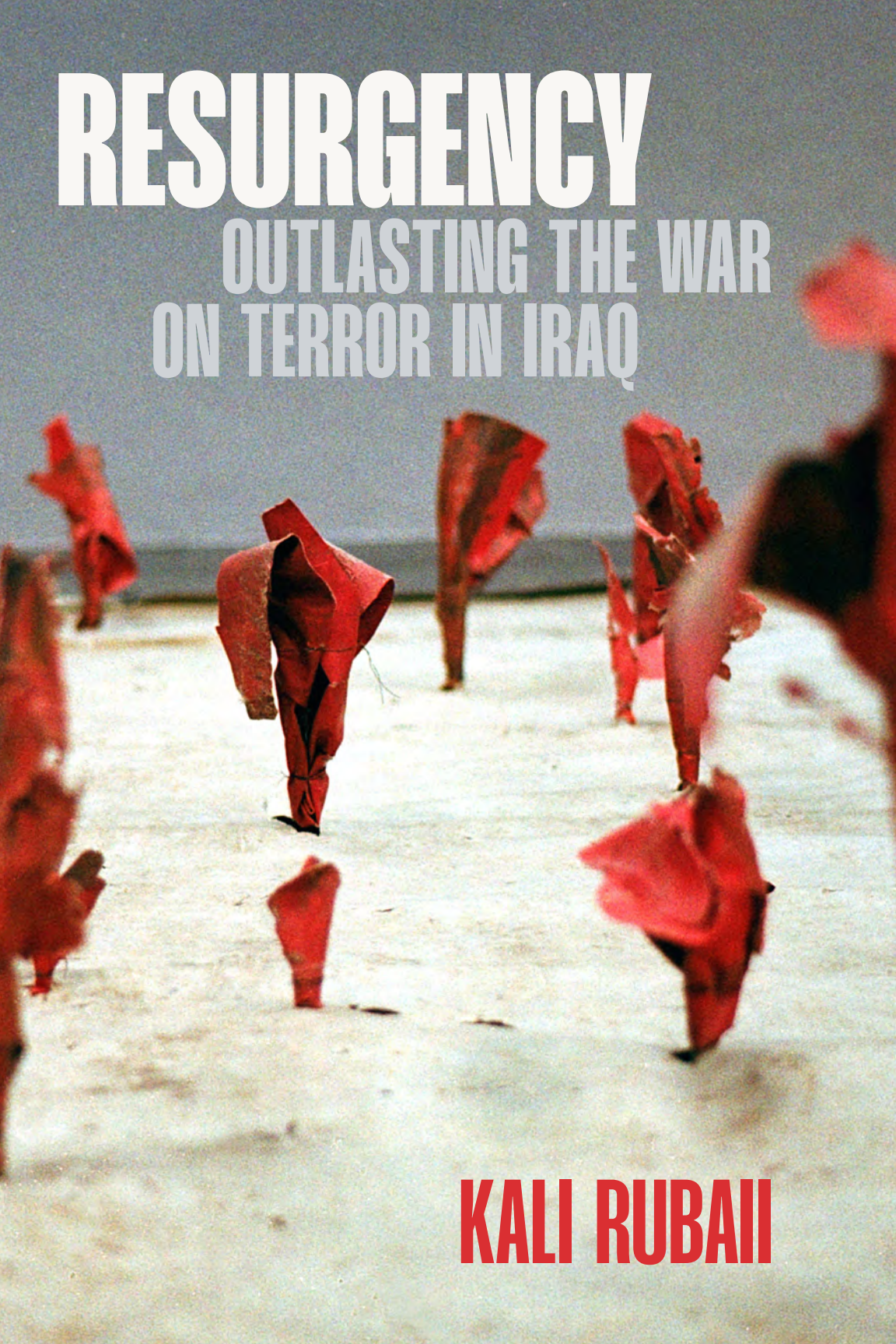
RESURGENCY

OUTLASTING THE WAR ON TERROR IN IRAQ



KALI RUBAII

RESURGENCY

GLOBAL INSECURITIES

A series edited by Catherine Besteman and Darryl Li

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OUTLASTING THE WAR ON TERROR IN IRAQ

KALI RUBAII

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM AND LONDON 2026

Printed in the United States of America on
acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Ihsan Taylor
Designed by Matthew Tauch
Typeset in Warnock Pro Regular by Westchester
Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Rubaii, Kali author
Title: Resurgency : outlasting the war on terror in
Iraq / Kali Rubaii.
Other titles: Global insecurities
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. |
Series: Global insecurities | Includes bibliographical
references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025040663 (print)
LCCN 2025040664 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478038726 paperback
ISBN 9781478033813 hardcover
ISBN 9781478062295 ebook
Subjects: LCSH: War and society—Iraq—undefined—Anbār
(Province) | Ethnology—Iraq—undefined—Anbār (Province) |
Militarism—Social aspects—Iraq—undefined—Anbār
(Province) | Political anthropology—Fieldwork—Iraq—
undefined—Anbār (Province) | Resilience (Personality trait)—
Iraq—undefined—Anbār (Province) | War and society—Iraq |
Anbār (Iraq : Province)—Social conditions—21st century |
Anbār (Iraq : Province)—Environmental conditions |
Iraq—Social conditions—21st century
Classification: LCC HN670.A925 R833 2026 (print) |
LCC HN670.A925 (ebook) | DDC 303.6/6095674—dc23/
eng/20260211
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025040663
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc
.gov/2025040664

Cover art: Rheim Alkadhi, *Harvest of Flames*, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Christiane Schmidt.

This book is dedicated to Debra Ellis, my soulmate in building refuge over and over.

You gave me the beginning of time, taught me how to live on borrowed time, and always confront the end of time with magic, beauty, and grace.

When I am with you, I feel right in the world.

DEAR ANTHROPOLOGISTS:
WHEN YOU BITE INTO MY EXPERIENCES,
MAKE SURE YOU EAT WITH YOUR HANDS.
—DUA, THE POET

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PREFACE

No page of this book was written without the presence of untimely death—deaths that took too long and deaths that were too soon. Personal losses since the book's inception are in the tens. But the shadows of death stalk differently in large numbers. The year I made final edits, US police killed more people than ever before. The United States spent more money on the military than ever before. The year 2024 witnessed the largest, longest global antiwar protest, as the world saw thousands of human beings die by bombing and starvation. In the United States and Europe, extreme and unreasonable coercive responses proved democratic governance a façade. It was a year in which my own beliefs in "people power" were shaken, in which the outlook of my interlocutors in Iraq—who have long witnessed fascist surveillance, snipers, prima facie killings, and corruption in response to their calls for representation—rang truer than ever: that things can get worse than one imagined, that outlasting such conditions may be one of the most effective ways to subvert empire, and that repair efforts are a valiant political act in the face of repeated mass atrocities.

A young resident working at Fallujah hospital texted me in 2024, on the twentieth anniversary of the 2004 US battles in the city, following up on his telling me that Fallujah was a military laboratory for current mass violence on Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian people: "Everything we witness today we have witnessed in Fallujah." Indeed, over the course of my work and research in Anbar province, I witnessed the following:

— Sieges and mass starvation.
— Hospitals and schools bombed, shelled, demolished.
— Babies dying in incubators.
— Prima facie executions.
— Whole family lines wiped out.
— Dogs eating human remains.
— Soldiers and private contractors laughing while blowing up buildings.
— Men gathered, stripped naked, and tortured.

— Soldiers pillaging homes and museums.
— Mass displacement of millions.
— Crop defoliation.
— Censorship and persecution of protesters, worldwide.
— Villainization of organized, armed resistance as "terrorism."
— An actual increase in terrorism.
— Censorship and assassination of journalists.
— Concrete walls proliferating across the landscape.
— Stocks and CEO salaries of complicit tech companies soaring.

This is not a book on comparisons or military genealogies: it is a book of people's stories about the legacy of US occupation over the past twenty years in Anbar province, Iraq. Yet, as I revise the manuscript while witnessing another onslaught of bombs detonating across the Middle East, I cannot help but hear the echoes of Anbari voices insisting: "Tell them. . . . Tell everyone." The call is not only to bear witness, but also to understand the prophecy: today is better than tomorrow will be.

Little about US imperialism in Iraq is exceptional or original. And, while Anbari people are uniquely innovative, indignant, and creative, the way people outlast imperial conditions is not exceptional either. It is this historical repetition that bears notice. It is not only the lethal shock of war that destroys worlds; there is a constructive side of military coercion that plans ahead to prevent resistance in the future. The ongoing global War on Terror does not just destroy worlds in the name of eliminating terrorist threats imagined to reside in infrastructure, bodies, and minds. It also builds a world that erodes the capacity for future resistance and that seeks to change social and material environments so that recovery is impossible.

Indigenous and Black communities have taken up counterclaims, such as: "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds." However, it seems clear from decades of policies in Iraq that imperial actors *do* know that to bury us is to plant seeds—and they actively prepare to prevent our germination and blooming. Thus, *the resurgency* may need to organize more carefully against counter-resurgent futures.

For those in Anbar province, returning home and cultivating knowledge, lives, and land across generations is a political project that resists counter-resurgency. Many of the interlocutors in this book argue that there are times for active and direct resistance, whether nonviolent

marches or armed formation. There are also times, equally important, for running away, resting, waiting, and laying low to recuperate. This is not *merely* survival. Rather, this is a project of outlasting the moment for long enough to rebuild, return, and resurge.

The resurgency can only take place because people under duress are already restoring the ground for the next struggle. Watch for the rebound.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book belongs to those who took great risk in practicing reparations ethnography with me, took me into their lives, and taught me entirely new ways of coming home. Your pseudonymity ought not undermine your intellectual contributions: thank you forever. I promise to keep coming back.

To my mentors, who became incredible colleagues and friends: Andrea Steiner, Andrew Flachs, Anna Tsing, Bassam Haddad, Carole McGranahan, Dahr Jamail, Danilyn Rutherford, Darryl Li, Don Brenneis, Dr. Firas alKubaisy, Dr. Nahidh alFalahi, Dr. Samira Alaani, Ghada alMadbouh, Ghassan Abdullah, Ian Lindsay, Jenny Kelly, Joel Beinin, Kristina Lyons, Laleh Khalili, Laura Zanotti, Lisa Rofel, Loki Pandey, Mayanthi Fernando, Michele Buzon, Miko Nincic, Nahoko Takato, Nomi Stone, Raed Jarrar, Sami Hermez, Shayma Hassouna, Sherene Seikaly, Suzana Sawyer, and Wrye Sententia.

To my collaborators in the Islah Reparations Project: Amira Sakalla, Ashleigh Zimmerman, Cameron Zachreson, Dave Inder Comar, Debra Ellis, Jay Visbal, John and Barbara Erickson, Mandy Carroll, Malihe Razazan, Marjorie Langdon, Melissa Otero, Nabil Musa, Nadya Tannous, Osama Mor, Ross Caputi, and Salman Khairalla. And to champions of transcommunal justice: Ahmed, Anand Gopal, Andrew Shaffer, the Collateral Repair Project, Chen Alon, Darrel Darling, Darrel and Sue Yeaney, David Grishaw Jones, Don Wagner, Donna Baranski-Walker, Dr. David Resneck-Sannes, Dr. Ghada, Haj Sami, Rev. Herb Schmidt, Jeremy Empey, Kaylan Geiger, Khury Petersen-Smith, Lea Park, Linda Kateeb, and Najlaa. To Stranger (Paul Burow), who taught me how to use a university library and opened up books halfway to get me focused. To the Shigematsus, my family who always welcome me home. To Jon Chaconas, who held my hand when I touched down in Baghdad for the first time and felt the full weight of diasporic return.

To my research assistants: August Trepanier, Creighton Burns, Emily Lauber, Hiwa Hassan, Nooralhuda Sami, Ovie Agezeh, Watheq Jasim, and Zeyad Monam.

To those who facilitate good deaths, bear witness to bad ones, or make their own meaningful: Baby Samira, Cynthia Yagi, Jackie Ryan, Ken Duret, Gagu Levin, Balasem, Haj Sami, Scott Kennedy, Selki, Hopper, and some very special ghosts. Your presence in my dreams vexes and comforts me. To the younger ones who were there during stages of this book: Zoe, David, Kara, Roy'ah, Tima, Melody, Iris, Althea, Azraq, Samira, and Reina. By now you have some idea of the terrible things we bequeath to you. I am so sorry.

To the petals and leaves that saved my life twice, because it turns out that, more often than not, people with guns also like finding flowers in passbooks.

And to my mom, who always chooses to pay the high price for standing on the right side of history, and who has afforded me indefatigable companionship in manifesting a life otherwise. She always transforms daunting prospects into adventures. For example, her response to my falling in love with Bendy, a little street cat in Amman, was "Let's get this cat home!" She proceeded to research every airline, border crossing, and vaccine requirement for such an endeavor. It was not the first or last time our lives would center around flea-shampooing an animal in a hotel bathtub at midnight. Her gritty alliance, ability to make magic, and love of living creatures are the stuff of worldmaking love.

