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# Feminist Geopolitics Revisited: Body Counts in Iraq\*

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Feminist geography and political geography still represent two solitudes within the discipline. While increased traffic between these different parts of the discipline points to a degree of intellectual engagement, there remains a paucity of feminist thought in political geography. This article examines recent scholarship on feminist political geography, with a view to applying its insights to the struggles to protest and end political violence. The concept of feminist geopolitics is employed and recast, both as a bridging concept between feminist and political geography and as an analytical approach that has political valence in the context of the war in Iraq. Feminist geopolitics is revisited in this article, but remains a critical analytic in relation to body counts and other casualties in war zones. **Key Words:** feminist geography, feminist geopolitics, Iraq, political geography, violence.

An average of nearly 100 Iraqi civilians were killed every day in May and June [2006].

—(CBC 2006)

This article has two discrete but closely related objectives. On the one hand, I address the question of what feminist theory and feminist geography, in particular, bring to political geography, arguing that they contribute a distinct approach to the production of geographical knowledge. On the other, I aim to sharpen and deepen one dimension of feminist political geography by revisiting a piece of my own work on feminist geopolitics and body counts in war zones. Drawing on the scholarship of feminists both within and beyond the discipline, I contend that feminist thought challenges existing conceptions of “the political” in political geography; and that feminist subjects “embody, enact and expose” paradoxes (Joan Scott in Pratt 2002, 198) that eschew disembodied, free-floating epistemologies. Together, these feminist contributions generate grounds for alternative modes of knowledge production in geography that are at once feminist and political.

In part one of this article, I explore some of the most salient contributions of feminist thinking and feminist geography in particular to political geography. My focus is geopolitics and

specifically the “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq, but includes a brief analysis of recent scholarship that traverses the divide between political geography and feminist geography. The traffic between these different parts of the discipline points to (a) increasing intellectual engagement, but (b) a notable lack of feminist geography on the radar of mainstream political geographers. The authors of one undergraduate textbook in political geography assess the relevance of feminist geography to political geography this way:

two relatively new themes have become prominent in publications devoted to or identified as political geography. One is an attempt to relate geography to changes in social theory. Much of this is a continuation of one or another of the many efforts to apply Marxist theory to geography, though with different emphases and interpretations. The other is the introduction of “gender issues” or “feminist viewpoints” into the continuing evolution of our field. *It remains to be seen whether either of these trends has enough substance and staying power to survive the inevitable assaults of reality on them.* Some of the ideas may survive in other disciplines such as sociology or political theory, but only those based on both politics and geography are likely to be incorporated into future mainstream political geography.

—(Glassner and Fahrer 2004, 8–9; emphasis added)

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Apparently, the case for feminist thought (as well as Marxist theory) in political geography has yet to be made in some academic circles. I intend to fill this gap in a partial way in the remainder of the article.

In part two, I revisit an argument that I made about “feminist geopolitics” and the uneven practices of body counts in Afghanistan in 2001 (Hyndman 2003). Written after 11 September 2001 (hereafter “9/11”) but before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, I countenanced a liberal argument that underscored the universal value of human life (and death) because I saw it as politically persuasive to the citizenry and government of a superpower state whose mantra is one of transforming so-called rogue states (see Sidaway 2003) into democratic ones.<sup>1</sup> I posited that U.S. citizens would find the death toll of Afghan civilians killed in order to roust the Taliban, a number similar to that of Americans killed during 9/11, unacceptable. Tactically, I proffered that “their” deaths would count to Americans as much as American deaths, if someone were in fact counting Afghan civilian casualties. I fully realized the theoretical critiques and shortcomings of this liberal argument and its problematic assumption that all life is valued equally, but wanted to highlight the [liberal] failure of the U.S. military as an occupying force to take on its [liberal] legal responsibility, as outlined in the Geneva Conventions, to record these fatalities. As Wendy Larner and Richa Nagar in different contexts have asked of their feminist research, “what kinds of struggles does my analysis make possible for them [research participants]?” (Larner 1995; Nagar 2002). I attempted to make possible the struggle for greater U.S. accountability in relation to civilian deaths. Counting bodies in Afghanistan has had some effect; the U.S. Congress was persuaded to pass a US\$17.5 million compensation package for victims of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the U.S. military presence and violence in Iraq have only escalated since May 2003 when President Bush stood before a banner that declared “mission accomplished.” Are body counts politically persuasive? And if not, why not?

