

for critics of the status quo looking for alternatives and then some. She is calling for something radically transformative. And so should we.

There are numerous treats throughout Stavro's book. I will conclude with one. Stavro brings her readers into the heady days of post-war France and the struggles of left-wing intellectuals, particularly the anti-Stalinist non-communist left. Stavro discusses Beauvoir's co-creation of a new political party, the roots of which started to emerge in 1946. It was called the Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire (RDR), and although short-lived (it existed only for about a year), it certainly displayed the capacity to initiate. As Stavro says, it was meant to be a "third party" between the Marxists and the status quo. The party took a stand against American triumphalism with its surety that liberal democracy would succeed, but was also wary about commitments to communism. As one member said, RDR dedicated itself to the "great democratic tradition of revolutionary socialism" (172). Co-create a new party anyone?

How Perpetual War Becomes Ordinary

Michael Richardson

Rebecca A. Adelman. *Figuring Violence: Affective Investments in Perpetual War*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019. 352 pp. \$30.00. ISBN: 9780823281688

Militarism has been finely woven into in the discursive, affective and material fabric of American life, but who are the specific figures around which militarism coalesces in everyday life? What investments are made in particular bodies and what investments are demanded of them? How do certain figures – the civilian child, the military widow – ground perpetual war in public and intimate feeling and in doing so foreclose the idea of peace?

In *Figuring Violence: Affective Investments in Perpetual War*, Rebecca A. Adelman examines the latter years of the war on terror, a time in which the extraordinary quality of perpetual war dissolves into ordinariness alongside the drawdown of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and the acceleration of lethal drone operations. Chronologically and topically, the book is an informal sequel to Adelman's earlier work, *Beyond the Checkpoint: Visual Practices of the Global War on Terror* (2014), which focused on Bush-era phenomena such as terror alert spectrums and airport security scanners. But this new book is more ambitious in scope, substance and theoretical innovation, as Adelman expands her focus from visual culture to include the broader discursive, affective and imaginary dimensions of militarism in American life.

Figuring Violence examines political subjectivity in America in the last decade of the war on terror, a time during which the name was officially dis-

carded yet war became increasingly normalized as the perpetual project of the state. As Adelman writes, it is “a book about imagination and affect in war time and the beings around whom they converge” (17). It shows how certain figures “anchor contemporary American militarism,” which Adelman defines as “the complex of feelings, beliefs, and perceptions that make war in general—and our current wars in particular—seem necessary, if not inevitable, and ultimately beneficial” (19). Her interest is in showing how affective investments in certain figures helps to legitimize perpetual war, even while excluding them from recognition as political subjects.

“Figuring” is the major conceptual contribution of the book, although it also offers important theoretical insights about how affect and mediation function across the spectrum from public to private. For Adelman, figuring is an affective and discursive process, one that takes particular bodies and transforms them into figures invested with particular meanings. She uses the term “to describe a process of imaginative construction that dwells on the suffering of its objects and entertains fantasies of its amelioration” (18). But this imaginative dwelling cuts out or marginalizes the voices of those who suffer, especially if what they have to say counters or even complicates the performative demands of militarism. As Adelman writes, “figuring proceeds under the guise of attending to another being’s value, sentience, and suffering, but ultimately engenders denial or negation of their political subjectivity” (20). For example, military children are figured as particular kinds of vulnerable yet stoic subjects by different forms of entertainment designed to ease the challenges of military. At the same time, the military child cannot engage with militarism at a political level, because doing so would complicate their crucial role within the military family and as avatars of resilience. Figuring thus always entails this double maneuver, producing the figured other as accurately known and imagined, yet never able to be addressed or accessed directly.