It is only by the grace of wiser people that I have come to say what I mean. I thank Duke University Press editors Darryl Li, Catherine Besteman, and Elizabeth Ault, and four anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback. Thank you to Steven Hiatt, Heath Sledge, Ihsan Taylor, Philip Thomas, and Debra Ellis for timely, meaningful edits; to Sheehan Fisher for support with image files and all things technical; and to Ian Lindsay and Ovie Agezeh for making the maps. At the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) book workshop and the Purdue "Engage" workshop, I received generous feedback from Bassam Haddad, Carole McGranahan, Eleana Kim, Marc Lynch, Omar Dewaschi, and Zoe Wool. Responsive engagement from scholars whose own books and articles taught me—and who were generous enough to reply to emails from a graduate student reaching out—include that of the aforementioned, and Laleh Khalili, Joel Beinin, Don Brenneis, Stephen Graham, Lila Abu-Lughod, Eyal Weizman, and Yael Navaro.

I mourn all the subtle things I trampled over to build a written path, in English no less. I am grateful to Nomi Stone, Carole McGranahan, and Anna Tsing (who suggested about writing: "Try the experiment and see

what happens") for insisting on the play and creativity that makes room for those trampled things, even if sometimes it just means poking holes in a shoebox so they can breathe from inside. I am grateful to those institutional champions who supported me through, with, and against institutions to protect that creativity from suffocating hegemony and algorithmic paradigms: Brenda Gunion, Dada Docot, Danilyn Rutherford, Eve Spangler, Elena Benedicto, Holly Okonkwo, Laura Zanotti, Lisa Rofel, Melissa Remis, Michele Buzon, Rua Williams, Mark Griffiths, Andrew Flachs, and Scott Bugental. Institutions that supported my research include my side-job employers throughout graduate school, the Marcon Foundation that kept me housed amidst uncontrolled rental exploitation, the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity Program (NCFDD), the Purdue Anthropology Department, the Anthropology Department and the Community Studies Program at UC Santa Cruz, Birzeit University, University of Anbar, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, the Antipode Foundation, the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TAARII), the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC), the National Science Foundation, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the UC Santa Cruz Cota-Robles Fellowship Program, the UC Santa Cruz Chancellor's Teaching Fellowship Program, the UC Davis McNair Scholars Program, the UC Davis Regents Scholarship Program, and the UC Davis Integrated Studies Honors Program, where I learned how to tell stories. I am also grateful to Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting in Santa Cruz, California, and Eleventh House café in Lafayette, Indiana, not only for hosting me as a writer but also for offering bathroom access to noncustomers and taking cash payment from the underbanked.

If you wrote with me, you saw me in pain. Writing groups, workshops, and discussions with generous and trustworthy minds made this book happen: Alex Lee, Bridget Guarasci, Caterina Scaramelli, Gabi Kirk, Huma Gupta, Jeffrey Omari, Jessica Barnes, Kerem Ussakli, Lisa Rofel, Mark Griffiths, Mark Vardy, Mona Damjuli, Nida Alahmad, Nidhi Mahajan, Nirmala Erevelles, Omar Siri, Rhys Machold, Rowan Powell, Saiba Varma, Sara Farhan, Simone Popperl, Sohoon Yi, Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Tessa Farmer, and Zainab Saleh. Zahirah Suhaimi always widens the aperture of theory with unparalleled intellectual generosity. Tessa Farmer has acute ethnographic insight and durable integrity in all things. Kate McClellan makes me feel calm and smart (and is on Zoom with me as I write this). Cass Turner is an expert

detangler of messy thoughts. Cailey Hall taught me the witchcraft of reverse outlining. Jeffrey Omari came up with the idea of Friday Writing Group. Caroline Kao stretches my critical thinking and always shows up for what matters most. And Vivian Underhill: running together while talking nonstop, we solve all intellectual and personal puzzles.

And finally, thank you to the rhythm keepers. I wrote this book to five albums on loop: Emancipator's *Safe in the Steep Cliffs*, Pretty Lights' *A Color Map of the Sun*, Little People's *Mickey Mouse Operation*, 47Soul's *Shamstep*, and Lowkey's *Soundtrack to the Struggle*.

INTRODUCTION: TRANSHUMANCE

"Hearts" means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. "Minds" means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. . . . Over time, successful trusted networks grow like roots into the populace. They displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents. —US ARMY AND USMC, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE WAR ON TERROR IN IRAQ

"This mosque, the one right there, it was bombed before. During the war, the US . . . Oh, wait, no—first during 1991! And then in 2004 when the US came again. Then during ISIS . . . many times." Hameed broke into laughter, chuckling as he tried to remember all the times the mosque had been damaged, rebuilt, and then destroyed again. We were driving together, approaching the green bridge that connects the two sides of Fallujah. We passed the minaret, the bricks of which twist in an elegant pattern, with some jagged parts that show where it has been repaired. It had the patchy elegance of *kintsuji*, broken Japanese ceramics repaired with gold to highlight rather than hide the seams. Hameed's laughter grew as he added stories to the mosque's history: "Every time, they try to displace us. But we come back. We are like the trees. We always grow back." He told me this story in 2021, as we headed through Fallujah back to his home. It was good to see him again after many years apart.

.....

We first met in 2014, roughly ten years after the US occupation and what many periodize as "ISIS time."[1] I lived and traveled with Anbari farmers who, during their displacement in Iraqi Kurdistan, took great risk to visit

their trees back in Anbar during pollination and harvest seasons. When I met him in Shaqlawa, near Erbil, Hameed gestured at the devastation of his refuge environment, pointing to the gray walls of the construction site on which he worked and where he resided as an internally displaced person. His family was one of many farmers temporarily displaced by yet another battle. From 2015 until 2018, Hameed's family and his displaced neighbors worked as day laborers in cement factories owned by 77 Group, Lafarge, and Bazian Cement, which have large contracts with Iraq's construction companies, building homes, prisons, bases, and walls. For housing, these families were allowed by private investors and wealthier Kurdish families to live in partially constructed homes on the condition that they do work on the buildings. But by completing concrete construction on the dwellings, they gradually ousted themselves from their housing. Hameed's wife, Dania, spoke of the many "wasted lives" that haunted their temporary dwelling, including her own, those of the exiled dead, and her newborn child, who suffered a lethal birth anomaly that was slowly suffocating him—lives that she argued could have been otherwise were it not for repeated military violation of her homeland.[2] Hameed's time in Shaqlawa was punctuated by trips with me back to Anbar, where he sought to keep his crops alive amid ongoing battles. On the route in between refuge in Kurdistan and home in Anbar, the textures of war saturated one's senses. We drank cloudy water that tasted bad. We breathed dusty air that smelled like sulfur and sometimes like animal carcasses. We traveled through dangerous checkpoints, hearts pounding. We walked under trees and collected rocket fragments. It rarely felt clear where the sources of danger might be, or for how long, or why. For Hameed and his family, interlocking conditions of military violence and mass displacement permanently transformed their environment even as they struggled to revive it. This was not the first time they had been displaced, and they did not expect it to be their last.

For those surviving the brunt of the US-led War on Terror, military violation includes not only the initial shock of war but also the incapacitation of recovery from that shock through modes of coercion that curtail future uprisings by eroding social and physical terrains. I call this incapacitation *counter-resurgency*. Counter-resurgency includes US military practices, some that began in 2003 and have been perpetuated by policies formulated and implemented since 2005, that have permanently transformed Iraq's landscapes: segregating Sunni and Shi'a communities, imposing sieges, cutting off water supplies to crops,

deregulating extractive industries, and restructuring supply chains have all formed material conditions of ongoing coercion that pose pragmatic concerns and ethical dilemmas for Anbari farmers. These material conditions become recognizable as counter-resurgency over the long term. Returning with Hameed again, roughly twenty years since the 2003 US invasion, verified the enduring impacts of US "intervention" (including subsequent counterinsurgency efforts, the aftershocks of militia invasion by ISIS and al-Hashed, and the ongoing influence of US-drafted policies) on the land and people of Iraq. For example, on February 2, 2024, US forces bombed eighty-five sites inside Iraq using the same congressional authorization that initiated full-scale military invasion in 2003 (see Knickmeyer and Jalonick 2023).

Hameed has been displaced five times from his home in Saqlawiya, a village outside of Fallujah. He has spent a fragmented total of six years away, and yet, if you ask him where he lives, he will say he has always lived in Saqlawiya. The mosque's permanence, as well as Hameed's, is signified in part by many destructions, departures, and returns. The mosque endures, not by remaining the same but by crumbling under each occupier, each battle, and being rebuilt in between. Hameed returns to repair his home, where his family still cultivates date trees and a large garden, after each battle. Even as the metal gates on his unpaved road are bullet-pocked, they are also repainted. Repair work is costly and slow, and it requires the collaboration of plant and animal life in the project of outlasting the War on Terror: this is the stubborn effort to remain on the land beyond the scope of current violation.

Repair, in this case, is not about unidirectional recovery from a single event with the expectation of going on once things are fixed, but instead about a patchy project of "good enough for now" amid a never-ending series of violations. Just as people like Hameed return again and again to their homeland in order to stay there, or as seeds resurrect plant life on devastated farms, the material presence of the mosque Hameed points out does not lie in the specific bricks that comprise it right now, but rather in the potential of a demolished thing to be rebuilt again. Resisting destruction, displacement, and dispossession sometimes means submitting to it, outlasting it, and then resurging. I follow the lead of Anbari repairers in theorizing the material politics they live by as an ethical and political commitment to what I call resurgency.[3] These repairers do their work by being perpetual returnees: they leave home, but they always come back.[4]

What are the politics and pragmatics of living in and through the echo chambers of mass destruction? When I ask Hameed why he continues returning to and repairing his land, when it would be easier to sell it and move elsewhere, he recites this passage of the Hadith: "Even if it is the last day on earth, plant a date palm." This instruction from the Prophet Mohammed is an oft-quoted mantra for Anbari farmers surviving the devastation of warfare. Not only does it capture the importance of tending to the environment in the face of bleak prospects, but it also serves as a mundane ethical prescription for outlasting the War on Terror in Iraq. Dina Jowad, whom you will meet later in this book, staying in a construction site with her family as she seeks to conceive a child, puts it this way: "The first time someone destroys your world, rebuilding may be a decision to make without a plan. But after two or three times, it is a method, like a strategy to keep getting up again."

In response to counter-resurgency (and other forms of coercion), people are not always either resisting or failing to resist; nor are people simply adapting. Their worlds are simultaneous to and even precede coercion; thus, their actions are not situated *against* coercion but rather reach past it. People engage structures of oppression with plasticity, sometimes boycotting them, engaging them submissively or passive-aggressively, or else subversively maneuvering them. At other times, people directly confront them, sabotage them, protest them, refuse them. It would be simplistic to assume that people are consistent over time, or that their modes of political engagement can be classified in simple terms: people are strategic. Even those adamantly against the militarization of their homeland sometimes use the tools of their occupiers to get by, or want some of those tools for themselves. Rarely does one group of people, or even one individual, choose a single mode as an ideology (group X does *refusal*, group Y does *resistance*, group Z does *adaptation*).

Now that they are home again, Hameed and his family are slowly rebuilding their house and replanting. But the argument that "life goes on" is an insufficient description of what Hameed and so many others are doing. To say that "life goes on" after war is to dismiss the many deaths and damages that limit the capacity of people to recover, the kinds of "double death" that threaten to usher extinction (Rose 2012a, 2012b). Such a claim falls into the agency trap common in anthropology, which seeks to highlight human agency at the risk of redeeming catastrophe, when in fact the way life does go on is limping and full of ongoing grievance. The "life goes on" argument also presumes that life would go on

regardless of the choices people make, thus depoliticizing repair. In this book, life is *made* to go on, or it is stopped from going on, because of ethically and politically informed actions. Certainly, much more than resistance is taking place among those who survive and outlast repeated destructive violence. In fact, this book seeks to expand both the temporal and descriptive categories of what war is, and therefore also to demonstrate how outlasting truncating conditions of survival includes broader forms of response than what might most often be identifiable as resistance.[5]

This book is not an ethnographic portrait of Anbar or its people. Instead, the theories and stories put forward here are informed by the specificities of Anbar province in geopolitical history, especially in relation to US imperialism. Anbari people are famed for their refusal to accede to their various occupiers. Anbar province has long confounded its occupiers, which locals often list in this order: "the British, the Americans, al-Qaeda, ISIS, al-Hashed, and whomever comes next." During my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 (when Anbar was occupied not only by ISIS but also by an Iraqi government angered by Anbari protests in 2012), and then again in the years between 2021 and 2024 (when military control was more centralized and Anbari people complained of having been disarmed, living out the calm before another storm), it became clearer to me how Anbari forms of resurgency worked materially. Of urgency to those I was living and moving with was the parallel question of how these resurgency strategies were being crushed by various forms of subjugation.

