RESEARCH

No Guilt, No Shame: Discerning Signs of Post-Conflict Moral Injury in Atmospheres of Political Impunity

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Social scientists in the United States have published extensively on the concept of moral injury among soldiers in the past decade. Contemporary research gestures principally to expressions of guilt or shame as the primary mechanisms by which one can discern moral injury in a soldier. Guilt and shame are understood to be the emotional responses to the a soldier's realization that they have taken life (or witnessed the taking of life) especially in an atrocity; such feelings tend to be amplified in the face of hostility to recent military missions (and, implicitly, military actors) on the part of the American populace. Scholars of moral injury point to the U.S. war in Vietnam, and to some extent those in Iraq and Afghanistan, as conflicts which left veterans with a sense of "all-encompassing absurdity and moral inversion." What happens to our understanding of how to recognize moral injury, this article asks, if we expand our investigation of moral injury beyond the framework of an increasingly anti-war United States populace, and consider wars that are civil in nature as opposed to waged on foreign grounds? Focusing on non-US geopolitical sites where cultures of impunity have taken root post-conflict, this article finds that guilt and shame suddenly become considerably less productive tools by which to identify the moral cost of war to combatants. Recuperating an original formulation of moral injury suggested by Robert Jay Lifton in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and interpreting it alongside a close-reading of documentary cinema featuring perpetrators of atrocities in Indonesia, Cambodia and Lebanon, this article proposes that we broaden our criteria for perceiving moral injury beyond the filters of guilt and shame if we hope to arrive at a more universal understanding of the phenomenon.

Introduction

In academic literature, verbal expressions of guilt and shame are the most widely cited primary indicators of wartime moral injury.[1] However, these particular emotional expressions, I argue, are intimately connected to the geopolitical specificity of U.S. conflicts and our attitudes toward war in the last half-century. The nature of the conflicts in which the U.S. military has been involved has shifted from "conventional" warfare in the age of the World Wars, to "unconventional" and often guerrilla warfare. This shift has irrevocably confounded our understanding of the rules and ethics of military engagement, a key factor likely to influence moral injury. But perhaps more importantly, U.S. veterans of wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan have often encountered considerable opposition to the war when they returned home and a newfound hesitation to grant the soldier the status of a "hero." The soldier had become the symbol of intractable, unwinnable, and expensive wars—and increasingly, abuse, torture, and atrocity. With often understaffed Veterans Affairs facilities, veterans were left alone to process civilian hostility, the life-altering experience of wars that had not been "won," and bitter disappointment in politicians who now denounced the wars they once supported. The resulting feelings of guilt and shame were thus highly determined by on-the-ground cultural and political realities in the U.S.

We might therefore expect differing expressions of moral injury in different cultural and political contexts. In other words, were we to shift our geopolitical focus, our parameters for identifying signs of moral injury would also have to expand.[2] In what follows, I turn to three case studies of moral injury in civilian combatants who tortured and massacred fellow citizens during civil conflicts. The former combatants hail from Indonesia, Cambodia, and Lebanon—countries with distinct histories of political violence but which remain linked by several key factors. In each case, civilians militarized to take part in domestic conflicts predicated on ethno-political tensions. Once the conflicts had ended, legislated amnesties and/or cultures of impunity permitted former perpetrators to operate with impunity. Many went on to

positions of political or social influence, and most reintegrated into their communities alongside their former victims without fear of legal prosecution or social retaliation. In some cases, the perpetrators continued to espouse the ideological commitments that motivated them to pick up arms. The relative paucity of the kind of cultural triggers which would prompt socialized responses of guilt and shame, made former perpetrators less likely to express them. This is not to say that they do not suffer from moral injury. If anything, it helps establish that the crises of morality provoked by civil conflict, torture, and atrocity take many forms depending in part on geopolitical context.

There has yet to be a study of moral injury in these countries.[3] Thus, in the absence of empirical or qualitative data, this article analyzes documentary film-based interviews with former perpetrators. In particular, I turn to Joshua Oppenheimer's (2012) film *The Act of Killing* about the Indonesian genocide in 1965 and 1966, Rithy Panh's (2002, 2013) *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* and *Duch: Master of the Forges of Hell* about the genocide in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, and Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim's (2006) *Massaker* about the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees during the Lebanese civil war. Through a close-reading of the films, contextualized through the theoretical writings of psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (1967, 1973), I identify narratological and affective evidence of moral injury based on neither guilt nor shame. I place Lifton's early theories on the subject of moral injury alongside his theories of the combatant's "death encounter" (1967, p. 481) and of "middle knowledge" (1973, p. 61) terms which describe the long-term impact of death on the human psyche, and the distancing mechanisms we employ to keep death at bay. The dialogue between Lifton's theories (1967, 1973) and the narratives told by the men in the films establishes a central element of moral injury: the disorientation caused by attempts to reconcile unreconcilable "moral orienting systems" (Moon, 2019, p. 4) even decades later. In fact, the methodology of Lifton's (1967, 1973) theory is as important as their content. His narrative-based approach to understanding both the psyche and the soul places an innately humanist method of praxis in conversation with an otherwise social scientific inquiry, allowing us to see a core crisis which precedes guilt and shame.

Defining Moral Injury

U.S. psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (1994) uses the term "moral injury" (p. 20) to describe the troubled condition of his patients, U.S. veterans of the war in Vietnam. Through a combination of patient interviews and literary analysis of ancient war literature, such as the Greek poet Homer's epics *The Iliad* (762 BCE) and *The Odyssey* (725 BCE), Shay (1994) arrives at an understanding of moral injury as a condition which testifies to the demand that one "sacrifice their moral integrity for the greater good" (Wiinika-Lydon, 2018, p. 355). Outwardly, moral injury could manifest as psychological symptoms not unlike trauma. Yet, whereas trauma is understood as a psycho-

logical disorder, moral injury has wider-ranging consequences that go "beyond what trauma discourse can describe." It is caused by a "betrayal of what's right by someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., in the military—a leader) in a high stakes situation" (Shay, 2014, p. 182), and leads to the deterioration of character and a sense of being ill-at-ease in the world. Today, more than half a century after the Vietnam war began, mental health researchers and practitioners continue to use the term to describe U.S. veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.[4]

Despite the concept's circulation, a definitive definition for moral injury remains elusive. Indeed, Hodgson and Carey (2017) describe moral injury as an exploratory term for "a complex phenomenon that requires a holistic approach beyond any one discipline" (p. 1223). Warning against the tendency to reduce moral injury to psychological trauma (and, one might add, perhaps even the newer neologism of perpetrator trauma [Mohamed, 2016]) they caution that "[a] predominantly psychiatric and/or psychological paradigm can obscure [other] factors associated with moral injury" (Hodgson & Carey, 2017, p. 1223).[5] These factors include theological concerns such as spirituality and faith, as well as social relationality (Beckham, Feldman, & Kirby, 1998; Hodgson & Carey, 2017; Kopacz, Ducharme, Ani, & Atlig 2017; Tietje, 2018; Yandell, 2019).

