military-funded university centers on interactive and immersive technologies and their environments (p. 164 in *WM*). As Burston suggests, militarization occurs through the building of networks between these institutions and the funding and development of new entertainment practices. Cynthia Weber analyzes how seemingly distinct popular culture narratives of attacks against the U.S. at Pearl Harbor, 9/11, American teen Charles Bishop’s 2002 suicide flight into a Tampa, FL skyscraper, and U.S. high school shootings create a media environment that rests on the tenuous articulation of these events together. This is not to say there are not connections between them. The 2002 film *Pearl Harbor*, for instance, helped turn Hawaii’s former military base in Pearl Harbor into a “site of return” for families of firefighters and other victims of September 11. Matthew Killmeier’s analysis of the corporate censorship of the Dixie Chicks after they came out against the 2003 Iraq invasion also reveals the contested political terrain of popular country music in the U.S., and its fragile articulation to New Right politics (in *BEO*).

One of the most visible points of disagreement between some of the authors is over the status of images of war and their relative significance to public debate. Nicholas Mizroeff (2005) and Andrew Hoskins (2004) analyze TV news images of the 2003 war in Iraq as, in Mizroeff's terms, a "banality of images" (chapter 2):

What was in retrospect remarkable about this mass of material [from news coverage of the 2003 Iraq War] was the lack of any truly memorable images. For all the constant circulation of images, there was still nothing to see. . . . This apparent lack of drama [is] the key to an important story. . . . images ceased to be the substance of substantial debate" (Mizroeff, 2005, pp. 67–68).

Both Hoskins and Mizroeff speak of the "drive-by" or "traffic cop" visibility of war, the distracted, not meant to be contemplated, supersaturated coverage of war in the form of moving images (Mizroeff draws here on Jacques Rancière's thesis on society as police). For Mizroeff, the Iraq War lacked iconic images and was reduced instead to a daily experience of jump cuts across live broadcasts that create the dulling feeling of tedium (pp. 27–28, 67). For Hoskins, television news images cannot ever be iconic; only still photographs can function as icons of war's impact (see pp. 13–45). As a result, according to Hoskins, the cultural memory of war resides in still photographs rather than in the TV news broadcasts of war, the latter of which, through their repetition of moving images, lead instead to a politics of forgetting (Hoskins draws in particular on Sontag (2003) for this argument).

Both Mizroeff and Hoskins do not offer much in the way of explanation for their assertions about the status of war's visual images on television, and why they cease to function as meaningful representations of war, or in the case of still photography in Hoskins book, are overly burdened with meaning. Mizroeff is admittedly less interested in the cultural function of war images and instead theorizes the experience of location from which one can differently view representations of war, "the multimedia site-specific performance of everyday life" (p. 31). His book *Watching Babylon*, thus, is not about the visual representation of war but instead addresses *ideas of visibility* (in modes of what he calls "vernacular viewing") and the geographic and perceptual situatedness of the viewer's locale. The book is divided into three chapters, each of which articulates a different connotation of Babylon: as a historic site on which the city of Baghdad is now located, a suburban township on Long Island, NY, where the author lives, and as a metaphor for imperialist modernity. Mizroeff's analysis could be best described as a media-based cultural geography of the conditions for visibility of the 2003 Iraq War and the current state of



U.S. military occupation there. The book's first chapter on Babylon, Long Island, NY, describes the decidedly suburban surroundings of the area, focusing particularly on the Hummer SUV and the "hyperhouse" and its home theaters as sites in which suburbanites are indirectly and intertextually implicated in militarization (p. 29). The SUV and home theater occupy places that do the "seeing" in his analysis, as evidenced by his extended discussion of the 1977 cult film classic *The Amityville Horror* (the famous haunted suburban abode also located in Long Island) and other examples in the horror genre, including the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (with its high school located on a hellmouth). The horror genre metaphorically represents what Mizroeff describes as the permeability between suburban screen media and the "reality" of war (p. 56), which creates an undetermined, future-oriented way of seeing that he links to the former anarcho-politics of the commune, New Babylon, which became suburban Babylon, Long Island (p. 65).

The new "eyes" of the housebody, its television and computer screens, are no more able to keep out evil than the old glass windows. It is through the figure of horror that the suburbs have entered the contemporary imagination whether in the recurrent *Nightmare on Elm Street*, the gateway to hell in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Sunnydale High, or the disavowing irony of the *Scream* movies (1996–2000). Despite its insistence on security, vernacular watching [e.g., distracted, peripheral viewing] is in every sense a haunted practice (p. 60).

Against what Mizroeff describes as the "idealized American viewpoint that has no specificity," his first chapter seeks to describe the specificity of the suburban locality from which Long Island residents are positioned to see distant war. His point throughout the book is that vision is a situated practice, but its placement is also the means for its instability: from the fully media-wired homes and giant SUV's some residents drive, to the "exercise soldier" Mizroeff encounters in his local gym, a man who yells out in enthusiastic support of the news coverage of the war in Iraq. Mizroeff presents his book as a response to not knowing how to speak back to the "exercise soldier" and the repetitive "weaponized images" of war on TV news that he says overrun viewers' capacity for contemplation (see pp. 70–84), a critique Hoskins also makes of the moving images of TV war—claims that reiterate the propaganda theory of communication. Mizroeff looks for "vernacular sites" in which subjects like the exercise soldier might be disrupted. One such site he locates is graphic novels through which subjects, he argues, can encounter the present conditions of war in a different temporality than that of the insistent liveness of TV images of war (see pp. 106–115). With so little available scholarly

commentary on the political graphic novel, this reader particularly wanted more discussion from Mizroeff on the representational practices of this unique war genre.