In exploring the politics of body counts, I revisit the concept of feminist geopolitics as an analytical framing of militarized violence and death in Iraq. In an earlier paper, I argued that feminist geopolitics is an approach to interna-

tional relations that provides more accountable, embodied ways of seeing and understanding the intersection of power and space (Hyndman 2003). I made the case then and still contend that it refers to an analytic that is contingent on context, place, and time, rather than a new theory of geopolitics or a new ordering of space. Feminist geopolitical analyses are more accountable to the safety of bodies, traversing scales from the macrosecurity of states to the microsecurity of people and their homes; from the disembodied space of neorealist geopolitics to a field of live human subjects with names, families, and hometowns. The argument that counting civilian deaths “over there” as a strategy to protest and stop the deadly military approach employed in Afghanistan has proven, however, politically ineffectual. The mounting deaths of U.S. soldiers “over here”—now more than 2,500—is a more pressing concern for the U.S. government, affecting domestic support for the war in Iraq. In taking feminist geopolitics to Iraq, where tens of thousands of civilians have perished, I revisit my analysis with a view to reframing my argument and the struggles against violence there. I question whether counting bodies has not become a disembodied, abstract process, the methodology of which has been as contentious as the deaths themselves. I argue that feminist geopolitics offers more epistemologically embodied accounts of war that more effectively convey the loss and suffering of people affected by it. Specifically, feminist geopolitics challenges the state centrism of global politics, the disembodied epistemology of knowledge production, and the masculinist practices of militarizing states. In so doing, feminist geopolitics destabilizes dominant and often disembodied geopolitical discourse. People as much as states are the subjects of geopolitics. Bringing feminist thought to political geography generally and the war in Iraq specifically deepens analysis that links the two.

## **Two Solitudes: Feminist and Political Geography**

Despite important feminist forays into political geography (Kofman and Peake 1990; Staeheli 1999), feminist interventions have been relatively rare. Staeheli observes that feminist geographers have generally not been identified

as political geographers, raising the question as to whether these domains of geography are mutually exclusive. Is there evidence that the boundaries of geography's subdisciplines are being policed in exclusionary ways? Or have these geographical approaches and projects simply been separate undertakings with little overlap within geography? These and other questions are addressed in a landmark collection of geographic scholarship recently published to fill the gap between feminist and political geography (Staheli, Kofman, and Peake 2004).

Jenkins, Jones, and Dixon (2003, 58) ponder a related question, asking whether there is "a *distinct* critical edge to feminist research" in geography. That is to say, is feminist geography the same as or different from critical approaches in geography generally and in political geography specifically? Feminists, queer theorists, and scholars of racism have demonstrated that the political cannot be contained by a class-based analysis: the personal, the sexual, the cultural and the corporeal are all political too (Sparke 2004). Nor is the political solely the domain of states, their relations of power to one another, their institutions, and relations to their citizens. Feminists have long argued that the personal is the political, while eschewing the privatization of such politics in the domestic sphere. The political is constitutive (Martin 2004); that is, it "implies an approach to the political as an ongoing process in which societies are made—constituted—in and through struggle" (Staheli and Kofman 2004, 3). Feminists both inside and outside of geography have also been advocates of reconceptualizing what constitutes the big 'P' political, the proper subjects of political geography. Much "contemporary political geography describes a 'world without people' or at least a world of abstract, disembodied political subjects. . . . The ways in which knowledge is produced within political geography constitute a masculinist practice. It yields a kind of knowledge that is claimed to be universal (or at least all-encompassing) and impartial" (Staheli and Kofman 2004, 5).

Critical geopolitics, a camp within political geography, has undertaken the challenge of questioning, deconstructing, and exposing dominant political scripts that make such universal claims (Dalby 1994; Ó Tuathail 2000). It questions assumptions in a taken-for-granted world and examines the institutional modes of

producing such a world vis-à-vis writing about its geography and politics (Dalby 1991). If critical geopolitics undermines the universality of knowledge claims from the realist/international relations traditions within geopolitics, then the question remains whether feminist geography, or feminist geopolitics specifically, contributes something distinctive.

It does. Like scholars of critical geopolitics, feminist geographers have illustrated that the "global visions and grand theorizing" of political geography in the main have meant that the politics of the everyday is elided (Sharp 2004, 94). Critical geopolitics, however, has been charged with being disembodied and free-floating in its own problematic ways (Sharp 2000). While arguing against positions that are unmarked, unmediated, and transcendent, critical geopolitical writing can unwittingly become part of this category (Sparke 2000). Embodied vision, that is to say ontologically committed partial perspectives, may have the potential to subvert dominant geopolitical narratives, actions that might have concrete effects on the lives of people who are players in such events (Hyndman 2004). As Dalby (2003, 4) cautions, "recent debates under the rubric of critical geopolitics are always in danger of becoming discussions of social science method rather than engagements with politics, discussions of the relative merits of various theorists rather than critiques of the geopolitical reasoning in vogue in world politics." While reclaiming method as a key part of claims to knowledge, feminist thinking in political geography aims to rectify disembodied knowledge production and promote epistemologically embodied ways of knowing.