If the definition of moral injury is still taking shape, there is less debate among U.S. scholars surrounding its causes and how we may recognize it. Twenty years before Shay (1994) would write of moral injury, Lifton (1973) argued that U.S. veterans can be with a sense of "all-encompassing absurdity and moral inversion" (p. 137) when power asymmetries between the U.S. military and their contemporary antagonists complicate rules of engagement, making wars seem more like exercises in survival than an armed defense of a political or ideological values. These asymmetries, Lifton (1973) wrote, laid the groundwork for "atrocity-producing conditions" (p. 41)—the inevitable product of a "counter-insurgency war undertaken by an advanced industrial society against a revolutionary moment of an underdeveloped country, in which the revolutionary guerillas are inseparable from the rest of the population" as in Vietnam.[6] While Lifton thought this new type of warfare was responsible for a sense of moral "dis-ease" among soldiers, it was his own decidedly anti-war politics, which led him to see a compromised morality as the inevitable collateral of contemporary military aggression. In other words, war could not avoid provoking a crisis in the soldier on the frontlines.[7] Though Lifton never used the term "moral injury," the impossibility of a wartime morality undergirded his concern for the American soldier.

Nearly two decades would pass between Lifton's (1967, 1973) publications and a more extended academic study of moral injury in soldiers. Beginning in the 1990s, as a result of his own work with Vietnam war veterans, psychiatrist Jonathan Shay (2011) sought to encourage the military to more actively address soldiers' mental health. Like Lifton (1967, 1973), Shay's (1994) approach was determined by a

political investment, though one substantially different from Lifton's. Nowhere near as avowedly anti-war, Shay (1994) hoped to work from within the institution of war-making. By this time, related concerns such as trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.) were well-researched and discussed both in the academy and among practitioners, but the military hesitated to embrace these concepts.[8]

Recognizing that a discussion of mental health (broadly speaking) among soldiers would have to be presented via a non-alienating rhetorical framework in order to enlist institutional support, Shay (1994) settled on the language of "injury." He concluded that this terminology would be less stigmatizing than that of a "disorder," though it should be noted that his definition was, at times, not altogether different from the concept of trauma itself.[9] Shay's (1994) political orientation produced a significantly different articulation of moral injury than that which Lifton (1973) initially suggested, insofar as it did not intend to question the morality of war altogether, but to tether moral injury to poor leadership: a matter seemingly easier to address. This calculated approach ensured the conceptual longevity of moral injury by rooting it in recognizable but slightly more palatable terms and suggesting a solution. Theologians have now joined social scientists in discussing moral injury as well, expanding the theoretical and practical methods of investigating how atrocities provoke a crisis of individuality and relationality.[10]

The Death Encounter and Middle Knowledge

Having considered the historiography of the concept and its development, I begin my analysis of other narratives of moral injury with Lifton's (1973) original formation. Lifton's method for theorizing how perpetrators process their role in atrocity hinges upon narrative or discursive tropes.[11] Death, he maintains, is the biggest threat to the human race. It has been encoded thus in our biological, psychological, and social evolution. Encounters with death necessarily provoke an internal crisis, born from the knowledge of having survived annihilation (Lifton, in Caruth, 1995). In the context of political violence, combatants who commit atrocities or individuals who are involved in a genocidal regime experience successive death encounters; they cause, escape, and witness death with regularity. The intensity of the fear of death in combination with its unrelenting presence, Lifton (1973) observes, requires the perpetrator to re-conceptualize death in order to continue as a combatant.

This act of reconceptualization is accomplished through narrative—in other words, by creating a new story about what death means—and how. The paradigmatic example of this narrative reconceptualization occurs in the soldiers of death in terms of "glory" or "martyrdom" (p. 25) the rhetorical tropes through which professional or civilian, combatants the world over are taught to reimagine death. Combatants believe that one can attain glory by causing the death of an enemy, while shielding fellow combatants from death and avoiding one's own. In a non-combat context

– one in which civilians mobilize to help a regime enact genocide, for instance — these combatants lend "glory" and legitimacy to the regime by eliminating so-called subversives, undesirables, or enemies of the state. With this new narrative, death becomes not something to be feared or even simply survived, but to be mastered. This act of narrative alchemy becomes the first step by which a bulwark is constructed against guilt and shame.

While perhaps a battlefield necessity, Lifton (1973) argues, such rhetorical moves foreclose healthy engagement with the concept of death, effectively leaving the underlying fear intact. The sense of invincibility derived from the attempt to hold death at bay only masks a struggle with "how to cohere and...absorb and in some measure confront what one...has been exposed to" (Lifton, in Caruth, 1995, p. 137). In other words, this reflexive and subconscious defense mechanism helps both to guard against the consequences of witnessing brutal death, while extending the suspension of religious and secular injunctions against taking life. The masking inaugurates "a form of [psychic] doubling" in which "elements that are at odds in the two selves," (the "ethical contradictions" between two moral orders) have a "numbing" effect, shielding the combatant from other emotional responses.

The twinned phenomena of doubling and numbing are especially pronounced in perpetrators of mass violence, "people who doubled to adapt to evil" (Lifton, in Caruth, 1995, p. 137). By way of example, Lifton (1973) writes of a combatant who takes part in a massacre not long after surviving a lethal ambush. At the risk of collapsing from mental and emotional overwhelm, Lifton writes, the soldier must reframe the ambush. He will likely do so through a teleological narrative of vengeance. A common example might include the notion that the combatant has redeemed the deaths of his peers (and the threat of having almost been annihilated himself) by taking enemy lives, as if in a relationship of exchange. He has forged "a psychological link between the deaths that had so overwhelmed [him] and the actions [he] could take in order to reconstitute [his sense of self]," and in such a way that allows for meaning couched in terms of life, not death (p. 48). Shay (1994) calls this mindset one of "revenge as reviving the dead" (p. 89). In other words, The soldier's new narrative translates certain deaths into the language of martyrdom and remakes killing as the attainment of glory and honor (Lifton, in Caruth, 1995; Lifton, 1973). Massacres, torture and other atrocities thus become "the 'natural' consummation" (Lifton, 1973, p. 55) of what Lifton refers to as "the collective survivor mission" in which death anxiety becomes sublimated into a drive to kill.