Hoskins' *Televising War*, while ostensibly a book on television, sometimes has more to say about photography than TV news. He addresses photography as a counter-example to television's structure of forgetting war. Still photographs, he suggests, are more significant as memory devices than television news because photographs stick in the mind in ways that television images, no matter how much they are repeatedly broadcast, cannot. There is something quite Nietzschean about Hoskins' claim about still photographs—a claim that is routinely articulated in theories of photography (e.g., Barthes (1981) argues that photography “embalms” the past). In this line of thought, photographs subjectify war while television objectifies it. The subjectification of war in photography enables viewers to feel pained, rather than anesthetized, by an image—that is, it draws viewers into a relationship of “witnessing” (see, e.g., Peters, 2001). This is a Nietzschean approach to memory because it suggests, as Nietzsche did in *The Genealogy of Morals* that “if something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory” (1967, p. 61). Hoskins draws on a set of taken-for-granted notions in cultural theories of photography and cultural memory that photographic images enable contemplative forms of memory work to a greater extent than those of television news, in part because of their mnemotechnics of pain on which their models of memory are often based (an argument Sontag (2003) and Zelizer (1998) call into question). The moving images of television news, he argues:

Powerfully sustains past events through the repetition of key or ‘stock’ images, whilst on the other, they force upon audiences an amnesia of events not deemed newsworthy (p. 5).

Barbie Zelizer's chapter in *Reporting War* adds another significant dimension to the critical study of war's visual culture and the role of photography in the construction of cultural memory of war. Against the claim that photographs can burn images into memory, she instead looks to the news industry's conventionalization of war photography. News depends upon photography to carry the burden of description in the coverage of war. Rather than viewing photography as a referent to war (especially because most news photographs of war are not of the battlefield), Zelizer demonstrates how it is the photograph's “connotative force” that facilitates “the durability and memorability of a news image,” a force buttressed by the news convention of reproducing current photographs that reference earlier photographs of war from previous conflicts (p. 130). News photography does not so much document war, she

argues, but constructs a highly conventionalized myth of war that harkens back to another militarized past. That is, “journalists strike parallels between wars for no better reason than the surrounding mandates for interpreting them resemble each other” (p. 131). Zelizer suggests, then, that the photographic construction of a conventionalized “cultural memory” of war has far less to do with the viewer’s contemplative relationship to the images and far more to do with the industrialized practices of news photography of war and the interpretive cultures of news photographers.

## CONCLUSION

Each of the texts reviewed here offer a set of critical takes on the media of war. Like most anthologies, too, the limitations of these readers arise in part from their textual omissions. Those readers looking for feminist and gender analysis of media and war, for instance, will find only one chapter on the topic across the three anthologies—Jayne Rodgers’ “Icons and Invisibility: Gender, Myth, 9/11” (in *WM*). Readers will need to turn to other sources such as the Winter 2005 special issue of *Feminist Media Studies* on gender and war (Michelle Rodino’s article on the militarization of soccer moms is especially enlightening), the Fall 2005 special issue of the *NWSA Journal* on gender and the politics of fear (Stabile & Rentscher, 2005) and single journal articles (e.g., Stabile & Kumar, 2005) for field-specific feminist analyses of media and war (Ross & Moorti, 2005). Critical readers on gender and 9/11 are also key resources for feminist takes on media and war (e.g., Hawthorne & Winter, 2002 and Hirsch & Smith, 2002). Jeffords and Rabinovitz’s anthology (1994) still offers remarkably timely feminist and gender analysis of the 1991 Gulf War.

While the anthologies are short on feminist analysis, they do include especially significant analyses of race, racism, and imperialism in war reporting. Three contributors to Allan and Zelizer’s *Reporting War* pay special attention to the absences and invisibilities in war coverage, particularly around war zones in Africa and on the Indian subcontinent that U.S. and U.K. news media still deem to be less news worthy than European and Middle Eastern conflicts (see Carruthers, Sonwalkar, and Rantanen). Rantanen’s analysis of how European news agencies evaluated non-European news agencies as suspect sources of information in the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq demonstrates the industrialization of imperialism within the news agencies. Daya Thussu and Des Freedman’s “Introduction” to their edited collection (*WM*) provides a needed framework on the links between neo-liberal policies, discourses of globalization and empire, and U.S. militarism, while Aijaz Ahmad critically re-articulates the links between imperialism and the aggression of the U.S. war on terrorism. Two contributors to *Bring ‘Em On* address issues of race around

George W. Bush's stereotyping of Arabs in his public addresses post 9/11 (Merskin) and the racist portrayal of enemies as analyzed in Hart and Hassencahl's content analysis of political cartoons. Despite these chapters, questions of race and imperialism could be more directly integrated into the scope and framework of the anthologies. Books such *Media, War and Terrorism: Responses from the Middle East and Asia* (Van der Veer & Munshi, 2005), for instance, do this kind of integration work by expanding the critical examination of race, nation, location, and media representation of war in chapters on Turkish immigrants in Britain and their viewing of TV representations of September 11, 2001 and media audiences in Malaysia and their interaction with commercialized portrayals of Osama bin Laden and Islam more generally.

The texts reviewed here are significant resources in a growing area of research inquiry and curriculum development into militarization and the media. While journalism is an increasingly militarized practice (e.g., Brandenburg in *BEO*) and we are surrounded by media environments steeped in what Thomas and Virchow call "banal militarism" (in *BEO*), the authors of these books remind us that the tools for critically analyzing the militarization of culture are also the tools we can use to start *de*-militarizing its practices.

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