As Richa Nagar (2002, 182) notes, "reflexivity in US academic writing has mainly focused on examining the identities of the individual researcher rather than on the ways in which those identities intersect with institutional, geopolitical and material aspects of their positionality." Such an individualistic approach is problematic because it fails to sort the differences among ethical, ontological, and material aspects of positionality. Dominant modes of representing the war in Iraq in North America are shaped by broader processes linked to colonialism (and therefore Orientalism), oil production, and other political processes that operate at multiple scales.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows I employ feminist reflexivity that approximates a critique of my own analysis of body counts (Hyndman 2003). In that first article, I employed the concept of feminist geopolitics to argue that only by counting the deaths of innocent civilians on both sides of violence (Afghans as well as Americans) and protesting all of these deaths will such killing be stopped. In the context of Iraq, I revisit this position. I recognize that the value of counting bodies in this war is not stable over time or across space, but the common practices of reporting casualties have become so normalized that they at once obscure and reproduce the workings of geopolitical power that frame these numbers. The identities of and relationships to reported deaths and images of injured civilians have everything to do with the way we respond to the war or crisis at hand (Massey 2004). I advocate more relational ways of representing Iraqi casualties, by linking Iraqis to North Americans in ways that go beyond merely counting deaths and injuries. Counting bodies is important, but it does not *account* for the remarkable destruction of lives and livelihoods occurring in Iraq today.

### The Two Wars: From Afghanistan to Iraq

A number is important not only to quantify the cost of war, but as a reminder of those whose dreams will never be realized in a free and democratic Iraq.

—(Ruzicka 2005)

The dead of Iraq—as they have from the beginning of our illegal invasion—were simply written out of the script. Officially they do not exist.

—(Fisk 2005)

The “fatality metrics” of war, the body counts of soldiers and civilians killed in violent conflict, represent a geopolitics of war in themselves. The quotations above capture, in the first case, the efforts of an American activist who tried to insert the body count into the geopolitical script of a “free and democratic Iraq,” and in the second, the observations of a British journalist critical of the invasion of Iraq, lamenting the invisible, mounting deaths of Iraqis that peaked in July 2005. The deaths of militarized soldiers are officially counted, described, and remem-

bered by the armies that send them in to fight and the families they leave behind; the deaths of civilians are not. Casualties might be thought of as masculinized (soldier) and feminized (civilian) sides of the body count ledger amassed by both official and unofficial sources. Although counting is an important device for remembering, it also flawed in the way it transforms unnamed dead people into abstract figures that obfuscate the political meanings of the violence and its social and political consequences.

Counting bodies does not sufficiently account for the remarkable destruction of lives and livelihoods occurring in Iraq. No metric or measure of trauma and violence should dominate the meanings of suffering and loss. Global media do provide us with overwhelming information about the scope and number of atrocities occurring across the world, making their meaning and scope difficult to grasp. “There is too much to see, and there appears to be too much to do anything about. Thus, our epoch’s dominating sense that complex problems can be neither understood nor fixed works with the massive globalization of images of suffering to produce moral fatigue, exhaustion or empathy, and political despair” (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997, 9). Nonetheless, what we see or read is partial in two senses: it is a selective and always incomplete representation of the crisis at hand, and it has been fashioned in particular ways that are at once institutionalized and convey dominant kinds of meaning (Shapiro 1997). “Vision is always a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices,” so “an optics is a politics of position” (Haraway 1991, 192, 193). These partial representations shape our responses, or not, to the geopolitics of war and the suffering at hand. “Much of routinized misery is invisible; much that is made visible is not ordinary or routine” (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997, xiii). *How* violent conflict and death is represented in the context of war is at least as important as *how much* destruction and death wreaks havoc on a society.

The more difficult question is how to produce *responsible* relational representations of war that convey meanings of loss, pain, and destruction without further fuelling conflict. How does one represent the futility and tragedy of civilian death without promoting vengeance? More important, which impressions and understandings

of war actually shape public opinion and government actions, so that struggles to end such violence may be successful? In revisiting feminist geopolitics in relation to body counts, I argue for analyses that contextualize the effects of violence by connecting the lives and deaths of victims counted during war to those of the audience that consumes that information. Accountability, I contend now as then, is predicated on embodied epistemologies and visibility, but fatality metrics fail to embody the casualties of war. Feminist geopolitics is about putting together the quiet, even silenced, narratives of violence and loss that do the work of taking apart dominant geopolitical scripts of “us” and “them.” Although the deconstruction of such scripts is vital, feminist geopolitics aims to recover stories and voices that potentially recast the terms of war on new ground.