COUNTER-RESURGENCY

In examining the reciprocal dynamic between displacement and militarized landscapes, this book works through several modes of coercion that do not graft on neatly to the temporal and spatial boundaries of military battles. It offers detailed ethnographic insight on the ways varied forms of military coercion seep into daily life by shaping lived environments. Such conditions can feel like "the last days on earth" and present people with futures to which they are disinvited while also leaving people with war-torn places that feel estranging. Following the lead of Anbari interlocutors, I approach the War on Terror not only as a political phenomenon but also as a modality that can be captured or traced materially.[6] By taking a ground-up approach, *Counter-resurgency*

TABLE I.1

COUNTERINSURGENCY	INSURGENCY
Military or political efforts to prevent organized resistance against a dominant regime; containment of the potential for revolt or armed uprising.	Organized resistance against a dominant military or political regime, often in the form of revolt or armed uprising.
COUNTER-RESURGENCY	**RESURGENCY**
Military, political, or economic efforts to incapacitate resistant recovery from the shock of warfare, disaster, sudden economic shifts, or counterinsurgent measures.	Deliberate, strategic, and resistant recovery; repair in response to unrelenting attack.

recognizes and locates the resurgent (im)possibilities that lie in the relationships between farmer and seed, bread and clay, house and culture.

This book is about how displaced farmers in Iraq struggle to outlast their occupiers by repairing war-made landscapes designed to preclude possibilities for their organized resistance, or even their survival. It explores several modes of counter-resurgency deployed by US and Coalition forces that have been adopted by Iraq's own military, and sometimes mimicked by militia groups like ISIS, and that are operationalized by corporate opportunists. These include territorialized social division; the toxification of Iraq's water, air, and soil; and the production of temporalities that preclude insurgent potential. By following how people move across war-pocked landscapes, how they seek alternative methods of fertilizing date trees and supplementing soil, how they interface with military waste like bomb fragments and dust, and how they contend and collude with invasive extractive industries, *Counter-resurgency* foregrounds the theories of people who are cultivating a framework for stubbornly outlasting the War on Terror. Their theories inform those concerned about environmental transformation, mass displacement, slow violence, slow resistance, and the possibilities therein (Nixon 2011).

Analysis of warfare against and through a civilian population is often articulated in power dyads, ones like counterinsurgency and insurgency. This book works with the conceptual framing of counter-resurgency and resurgency, derivatives of the aforementioned dyad. First, I want to define the counterinsurgency/insurgency dyad for

context. Counter*in*surgency is when militaries attempt, through propaganda, financial incentives, armed military operations, and policing practices, to prevent a civilian population from becoming part of organized, often armed resistance to the governing regime, either by joining an insurgent group or behaving in ways that have insurgent potential. Counterinsurgency has been heavily theorized by military theorists from David Galula to David Petraeus and popularized in the film *The Battle of Algiers* and the book *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. The prefix, "counter," is an alibi that rhetorically positions counterinsurgency (or counterterrorism) as if it is a defensive response to existing insurgency, but in practice counterinsurgency usually comes first. As Stephen Graham (2006) argues of Iraq, there is no insurgency without occupation: insurgency is a response to *counter*insurgency, because targeted people become insurgent people.

Insurgency, it follows, is organized resistance against a regime. It is not an identity category: it does not refer to a specific group of people (the "insurgents"), or to a specific political orientation, but to a position in relation to structures of power.[7] Insurgency, therefore, is neither noble nor sinister. Insurgency confronts a hegemonic regime (Holston 2009; Shah 2010) and is derived from a set of antiregime qualities, which can be triggered or suppressed. For example, many soldiers who worked for the Iraqi state were not insurgent in 2002. Many became insurgent when the US invasion in 2003 generated a regime change: some of those same men with those same guns headed to Fallujah to mount resistance to the new regime. Insurgency is not only a human phenomenon: plants surge up from under and within. The dead rise like grass and tickle our naked feet. Rage boils up from the mountain and sprays lava on the heads of trees. Indeed, human insurgency has nonhuman accomplices. Knowing this, counterinsurgent practices include targeting those nonhuman collaborators: defoliating Vietnam and exterminating North American buffalo are two US examples.

While counterinsurgency and insurgency are competing short-term projects, counter-resurgency is about limiting the scope of popular resistance *in the future*, often through forms of social engineering that include mass displacement, landscape transformation, and economic and social policy. I argue that what is more violating than the initial shock of damage is the incapacitation of recovery from that shock.[8] Thus, "counter-resurgency" is a term of my own making that refers to limitations on the capacity to recover.[9] We need to pay attention

to counter-resurgency because it is a form of coercion that can be overlooked even though it is perhaps the most powerful in limiting resistance. Counter-resurgency lays the groundwork for incapacitated recovery, sometimes before initial destruction is even over: it focuses on the future, on preempting insurgencies to come. In Iraq, policies to privatize the country were drafted even while active military battles were taking place in the early 2000s. Their effects are being realized now, long after. As Rachel Carson argues, in speaking to the materially traceable sources of chemotoxicity in *Silent Spring*, coercive landscaping casts "a shadow that is no less ominous because it is formless and obscure" (1962, 188). Because of such temporal lags, the effects of counter-resurgency may appear to be indirect or without a source. But there is a source, and it is obvious to those who live in the "shadow" cast by the War on Terror.

It is in the depths of counter-resurgency that the people featured in this book refute a core narration of war as having a before, middle, and aftermath. When people refer to counter-resurgency methods and effects as "worse than death," this is political speech meant to draw attention away from death and destruction as a baseline for measuring violation and toward the conditions of possibility by which people are dispossessed through counter-resurgency. Umut Yildrim notes of "combat breathing" (Fanon 1965) that even "daily pulsations" are "targeted by colonial power so as to reduce entire populations to survivors rather than resistors" (Yildrim 2024, 127). In Iraq, this colonial targeting of resurgency includes displacement, broadly; less-than-lethal violence that limits the power and meaning of people's lives and deaths; divide-and-rule tactics that erode unified resistance and limit mobility; widespread suspense and uncertainty that limit planning and future-building; desiccation that robs the land of its capacity to host and sustain lives; germicide that truncates the capacity to cultivate the next generation; and abstraction that empties refuge and rest from home spaces. The effects are delayed, visible only when the scope of analysis of military coercion extends beyond the declared operational vectors and temporal reach of war.

RESURGENCY

Because counter-resurgency practices in Iraq are mostly unmarked—in part because their impacts take place after the narrated story of war ends and in part because they are intentionally nameless—so, too,

responses to resist them are harder to see. But, if one is able to notice the pervasive ways that counter-resurgency works for and with warfare (that condition under which one's thriving is pitted against the thriving of others), then it becomes easier to see how holding memories, outlasting pressure, repairing things, and returning are all just as politically agentive as a protest, and that these projects in fact (re)build the environment for grassroots resistance.

Resisting counter-resurgency looks different from resisting other forms of coercion because people are strategic over time. When some of the farmers I met told me how they kept their heads down and stayed on their farms rather than participate in the popular protests in Fallujah in 2012, this initially struck me as a choice to avoid political action. Yet many families I worked with were proud of their Anbari reputation as resistors. As I learned about how stubbornly they were committed to remaining in place in spite of so many forms of displacement, I came to understand that theirs was a project of obstinance: actively resisting by enduring.[10] Thus, building on the anticolonial concept of *resurgence*, which can sometimes connote a natural or automatic regrowth to ensure intergenerational survival, I use the term *resurgency* to emphasize an intentional project oriented toward strategic recovery, as well as a stubborn moral and political response to unrelenting attack.[11] *Resurgency* responds to coercion by bouncing back after being knocked down but also *while* being knocked down: it includes ongoing repair amid ongoing violation.

Resurgency is not a reflex. It requires persistent, strategic, obstinant repair that refuses counter-resurgency projects by outlasting them. As scholars of resurgence have argued, its political and ethical frameworks are situated in different spatiotemporal epistemologies that tend to long outlast the scope of historical time understood by colonial regimes.[12] When you ask someone in Anbar, "How are you?" (*Keef halek*), you might get the response, "Today is better than tomorrow" (*Elyoum afdal min alghab*). The phrase, used more often during times of hardship, expresses a disposition to the future that reorients expectations in the face of bleak prospects presented by widespread conditions of warfare on a massive scale. In Iraq, resurgency is a special kind of repair in the face of likely demise, preparation not for a better life but for the next attack, and for return. Under duress, people are operating stubbornly now, with the acceptance of a future that is likely to be much worse than the present. There are many routes to

outlasting coercion: playing dead, laying low, waiting for the storm, the bear, the robbers to get bored and leave. In this book, outlasting is a form of enduring that focuses on an (often worse) horizon beyond the current structures of oppression, but without hope as a precondition for action. It offers a framework for critical analysis that acknowledges how both hope and utter despair might be misplaced, even dismissive, in moments of extreme suffering. There is a tough tomorrow to prepare for, a future that requires reparative work now for a resurgent uptick later.

The work of outlasting the War on Terror calls for endurance, or as Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) describes it, a compelled choice. With a similar theorization of survival and adaptation with regard to Lebanon's warscape, Munira Khayyat and Rabhi Shibli (2011) argue that staying alive in unlivable conditions is resistance. Unlike Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism (2011), which orients toward desired but unrealizable outcomes, *resurgency* takes place without the (false) promise of success. Instead, it is responsive to the ways counter-resurgency manipulates the temporal and spatial qualities of a people's environment. The goal, as most Anbari farmers in this book expressed it, is to stay on their land long enough—and by any means—to outlast current conditions, knowing that it will become harder and harder to do so.

But resurgency is not always about simply staying alive or coming back to life. If resurgency is a project of response, then it may not always be prudent to "bounce back" after being knocked down; sometimes staying on the ground or being buried there makes more sense. Relinquishing the "savable future" does not lead to despair necessarily, but rather to reorientations toward agency, reciprocity, vulnerability, and justice. Sometimes Islamic formulations of fate or the future being in God's hands come into play in this kind of resurgency, but not always. Some orientations to an unsavable future stimulate political impetus, but some are deeply demobilizing. This book is not an attempt to search for agency in the dark with a flashlight, or to outline an ideological framework, or to claim that all forms of resurgency are noble or effective; indeed, you will meet people for whom giving up and acquiescing is either the most reasonable path to survival or a preferred route to demise. Their theories about power and domination are no less sophisticated, politically informed, or intentionally acted upon. Sometimes resurgency means refusal, insisting on doing

things right even or in spite of pressures otherwise. But just as often it means pragmatic, instrumental choices to lose well. Through engagements with how people respond to war-induced social and ecological collapse, this book foregrounds the theories of Iraqi people (namely repairers) who are cultivating a politics of social and ecological resurgency that embraces undesirable outcomes as a core feature of outlasting the War on Terror.

WAR TRANSHUMANCE

Traditional transhumance involves coming and going seasonally—usually with livestock—in ways that deepen ties to a place, rather than reduce intimacy with it. Warfare expands these conditions to farmers and others who do not traditionally move in this way. War transhumance is not only about coming and going from places (sometimes being away from home in order to get back and repair it), but also about coming and going from historical moments (remembering being perceived as communists in order to see patterns in now being perceived as terrorists), and coming and going from particular relationships (sometimes fighting against and sometimes aligning with; sometimes protesting, sometimes acquiescing). War transhumance is a vehicle for resurgency: people dodge battles, flee to elsewhere, and then return.

If transhumance can teach us anything about counter-resurgency and resurgency, it is that there are times and places for waiting, healing, and biding time; and there are times and places for overt confrontation. For those who have known many iterations of counter-resurgent coercion, being strategic and flexible is a wise way of relating to the temporariness of all conditions—from one's own lifetime to one's current occupier. "We have been here before" and "This too shall pass" are perhaps twin iterations of temporal transhumance recognizable to US audiences, but in Iraq there are other conceptual phrases like "Today is better than tomorrow" and a reminder of "things worse than death." War transhumance, therefore, is a method, a way of understanding one's location in relation to both place and time as temporary, strategic, and oriented toward redoubling capacities for return, resurgence, and resistance.