One of the virtues of *Figuring Violence* is its insistence on the attentive reading of affect in an array of cultural texts, tracing historical genealogies of specific, embodied contours of affect (and emotion) into the present moment. For Adelman, “affect is an exchange; an affective investment, then, arises from a desire to specify its parties and set its terms” (21). Her interest is in showing the complicated, cumulative and frequently durable ways in which particular affects are laminated onto particular bodies such that those bodies become “figures” of militarism. *Figuring Violence* understands the emergence, consolidation and circulation of affect in specific sites as bound up with both imagination, which “purports to know certain types of beings intimately, while refusing to acknowledge their complex subjectivities” (25), and mediation, which “encompasses various means of transmission and representation that enable audiences to experience and to imagine distant people, places, and phenomena” (23). Consequently, Adelman is interested in distinct and materialized occurrences of affect that shape or restrict political subjectivity, rather than in generalized autonomous intensities or forces.

In keeping with this approach, Adelman writes in conversation with a number of significant thinkers in affect studies, including Lauren Berlant, Sarah Ahmed, and Elizabeth R. Anker. Her method of close reading reflects Adelman’s critique of the tendency in affect theory towards speculation and abstraction, which she says has real risks, potentially obscuring exactly that which it claims to examine. Practicing what she preaches, Adelman’s deploy-

ment of affect as method is finely tuned and rigorously precise, both in the specific case studies offered in each chapter and in the deeply researched histories that precede them. Methodologically, as well as analytically, the book is a compelling model for affect studies scholarship.

Figuring Violence is structured around a rising intensity. The book elaborates the six distinct affects of apprehension, affection, admiration, gratitude, pity, and anger across six figurings: the civilian child, the military child, the military spouse, the wounded warrior, the detainee, the military dog. Across each figuring, Adelman argues that one of these affects drops away — such that apprehension, crucial to the figuring of the civilian child exposed to images of war, is no longer found in the figuring of the military child. This structure has an appealing symmetry to it, but is at times almost too neat: might not the liberal imaginary of the Guantanamo detainee entail apprehension as well as pity and anger? Still, this structure enables Adelman to show the relationship between foreclosures of affect and imagination and the circumscription of political subjectivities.

Adelman does this through a similar structure for each chapter: a particular moment provides an entry point into the figuring, its history is elaborated, and then a number of case studies from contemporary culture are carefully analyzed. Chapter 1 examines the civilian child asked to respond artistically to the attacks of 9/11 or shown photographs from Abu Ghraib, showing how all six affects are present but defined by apprehension for what this exposure might mean. In Chapter 2, the focus moves to the military child, for whom “affection, admiration, gratitude, pity, and anger flow on the condition that military children feel appropriately about militarization and their experiences of it” (77). Staying with the military family, Chapter 3 shows how affection drops away in the figuring of the military spouse, revealing “the seamlessness with which affective recognition and material neglect can coexist in contemporary American militarism” (103), as expressions of the nation’s admiration in Presidential proclamations brings with them the necessity of conformity to gender and sexual norms and the erasure of lived experiences. Chapter 4 considers gratitude, as well as anger and pity, in figuring those with combat trauma through calculations of cost and expressions of thanks. Turning to liberal imaginaries of justice in the war on terror, Chapter 5 dissects domestic initiatives to welcome Guantanamo detainees and the reception of their poetry and therapeutic art to show how pity denies political agency. Then, in Chapter 6, Adelman examines the imaginative figuring of dogs in war to ask why it is that the mistreatment of animals occasions an uncomplicated anger at odds with the numbed public response to human suffering. Finally, in a brief conclusion, Adelman hints at how the anger she is left with might become the foundation for an ethics that works against militarism’s figurings of depoliticized subjectivity. Such an anger would be “unconditional in its response to suffering” and “wild, loud, and vertiginously full of potential” (264).

It is a tantalizing place to leave this finely wrought, passionate book. Deft in theory, nuanced in argument and rich in detail, *Figuring Violence* is one of those rare books that feels important from the first page and it will surely earn a wider readership across the study of affect, militarism, culture and everyday life in America.