In my earlier work on body counts during the “war on terror” in Afghanistan, I argued that the visibility, or lack thereof, of civilian deaths contributes to a gendered geopolitics that values (masculinized) U.S. lives over (feminized) Afghan ones. I illustrated how, after 9/11, short biographies of hundreds of the people killed in the World Trade Center and elsewhere appeared in *The New York Times*. The human face of these horrific acts of violence in the United States was everywhere apparent. A long time passed, however, before the same paper began to publish photos of civilians who had lost family members to the bombings in Afghanistan, and to cover controversial statistics about how many civilians had been killed in that country by U.S. military planes equipped with smart and not-so-smart bombs. Silence around the equally posterous deaths of a people already ravaged by war and starvation was, I argued, (geo)politically problematic. Public silence about the death or suffering of innocents in war is a form of political appropriation. The death ledgers, if one can call them that, were highly gendered lists of us and them, named and not, Americans and Afghans, soldiers and civilians. The tragedies at both of ends of this violence were very similar in terms of lives lost, but the patriotic values placed on them and their geopolitical value were highly disparate.

One obvious critique of this position is that all lives are not equally valued, as the liberal covenant would suggest. By forging this chain of equivalence I was arguing for an accountability

to the very logic and principles that authorized military force in Afghanistan, namely that of the United Nations Charter and its Security Council resolution. Another critique of liberal logic is that it often authorizes violence in the name of national interests that are part and parcel of liberal modernity. As Talal Asad (1997, 285) points out, “the modern dedication to eliminating pain and suffering often conflicts with the other commitments and values: the right of individuals to choose and the duty of the state to maintain its interests.” Nonetheless, body counts of the invisible, feminized other, namely Afghan civilians, bring some visibility to the loss and suffering in the context of American civilian deaths and an awareness of the damage that that war on terror has wreaked. I do not, however, subscribe to the idea that subjective, specific experiences of death can be objectively compared. A utilitarian calculus of death and loss is precisely what I aim to undermine as the dominant geopolitical discourse.

In the context of Iraq and recent debates about the legitimacy of various civilian body counts, the numerical calibration of loss and suffering is making us (North Americans consuming the war through the media) more, rather than less, complicit in the war. Counting practices have even been used to support the invasion of Iraq: Saddam Hussein killed some 280,000 Iraqis during his rule, so the loss of a portion of that number is justified in the eyes of those comparing death tallies in a realist framework (Human Rights Watch cited in *The Economist* 2004b).<sup>3</sup> The public is told that the death of some Iraqis, whether military personnel trained by the occupying forces, or civilians, is inevitable, a military necessity, collateral damage, or the price to be paid for freedom and democracy. Why do newspaper readers and television watchers know the officially documented names and exact number of U.S. and coalition soldiers that have been killed, but not the number of Iraqis—civilians, armed forces, and insurgents—who have died?

The antiwar argument and its attendant liberal politics are implicit in work of Iraq Body Count (2006; hereafter IBC), a nonprofit initiative to verify reported deaths in Iraq due to the violence of the occupation and to keep a record of Iraqi deaths. IBC relies on secondary sources from reputable media who use mortality stats, health ministry numbers, and police

reports; it is run by twenty volunteers from the United States and Britain. The site cites General Tommy Franks of the U.S. Central Command who says, “We don’t do body counts,” and so IBC does. It asks visitors to add webcounters to their personal computers so that they too can count the daily deaths in Iraq. The IBC site points out that in “the current occupation phase this database includes all deaths which the Occupying Authority has a binding responsibility to prevent under the Geneva Conventions and Hague Regulations. This includes civilian deaths resulting from the breakdown in law and order, and deaths due to inadequate health care or sanitation” (IBC 2006).<sup>4</sup>

IBC maintains that “Civilian casualties are the most unacceptable consequence of all wars. Each civilian death is a tragedy and should never be regarded as the ‘cost’ of achieving our countries’ war aims, because it is not we who are paying this price” (IBC 2006).<sup>5</sup> Like the liberal logic of intervention in Afghanistan, IBC enlists international law and a UN approach to human security to justify its actions. It openly states that its audience is the American and British publics and governments (BBC 2005).