Though much of my scholarship centers on Fallujah, this book focuses on transhumance and the ways people move to and from spaces

Map 1.1. Map of Iraq.

of refuge. In 2014–15, my fieldwork was based in Iraqi Kurdistan, with trips to and from villages in Anbar province, while between 2021 and 2024 it was based in Fallujah and surrounding villages. The idea of ethnographic transhumance emerged organically from my fieldwork, which was defined by movement: coming and going for long periods of time, over the course of decades. I also spent hours in online communications from California, Texas, and Indiana with friends and interlocutors in Fallujah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, Ramadi, Suleymania, and Erbil. These

Map 1.2. Map of towns and villages featured in the book.

hours preceded my fieldwork and continue into the present, shaping my social networks in Iraq, and throughout the diaspora of Iraqi refugees I first met and lived with in Jordan back in 2009. During my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015, I conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation in Iraqi Kurdistan, where I spent a total of eleven months living on construction sites with displaced Anbari families.[13] From there, I made several trips to rural areas surrounding Kharma and Saqlawiya,

never as far south as Fallujah. They were short, limited trips. I lived with, moved with, farmed with, and loved several families who (after becoming invested in the "American book") chose to bring me to and from their homes in Anbar province. Their transhumance was mobilized by episodes of military violence: as places became dangerous, they fled; as they became safer, they returned. Refuge seemed to be a core theme of what was unfolding: refuge, that place where one goes to wait out or recover from violence, and from whence one reemerges and returns. In 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, I saw these families again, back in their home villages or in Fallujah and Ramadi (for several one- to six-month periods). While I often stayed in their homes, I sometimes lived above a friend's pharmacy in downtown Fallujah, renting a small office space adapted with a gas stove and a bed. I call farmers' movements *war transhumance*. Rather than traditional transhumance following livestock grazing, the pattern of war defined farmers' lives and relationships with their homes.[14] In the case of war transhumance, such movements were, among other things, a defining feature of resurgency. It also defined my methodology.

The peripatetic nature of my research is the basis for ethnographic transhumance. If transhumance (*trans-*, across; *humant-*, humus, soil) is the practice of moving from one place to another in a seasonal cycle, going back and forth to cultivate land, and migrating cyclically, often over a great distance, this also captures my method of researching. Instead of staying in one place for an extended period of time, visa restrictions, conditions of war, family obligations, teaching requirements, and the nature of my theoretical questions meant that I came and went from places and groups in a rhythmic pattern. This is a form of multisited research that is as much about the practice of repetitive back-and-forth movement as it is about the multiplicity of places themselves. Transhumance captures the increasingly fluid and changeable channels of power in a world shaped by what Catherine Besteman (2020) calls militarized global apartheid. Ethnographic transhumance's back-and-forth/up and down may be necessary in order to conduct any research that critiques structural violence in the twenty-first century. Given the high degree of mobility, both forced and desired, among people worldwide, it seems almost impossible to stay in one place—or rather, to stay in one place, one must leave often.[15] In ethnographic transhumance, which is cyclical and nomadic, being absent is as important a methodological practice as being present; it allows one to avoid imposing oneself, to protect people at times when being present would pose a risk and burden to them, and

to maintain enduring relationships over a lifetime from different parts of the world. It also complicates the mandate to "study up" by studying from below the ways that movement and power mutually articulate.

This book reflects the disorienting conditions of war transhumance: the reader may find it unmooring to move back and forth, not only arriving at and departing from many different places, but also moving back and forth temporally, between different decades. While I have done my best to ensure that the reader knows where and when the narrative is located as they read, the fact is that such movement also has a disorienting affect upon the people doing transhumance. I do not want to erase entirely the feeling of not always being sure where one is, or what time period one is speaking of. It was not uncommon for my interlocutors to confuse their own sense of where and when, sometimes checking documents to help themselves remember what year or what town they were speaking about. In addition to this layer of complexity is another: this book is not always explicit about exact months or town names because, while fading, there remains some risk that identifying one's presence in a town at the same time as militia-linked activity could implicate my interlocutors in militia participation, real or assumed.[16] In sum, the "where and when" of war transhumance is simultaneously essential and impossible.

COERCIVE CONTINUITIES: ENDURING EFFECTS OF US INTERVENTIONS IN IRAQ

During popular protests in 2019, Iraqis made a unified claim against the gutting of their country by a corrupt government serving foreign interests over its citizens. People like Hameed, watching their crops die in the 2020s and seeing militias kill people in the 2010s, are not wrong to see the ties to the US occupation twenty years earlier, even if they do not know the exact policies that produced continuities resulting in their many dispossessions. The specific actors do not seem to matter much in their narration of stories past and present—the "they" displacing, dismembering, killing, and dispossessing them may change, but the project being carried out remains an imperial one that can be easily traced (in jokes sometimes) as far back as British colonization and as recently as US occupation. Toby Jones (2012) argues that in spite of various technical innovations in violence, the 2003 invasion and the War on Terror

do not represent a shift in US policy in the Middle East. Furthermore, the impact of this deeper history is not geographically bounded: the Iraqi diaspora is global and multigenerational. As Zainab Saleh (2020b) describes in sharp detail, those outside Iraq experienced complex relational shifts to "home" as changes in military policy shaped Iraqis' transhumant, (trans)national routes to and through time and place.

Military coercion shapeshifts on the landscape, sometimes taking the form of bombs and at other times taking the form of policies. The so-called postwar landscapes (a.k.a. warscapes) are related to differently by people who continue to live there (Crane 2023; Kim 2022; Korf et al. 2010; Nordstrom 1997; Ruiz-Serna 2023). Materially, the technologies of coercion also shift. But often broad terms like *war* or *conflict* are depoliticizing, implying fairness or evading responsibility: genocide is different from settler colonialism is different from military occupation is different from indirect rule is different from counterinsurgency is different from dictatorship is different from embargo. Expanding Patrick Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism to remote neocolonialism (2006), I join contemporary scholars in defining war as a coercive structure rather than an event (e.g., Khayyat and Shibli 2011), opening up the category of war beyond declared starts and stops to a series of battles. Different regimes enact different forms of violence on different people at different times. In Iraq, war includes influence and invasion by other countries like the United States and Iran, the incursion of militias like al-Qaeda and ISIS, sanctions and economic restructuring, and "aftermath" formations of war, including sectarian antagonism, environmental toxification, and mass displacement. However, working within the broader conceptual space of military coercion (*ghazu* in Arabic) is useful to seeing patterns that include more than one strategy and even more than one actor over the *longue durée*. Thus, without aiming to dilute specificities, I use the term *military coercion*, as well as the term *war*/*warfare*, to speak about durable, systematic conditions that deploy many different forms of violence. This broad view of military coercion is essential to being able to see counter-resurgency at all, because counter-resurgency is not limited to a particular field of warfare.

This book is thus based on fieldwork among people moving around inside Iraq roughly one decade and then two decades after the 2003 US invasion. The focus is on the enduring legacy of US intervention in Iraq, including how the United States fits into the collage of other

actors in recent history, including militias like ISIS or corporations like Lafarge. As I will outline, it is no accident that Iraq today is deeply impacted by the forms of military coercion implemented by the United States since (and before) 2003. In doing so, I highlight how actors and tactics change, and how people enact preferences about better and worse forms of violence, revealing that people's strategies for dealing with military coercion are as flexible as the coercion they face.

For many, the difficulty and pain of living in war conditions have never ended. Iraqis lived under British occupation and then under a dictator, prior to US occupation. Before the First Gulf War (1990–91), Iraqis had lived through the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, and Kurds had suffered the Anfal.[17] People lived through a decade of sanctions. Iraqi people are no stranger to military coercion, with generations of expertise in living through battles, sieges, dictatorship, foreign occupation, militia violence, state collapse, counterinsurgency campaigns, corrupt policing, infrastructural devastation, mass displacement, and torture. As you will read in chapter 2, older generations critically assessed US military violence in Iraq as a subpar version of British colonialism, which they remember as more organized and less destructive.

During World War I, under a League of Nations mandate, Britain seized Iraqi territory from Ottoman Turkey and governed through a Hashemite monarch beginning in 1921. Iraq saw formal independence in 1932 under the Hashemite monarchy, though Britain maintained military bases and oil rights. During this period, several revolts against British imperialism took place, and counterinsurgency responses formed two decades of various military and civilian governments. In 1958 the monarchy was overthrown and Iraq was declared a republic, after which a series of coups took place. In the 1970s, border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait, including Kuwait's rejection of an Iraqi harbor in the Shatt al-Arab delta, heightened regional tensions.

Saddam Hussein took power in 1979 and launched a counterinsurgency campaign against the Marsh Arabs and initiated the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, marked by trench warfare and chemical weapons, and backed by US military aid and intelligence. By the late 1980s, Hussein's regime conducted the brutal Anfal campaign against Kurdish separatists, deploying ethnic reorganization and chemical weapons (Talabany 2001). These tensions culminated in Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, which triggered a coalition of countries—whose economic interests were impacted by Gulf State stability—to respond with war after the UN

Security Council implemented international sanctions and condemned Iraq's military action. This became known as the Gulf War.

A decade later, sanctions imposed by the UN operated as a form of less-than-visible warfare that was just as lethal as, or even more lethal than, the previous battles (Gordon 2010; Jawaheri 2008; Walzer 2015). Malnutrition was a widespread condition of everyday life. Dr. Fadi, whom I met during his displacement in Jordan in 2009, described US bunker-busting bombs in 1991, and later UN sanctions:

> The sirens went off and the shelter filled with families, a lot of children. The Americans were bombing with a drill, it would drill down and after the explosion there were so many children's bodies. It was a massacre. . . . But it was during the sanctions when I learned the worst lesson of being a doctor: I had to watch children suffocate to death from asthma. As a young doctor, I knew how to solve this problem, but I could do nothing, because they wouldn't allow us to import inhalers. The sanctions were a war.

Under the Clinton administration, which supported sanctions, then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright asserted that it was "worth it" when asked in a *60 Minutes* interview about the half-million Iraqi children who were dying under sanctions (CBS 1996). Not only did sanctions kill, they shaped Iraq's economy in ways that also supported isolationist Iraqi independence, all of which shattered when Iraq's markets were opened and privatized by the US invasion in 2003.

In January 2003, as part of the War on Terror, the United States led a Western coalition[18] in a "shock and awe" military invasion of Iraq, under President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney (a dynastic déjà vu of characters from the First Gulf War not lost on commentators in the United States).[19] Shock is commonly understood as a kinetic event producing a rapid shift in conditions of possibility. Shock can be induced by a battle (like the US occupation of Iraq in 2003), a natural disaster (like an earthquake or flood in Puerto Rico), or a sudden political/economic change (like economic collapse in Lebanon) (Klein 2008). Military regimes refer to shock, as in "shock and awe," in this way. In this book, I also refer to shock in a second way, as an ongoing affective and material condition, the state of being in shock, which can be accompanied by detachment and disorientation (Fullilove 2004). I was reminded in medic training during fieldwork (which I describe in the interludes

of this book) that being in shock from injury, more than injuries themselves, is most dangerous to a body. This danger is caused by the body's inability to recover or recalibrate. This is why my attention is drawn to the conditions of living with/in/beyond the immediate impacts of war, when the conditions for/against recovery and resurgency are most apparent. This attention is critical particularly because, through a concerted set of policies and tactics, the 2003 US invasion was set up from the beginning to obscure its own long-term consequences.

After Saddam Hussein was deposed, a diverse and integrated Iraq saw a rise in the kinds of violence predicted by Allen Feldman's theory that the more diverse and integrated a society, the more violent its disaggregation and segregation (Feldman 1991; see also Dodge 2008 and Rubaii 2019). Minority groups like Mandaeans and Yazidi were targeted and expelled. Doctors were assassinated. One of the largest mass exoduses of human beings took place from Iraq in the wake of US occupation (Saleh 2020a; Vine et al. 2020), while a variety of military actors operated on an increasingly Balkanized landscape with complex and ranging agendas.

By 2005, the United States and the transitional government, the Coalition Provisional Authority, began relying more and more on sectarian militias to fight other sectarian militias. Some of these methods were familiar because they had been deployed by the British seeking to subdue resistance, or by Saddam Hussein in suppressing opposition. Iraq and its many "unruly" people were the subject of a new round of military theorization, particularly COIN (from Co-In, as in "counter insurgency"). As I describe in chapter 2, the War on Terror, and its related strategic forms like COIN, is an adaptation and rebranding of longstanding imperial practices to suppress popular uprisings, but it also weaponizes new technologies and frameworks. These include moral frameworks like human rights discourse, the juxtaposition of democracy against Islam, and coercive non-killing, as well as technologies like drones, internet data tracking for "culture" surveillance, and T-walls (military concrete wall segments for rapid landscape change).