According to Lifton (1973) the act of narrative translation mitigates the impact of the death encounter, suggesting that the perpetrator does not completely process the atrocity either as it occurs or in its immediate aftermath. Dori Laub's (1992) concept of the "event without witness" (Laub in Felman & Laub, p. 84) helps explain the combatant's failure to consciously interpolate violence that rises to the level of the atrocity. Laub, a psychoanalyst and Holocaust

survivor, gives the Holocaust as the paradigmatic example of the event without witness. Not only did "the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime" (p. 80), Laub (1992) writes—literally making witnessing impossible— but they also instituted a bureaucracy whose essential logic and structure was "inherently incomprehensible *and* deceptively psychological" (p. 80). Here Laub (1992) refers to the denial, bureaucratic euphemisms, secrecy, and other manipulations of truth. The Holocaust becomes an event without witness because the combined function of an annihilating violence and its denial makes the event so all-encompassing that there is no position that allows any-one—victim, survivor, bystander, or perpetrator—to "remain untainted" (p. 81). While Laub (1992) referred specifically to the Holocaust, the act of genocide (as in Indonesia and Cambodia) and the planned massacre of untold civilians (as in Lebanon) is governed by a similar logic: annihilate wit-nesses and protect the apparatus of death by shrouding it in opacity, denial, euphemism, and rationalization.

The perpetrator of atrocity thus faces two psychic obstacles to their ability to confront the consequences of their actions, much less to feel guilt or shame. The first is the mental gymnastics brought out by relentless and sus-tained death encounters. The second is the impossibility of witnessing annihilating violence. These two realities com-bine so that the perpetrator of an atrocity is never truly in full knowledge of his or her actions (Lifton, 1973). In climates where the political and social custom is to leave unchallenged the perpetrator's distorted consciousness and narrative rationalization, guilt and shame seem almost bey-ond the realm of possibility. Shay (1994) himself alludes to the narrative-driven component of revenge-based atrocity, referring to the agents of such atrocities "berserkers" (p. 77). Combatants to whom this label is attributed appear to partially dissociate during the atrocity itself. Shay gives examples from his patients' accounts: "I got very hard, cold, merciless;" "I lost all my mercy" (p. 82). Another describes an "ecstasy of power…pure frenzy." Shay continues to describe "berserkers" as (at least in the moment) "insatiable," "fear-less," "inattentive to [their] own safety," "feeling invulner-able," and "insensible to pain" (1994, p. 82).

And yet, dire moral conflict can still find belated and subconscious expression. Repression—intentional or other-wise—results in the subconscious externalization, or acting out, of the internal struggle that has up until that point been inhibited. Should the numbness that a combatant has cultivated continue in the long-term, they may therefore begin to exhibit forms of neuroses: physical and psychic witnesses to a subconscious moral injury (Lifton, 1973). The neuroses are an unconscious disavowal of the moral rup-ture by which the latter are channeled into alienation and isolation, aggression (Drescher et al., 2011), and other forms of expression. We may understand the subconscious non-guilt or shame-based expressions of moral injury in terms of middle knowledge. Lifton defined (1973) this final key term as an inability to either "find a place for the painful death-linked truth within one's overall formulation of self and world" (p. 61) or, simultaneously, to avoid "the pressing evidence of that truth." "The problem" of how to reconcile the death-linked truth of complicity in atrocity with the kind of moral person one imagined themselves to be beforehand "is solved by evolving (at least) two contradictory images"— one, a narrative façade and the other the somatic expression of discomfort. As such, the perpetrator's affective and nar-rative expression may inadvertently work together to articu-late the "pressing evidence," which their defense mechanism sought to disavow.

For our purposes, the term "middle knowledge" (Lifton, 1973, p. 61) is helpful because it also nods, metacritcally, to the external, socially determined limits of the perpetrator's self-awareness. In other words, if the existing social and political culture forms additional obstacles to feeling guilt or shame, it is likely that there are structural impediments to the ability of the society at large to come to terms with the events, not just the perpetrator himself. Thus, while policies such as a general amnesty may be an overt example of conscious denial, the individual perpetrator's middle knowledge is subconscious. The Indonesian, Cambodian, and Lebanese documentaries referenced in this paper make visible, quite literally, the liminal space of middle knowledge in which perpetrators of atrocities remain, decades after their actions, but without guilt or shame.

Imbibing and Regurgitating in Indonesia

The 1965–1966 genocide in the southeast Asian island nation of Indonesia arose in the wake of a failed coup attempt. Bolstered by the national army, civilian mobs and paramilitary organizations massacred Communists, ethnic Chinese, and their personal enemies. The official death toll has been estimated at between a half- and one-million in the course of less than a year (Kine, 2017). A three-decade-long dictatorship would follow.

Today, several of the former paramilitary wings have become active political parties with representatives in Indonesia's government. As Joshua Oppenheimer (2012) began work on his film, *The Act of Killing*, he realized that a half-century later, many Indonesians still lived in fear of their former persecutors and of the state. In fact, Oppenheimer had originally intended to film the surviv-ors, not the perpetrators, of the Indonesian genocide. After a hard-fought battle to find a survivor willing to appear on-camera, the survivor and his family were threatened into silence by the Indonesian army (Shatz, 2015). Oppenheimer had unfettered access, however, to the former perpetrators; several enthusiastically volunteered to share their stories for the historical record. For its part, the military seemed to be less threatened by the prospect of their former collaborators being on-camera; for good measure, however, they contrac-ted their old paramilitary allies to attack screenings of the films (Nakhnikian, 2015).

The former paramilitaries were forthcoming about the narratives they used to convert death into life. After they

tortured and executed fellow Indonesians, one former per-petrator recalls, they drank the blood of their victims in order to forestall madness. While cultures the world over have been known to symbolically or literally imbibe blood for various purposes, in the context of Indonesia's political viol-ence, drinking the blood of the victim was a material answer to an immaterial moral challenge. The act of killing, espe-cially by non-professional killers such as those who joined the paramilitaries, was an unnatural action. Abandoning the moral standards of communal livelihood in order to heed the call for political violence constituted such a steep inver-sion of the established moral code among civilians that it placed one's sanity at risk. Drinking the blood of the victim would symbolically restore equilibrium, converting death from the ultimate transgression to a sanctioned ritual as a safeguard against moral injury.

The Act of Killing, a highly unconventional and con-troversial documentary, plumbs the depths of how civili-ans-turned-perpetrators justified the taking of life. Organized as a film-within-a-film, Oppenheimer (2012) records as he facilitates the production of another film–one scripted and produced by the former perpetrators, depict-ing their accounts of the events of 1965 to 1966. They have been given a nearly unlimited budget for costumes, set design, and other hallmarks of a dramatic presentation. Many of the "extras" are villagers who remember, or know of, the real events which will be reenacted. While Oppenheimer himself seldom asks questions of the perpetrators, the questions (and their answers) naturally emerge in between scenes. Nearly as pronounced as the rationalizing narratives to which the perpetrators cling decades later are the "con-tradictory images" of their narrative façades as they hang in tenuous balance with a new, emergent truth.