Methods of counting bodies have never meant so much. I digress briefly to discuss the recent spat about *how* body counts have been conducted in Iraq. Mortality statistics, methods, and academic activism were widely covered in the media when with the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, published a pre-U.S.-election study that suggested the number of Iraqis who have died since the U.S. invasion is likely about 98,000, with more than 60,000 directly attributable to violence in Iraq (Roberts et al. 2004; *The Economist* 2004a).<sup>6</sup> The study found that the relative risk of death from any cause was 2.5 times higher for Iraqi civilians after the 2003 invasion than in the preceding fifteen months, a risk that drops to 1.5 times higher if data from the city of Fallujah are removed. These figures are exponentially greater than reports by the IBC and others.

The release of this paper on 29 October 2004, earlier than the journal’s normal publication date, suggests that “academic activism” was operating at two levels: among editors and authors. The “respectability” of *The Lancet* made a difference in how these alarming numbers were consumed. A spokesman for Tony Blair argued that the study appeared to be based on an

extrapolation technique rather than a detailed body count; the mainstream British press noted that the count was cautious: “While doubts have been cast over some of the report’s findings. . . . If anything, researchers appear to have erred on the side of caution, opting to omit all data from Fallujah, where the mortality rates were significantly higher” (Lister 2004). British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said on BBC radio, “This is a very high estimate, indeed. Because it’s *The Lancet*, it is obviously something we have to look at in a very serious way” (Straw 2004). *The Lancet* produces knowledge of a different valence. By the end of October 2004, civilian death toll estimates included the following: 14,000 to 16,000 (IBC 2006); 10,000 to 27,000 (Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank); 10,000 (the U.K. foreign secretary; Straw 2004); 37,000 (People’s Kifah); 100,000 (*The Lancet*).

Throughout 2005, new monthly death toll records were set. By mid-June more than 1,000 Iraqis had been killed in the previous two months by 160 suicide bombers. July 2005 was the bloodiest month in Baghdad’s modern history according to mortuary statistics kept by the city (Fisk 2005). During a single weekend, 15–18 July, at least fifteen suicide bombers killed 156 people, mostly civilians. During the week of 18–24 July, 74 civilians were killed, considerably more than were killed in the London Underground bombings that same month, though less than the number of Indian commuters killed by bombings in Mumbai in July 2006. By July 2006, civilian deaths in Iraq ranged from 39,070 to 43,520 according to the IBC. These fatality metrics provide disparate grids of civilian deaths, but the political and social meaning of these lost lives is effaced by the numbers. Comparative counting misses the point.

I argue then for a more relational accounting that draws on feminist practice, one that protests the silent, nameless death counts in Iraq and the United States. On 15 October 2005, *The New York Times* (2005) reported that 1,929 U.S. soldiers had been killed in Iraq, confirming the death of Cpl. John Stalvey the day before. This (regular) report was interesting precisely because of the newspaper’s front page story: that most of the Louisiana victims of Hurricane Katrina had yet to be named weeks after the disaster occurred. “The lack of information has robbed the death toll . . . of a human face” (Dewan 2005, A20). U.S. Government

interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, or lack thereof in the case of New Orleans, represent different missions, objectives, and disasters, but a chain of equivalence can be forged in terms of accounting for death: just as the mostly poor, people of color killed by Hurricane Katrina deserve to be named and remembered, so too do those in Iraq and Afghanistan, whether they are soldiers or civilians. Fatality metrics efface fatality meanings.

When President Bush stood in front of a banner proclaiming “mission accomplished” in May 2003 only 7 percent of the 5 October 2005 number had been killed. In 1993, it took the death of just eighteen U.S. Rangers in Somalia during an intense gunfight to precipitate the withdrawal of U.S. peacekeepers from that multilateral humanitarian mission; hasten the signing of Presidential Directive No. 25 stating that the United States will not send troops overseas to locations that do not present a direct threat to its national security; and prevent U.S. intervention in Rwanda in 1994 during the genocide that led to death for almost one million.

The multiple sites hosting meticulous records, biographies, photos, and circumstances of death for U.S. and coalition soldiers are not of central concern to my argument, except to note their authors’ assiduous efforts to include all possible details and stories of individuals killed.<sup>7</sup> Geopolitically, the question of who is counted is related to the questions of “who counts?” and “who cares?” The fatality metrics of body counts is clearly lopsided in the context of Iraq; victimhood is commodified and patriotism publicized for soldiers making “the ultimate sacrifice,” while Iraqi deaths are framed as “the price that must be paid” for introducing “freedom and justice.”