The centerpiece of US counterinsurgency strategy—"Iraqization," as it was called by military planners—operated by offsetting responsibility for the outcomes of war, and by retroactively absolving the US of legal responsibility for the occupation in the first place. Iraqization was achieved by destabilizing political and security structures and rebuilding them to deflect responsibility away from the US and its allies

onto "indigenous" actors. When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1546 in 2004, it established a timeline for the withdrawal of Coalition forces and the transition of governance from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) until Iraq could hold elections. The resolution also announced a de jure end to the occupation of Iraq and granted immunity to US-led Coalition forces in Iraqi courts for launching an illegal, aggressive war. The outcome for Iraq was "sovereignty without emancipatory substance" (Harrison 2008, 243), establishing the continued presence of the US as being at the "request" of the IIG.[20] This reframed coercion as the choice or request of Iraqi actors, as if the occupation was by invitation, with consequences then being dissociated from the US initiative in launching the invasion. Additionally, Iraqization consisted of training the Iraqi Security Forces, who would assume responsibility for security in Iraq (Casey 2012, 31). This effort was headed by the US ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte; the US Drug Enforcement Administration's Steven Casteel (acting as senior advisor to Iraq's Ministry of Interior); retired Colonel James Steele, who oversaw the training of these forces; and General David Petraeus. Fighters were selected from Kurdish militias, the Iranian-based Badr Brigade, and CIA-backed secular groups such as the Iraqi National Accord, the Iraqi National Congress, and later Jaysh al-Mahdi (a.k.a. the Mahdi Army). Effectively, Iraqization not only authorized states like Iraq to act violently against their own populations in the name of peace against a greater enemy, but also authorized foreign powers like the United States to intervene indirectly. Against this backdrop of coercion, it was unsurprising that, in 2015, many Anbari people expressed to me both their intense criticism of the United States and their desire for US reoccupation to stop both Shi'a militias and ISIS. Like the British before it, the United States was seen as a bad but better coercive force.[21]

Effectively, what is blamed on corruption, and before that on ISIS, are direct offshoots of Iraqization and the blurring of military actors, legal categories, and their violent outcomes. In 2021, the Iraqi army's declaration to "shake the earth under the feet of the wicked [ISIS] cowards" echoed prior US military rhetoric from 2004, when the Bush administration described efforts in Fallujah to pressure and disrupt insurgents. According to Eric Bonds, military strategy in Iraq often involved what he terms "terrorizing violence" (2014)—intentionally targeting civilians and infrastructure to instill fear, despite legal prohibitions on doing

1.1. Checkpoint in Anbar province with repurposed remnants of past battles, next to construction materials. Photo by Kali Rubaii, 2023.

so. This approach aimed to make areas uninhabitable, disrupt supply chains, and cause widespread fear. Thus, in one decade, the US Marines in Anbar province were the primary enforcers of this strategy; a decade later, the Iraqi army adopted similar tactics.

Similar to a blurring of military categories and military actors, during my fieldwork no one volunteered to me details about political leaders beyond basic descriptions of which tribes are located where. When pressed, people would oblige my questions with a hand wave toward "over there" and refer to vague monoliths like "Iran" or "the government" or "ISIS," often incorrectly assigning historical events to generalized actors. During my fieldwork from 2020 to 2022, I noted that even during elections in 2021, most people remained focused on their material lives, which were not impacted uniquely by who was or was not in charge, but rather by the limits of infrastructure, the chemotoxicity of the environment, and the spatial contours impacting their movement. In other words, material life is not reducible to political life alone (Stamatopoulou-Robbins 2019), as seen in the following discussion of the War on Terror's strategic design of a counter-resurgent landscape.

The War on Terror's continuity is structured through its operation as a landscaping project set by the shock of war and maintained by counter-resurgency. Public infrastructure was bombed, dismantling the medical system and limiting access to clean water, food, and air (Harding and Libal 2019). In its wake, one hundred conditions of US withdrawal drafted by Paul Bremer privatized every sector of Iraq's economy.[22] For example, Order 39 gutted the possibility for reconstruction that would serve the public. Postwar "reconstruction" wrested ecological, labor, and financial power from Iraq, repairing nothing while seeming to rebuild the landscape in the image of American suburbs. Meanwhile, Order 17 granted foreign contractors and private security firms full immunity from Iraqi regulations, leaving no recourse for injury, death, or environmental damage inside Iraq's legal system (Juhasz 2004). Order 81 was introduced to prevent farmers from saving and replanting multiple generations of their own seeds in lockstep with a neoliberal agenda of controlling seeds via corporate contract (Chandrasekaran 2006). Walls were used to divide neighborhoods in insurgent cities like Fallujah, leaving a permanently transformed political and social landscape. Such measures were deeply counter-resurgent, subduing populations not only at gunpoint, but also through the frequencies of mass emotion (e.g., the PSYOPS program to "influence the emotions, motives, reasoning, and behavior of governments and citizens"); and in the arrangements of living and life-giving relations among humans, plants, animals, and artifacts of war (Mohammad 2011; Mohammad and Peluso 2012).[23]

Throughout this book, I use terms to describe methods of the War on Terror: war/warfare, shock, coercion, and counter-resurgency. It is important not to let connotations eclipse definitions in the use of these military terms. However, these are conceptual terms that do not line up perfectly with US-based military concepts like "counterterrorism" and "population centric warfare." This misalignment has to do with the fact that categories by which people understand their own coercion, and the categories by which institutions fund and enact that coercion, rarely align. For example, the difference between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism relates to the difference between countering terrorism and countering insurgency, but because so many of the Anbari people I worked with are framed as de facto terrorists, the distinction between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency matters not at all.[24] No person ever said to me, "When soldiers busted into homes while

people slept, it felt like a distinct or separate kind of military practice than when bombs fell," or that being displaced by an invading army is exceptionally unique from being displaced by a militia, or that the thing called "COIN" was somehow distinct from the thing called "counterterrorism." Instead, as described earlier, I encountered how blurred and overlapping forms of military coercion—and efforts to outlast them—develop on the ground over time.

Strategic outlasting, or a flexibility that attends to shifts of coercive power over time, is figured out in the field of multiple, blurred, and overlapping forms of military coercion. In 2003, the US invasion of Iraq, named Operation Iraqi Freedom, faced significant resistance, particularly in Fallujah, a city with a history of defiance and a large population of disbanded Iraqi military personnel. Despite two major battles in 2004 that caused massive displacement and casualties, the US struggled to control Fallujah and nearby Ramadi. Anbar province, strategically located near the Syrian border, became a focal point for various armed groups. Anbar faced threats from American invasion, al-Qaeda, and militia violence from Iraq's Ministry of Interior. By 2006, some Anbari tribes were willing to take American money to fight al-Qaeda (which was alienating itself in the region) instead of US forces. This period is known as the Anbar Awakening. One US military expert credited the possibility of this collaboration to "tribal engagement, one of the most successful US programs implemented in Iraq. It has been so beneficial that it was extended to other provinces, and through the Concerned Local Citizens program" (Searle 2008, 62).

However, "tribal engagement" was not an original, US-derived idea: people are strategic, and not necessarily unified, in how they outlast bad situations. This strategic flexibility can be gleaned from how the tribes that worked with the United States later collaborated with Shi'a militias, indicating a pragmatism reflected throughout this book: choosing among the least worst options in order to remain, resisting the most worst options when possible. Beyond counterinsurgent relations with armed Anbari groups, US special operations forces in Anbar province, as well as Army and Marine Corps forces, "greatly expanded the security environment, altering the political landscape in Anbar" (Searle 2008, 62). I chose to work with people from Anbar precisely because of their relations to the blurred and overlapping forms and effects of military coercion. By the time of my fieldwork, they were among the most villainized, targeted by multiple governing regimes. Because of

this, Anbari people continue to contend with the kind of politically and materially "altered" "landscape" Searle documents as they navigate an environment pocked with layered effects of US imperial wars, or what some may call a wake—a disrupted flow with more than material consequences (Sharpe 2016)—and what Nadine Hattom (2023) refers to as a shadow, a presence with an ongoing effect.

My engagement with the complexities of military coercion and the outlasting of their effects put me in conversation with contemporary scholars of war environments, who have identified ways that harm to the environment is both a form of coercion during declared wars and a method of smothering recovery and resistance. First, I aim to show how counter-resurgency is a slow but systematic attack on Iraq's social, agricultural, economic, and environmental fabric. Critical attention to the nature of warfare resonates with Rob Nixon's seminal argument that precision warfare has a long aftermath with many casualties that go uncounted, and that war's "situational obstacles to life itself" produce material effects—that is, a lethal and ecological aftermath that is anything but "precise" as advertised (2011, 224). However, I disagree with Nixon that the long reach of empire is about temporal and spatial imprecision. The idea of an imprecise aftermath still accepts the idea of war as a discrete event with regrettably sloppy externalities that are slow because they leak out from an initial starting point. By "slow violence," Nixon seems to mean violence's delayed impact, while I argue that "slow" violence is enduring because it is incessant and unrelenting. Further, what Nixon describes as the "passive-aggressive presence" of war need not be accidental or left over (2011, 224). As Shourideh Molavi writes: "Destruction and control of environmental infrastructures has repeatedly moved from being a tactic of war or collateral damage to an end in itself. Environmental infrastructure wars—operations that involved systematic destruction of energy, sanitation, gas, oil, waste, and water supplies and systems—are increasingly applied in the Middle East and North Africa" (2024, 18). A whole range of coercion—from "total war" destruction of civilian infrastructure to counter-resurgent policies to counter-resurgent landscaping—limit material possibilities of life in Iraq and require more than one recovery.

Contemporary scholars of war ecologies have also identified ways that the environment is treated as a mechanism of coercion not only during declared wars but also as a project of preventing recovery. Diana Davis, writing about environmental orientalism in empire, argues that

the impulse to improve or restore the environment serves as an alibi for imperial projects, from irrigation and reforestation to "the sedentarization of nomads as a measure to prevent 'overgrazing'" (2011, 4). (Note that these measures include attempts to limit transhumance.) Rachel Woodward defines military landscapes in this way: "Military landscapes are constructed with intent. The assertion of future intentionality to continue to shape such space in the military's image confirms that right to be" (2008, 84). As Bridget Guarasci (2022) describes it, war can be understood as climatological, acting on different ecologies across different scales. In short, critical scholars of militarized environments have critiqued *aftermath* as a concept because such a temporality may exist only for military planners or for occupying soldiers who can return home from a landscape that is, for them, an event rather than a homeland. In Iraq, what may be visible as an aftermath is also a starting place for resurgency and counter-resurgency. Thus, environmental coercion sets conditions under which the project of outlasting is about acting in the downbeats of history: repair is not only recovery *from* but also preparation *for* the next war or the next displacement (Griffiths and Rubaii 2025; Wilson 2023).

Anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists like Laleh Khalili, Darryl Li, Eyal Weizman, and Joseph Masco have demonstrated ways that so-called less-than-lethal militarism claims to harm less by surveilling more broadly, targeting more precisely, killing fewer, and intervening preemptively—that is, stopping resistance before it can happen. But from Laleh Khalili's genealogy of confinement practices (2013) to Hugh Gusterson's study of remote-control drone warfare (2016) to the study of militarized life in towns and bases (Gillem 2007; Graham 2002, 2004; Lutz 2002, 2019; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Vine 2015), scholars of contemporary miliary violence have articulated how war remains inherently material, space-shaping, and lethal. Meanwhile, others have focused on how military temporalities reach deep into the future or generate temporal modes like suspense and disorientation in the present (Griffiths 2021; Masco 2014; Masri 2017; Samimian-Darash 2013; Stone 2017; Trnka 2011). Together, these scholars address the lived environment as inclusive of space, time, and social relations; I focus on how each of these is weaponized to preclude resurgency.

"Military coercion" signals this blurring by incorporating the many subcategories of coercion, and their many practitioners, into one conceptual term.[25] After what I can only describe as decades of conducted

chaos, one might best understand warfare as structured and fueled by imperial formations, acted out by myriad entities whose names, faces, and goals are vague, fleeting, and confusing (Doyle 2014). Whether American soldiers, contracted militias, independent militias, or corporate opportunists, the reader might find that Anbari interlocutors are insightful to clump all invading entities into a weather-like "they" that must be waited out, often by transhumance—temporary departure and return to recover from whatever stormy havoc "they" wreak and whatever wreckage "they" leave behind.[26]

Thus, by military coercion I mean those forms of violent force used to dominate places and people, including *total war* (which destroys indiscriminately, including civilian infrastructure), *counterinsurgency* (which focuses on preventing resistance to such domination), and *counter-resurgency* (my own term used to define a focus on preventing resistant recovery). Often counter-resurgent coercion is less visible than other forms of military coercion because it operates through more-than-military enterprises and over longer timescales. I was instructed by interlocutors on how important it was to see the War on Terror where it was not obvious, and therefore in forms that are not always named explicitly by the regimes that produce them: in the "ground" shaken, in the "resurgence" prevented.[27]

BEING THERE *WITH* AND BEING THERE *FOR*

When and to whom do places become—or come to be perceived as—distant, especially when both physical and epistemic violence are in play? And what are our obligations to "distant" or even unknown others over a lifetime?[28] During the third siege of Fallujah in 2016, my friends were eating garbage to survive hunger, and I was in the United States writing about it. It was not useful for me to be there with them. I had worked closely with one such friend for years, yet until 2021 we had never met in person. What exactly closes the proximity between you and me, me and here, here and there? Things move and change, and places become unreachable to some, inescapable to others. Iraq is a place from whence millions have fled but also a place to which thousands have come for work, return, and refuge. One of the main effects of war is refraction—war distorts distances and proximities. It forces odd and uneven intimacies, networks, and puzzles. As Engseng Ho (2006) argues with

reference to Hadrami society, absence does material things in the world. When my friends in the Middle East are in trouble, sometimes the best place I can be for them is at the steps of the US capitol, or at the port of Oakland, or marching on the streets of Chicago. Only sometimes is the best place for me to be in their homes with them. In other words, there is a valuable confusion between *being there with* (as in a location) and *being there for* (as in a political and ethical orientation). Ethnographic transhumance, especially over the long haul, forges relationships that rely upon delivering on the promise to return rather than the promise to stay.[29]

Ethnography and war both pose the same pragmatic question: Where do we put our bodies? In working with Anbari people, I ended up doing fieldwork in a "war zone," a term I have long doubted because it misses the histories and deep personal affiliations people have in the places they call home. The concept of "war-zone ethnography" presumes that an ethnographer can look at a map and choose a place based on criteria of what constitutes a zone of war (Gregory 2010). I want a critique of empire that approaches Iraq as more than simply a case study. For many ethnographers, we do not choose places or topics as such. They choose us. Being both American and part of the extensive, multigenerational Iraqi diaspora compounded these complexities.