Oppenheimer's (2012) primary interlocutor is Anwar Congo, a former leader of the paramilitary group, the Pancasila Youth. Now an aging man with white hair, Congo remains a venerated figure for the party loyalists who sur-round him, treating him with saccharine deference. For the most part, Congo is perceived by both the survivors among whom he lives and by Western journalists as an "unrepent-ant hit man" (Beech, 2017), whose indefatigable "gusto" as he films his version of events is "jarring" (Weiner, 2013). He shows neither guilt nor shame. Nevertheless, Congo does exhibit signs of moral injury, specifically through the dis-cursive and somatic tropes of imbibing and regurgitating.

Our first encounter with this trope arrives early in the film. Congo has just demonstrated for the camera, with no small degree of pride in his ingenuity, a method he innov-ated to kill his victims. Standing on the roof of a building where he used to torture and kill, he holds a wooden block the size of a man's forearm in both hands. Attached to it is a thick piece of wire. He demonstrates the proper method of use by wrapping the wire around the neck of a man seated nearby, one of his lackeys, and gently pulling the wooden block to create tension on the wire. Even with such relatively gentle pressure, the man's tongue rolls out of his mouth,

pushed outward by the pressure of the wire on his neck as it constricts his throat. When Congo releases the weapon, his face is somber. "I've tried to forget all this with good music… Dancing… Feeling happy… A little alcohol… A little marijuana… A little…what do you call it? Ecstasy. Once I'd get drunk, I'd fly [here he uses the English word] and feel happy" (Oppenheimer, Cynn, Sorenson, ten Brink, Kohncke, & Uwemedimo, 00:10:21–00:11:11). He begins to dance the cha-cha with a smile on his face, singing a light melody.

As he dances, we realize that he does so with the wire around his own neck. In all likelihood, he placed it there thoughtlessly, thinking only of keeping his hands free. But this new home for his instrument of death seems an apt metaphor. There may be no one left to victimize a half-cen-tury later, but the weapons remain, and they must (as if they were of their own mind) find a new object. The deaths he forced upon others, but which he refused to encounter, will force acknowledgment from him, even belatedly. His sub-stance abuse becomes a coping mechanism through which he continues to try to forestall the encounter that could lead to emotions he is not prepared to feel.

Even without these substances, however, it is not difficult to keep running from the legacy of the death encounter. During the genocide, he would have been protected from such an encounter by a combination of internal factors such as his belief in his own power over life and death and external factors such as his local stature. Moreover, he had the cover of ideological conviction: Congo and his paramil-itary had been charged with the task of killing "those who want to destroy our country" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:24:22). Thus, even if moments of introspection have recently called into question how he understands death, his status in his community as well as the continued political and social suc-cess of his paramilitary party continue to inure him, ensur-ing that he need not reflect too much.

Half a century after the Pancasila Youth wreaked havoc in this part of the island nation, Congo and his peers continue to be guests of honor at the paramilitary rallies. In one scene, we find them bedecked in their regalia, the now-elderly men greeted enthusiastically by middle-aged and young men. A speaker can be heard warning that the neo-communists and left-wing extremists of today are just as dangerous as the communists they faced in the 1960s. Eradicating them, the voice exhorts, "isn't only the duty of the army and police. We Pancasila Youth must take a stand" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:24:31). The call-to-action continues. And though extraju-dicial killings no longer take place, they are still legitimized in theory by an old moral discourse. Congo confessed need for alcohol and drugs however demonstrate the extent to which time has become out of joint, and the moral codes of the 1960s and the 2010s seem to clash. Unable to reconcile the two moral systems, he seeks a distraction.

The sense that time is out of joint becomes more pro-nounced as the viewer watches Congo and his associates make their film. Sometimes Congo appears nostalgic for the past. Other times, his past and present selves seem to have

a more tortured relationship. For instance, in one scene, Congo takes Oppenheimer's (2012) camera crew on a tour of his village. Sitting next to his subordinate, Adi, Congo points out sites of torture and execution as their driver steers silently. Passing over a bridge, Congo gleefully recalls throwing bodies into the water below in the 1960s: "They looked beautiful, like parachutes. Bam!" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:41:40). Later, he gossips conspiratorially with Adi as make-up artists prepare them for a scene in their film; it appears that Congo and Adi will be playing torture victims, themselves. Somewhat incongruous with their thespian disguises, the two are discussing a nearby man who has also been cast in Congo's film. Congo is angry that the man has been included in the film: "Back then he was nobody" he bitterly observes (Oppenheimer et al., 00:43:44). He was not nearly as important—his hands not nearly as bloody—as Congo.

And yet, in a more introspective moment, another side of him appears. Adi and Congo sit on a dock, fishing; Congo confesses, seemingly at random, that he has nightmares. Hypothesizing as to the source of the nightmares he suggests that perhaps they stem from the fact that "when I strangled people with wire I watched them die" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:47:39). In his very language is the vernacular corollary to Lifton's (1967) theory of the death encounter. Death has left an indelible mark on Congo. Adi, however, does not want to entertain this line of conversation. Finding another name for the death encounter, Adi understands Congo as "haunted" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:48:06)—but not because of a predictable psychic response to murder. Instead, Adi says, it is because "your mind is weak."

Implicit in Adi's statement is the idea that Congo must feel guilty—a statement which Adi makes directly, a few seconds later. Congo's mouth opens and shuts without sound: He seems to be rejecting what Adi says while trying to release something at the same time. His eyes narrow at the word "guilt," suggesting that this is not quite the correct word. Then, he grunts in an acquiescence. While "guilt" may not accurately describe how he feels, Congo *is* nonetheless ill-at-ease. Adi takes advantage of Congo's momentary confusion to launch into a soliloquy on the value of seeing a "nerve doctor" [psychiatrist] who can correct "nerve disturbance" with "nerve vitamins" (Oppenheimer et al., 00:48:55–00:49:20). Adi saw one, he confesses, but only "for a mild stroke." Though Congo may not be suffering from a sense of guilt, Adi fears the possibility as he seems acquainted with at least the trajectory that precedes guilt. Sensing that his former leader has begun to flounder in the ever-widening abyss between wartime and peacetime mores, Adi is determined to stand in the gap. He takes recourse in the language of the survivor mission—asserting a moral code that re-exerts its gravitational pull in order to keep them both safely within the confines of the familiar.

Congo will not express feelings of guilt or shame at any point during this documentary. Still, in one of the final (and most contested) scenes of the documentary, his very body seems to be in rebellion, insisting on making manifest the pressing evidence of the death encounter and contradicting his earlier expression of glee and pride, making it some kind of belated encounter with death inevitable. Reversing the logic of imbibing blood, alcohol, and drugs, he suddenly begins to dry heave, wishing to expel something from his body with alarming violence. In this moment, he stands alone on the very roof from which he earlier demonstrated his innovative methods of execution. "This is where we tortured and killed the people we captured" (Oppenheimer et al., 02:31:11) he says, as if seeing and introducing this space for the first time. He stands in silence for a few more moments, and suddenly, apropos of nothing: "I know it was wrong, but I had to do it" (Oppenheimer et al., 02:31:39).