## The Metric Matters More Than the Madness

*How many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.*

—Bob Dylan, 1963

Between anonymous body counts and (mostly) nameless other casualties, connections between here and there, us and them are largely absent from the media consumed in the West. The reported murder in Iraq of Margaret Hassan, director of the international nongovernmental aid agency, CARE, is an important exception. Her death was a *story* because she was “one of them” and “one of us.” Irish-born with British and Iraqi citizenship, she had lived in Baghdad for thirty years with her Iraqi-born husband. Ms. Hassan came out against the U.S. invasion of Iraq; she had served the needs of Iraqis through her aid work for a dozen years before she was kidnapped and murdered (the killing is especially enigmatic given that both Al Qaeda and many Iraqis had called for her release). Her story affected many who watched the war and its toll, largely because it was told. Most are not. How can media coverage of violence render its victims protagonists in the tales told about war? When violence or disaster strikes, reporters invariably seek out the number of fatalities among their nationals as news of local interest. This is a parochial strategy perhaps, but one that links tragedy over there to life over here.

Ó Tuathail [aka Gerard Toal] (1996) assesses the journalism of Maggie O’Kane, an Irish journalist whose visceral dispatches from the frontlines of the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina represent a kind of feminist geopolitics at work. O’Kane’s journalism is politically and personally engaged in its representation of conflict. As Ó Tuathail writes, her work offers a “way of seeing that disturbs the enframing of Bosnia in Western geopolitical discourse as a place beyond our universe of moral responsibility” (Ó Tuathail 1996, 171). “I propose the notion of an ‘anti-geopolitical eye’ not as a distinct alternative way of seeing Bosnia that transcends the geopolitical . . . [but] an eye that . . . persistently transgresses, unravels and exceeds the frameworks of scripting Bosnia in Western geopolitical discourse” (Ó Tuathail 1996, 173).

Ó Tuathail describes O’Kane’s work as suppressing a Western voice-of-god geopolitical script by rendering people, not states, its protagonists. Like stories of Margaret Hassan’s kidnapping and eventual death, O’Kane’s reports are politically engaging in relation to her audience with whom she “establishes a moral proximity” (Ó Tuathail 1996, 175). In so doing, she inserts her reader into the everyday realities of

people affected by violent conflict. She attempted to invoke political change through these stories and through more obvious political tactics—such as an open letter to John Major, then Prime Minister of Britain—that built on these narratives of everyday people affected by war (Ó Tuathail 1996).

Feminist geopolitics in the context of violent conflict narratives renders civilian people as embodied political subjects; it forges a space for the telling of their stories, not just those of states. In so doing, feminist geopolitics destabilizes dominant and often disembodied geopolitical discourse.

### **Bridging Us and Them**

In the shadow of torture in Abu Ghraib prison, Derek Gregory (2004b, 323) writes that there “has never been a greater need to untwist the separations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ than the present moment of danger.” Also commenting on the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, Jasbir Puar argues that such violence is not an exception or an extension of imperialist occupation. “Rather, the focus on purported homosexual acts obscures other forms of gendered violence and serves a broader racist and sexist, as well as homophobic, agenda” (Puar 2004, 523). She too is concerned with the Orientalist “othering” processes that are part and parcel of the war on and in Iraq. The representation of deaths, ours and theirs, takes on crucial importance in this volatile context of the war on terror. Gregory’s most recent book, *The Colonial Present* (2004a), demonstrates a remarkable shift in what it means to be critical in one’s analysis. From social theorist to political storyteller, Gregory’s take on the war on terror since 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq is, like O’Kane’s, engaged, outraged, and visceral. Political geography generally and geopolitics specifically stand to benefit from such anti-Orientalist and feminist thought. If political geographers are serious about understanding the twisted confluence of militarized masculinities, femininities, sexual identities, and casualties in these politicized sites of torture and humiliation during war, then more rather than less conversation across the gap between feminist and political geography is needed. Feminist geopolitics, as an attempt to draw on the strengths of both, represents one way forward.

Does the threat of terror, rehearsed incessantly by the Bush and Blair administrations, trump efforts to reduce violence and death among civilian populations? In Afghanistan, the answer is yes. The death of innocents has been couched as an unavoidable consequence of the war on terror. Although numbers are incomplete, almost as many civilians have died in the effort to eliminate the Taliban and establish a new government as those who died from the attacks of 9/11. In Iraq, a war unrelated to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda (not to mention weapons of mass destruction), the same appeared to be true *until* the death toll of U.S. soldiers began to mount. The repatriation of soldiers’ bodies to the United States is a barometer of public opinion regarding the war, one that shows declining support for U.S. involvement in Iraq and for the president who authorized it. The U.S. government efforts to hide the dead bodies of repatriated soldiers were unsuccessful, and this exposure to death has had devastating consequences for the Bush administration. By August 2005 most Americans believed that the war in Iraq was a mistake. Polls showed that 59 percent did not think the war was worth the loss of American lives, and 55 percent disliked the way Mr. Bush was handling it. “Opinions differed by party—79 percent of Republicans thought the president was doing just fine. But this and other polls show a perception of failure that rises with the body count” (*The Economist* 2005, 24). By May 2006, U.S. public support for the war and for Mr. Bush had plummeted to well below 40 percent.