The study of militarism is a huge enterprise that requires a diverse group of scholars, some more readily positioned to study from below, others to study up. Many of us do both, and may therefore notice how the burdens of ethnographic risk do not fall evenly along the seams of access. For example, because of visage alone, some of my colleagues could not go to Anbar province during heightened militarization, when I could. Because of people who need us, or the physical condition of our bodies, or employment and visa restrictions, some scholars are unable to take certain levels of risk at times when others can. My name, visage, and decades of trust built over time meant that I could move more freely than others in the places I did at the times that I did. These factors are privileges, but for the same reasons I also bear the uneven costs of this accessibility.[30]

During my fieldwork I often wondered what right we have to be or feel safe in scholarship on harm. What would it mean to think differently about taking risks and doing harm, and instead consider the actions and choices associated with "doing risk" or "taking harm"? By "doing risk" or "taking harm" I mean this: because my research is material, I understand

risk as a praxis through which I consider an openness to being harmed and to examine the harm I already do. Anthropologists working on militarism as a context that shapes people's lives in both blatant and subtle ways often accept physical risks as part of ethnography. The essays in *Fieldwork Under Fire*, which recount ethnographers' personal experiences with military violence, rape, displacement, and danger, demonstrate how most anthropology of violence poses personal, often physical, entanglements with it (see Nordstrom and Robben 1996).[31]

Approaching the body-as-sensor has been one of my commitments to undoing puritanical and Enlightenment assumptions about mind-body separations, but also in grounding theory materially. As many ethnographers know, our bodies can be both field sites and knowledge-makers. To some degree, participant observation in the War on Terror means making one's own body vulnerable to and knowing of its harms. For me, this meant doing things like drinking dirty water alongside my interlocutors and contracting cholera, rather than treating my personal health as exceptional. It meant staying in places as they became dangerous, not because they were "zones" but because they were (before, during, and after) homes. It meant sharing space with, and sometimes receiving threats by, armed contractors. It meant calculating actual risks, rather than those narrated and popularized in American imaginaries: injury from an explosion is possible in Anbar, but exposure to carcinogens is a certainty. The War on Terror, like any war, is not an event, or even a set of events, but instead a structure that materially manifests modes of daily life. It sets conditions, like dirty water. It therefore sets the conditions under which participant observation can or should take place.

I approached fieldwork in this way, as one informed by the ethical and political debates in the anthropology of militarism at the time of my training (Besteman et al. 2009). Iraq is often discussed as an inaccessible field site for participant observation, and in the early years of the War on Terror, Marcia Inhorn asked: Is anthropology scared to study war (2008)? Indeed, in spite of the work by anthropologists who have conducted ethnographic research inside Iraq, popular narratives about Iraqi life have been mostly dominated by US military combatants who, writing with varying degrees of expertise and intention, inevitably write from the perspective of people who have entered Iraqi territory in complete violation of the primary tenets of ethical ethnography, and whose perspective is limited to the scope of the military interests that brought them there in the first place.

The anthropologists who trained me critiqued US military recruitment of anthropologists and other mechanisms of leveraging culture to subjugate Iraqi and Afghan people in the War on Terror. And yet, in spite of these deeply held political positions in my discipline, material intimacy with Iraq itself has remained relatively limited to remote research, work within the Iraqi diaspora, archival research, or work within the Green Zone (a base-like enclave in Baghdad for ruling-class elites).[32] I was struck by the critical edited volume by leading anthropologists, *Iraq at a Distance*, which refers to Iraq as an inaccessible field site. The cover features an aerial photograph taken from an aircraft or drone of Americans sunbathing in a military base. I never saw such a place in Iraq, nor did any of my Iraqi interlocutors.

While I do not know others who have done extensive fieldwork in Anbar province, several anthropologists have conducted fieldwork in other parts of Iraq since 2003, especially since 2020, when visas became easier to get. These include Kerem Ussakli, Omar Siri, Omar Dewachi, Hayder al-Mohammed, Bridget Guarasci, Candace Lukasik, Nadje al-Ali, Nooralhuda Omar, and Ameneh Solati, each of whom has been a generous intellectual collaborator. Beyond anthropologists, American and European activists stood in neighborhoods of Baghdad as voluntary human shields protesting the US invasion. Iraq continues to host scholars and writers like Feurat Alani, Zahra Ali, Sinan Antoon, Huma Gupta, Khury Petersen-Smith, and Nabil Salih; pilgrims crossing borders to visit holy sites daily; and immigrants from Africa and Asia seeking employment. And Iraq is visited and lived in by hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people. In other words, Iraq may be inaccessible as a field site when it is a "field site" or a "war zone," and more accessible when it is, say, a homeland, a site of employment, or a place one returns to die.

While it is sometimes dangerous to leave a place like Iraqi Kurdistan and enter a place like Anbar province during periods of military violence, people do it all the time. Fathers, teenagers, pregnant women, militia fighters, elders, and middle-aged businessmen all live year in and year out, moving through newly made borders as the "zones" of war shift across the land. Throughout my fieldwork, the War on Terror closed certain proximities and dilated others. As patches of violence moved like clouds over their skies, Anbari farmers hopscotched their way as best they could to pockets of relative safety. When invited, I joined in their movements.

I.2. Hameed's rebuilt house behind its bombed form. His newer date palms foreground the decapitated trunks of dead ones. Photo by Kali Rubaii, 2023.

REPARATIONS ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC TRANSHUMANCE

This section is about the complicities relevant to my research methods and findings, about how the US military, people living in Iraq, the discipline of anthropology, and I myself are entangled in violent relation with one another. What are our individual responsibilities as people with particular overlapping identities in transnational research? What are the pragmatic constraints and possibilities in research on the harm of others? Here, I outline a discussion of my anthropological approach, one that I call "reparations anthropology."

As part of anthropology's turn toward radical humanism, I aimed to decenter a *theoretical* intervention in my research, letting theory be led by a more urgent political project of repair (and its relatives: reparations, abolition, revolution, and resistance). I conducted extended ethnographic research for this book for roughly two years in 2014 and 2015, and a cumulative two years across 2021 to 2024. With Iraqi heritage on my

father's side, I belong to a diaspora generation that was intentionally distanced from the Arabic language (among other things), a result of what I assume is a combination of trauma and aspirational whiteness common among immigrant communities in the US.[33] My ethnographic fieldwork inside Iraq was not facilitated by family connections, but rather the result of personal ties forged since the early 2000s, initially generated by collaborating *as an American* with Iraqi activists on grassroots reparations projects from Jordan and the United States. For many years before research began, I was part of a small collective that crowdsourced support for resettlement and medical advocacy for people displaced during the US invasion, coordinated the procurement and transport of supplies to besieged neighborhoods in the 2010s, and continues to facilitate out-of-country corrective heart surgeries for children born with treatable birth anomalies.[34] It was through these relationships that I entered fieldwork as a person with a trusted reputation. It is not a coincidence, then, that those who appear in this book are engaging questions of repair from/against US imperialism.

As an American citizen seeking neither to deny my Iraqi heritage nor let it be an alibi for shirking responsibilities with regard to imperialism, it was important that I acknowledged the US occupation in all of my ethnographic interactions and to receive the distrust, skepticism, and testimony that my mixed subject positioning invited. *Reparations ethnography* took many forms, but it mostly served as a *prompt* for contending with positional relations both between people and between historical phenomena. For some in Anbar, meeting me was their first time speaking face-to-face with an American since the battles of 2004. Mainly during transitions, people would become loquacious in giving account of violence done to them by Americans. Of note was the consistent pattern of incredible cruelty. People's stories echoed with the derisive laughter of American soldiers enjoying inflicting pain and fear. Decades on, terror does not fade.

Whether I or my interlocutors brought up reparations—which can sometimes loosely attach to the concept of *islah* (reform, repair) or *taewidhat* (restitution, compensation)—it was always in order to play with how far we could stretch the boundaries of transnational relationships and how far we could materialize the question of justice. For example, while I initially approached reparations as a reallocation of property or redistribution of resources in the American and European frame

of reparations for enslaved labor or stolen land, my interlocutors also included in this framework the redistribution of harm. Not quite revenge, and not quite not revenge, *islah* (or *taewidhat*) informed what Anbari farmers did with me or how they utilized me. Directed by the requests of Anbari farmers, reparations ethnography included a wide array of actions on my part that incorporated risk and harm beyond a "use value" approach: eating radioactive food grown on their land, failing attempts at breastfeeding infants, and staying behind when foreigners were evacuating unstable places were forms of solidarity distinct from coordinating emergency medical services, funding surgeries, signing on as a resettlement sponsor, or giving blood.[35] Reparations ethnography also meant moving with people to serve as a decoy when they crossed dangerous borders—a kind of movement that was enabled because of my fortunate surname. My political inheritances thus presented both the challenges of particular ethical responsibility for something akin to, but also poking fun at, reparations; and the secondary opportunity to conduct unique research. Thus, reparations served as a *prerequisite* and a *prompt* that opened the door for experimenting with(in) the stretchy, sloshy gap between justice and resurgent repair—a way to politicize and challenge the very idea of repair. This also became a way to understand and participate in repair from the damages of war while leaving room for a politics of documenting harm and injury (not always to achieve reparation).

Reparations anthropology is, at base, one approach to being in the world with others and doing things together that remains explicit about unjustly designed difference. Approaching reparations as a more-than-methodological prompt during my research, I considered what kinds of repair are erasing and violent, when is repair worthy of rejection, and what kinds of repair are actually happening materially to a landscape that continues to face incessant violation? Scholars in the anthropology of reparations have established that the framework is insufficient as a justice apparatus but has potential as a methodological tool. Susan Slyomovic (2014), writing on the dilemmas of receiving German reparations, forewarned of how broaching the topic of reparations also broaches the insufficiencies of the concept. In a similar vein to philosopher Olúfémi Táíwò (2022), writing on the appropriation of justice campaigns by colonial regimes, Rechavia-Taylor (2020) argues that the exercise of legal reparations can strengthen the liberal

imaginaries underpinning transnational violence. Indeed, when I see the word "reparations" in English, I cannot help but see the wide eyes of white guilt searching for a human object upon which the price of a soul might be redeemed (Hartman 1997). I share Slyomovic's concerns about how reparation erases, individualizes, absolves, or quantifies incalculable and ongoing structural violence (Borneman 1997). Meanwhile, these same meaningful limits can be invoked as alibis to circumvent accountability. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his research on the quantifiable costs of redlining, notes that members of the US Congress and Senate have cited practical complexities as a reason to foreclose the question of reparations (see PBS 2019). More broadly, scholars have described insidious violence done in the name of repair, especially amid counter-resurgency efforts that patently suppress certain forms of recovery in favor of others and rebrand militarism, corporate exploitation, or environmental destruction as "green" or otherwise morally clean (see Klein 2008; Smith 2022). The reformist impulse to celebrate repair as a universal good and destruction as universally harmful can evacuate the many voices of those who want the demise of the way things are (a.k.a. abolition).

But there are other reparative models. Not all of them insist that the terms of justice be shared and that the redistribution of plundered resources take place with the consent of the oppressor. For example, in his ethnography of Jamaican scammers—who view their scams as reparations because what their criminal activities repair are not relations but autonomy—Jovan Scott Lewis (2020) posits that true reparations may be found through radical means that are criminalized because they pose a threat to inheritors of colonial power. For many, this century is a time for dis-integration, for necessary destruction: we do not all want to live in a world where our oppressors survive (see Jobson 2020). Reparations, in my approach, is not about peace and harmony that presumes relations should be restored or made good, or that broken parts should be integrated into a former whole. Repair can be antagonistic, holding unwanted relations together for long enough to survive them; and repair can be hopeless, carried out with anticipation of a future that is worsening and without resolution. Savannah Shange best describes such abolitionist repair as calling to "attune us to our own affective relationship with destruction and decay and death" (2020a): "You bring the wall down, so then you can clear the rubble and build something to live in—build something worth living" (2020b). Reparations as an

ethnographic, theoretical, and methodological prompt (rather than an answer) gets us closer to what Deborah Thomas (2019) proposed: that instead of its transactional applications, anthropology could conceive of reparations as an analytical framework for engaging genealogies of colonial violence that nonetheless contributes to active, always fraught, grassroots struggle.