Slowly, he turns away and gags. Once, twice, he turns his back to the camera, walking away doubled over. Bent in half, he supports his convulsing body by bracing himself against the wall. The sounds he makes are inhuman—almost animal-like: He growls, chokes, groans. Yet, neither liquid nor solid comes out of his mouth. He is unable to purge himself of what he has swallowed. When he finishes dry heaving, he spits—a highly superficial and unsatisfactory way of removing at least some irritant from his body. He comes back to the face the camera, his face glistening with a cold sweat. He sits against the wall. "Why did I have to kill them? My conscience told me they had to be killed" (Oppenheimer et al., 02:32:21), he says, again, apropos of nothing. He picks up his various murder weapons—props that have been left on the roof–and tries to speak as he fingers them, but he has trouble getting words out of his mouth. The dry heaving begins again. He pivots his body towards the wall for support, grabbing a mesh fence for support.

The temporal markers inflecting Congo's word choice are significant. The words "I know it was wrong but I had to do it," simultaneously invokes the present and the past, blurring competing moral temporal orders. He knows *now* but had to *then.* With this construction, he articulates the simultaneous distinction between and convergence of what Moon (2019) describes as the "moral-orienting systems" (p. 4) of the past and of the present. The difficulty of managing this relationship is made explicit in between the lines of his statements. On the one hand, he disavows responsibility and agency by limiting the time of consciousness of wrongdoing to "now," inherently after-the-fact. It is in the "now" that his body expresses the belated moral injury from a half century ago. And it is only in the now that the concept of wrongness is expressed. On the other hand, however, his acknowledgement of wrongdoing is limited, and does not rise to the level of guilt. He continues to rationalize his actions, not only by absolving himself of the knowledge of wrongdoing in the moment, but also by taking recourse to the language of compulsion. Expressions such as "I *had to* do it" and even questions such as "Why did I *have* to kill them?" remove agency, as if he were subject to a system beyond his control. As if to make this clearer, he nods to the primacy of competing moral order that mandated killing

when he observes that his conscience told him that he must kill. Introducing the language of a competing moral order tempers his degree of responsibility. So long as he is in this space, one that clearly marks moral transgressions and inversions but precludes guilt and shame, his moral injury is clearly signaled through his body's middle knowledge. And as long as his lackeys and peers continue to enjoy impunity to the point of brashness, they will continue to close ranks according to the code of the survival mission.

Muscle Memory in Cambodia

From 1975 to 1979, another genocide was underway after yet another a coup in nearby Cambodia. Cambodia's new leadership, the Khmer Rouge, forcibly implemented a form of socialism modeled on Mao Tse Dong's "Cultural Revolution" in China. Displacing swaths of the urban population to the rural farmlands, the regime worked laborers to the point of starvation in order to produce food for national consumption and foreign export. Simultaneously, the regime mobilized civilians (often through coercion) into its service to arrest, torture and kill so-called enemies of the regime. The death toll has been estimated at 1.7 million casualties in four years, one-quarter of Cambodia's population (Kiernan, 1996). Though several of the regime's leaders stood trial in the 2000s, most of their sentences were commuted. Even today, prominent members of Cambodia's government deny the genocide occurred,[12] and sympathizers have sought to thwart more trials by claiming that they would only reignite war (Cruz, 2015).

Cambodian Rithy Panh (2001; 2013), director of *S21* and *Duch*, is a genocide survivor himself. He writes that the violence he experienced and witnessed had metaphorically killed him and then given birth to him anew "but with the pain, the death inside me" (Bradshaw 2019). Thus, on the opposite end of the spectrum from those who perpetrated against him, Panh is intimately aware of his ongoing relationship with death. Compelled to push through the pain, he seeks out the men who physically perpetrated the genocide, hoping to create a recorded, extrajudicial testimony that would enable his country to "approach the truth" even in a climate still shrouded in fear and silence. The men whom he finds for his first film, *S21*, are of a different ilk than Congo. They were "grunts," occupying a considerably lower position on the hierarchy of authority. Far from enjoying the position of feared strongman in their communities, these men seem to have preferred a quiet return to normalcy in their old communities.

Khieu Ches, who goes by "Poeuv," is a baby-faced man who has not visibly aged in the decades since he was conscripted by the Khmer Rouge. Brought to Tuol Sleng, or "S21," as a teenager to serve as a guard, he held captive "enemies of the state" in a former school-turned prison. Several decades later, Panh has brought Poeuv and several other former guards back to S21 for his film. The former prison has found yet another life as a museum dedicated to the memory of the genocide. In this changed space, the men gather once

again, this time to reenact their days as guards in front of a camera—and to pour over photographs and records of their victims.

At first subdued and withdrawn, Poeuv describes he rounded up prisoners for their execution. As he speaks, he rocks back and forth as if trying to self-soothe. Standing in a vast, empty room with large windows, he describes how the room was once full to capacity with prisoners chained together on the floor. The more he speaks, the more he appears to become energetic and animated. He methodically works his way up and down the rows of the ghostly prisoners, his voice now robust with authority, filling the room as he reenacts searching prisoners for contraband. Without looking at the camera—which would break both the fourth wall and his concentration—he offers an accompanying narrative for his actions for our benefit. After a short time, he appears to have forgotten the camera altogether. He barks his orders to phantom prisoners, widens his stance, and jabs his index finger in the direction of a "prisoner" lying chained upon the ground: "You! Taking your shirt off without the guard's permission?! To hang yourself by your shirt?! Give me that!" (Couteau & Hastier, 00:40:16). He stomps over to snatch the shirt and walks away. But then, as he leaves his prisoner, he remembers his audience once again and explains that he has confiscated the shirt.

In his daily life, Poeuv does not enjoy the same freedom as Congo; we will not find him traipsing through streets with a full-camera crew, forcing genocide survivors to serve as movie extras. But inside the familiar prison walls, Panh has created a safe space in which Pouev is free to return to both the past and to a moral universe he knew well. In this transformed space and time, Pouev's enthusiasm and animation hardly suggest guilt or shame. In fact, he seems relieved to have the opportunity, however brief, to return to a world in which the moral order was clear and in his favor. The reenactment we witness is therefore not that of actions executed "exactly and unremittingly in the mode of a traumatic repetition" (Leys, 2000, p. 293), but something akin to muscle memory. It combines the affective and narrative registers of duty, encoded and rationalized through the euphemisms, songs, and symbols of Khmer authority that are so prominent in Panh's film. He has re-embodied the regime's logic.

Pouev's eagerness to return to another place and time indicates his awareness of the recent inversion of the Khmer Rouge regime's own moral order. The regime officially lost power in 1979, four years after they came to power, but remained influential until 1999—just seven years before the film was released. Toward the tail-end of the regime's influence, the new Cambodian government clearly signaled the dawn of a new moral and political order: They petitioned the United Nations for help in prosecuting the Khmer Rouge's leadership for the then- two-decade old genocide. In 2003, just three years before the film was released, the tribunal officially launched. It is in this dynamic context that Panh brought Poeuv and his peers back to S21; they are being

asked to recreate their pasts at precisely the moment that their past is being upended.