During the summer of 2005, Cindy Sheehan—mother of Casey, a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq in April 2004—began camping outside President Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, to protest the war. She attracted a large following of fellow campers during her time in Crawford, repeatedly raising the question of why U.S. soldiers should be dying in Iraq. Mr. Bush refused to meet with Ms. Sheehan during her protest, instead citing the example set by “patriotic,” pro-war mother and wife, Tammy Pruett, whose husband and five sons had all served in Iraq, though none had been killed. The families of soldiers killed in Iraq lined up on one side or the other of this debate, leaving the question of whether the war in Iraq warranted such deaths an open one. This fascinating deployment of mothers on the “front” is not new, except



perhaps in North America. Mothers' fronts have long been used to mobilize public opinion, lobby governments, and incite the withdrawal of troops from combat zones of political contention (Enloe 1993; Hyndman and de Alwis 2003). Mothers stand in for their dead sons, ostensibly speaking *for* these bodies as people whose lives are not taken seriously by the state that deploys or destroys them.

### **Concluding Words on Concluding War**

In both Iraq and Afghanistan our deaths appear to matter much more than their deaths.<sup>8</sup> The stakes are representational and political. "The world's most powerful military today is led by a cabal of restless nationalists immersed in an anti-intellectual culture of affect and aggressive militarism" (Ó Tuathail 2003, 857). Ó Tuathail outlines William Connelly's argument that human thought is not merely representational but also "enactive," that it is made possible by a level constituted through encounters and negotiations with the world: "The affective tsunami unleashed by the terrorist attacks of 2001 is a broad and deep one that has set down a powerful somatic marker for most Americans" (Ó Tuathail 2003, 859). Another tsunami of dead U.S. soldiers appears to be enacting greater wariness of the war in Iraq, a war Americans now believe has little to do with the attacks of 9/11.

When our losses are mourned and broadcast, the deaths are more fully registered and the violence of the war questioned. These named bodies in the context of Iraq are generally not civilians but soldiers. Californian Maria Ruzicka (2005), in her last dispatch from Iraq, wrote that

Recently, I obtained statistics on civilian casualties from a high-ranking U.S. military officer. . . . A good place to search for Iraqi civilian death counts is the Iraqi Assistance Center in Baghdad and the General Information Centers set up by the U.S. military across Iraq. Iraqis who have been harmed by Americans have the right to file claims for compensation at these locations. . . . These statistics demonstrate that the U.S. military does track civilian casualties.

Ruzicka was a tireless activist who helped push the bill for the US\$17.5 million compensation package through the U.S. Congress for Afghan and Iraqi victims of the war (MacKinnon 2005).

She and her driver were killed in April 2005, driving to Baghdad airport. Did her body counts have an impact on the war itself? Certainly she paid a high price for her convictions, though she lived long enough to see some compensation for the families of civilians killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Her efforts to narrate the stories of families as embodied political subjects, even victims, established the "moral proximity" O'Kane produced, and moved the United States to "do something." Ruzicka's efforts were an expression of feminist geopolitics to the extent that they destabilized dominant geopolitical discourse by peopling it and by mobilizing the United States that invaded Iraq in the name of national security to provide some material security for the injured civilians and the families of those killed in that very invasion. Like Margaret Hassan, who was both like us and like them, and Maggie O'Kane who rendered "their" pain and suffering our own during another war, Maria Ruzicka attempted to invoke proximity and familiarity. She did so by documenting the stories and losses of those affected by the war in Iraq to lobby the U.S. government and inform the North American public. Critical race commentators such as Stuart Hall remind us that "concrete political engagement does not translate into an anti-theoretical stance," but rather widens the notion of what constitutes theory.

If you ask me what is the object of my work, the object of the work is to always reproduce the concrete in thought—not to generate another good theory, but to give a better-theorized account of concrete historical reality. This is not an anti-theoretical stance. I need theory in order to do this. But the goal is to understand the situation you started out with better than before.

—(Stuart Hall, quoted in Nagar 2002, 184)

Part of this project to bridge feminist and political geography, then, is to challenge the concepts, tools, and theories of political geography in ways that "democratize knowledge production through recognition of the importance of situated knowledge and through critical engagement between scholarship and the world in which we live and work" (Staeheli and Kofman 2004, 5). Feminist geopolitics challenges state-centric dominant geopolitical narratives that reduce dead bodies to fatality metrics by establishing moral proximity between those killed and those watching, and grounding disembod-

ied epistemologies in the suffering and survival of players in the war, making them political subjects alongside states and armies.