In 2009, when I was first living in Al Hashmi Shmali neighborhood in Amman, Jordan, among Iraqi refugees, the wise Eve Tuck called for a moratorium on "damage-centered research," which "operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (2009, 413). Yet, this was precisely the research I was being asked to do: to document injury as a route to reparative justice, even if it ended up being a kind of *islah*, a kind of repair, that sometimes turned the idea of reparations on its head. Through subsequent years of conversations with people actively repairing Iraq in the two decades after the US invasion, I came to understand reparations not as something to "achieve" but as a way to be an accomplice in betraying empire by either reversing the directional flow of harm/benefit in human relations, or severing those relations altogether. Documentation of harm, therefore, was not contributing to a theory of change, but rather a defiance of epistemic erasure. Engaging the concept of reparations became about engaging in the strategic and stubborn project of keeping things alive long enough to outlast current violence in preparation for more apocalyptic conditions yet to come.

Beyond theorizing and complicating reparations (the anthropology *of* reparations), I want to build toward an emerging field of *reparations anthropology* by combining methodological approaches that engage the dialogic relationship between complicity and positionality in practice. I present here a discussion of my complicities and positionality to demonstrate how these produce a methodological and theoretical grounding for reparations anthropology. I want you to understand why I did the research I did, in the way I did, and within the historical processes that position me as an individual in the twenty-first century responding to the politics of censorship on violence in Iraq during the War on Terror.

COMPLICITIES, IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT

Just by being a person in an unjust world, complicity is an inescapable inheritance. Tracing complicities here sets the stage for showing how consequential ethical entanglements play instrumental roles in the material pragmatism among the Iraqi practitioners and theorists of counter-resurgency, whom you will hear from throughout this book. Military coercion has not only shaped the surroundings of Anbari farmers with whom I work; it also shaped the discipline in which I work (Asad 1991; Said 1994).[36] Hugh Gusterson writes that especially in Central and Latin America, after two decades marked by widespread torture, death squad activity, and guerilla insurgency, "some anthropologists have sought (often at risk to themselves) to ensure that their writing speaks for the dead and bereaved and does not contribute to the culture of silence that often enabled the killing in the 1980s and 1990s" (2007, 161). But eyewitness accounts of terror are complicated, as war has shaped ethnography itself. Funding agencies have an aversion to supporting fieldwork in war zones; meanwhile, an excess of funding has supported military intelligence gathering, and political limits prevent "easy access" to places deemed threats to American empire (Lutz 1999). While Vietnam-era anthropologists patently rejected anthropology's role in the national security state—eventually declaring in the 1971 American Anthropological Association Principles of Professional Responsibility that such collaboration was unethical (Hill 1987)—after September 11, 2001, US national security experts "decided that anthropology is to the War on Terror what physics was to the Cold War" (Gusterson 2008; see also Gonzalez et al. 2019; Packer 2006).[37] Some anthropologists procured funding for military anthropology programs in the early years of the US occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, military institutes, colleges, and contractors began advertising for anthropologist consultants (Wood 2013). Montgomery McFate, advocate for the Human Terrain System, which mapped and exploited tribal networks in Iraq and Afghanistan, called anthropology a "discipline invented to support warfighting in the tribal zone" (2005, 43). Anthropologists like McFate work with the military and are complicit in contemporary imperialism.

It is not only anthropologists whose careers have been made through the plunder of Iraq. Counter-resurgency is a profitable, chosen undertaking that directly upholds the structural violence of empire. In my

ethnographic transhumance, not only did I move with, to, and from Anbari interlocutors (namely, friends who also recognized me as an American implicitly responsible for their violation), I also conducted research among people who, by the nature of their work, were positioned as their enemies.[38] These interlocutors, each of whom had continued to work in Iraq since the early 2000s, included US military operatives and military contractors of various nationalities, but also leaders in military-linked corporate industries (such as T-wall construction). Throughout my fieldwork in Iraq, I met with and interviewed factory managers and corporate profiteers. Additionally, in 2011 and 2013, I spent four months in Jordan, visiting counterterrorism training facilities and meeting special operations trainers and trainees.[39] In 2015, I participated in several weeklong combat-medic trainings in Denmark and Bosnia with special ops and private contractors who continue to work in Iraq today. And in 2023, I conducted in-person and Zoom interviews with US military operatives about their experiences in Iraq.

While all people are *implicitly* complicit in militarism and counter-resurgency, these interlocutors are explicitly and knowingly so, self-described as playing mundane roles in military coercion: doing on-the-ground cordon-and-search activities; training militias, police, and armies in the Middle East; running or participating in scenario exercises in model cities to prepare police and soldiers for "population-centric warfare"; and actively promoting worker suppression at factories. Many would tell me that they felt their jobs were immoral, yet they continued their work because nothing paid nearly as well. So, while interviewing and observing them was not "studying up" in the sense that these were not decision-makers or architects of the War on Terror these interlocutors' class status alone is worth noting in their own analysis of coercive power.

My movement between different inimical groups is another element of ethnographic transhumance, tacking back and forth to create a fuller picture of counter-resurgency.[40] I do not approach these power relations with a "both sides" argument, nor am I interested in adding to the large body of literature that already humanizes and even victimizes those who make a salary killing and dispossessing Iraqi families, however exploited, coerced, or abused they may be.[41] Rather, as you will see, I position the insights Anbari interlocutors provide about counter-resurgency in relation to visions and stories of those who implement it. I approached these interlocutors with the reparations

prompt, provoking discussions about where and how people put into practice their responses to complicity and positionality in relation to empire.[42]

POSITIONAL SLIPPAGES

While I follow a generation of militarism's anthropological critics (Gonzalez 2007; Gusterson and Price 2005; Price 2000, 2002), my complicity does not stop at the discipline of anthropology or its relations to war. My subject positioning for this research is of two kinds. On the one hand, I am one of those diaspora scholars whose ties to a homeland are fractional, shaped by distance and time. My research trips to Iraq initiated a return to a paternal homeland I had never before been to. On the other hand, my maternal uncle was an American pilot in the First Gulf War. I don't know him well, but nevertheless, the empire is there: the First Gulf War was like a familial civil war, with some relatives bombing others.[43] Throughout the subsequent quarter-century—roughly my entire life—the US pillaged Iraq's cultural heritage, plundered its museums, its oil, and its people—from which I had been estranged.[44] I came of age amid the transfer of that wealth to the United States, a country with an economy that appears to thrive when at war (Gusterson 2016).[45] People and resources move back and forth, but more in one direction than the other. So, it was in the wake of a third wave of military violation that I arrived in Iraq as an American ethnographer and guest, "less Iraqi" than I might have been otherwise, on the sliding scales of intersectional identities and their historical affordances. These types of institutional and intergenerational inheritances are how complicities become implicit, inescapable, and diffuse.[46]

My ethnographic transhumance is an ongoing and intergenerational one, with awkward slippages of positionality. Being both harmed by and a beneficiary of harm requires ethnographic transhumance, a method derived from how I approach the broader question of what can/should be repaired. As a researcher, reparations anthropology impacted my routes to approaching positionality. For example, my own subject positioning in relation to complicity results in constant pronoun play in which I am "one of us" in one moment and "one of them" in another.[47] I have come to understand this ever-unsettling orientation as a theoretically rich, emotionally lonely, and politically nuancing one that accounts for

the fluidity, complexity, and navigability of repair politics. This is a kind of war transhumance that not only traverses place and time, but also traverses positionality in relation to the harms of war—speaking about violence for, with, and as recipients of harm, while simultaneously being responsible for it.

Instead of experiencing the contradictions and failures of reparations anthropology as a set of problems to be fixed, the reparations prompt itself, at a minimum, maintains necessary confusions about the mutual expectations of researcher and interlocutor, of who we are historically and who we are personally (Rubaii and Varma 2023). In other words, *islah* approaches injustice as a way of getting real about one's historical complicities and sometimes making use of them beyond orientation to an endpoint. Reparations anthropology, which ought not aim to suture open wounds or pursue closure, stays and even plays with the trouble of complicity on multiple scales to make things workable enough among people positioned in uneven relations of power. Thus, moments of playing with the limits of materializing (in)justice appear throughout the book on occasions of uncomfortable (in)commensurability.

FINALLY, WRITING: A GUIDE TO THIS BOOK

I want to trouble the witness analytic in which research serves knowledge-making first and attends to the political context of its production as either an externality or side benefit of the former. Sami, whom you will meet later, said: "This is senseless. Why are we even doing this?" and then later answered his own question: "I want people to suffer when they read this as I suffer when I tell it." Writing other people's stories may gesture at justice, but it does nothing to change the material conditions of Sami's life.[48] At most it can redistribute a little harm in accordance with Sami's vision of third-party suffering. But others view this book as a warning. In spite of claims in English-language media describing Iraq as backward, "bombed to the stone ages," or "behind" in the narratives of progress, it is actually a place where people are innovating survival at the end of their known world and where they therefore craft sophisticated theories about political power.[49] As Hameed puts it, "Don't be naïve: we are your future." My ethnographic writing, therefore, tacks

uneasily between the first desire (that the book be a type of affective, damage-centered revenge ethnography) and the second desire (that the book foregrounds theories of Anbari farmers who know a lot about where many of us are headed) (see Davis 2005).

Chapter 1, "Things Worse Than Death," hinges on the figure of life and death to speak about how the War on Terror in Iraq utilizes forms of coercive power branded as "less than lethal" in the United States. Less-than-lethal coercion has long-term and invisibilizing effects that are both broader and greater than countable deaths. These include environmental manipulation, deaths that do not get counted, and the political evacuation of meaning assigned to Iraqi lives and deaths. The chapter highlights insights from multiple generations of Iraqi people, speaking back to US discourse about them and identifying the stakes of resurgency when it comes to individual bodies and meaningful lives/deaths.

Chapter 2, "Divide and Rule," hinges on the figure of (sectarian) identity to describe how Iraq's regions and neighborhoods have been spatially and socially divided since the US invasion of 2003. As they outlast the legacy of divide-and-rule tactics played out in Iraq, Anbari people are faced with separation and confinement that produce what one man called "the terrorist sandwich": the deadly paralysis of being increasingly bounded to particular regions, places, and families that weaken diverse and unified popular resistance to coercive power.

Chapter 3, "Suspense," features the figure of the checkpoint to describe how temporal uncertainty is a mode of control that gets metabolized in Anbari people's disposition to risk and terror. As they navigate checkpoints that mark the routes to and from their homes, suspense both paralyzes and compels dangerous movement to and from home. Young Anbari people speak to how counter-resurgent military control intensifies when temporalized.

Chapter 4, "Dryness," features land and soil to identify how privatization policies embed counter-resurgent conditions into the soil of Iraq. Not only is Iraq's landscape socially transformed by the War on Terror, it is also chemically altered. This chapter describes how the shift from a centralized agricultural economy under sanctions in the 1990s to a post-2003 decentralized agricultural economy has changed material qualities of water and soil, as well as multispecies and multigenerational relations among living things in Anbar. Counter-resurgency through dryness limits the carrying capacity of the land for enduring survival.

Chapter 5, "Germicide," is braided with chapter 4 and utilizes some overlapping terms. Germicide hinges on the figure of seeds to describe how counter-resurgency reconfigures the reproduction of new human and nonhuman lives. Documenting how resurgency is practiced by men and women whose projects of reproduction of plant and human lives are meddled with by the War on Terror, this chapter explores what it means to outlast counter-resurgency policies intergenerationally.

Chapter 6, "Abstraction," explores the figure of houses/homes and how they become vectors of counter-resurgency and how people contend with alienation. From temporary dwellings in construction sites, where families in Iraqi Kurdistan wait out war, to the dwellings rebuilt upon their return home, the chapter features the theories of people contending with changed relations between house and home, land and farmer, men and women by and through displacement.

The conclusion, "Disfiguring Hope," returns to the explicit yet quiet force of counter-resurgency in the War on Terror and reminds the reader of the spatiotemporal stakes in resurgency. This book does not conclude with a hopeful upswing. The reader is left with a reminder of Anbari ethical approaches to outlasting coercion in spite of nullified possibilities, and with a call to participate in projects of resurgence, even and especially when there is no particular horizon.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 "ISIS time" marks the general period when ISIS was a prominent actor in Anbari lives, roughly between 2014 and 2017.