The impact of the recent course of events on how perpetrators understand themselves and their actions can be discerned in the narrativization of another former guard, Him Huoy. As Huoy recounts how he bludgeoned, killed, and buried prisoners in mass graves after torturing them, subtle inflections in his rationalization signal the struggle to frame his actions as the moral order shifts. His verb tenses shift between the past and the present: "I *killed* so that they would be convinced that I *am* a child of [the regime]" (Couteau & Hastier, 00:44:25). He explains his past action in terms of a logic that retains its hold on him in the present. On the one hand, he suggests that he had to convince authority figures of his loyalty in order to guarantee his own safety–a nod to the present-day moral standard which has, even if only informally, demands an explanation. But Huoy remains in the grip of party (il)logic as evidenced by his claim that he is currently ("I am") beholden to the party. The temporal collapse makes sense; if the party had only recently lost its influence, it is unlikely that he would quickly shed the need to feel as if he demonstrated loyalty to the totalitarian entity which had controlled his life for so long.

Paradoxically, though the very recent events (at the time of filming) might have encouraged the men to reflect anew, the narrative of their reflection reveals even less certitude about the wrongness of their actions than Congo. In fact, if they clearly express any sense of wrongdoing, it is not about the nature of their own actions, but about their implied victimization by the regime. Sitting together in a group, they wonder aloud why the Khmer Rouge allowed them to live, using them to torture and extract confessions, while executing others who were not much different from them. Their questions, while explicitly moral, are oriented survivor guilt, or the guilt that they had survived a murderous regime, but not guilt for their crimes.

Though there is no indication of guilt, shame, remorse, or regret, men like Congo offer a tempered acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the guards of S21 signal their emergent crisis of middle knowledge. Men like Kang Kek Lew (alias "Duch") help us see, in stark relief, the moral injury in the aforementioned former perpetrators through his own lack of moral injury. In 2012, Rithy Panh released a new film consisting of his one-on-one interviews with the prison administrator who oversaw S21. When the Khmer Rouge regime finally collapsed in the late 1990s, Duch posed as a Christian aid worker in Cambodia's forests, hiding until he was found and forced to stand trial in 2006 ("Shock for Khmer Rouge leader as his sentence is increased to life," 2012). While on trial, Duch feigned a sense of regret which international observers immediately and uniformly denounced as a disingenuous and opportunistic bid for sympathy (Cruz, 2015). Duch gave up the façade on the last day of his trial, demanding an acquittal on the grounds that had not been the "most responsible" for the regime's crimes. His claim–one of moral relativity, both refused to disavow the immorality of his

actions while simultaneously deflecting responsibility onto his superiors–a strategy used by disgraced members of militaries and political regimes the world over.

In *Duch: Master of the Forges of Hell*, the viewer finds a surprisingly diminutive and soft-spoken, yet Janus-faced man. In one moment, Duch claims he was merely an ordinary Cambodian citizen forced to serve the regime in order to survive. But as he discusses his time as head of Tuol Sleng, another version of the truth becomes apparent: He believed in the Khmer Rouge's ideology so much so that he could quote–from memory, in French and decades later–the philosophical tracts which drove his ideological alignment with the regime. "Wicked or cruel. I don't know the meaning of those words," (Dussart, 01:15:21–01:15:38), he says; he simply applied the Khmer ideology "gently but methodologically" (Dussart, 01:15:21–01:15:38). He pages through a sheaf of papers which turn out to be signed execution orders. Speaking of the dead individuals to whom these execution orders correspond, he says only, "There was an emergency. We had to exterminate them" (Dussart, 01:17:36).

Understanding himself as a fastidious leader of a key regime prison, Duch describes his resentment that his leadership failed to reward his loyalty and work ethic. For example, his memos, as he is at pains to note, found their way to the desks of regime leaders Pol Pot and Son Sen. Speaking of himself in the third-person, he claims that regime leaders carefully read his reports and made their decisions, in part, based on his suggestions. At several points during the interview, he stops to show the camera the care he took with his annotations. He wants us to understand the exhausting nature of his so-called work: Duch laments that "[Y]ear after year, I never had a moment's rest every day from morning to evening, from seven to midnight. Sometimes I wouldn't sleep for three days and three nights" (Dussart, 1:11:00). His insistence on his work ethic and unquestioning and yet unrewarded loyalty to the party recalls Hannah Arendt's observations about Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann–another man whose obsession with being the consummate bureaucrat seemed to blind him to the moral implications of his culpability in totalitarianism (Arendt, 1963). With the brief exception of his early days on trial, Duch does not register the moral inversions to which he, and the rest of Cambodia, had been subjected (and to which he had subjected his subordinates) during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. Nor does he register the more recent, and still unfolding, inversion that as attempted to return civil society to normalcy decades later. Devoid of any affective signs of discomfort, his moral inversions have not yet—and may never—translate into moral injury. This contrast allows us to better appreciate the presence of signs of moral injury where they do occur, however subtle or nascent.

Drawing the Map to Moral Injury in Lebanon
In the final of our three case studies, we turn to Lebanon. Civil war broke out in the small Mediterranean country in 1975, the third civil war to visit this country in a century. For

fifteen years (until 1990), the conflict collapsed the Lebanese state as civilian militias warred, supported by international backers eager to stake a claim in a region of the Middle East embroiled in tensions. In 1982, midway through the war, members of a right-wing Christian nationalist militia allied with the Israeli military to massacre Palestinians living in refugee camps in Beirut. The massacre was the militia's "berserker" (Shay, 1994, p. 77) response to the recent assassination of their leader and Lebanon's recently elected president, Bachir Gemayel. The militia swept into the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps where thousands of Palestinians were living, cordoned off the camps, and began a three-day massacre. Israel, bowing to domestic and international pressure, carried out a pro forma investigation of their role in the massacre. Lebanon, however, never did. The general amnesty announced by the postwar Lebanese government in 1991 all but guaranteed their continued immunity.

In the early 2000s, German filmmaker Monika Borgmann attempted to make a documentary about the perpetrators of the massacre. She recalls being routinely dissuaded by people who warned her that she would find no one willing to talk about it. She learned that the amnesty had effectively inaugurated a form of unofficial censorship which protected former warlords now in positions of political and economic power. Eventually, however, Borgmann found someone willing to talk. He was loquacious, evidencing none of the reticence she had been told to expect. By the end of that year, her interview subject had recruited four others to the film project. But not long after, news of the film reached the Lebanese government. Shortly after Borgmann began filming, her interview subjects were arrested. Upon release, they recanted their statements to Borgmann, claiming they had lied about being involved in the war and had only participated in her documentary for financial gain. They had been pressured into silence (M. Borgmann, personal communication, May 2019).