This article has revisited the strategic feminist geopolitics and normative liberal political position invoked in my earlier work on the war in Afghanistan in light of the war in Iraq. In the earlier piece, I discuss Michael Shapiro's (1997) distinction between strategic and ethnographic perspectives of mapping cultures of war. Strategic perspectives deepen identity attachments and formal boundaries by treating them as real, whereas ethnographic approaches aim to unsettle such taken-for-granted attachments by questioning the boundary-making narratives through which they are shaped. In trying to invoke political change according to the logic of its makers rather than critically engaging the terms of its struggle, I took a calculated risk that the former would be politically more effective than the latter.

From strategic to ethnographic, my position has shifted. This article illustrates that embodied epistemologies provide alternative ways to frame war. The question of who is counted and who counts as subjects in this landscape of political violence points to a feminist geopolitics that may be more successful at disrupting the dominant geopolitical script of the war on terror in Iraq and elsewhere. Feminist geopolitics builds on the strengths of critical geopolitics, and in so doing recasts political possibilities by identifying fissures in dominant geopolitical scripts. But it goes further: it resuscitates the narratives of those affected by violent conflict, and recasts the subject of geopolitics as the fate of people, not simply as a struggle between states over oil and weapons of mass destruction. In very different ways Margaret Hassan and Maria Ruzicka embodied hope and prospects for change in Iraq. They defied simplistic binaries of us and them, here and there, but they also paid for such struggles with their lives. Their work destabilizes dominant geopolitical scripts and generates more epistemologically embodied ways of seeing. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> By liberal, I refer to the model of rights derived from seventeenth-century political thought that focuses on the rights accorded to individuals as well as the

obligations individuals owe society and the state (Kofman 2003). Critics of liberalism question the scale at which rights are borne (i.e., that of the individual), and highlight group or communal rights (Isin and Wood 1999) or deconstruct political community as pre-given (Mouffe 1992).

<sup>2</sup> A more explicitly feminist geopolitical analysis of the torture, humiliation, and feminization of male prisoners of war by U.S. soldiers and private contractors in Abu Ghraib prison remains to be done (for a start, see Gregory 2004b).

<sup>3</sup> This line of argument might be refuted by questioning the authority to employ violence: Hussein mercilessly killed many Iraqis through his state apparatus, but the United States illegally (under international law) invaded another country and is performing the same unacceptable, fatal behavior without the authority of the state behind it.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the project is an extension of a similar effort in Afghanistan, led by Professor Marc Herold who has produced the most comprehensive record of civilian deaths in the war there from October 2001 to the present. The Iraq Body Count is a nonprofit organization and database, available at <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/> (last accessed October 2006).

<sup>5</sup> The Iraq Body Count project aims to promote public understanding, engagement, and support for the human dimension in wars by providing a reliable and up-to-date documentation of civilian casualties in the event of a U.S.-led war in 2003 in the country. The duty of recorder falls particularly heavily on the ordinary citizens of those states whose military forces cause the deaths. In the current crisis, this responsibility must be borne predominantly by citizens of the United States and the United Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> The methods used to approximate this death toll are based on public health research techniques in developing countries where census data are often unavailable. Dr. Les Roberts of John Hopkins University and his colleagues (2004) employed a clustering technique whereby thirty-three neighborhoods were randomly selected, then the thirty households closest to a selected point were interviewed. Households were asked about births and deaths that had occurred since 1 January 2002. Their deductions about the number of deaths caused by the war were then made by comparing the aggregate death rates before and after 18 March 2003. A large range of deaths is offered, from 8,000 to 194,000, but the central and most likely value is 98,000. Not all of these deaths are attributable directly to the violence in Iraq, but roughly 60 percent is said to be the result of the violence. Fallujah was originally selected as one of the clusters, but due to disproportionate fighting and death in that city, the researchers omitted it from their analysis. This study is noteworthy for the unusual scrutiny of academic methods employed.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://icasualties.org/oif/> for Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, but also <http://www.centcom.mil/> for the US Central Command site and <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/index.html> for CNN's coverage. The Iraq Coalition Casualty Count maintains that its site is superior to that of the U. S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida, as well as CNN's site with photos. Few of these sites are straightforward in their political message. Some are outraged at the deaths, others are informational, yet others are clearly anti-war. On 20 November 2004, the number of U.S. military deaths recorded was 1,221, as counted by the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, with several more deaths among other nationalities.

<sup>8</sup> I refer here to the deaths of U.S. and British soldiers in Iraq.

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