Beyond the simple reality of censorship, the initial failure of this documentary project also reflected the disorientation the former perpetrators faced as they wrestled with the new moral codes of a peacetime society. The sudden transition to peace had been occasioned by a political treaty as opposed to a decisive military victory. Moreover, the amnesty required that, in the name of peace, former fighters develop an amnesty for the past decade and a half, disavowing the political and ideological identities in whose names they had violated secular and religious injunctions against taking life. As a result, at the confluence of moral injury and the declared general amnesty, there was a blind spot in which the perpetrator remained opaque even to himself; their moral-orienting system had been inverted—twice. The men were left on their own to figure out their curious "relationship with 'time' and 'history' and 'the past'" one which left them "'stuck' in the present", leaving them with a sense of irreconcilability (Ayoub, 2017, p. 68). It is for this reason that they had been willing to talk, despite the censorship of the amnesty; they were attempting to reconcile what seemed impossible. Armed with a better

understanding of the environment in which she was operating after her project's initial failure, Borgmann tried to produce her documentary once more, this time enlisting the help of her Lebanese partner, Lokman Slim. In 2006, she completed the project that would become *Massaker*.

The men of *Massaker* are linked together by more than just their status as perpetrators. They are also connected by the format through which their moral injury is made visible: the motif of the map. At various points during their interviews, each perpetrator is given a marker and a large sheet of paper on which to draw what they remember of the multi-day massacre. The men imagine the camp in different visual terms, some using symbols to mark literal people and places, others using more abstract techniques. They work intensely—some slowly and carefully, others more quickly. Their papers become increasingly crowded, almost claustrophobic, as they add details, astonishing Borgmann (M. Borgmann, personal communication, May 2019). Though these man had set foot in the refugee camps only once in their lives, nearly two and a half decades earlier, their illustrations of the camps' layouts were as accurate as if they had visited only moments ago. The men draw their way through layers of immunity and censorship, making clear how present many of these scenes remained for them.

In one scene, we see a tightly framed close-up of a hand as it draws a large circle on a white sheet of paper with a black marker. When the circle is complete, the hand moves on to the next detail in the drawing. The camera zooms out, maintaining its focus on the paper, to reveal the owner of the hand—a man whose back is to the camera, his head covered by a handkerchief, a lit cigarette in his other hand. Carefully, he places a row of closely placed dots around the perimeter of the circle and then a second row of more widely spaced dots. His shadowy profile turns to address someone sitting just outside of the frame, likely one of the directors. His drawing corresponds to a portion of his narrative in which he describes Palestinians packed tightly together around a pit, a firing squad behind them. "This is how the massacre happened" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim, & Schweitzer, 00:01:29) he tells his off-camera interlocutor. As he utters these words, the camera's focus shifts; whereas the wide-angle shots of him and his drawing placed the image on the paper in focus, now it is he who is in focus. The effect is to powerfully shift the meaning of the word "this." The perpetrator meant that what he depicted in his drawing is "how the massacre happened" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim, & Schweitzer, 00:01:29), but the directors' focus on him shifts the referent "this" from the two-dimensional drawing to the man. Massacres, in other words, are not circles surrounded by dots, or people standing around a circle. *The actions of this man on camera*, the film wants to say, *is "how" the massacre happened.*

Like Congo, Huoy, and Poeuv, a strong psychic connection continues to tether the men in *Massaker* to the moral register governing the moment of the atrocity, producing a friction with the competing moral order of peacetime Lebanon.

The moral register of the past was dictated by the pain of Gemayel's assassination and the militia's strong sense of survivor mission. We see this clearly when one of the interviewees is asked to describe the actions that he took on the day of the massacre. Though he answers evasively, his evasion is full of meaning. He describes the emotional and psychic impact of the death of Bachir Gemayel on him and other members of the militia, firmly avowing that no other death—not even that of his mother—could have caused him the same amount of grief. "It was the saddest day of my life" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim & Schweitzer, 00:39:40) he recalls. He continues: "After a while I will be able to get over her [my mother's] death, but I have never gotten over [Gemayel's]," for when Gemayel died, "everything we had lived for evaporated. Bachir Gemayel was dead and we were, too."

The profundity of his description of his emotional state, and the reality of the massacre that followed, evidence the extent to which death had thrown him into crisis–not simply because of the perceived relationship he had to his political leader, but because he sensed the proximity of death as a threat to himself. Indeed, this man later described himself as a time-bomb. His role in the massacre was eminently illustrative of Lifton's (1967) theory of the death encounter. The militiaman struggled to comprehend two deaths–one literal, one metaphoric–and, in search of both revenge and distancing mechanisms, he sublimated his fear of death by inflicting it upon the Palestinian refugees in the camps. The only death encounter he was prepared to acknowledge was that of his leader. It had produced a rupture in his sense of identity so profound that it could not be ignored. How he converted this death into grounds for more deaths–the narrative he placed in between the two events in a curious causal link– is not one he was able to explain.

Nearly twenty-five years had passed between Gemayel's assassination and the moment of this interview in 2006. More than a decade and a half had transpired between the end of the war and his testimony. And yet, the man still speaks of his failure to recover. Indeed, he cannot even speak of the massacre itself, the question about which he was asked, without reducing it to his own relationship to death. When pushed to speak more specifically to the nature of what he did, he exhales, sips water, and wonders aloud whether he can remember any of the details. Then, he repeats the language of the orders he was given by his commanding officer, concluding matter-of-factly: "We went inside the camp and what happened, happened" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim & Schweitzer, 00:41:01). Another interviewee suggested that he and his fellow militiamen were directionless in the wake of Gemayel's assassination. But here the editors cut to a scene of another subject silently at work on his red paper, carefully drawing circles, lines, double lines, and labels. The suggestion in the juxtaposition of these moments is that the men did, in fact, know what to do and how to do it. Borgmann and Slim's (2006) intended viewers know the history of the massacre.[13] The audience knows that the history of logistical and tactical collaboration between Israel and the militia predated the war and that an operation such as the one carried out at Sabra and Chatila involved considerable planning and coordination. Yet none of the men can account for the narrative link that facilitated their "berserking" (Shay, 1994, 77). "You are asking questions I don't know the answer to" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim & Schweitzer, 00:05:53) remarked one of the men, holding a drawing of the camp in his hands. "You're asking why I did it" (Ortmans, Cattelain, Avril, Slim & Schweitzer, 00:05:53). Of the massacre they have only a middle knowledge.

In another scene, a perpetrator takes a break from the intensity of his wordless drawing to smoke and talk to the film-crew in the small, dark room alongside him. He narrates the approach to Beirut and a pre-massacre meeting between the militia's leaders and the Israeli Defense Forces. Yet what he describes is not what he has drawn; neither the militia nor the commanding officers can be found on the paper covered in lines, shapes, and increasingly cramped writing. Everything he describes or seeks to represent has become disordered. He has drawn the camp before explaining how they arrived there, and he has "illustrated" the tactical implementation of orders before acknowledging what they were for. His speech and his drawings fail to refer to each other. Only what is unspoken seems to directly address the massacre. The knowledge, the evidence, and the historical record implicit in the map are inconsequential.

As their maps become increasingly cluttered, the men become less reliant on them. Waving his marker in the direction of his completed drawing, one perpetrator describes the sounds of the camp—screaming, shrieking, crying. It is these sounds, not the roads, alleys, and buildings presumably marked on the map, that guided him through the camp. His marker has stopped moving as his memory takes over to offer a sonic orientation to the Sabra and Chatila. Despite the seriousness with which these men take the task of drawing, these illustrations will never be capable of representing the premeditated massacre of thousands of people. Instead, they are maps of their moral injury. Afraid of remembering, but unable to forget, they strike a compromise by distorting and flattening their death encounters—that of Gemayel and those of the massacre–into symbols. Though the former militiamen seek to order and organize their memories in order to present a clear narrative, the significance of their maps lies mostly in the failure of representation. What they say cannot account for what they have drawn; at no point have they explained the significance of the lines or provided a legend for the plethora of symbols that cover their paper. Tellingly, even their own locations on these maps are absent or lost somewhere in the anonymity of shapes. They do not show the "this," or the "why" of "how the massacre happened."

Conclusion

Like trauma, moral injury has been a topic of interest intimately tied to concrete political developments and agendas–in this case, the healing of American veterans

of war. The concept of moral injury may indeed have purchase in other geopolitical contexts, but the signs by which we learn to identify it need to take into consideration the climates in which former perpetrators continue to exist. The case studies provided through this paper specifically address the expression of moral injury after civil conflict and in cultures of impunity. While these cases suggest that militarized civilians in these conflicts do experience moral injury, we will not be able to recognize this if we rely upon guilt and shame as the primary indicators. For scholars of moral injury, one of the next key questions to address is whether the concept of moral injury is universal, and, if so, how it manifests across differing cultures and conditions of political violence.

Notes

[1] Litz et al. (2009), a leading scholar of moral injury and one of the first to explicitly name guilt and shame as its signs, defines guilt as a "painful and motivating cognitive and emotional experience tied to specific acts of transgression of a personal or shared moral code" (p. 699). They define shame as a negative "evaluation of the self" which can cause the morally injured to expect and then interpret all social interactions in terms of "censure and rejection," and therefore to withdraw. While moral injury has been understood in non-warfare contexts, such as law enforcement, certain corporate environments (Matthews, 2018), or physicians (Talbot & Dean, 2018), this paper will focus on the specific context of wartime atrocities or related political violence such as genocide.

[2] What this paper does not ask is whether the concept of moral injury can be considered "universal." This important question has been asked in the context of several related concepts such as psychoanalysis (Khanna 2003; Anderson et al., 2011), trauma (Buelens et al., 2014, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Fassin & Rechtmann; 2009). A study of the universality or particularity of moral injury is beyond the scope of this article.

[3] While there has been at least one attempt to assess the mental health of former combatants in the Lebanese civil war, this survey is not a psychological study nor is it designed to answer questions related to either trauma or moral injury (Umam, 2010).

[4] The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (n.d.) has adopted the following definition of moral injury in the context of war: "The key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life, and so forth. In the context of war, moral injuries may stem from direct participation in acts of combat, such as killing or harming others, or indirect acts, such as witnessing death or dying, failing to prevent immoral acts of others, or giving or receiving orders that are perceived as gross moral violations" (Maguen & Litz, n.d., n.p.).

[5] Social scientists and theologians are at the vanguard of scholarship on moral injury, yet even within a single discipline, such as psychology, there are a constellation of distinct definitions through which one must sort. Griffin (2019) offers a literature review of the major studies and definitions of moral injury.

[6] The "industrial society" to which Lifton referred in this quotation was the U.S.

[7] More recent scholarship has had to contend with the question of whether war inherently produces moral injury. "War," Peter MacLeish (2018) writes, "is a routinized and valorized social institution that entails doing things that in other circumstances would be illegal and beyond the collective pale" (p. 135). It therefore becomes its own "site of production of morality" (p. 135), he argues, determining where the lines between moral and immoral are to be drawn while refusing to challenge its own "unquestioned moral center" (p. 139). Moon (2019) argues that the military (and, I would add, paramilitary organizations) requires soldiers to assume a new identity, one socialized around a new "moral-orienting system" (p. 3). As such, the conditions for moral injury are established in the very moment the soldier (or combatant) commits to war.

[8] David Wood (2014) writes that the U.S. Navy has euphemized moral injury as "inner conflict" out of reluctance to address a topic, which "goes to the heart of military operations and the nature of war." Military leaders were initially intent on viewing moral injury in strictly religious terms: a matter of a soldier making himself right with God.

[9] Despite the distinction he himself draws between trauma and moral injury, much of the language Shay (2002) uses repurposes the language of diagnostic terms such as P.T.S.D. He writes that the body "codes" moral injury "as physical attack," leading to "physiological arousal" (p. 185) of the "autonomic nervous system and adrenaline secretion" (in the wake of an atrocity (Shay 2002, 24). In at least one instance, he appears to describe moral injury as an extension of complex P.T.S.D. in opposition to much current scholarship which understands the former as simply (and not uniformly) co-morbid with the latter (Shay, 2002, p. 150–151).

[10] Theologians write about moral injury as the co-incidence of psychological and spiritual internal conflict. For instance, Tietje (2018) calls for a two-pronged approach entailing spiritual healing for "soul wounds" caused by moral injury, and therapy for "psychological wounds" ("A Chalcedonian Conception of Trauma and Moral Injury," paragraph 6). For this demographic, expressions of guilt and shame remain the primary indicators of moral injury. Yandell (2019) glosses shame as the more harmful of the two as it constitutes not only "disunion with self" but also "disunion with God" (p. 9). As a consequence of shame, "human beings…seek cover" from others (social detachment) and from God (spiritual dissociation)

(p. 13). Nonetheless, in a 2018 survey, less than half of chaplains who responded were in agreement that guilt or shame were the primary signs of moral injury (Drescher, 2011, p. 11).

[11] While Shay (1994, 2002) uses ancient literature to parse through contemporary moral injury, Lifton's (1973) work is particularly attentive to the discursive registers that soldiers use to describe how they gave and found meaning in the task of being a professional killer. His interest in sense-making is inherently connected to narrative.

[12] Notable examples include Kem Sokha, the Cambodian parliament's former minority leader.

[13] The target audience for Borgman and Slim's workshops, exhibits, films, and written material is Lebanese. They clearly state this in their mission statement and reinforced this by publishing their products in Arabic with limited translation into English.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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