2 In my other work, I address when lethal birth anomalies are understood as shaping lives that should have been otherwise because they embody war injuries, versus when survivable birth anomalies are *not* referred to in such terms. In both cases, Western discourse on disability as an identity does not sit neatly in a context where the inability to breathe or move is understood as a manifesting of imperial violence. The range of ways Anbari adults reference birth anomalies should not be read as ableist per se, but rather understood in the context of widespread military practices that thwart reproduction of plant, human, and animal lives on the landscape. For many like Dania, repeatedly giving birth to babies who die is one way her own reproductive labor is "wasted" or brutalized by empire. Thank you to Rua Williams and Nirmala Erevelles for discussions about disability, reproductive justice, and empire.

3 "Counter-resurgency" is an etic term for a cluster of military and neoliberal operations. "Resurgency" is an etic term informed by what I heard among interlocutors seeking to confront counter-resurgency. While there are terms for resurgence in Arabic, many of them have been used by various political parties in ways that are not attractive to my interlocutors. Certainly, return and resurgency are related. For example, *awda* (return) means not only coming back to a place but also a comeback, a reclaiming of one's land, country, home: repatriation.

4 In some ways, resurgent repairers, like "maintainers," are a subaltern group not represented by an identity category. They are often underestimated in terms of their historical potency to shape the trajectory of material and political life (Vinsel and Russell 2020). By "repairers," I mean a group of people who share a set of practices within a specific time and place—Anbari farmers, doctors, and construction workers are part of this category.

5 In her comments during a 2022 panel, Eleana Kim observed that what I describe as outlasting war may be a project in step with Audra Simpson's (2014) conceptualization of refusal (Kim 2022).

6 Aware of its critiques but lacking a better generic term, I use "interlocutors" for the wide range of people I spoke with.

7 Thank you to Caterina Scaramelli for her provocation on this question. Despotic regimes often seek to maintain the status quo by naming such maintenance as a revolution or an insurgency. Once a regime has power, it cannot, by definition, be insurgent. Thus, the claim by white supremacy militias in the US to be insurgent (and the subsequent desire by many to include them in a broadening category of terrorism) in fact plays into narratives of coercive peace: offense calling itself defense, or observers calling the maintenance of hegemonic structures "insurgent." As Darryl Li (2020) argues, it is a mistake to assume that militias or mercenaries are politically distinct from militaries. Yet, because of this affiliation, it is common to conflate "militia" with "insurgent," in part because it is not always clear whether a militia is working to maintain a regime or dismantle it. Some militias are insurgent at certain times, and others, at other times, are not. In Iraq, al-Hashed, for example, is a militia coalition that currently works on behalf of the Iraqi government, and is therefore not insurgent.

8 Naomi Klein (2008) identifies how policies may lie in wait until natural or manufactured disasters open opportunities for their realization. In step with her analysis, *Resurgency* shows the results of that doctrine.

9 Counter-resurgency is practiced in many places. For example, in 2020, UCSC graduate students organized a strike so effective as to garner international attention. The university initially relied on counterinsurgency measures: calling in police, dividing the strikers along social cleavages like racialized identities, and so on. But the administration also deployed less visible counter-resurgency measures to limit future protests: punitive nonhiring of strikers, adopting policies to curtail union power, and waiting out student turnover to induce matriculation. I use this example to show how counter-resurgency can be recognized in many places, but also to demonstrate how, by its very nature, counter-resurgency is difficult to see and important to notice. By the same token, methods of resurgency (in this case, students sharing knowledge among incoming cohorts, faculty offering research jobs to those punitively nonhired, etc.) are crucial routes to resistance in the long run.

10 This is related to what Lori Allen (2008) describes as "getting by": managing, adapting, and simply continuing to exist in a way that registers to those doing it as politically significant.

11 In advancing the term *resurgency*, I do not wish to undermine how resurgence is theorized against settler colonialism. Aubrey Jean Hanson identifies indigenous resurgence as "a socio-cultural movement

and theoretical framework that concentrates on regeneration within Indigenous communities. It validates Indigenous knowledges, cultures, histories, ingenuity, and continuity" (2017, 74), decentering colonialism. My interest in ecological endurance critically resonates with the recent collaborations of Marisol de la Cadena and Isabelle Stengers (see de la Cadena and Blaser 2018), and with projects like CLEAR Lab (https://civiclaboratory.nl/), which identify indigenous resurgence as key to environmental justice (Burow et al. 2018).

12 While I do not directly engage with ontologies of resurgence, scholars from a wide range of disciplines do. A few who inspire me include Tiara Na'puti, Lila Sharif, Jeff Corntassel, Jaskiran Dhillon, and Laura Zanotti.

13 During other months in this research period, I lived in a rented flat.

14 The word *war* (as in War on Terror), like the word *conflict*, can erase culpabilities of imperial coercion. I use the term "war" to describe the material conditions associated with warfare, not to define it politically or to play into depictions of the US-led invasion of Iraq as a mutual military conflict.

15 Many of the anthropologists who trace commodity chains (Tsing 2005, 2015) or study materiality (Navaro-Yashin 2012) do this kind of moving around.

16 I also write vaguely about tribe names and militias for the same reasons.

17 In 1988, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime led a genocidal counter-insurgency campaign against the Kurds, known as the Anfal (Kelly 2007).

18 The story American politicians told the United Nations, and the global public, was that this was a preemptive war to stop Saddam Hussein from using weapons of mass destruction. These developments followed swiftly in the wake of September 11, 2001, and while Iraq had no proven ties to the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Iraq became integral to the US account justifying the War on Terror.

19 See Dave Chapelle's Comedy Central sketch on "Black Bush" (December 13, 2017, https://youtu.be/9DLuALBnolM) and Dana Carvey's Funny or Die sketch (June 26, 2013, https://youtu.be/Ya8jeNN2hz0).

20 United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1546 (2004)," 1–2, https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1546(2004).

21 See Saleh (2020b) and Stoler et al. (2007) on complex imperial encounters, which complicate the discussion of empire further.

22 Yale University's digital archives host documents drafted by Paul Bremer, including the full text of every order, listed as "Coalition Provisional Authority Order 150, 51–80, and 81–97." Series III: Coalition

Provisional Authority Legal Instruments and Public Documents, L. Paul Bremer III Papers (MS 2123), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/12/archival_objects/3323290.

23 For a brief description of PSYOPS, see "Become a Master of Influence," US Army (n.d.)

24 For a simple (perhaps simplistic) explanation about this difference, see Pratt (2010).

25 Anbari farmers use the term *ghazu*. Sami Hermez (2017, 4, 11) describes how *harb* (war) also includes a general, "fuzzy" meaning.

26 As mentioned earlier, various militias were recruited by the US military and the Iraqi government, while others, often tribal militias, formed resistant groups in response.

27 Some may argue that counter-resurgency is only the inevitable and unintended result of a war. The degree to which outcomes are planned, or the degree to which actions are intended to have the consequences they do, is irrelevant to my claims about counter-resurgency for two reasons. First, claims about unintentionality are not particularly convincing when a protagonist repeats a set of behaviors over and over in spite of being "called out." In this case, the US occupation apparatus in Iraq borrowed from both others' and its own portfolio in generating conditions that serve imperial interests: its effects were and continue to be known. As Laleh Khalili writes on lessons and borrowings of British and Israeli confinement tactics used by the United States in Iraq, the claimed intentions of regimes like the US are not unpersuasive because they are untrue, but rather because the practices and material results of their actions are otherwise (2013, 44–64). Second, military regimes are not the only source of truth about their behaviors: the project by which resurgent recovery is foreclosed by military regimes need not be identified or documented by those regimes in order to exist. This book documents a patterned phenomenon by which resurgency is preempted and possibilities are foreclosed. Counter-resurgency targets things beyond easy claims to intention, but the pattern speaks for itself: these are not externalities, these are methods. Thus, the verb "to target" may be read without the subscript of intentionality and nevertheless maintain a full range of moral, political, and legal implications.

28 I have come to question the presumed and penetrative directionality of "access" in ethnography, when moving at the slow speed of trust and utility more often means making choices about how and to whom to make oneself accessible than it does about "getting in" somewhere or with someone.

29 Though much of my fieldwork was long-term, this is related to *patchwork ethnography* (Günel et al. 2020).

30 My earned "access" to Anbar means that I sometimes perform prosthetic fieldwork for colleagues—as it should be. Because of this, I have borne financial, health, temporal, and social costs, which are not credited or compensated in academia, where intellectual contributions are categorized as "property" and for which we (may not) receive "credit" in processes like tenure and authorship. It is unlikely, for example, that hours of fieldwork and hours of writing are equated in coauthored papers; or that the metabolic labor, necessary rest, and financial cost of treating illness, stress, injury, and reproductive health risks in from-below research on war are calculated in salaries, grants, and tenure/graduation timelines. As Catherine Lutz (1999) has pointed out, these uneven valuations align with the pattern that those who study up are predominantly white and privileged relative to those who work elsewhere in the broader project of critiquing militarism.

31 We each negotiate risk-taking with our families, employers, hosts, and communities, who also induce and bear costs in the risks and absences we take.

32 Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2006) depicts the costs of limited awareness about the rest of Iraq.

33 My Arabic proficiency was the result of intensive study at the University of California, Davis; Birzeit University; private lessons; and intermittent immersion starting in 2008.

34 Our crowdsourcing insisted that US and European contributors acknowledge their complicity without seeking to absolve themselves through contributions, which have included hundreds of thousands of dollars and hundreds of thousands of labor hours. (Year after year, the largest amount of labor and money still came from diasporic Arab and Muslim people.) The work on out-of-country corrective heart surgeries has continued throughout my research, championed by Debra Ellis and Dr. Firas alKubaisy.

35 No form of reparative or restorative justice actually restores the irreparable: this is not the aim (Hatley 2000).

36 For a history of anthropologist spies and military advisors, including Ruth Benedict's 1946 World War II study of the Japanese "national character" (Benedict 2005), commissioned by the national security state, see Price (2011).

37 US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the Human Terrain System in 2007 and Project Minerva in 2008.

38 One ethical precondition of ethnographic transhumance across such an extreme power difference was that, while I was open about my research aims to all interlocutors, I did not give any information to these interlocutors about Anbari life and people.

39 My research in Jordan was funded by the National Science Foundation and the American Academic Research Institute in Iraq, which did not

allow work inside Iraq because of security concerns. Much of my time in Jordan was funded by these institutions, but my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 in Iraq was self-funded through nonprofit work I maintained throughout graduate school. My most recent return trips to Iraq in 2021 and 2022 were funded by Purdue University startup funds with fellowship support from the American Association of University Women.

40 The lives of these groups, although very different from internally displaced Iraqi farmers, follow patterns of *war transhumance*, coming and going between Iraq and their own homes in the United Kingdom, the United States, Scandinavia, Europe, and Jordan to participate in both warfare (the enduring structure) and counter-resurgency.

41 In speaking with veterans and private contractors, I often discussed how acknowledging having done harm does not negate the reality of being harmed by work in the warfare industry (Abu El-Haj 2022; MacLeish 2017; Wool 2015).

42 Notably, in response to my reparations prompt, some counter-resurgents reminded me that they were doing the dirty work of capitalist expansion, fueled by my practices of consumption as an American citizen. While this was a rhetorical strategy to diffuse responsibility and evade a serious conversation about reparations, they were also right.

43 I recently learned that this uncle was the third generation of military operatives. Now, his children are the fourth.

44 Even cynical explanations for the 2003 invasion oversimplify military coercion in Iraq as a singular "oil grab," when there are myriad imperial actors with a wide range of interests.

45 Institutions where I have worked—the University of California with its military research and development, Rice University with its oil funding, and Purdue University with its Department of Defense contracts—are all linked to the War on Terror by financial and intellectual contracts.

46 I feel compelled to note that my surname, to which I feel strongly attached, was inherited through patriarchy that erases women ancestors, another example of these inescapable layers.

47 For example, to offer apology for US violation is to create grammatical distance that some may perceive as a rejection of my Iraqi heritage. On the other hand, to *not* do so creates distance from accountability for the complicities of being American with imperial inheritances.

48 People's names in this book are pseudonyms, vital to protecting them from harm or reprisal. In some cases, I combined two people into one when they could face harm if ever identified. However, the blanket application of pseudonyms can appear to protect people while denying authorship to those who deserve acknowledgment for their expertise. When pseudonyms contribute to such extractive dynamics, they are epistemically violent. Choosing between physical harm and epistemic

harm *for other people* puts the people making theory in this book under erasure: it seems that alienation remains an unjust prerequisite of storyability. In addition to pseudonyms, I use two terms for expediency: *American* (used by Iraqis for *only* US Americans) and *Middle East* (more recently referred to as SWANA).

49 In the 1990s, James Baker allegedly told Tariq Aziz, then deputy prime minister of Iraq, that Iraq would be bombed back into the Stone Age. Aziz's response speaks to outlasting as a framework by which to contend with US threats of existential proportions: "Mr. Secretary, Iraq is a very ancient nation. We lived for six thousand years. I have no doubt that you are a very powerful nation. I have no doubt that you have a very strong military machine and you will inflict on us heavy losses. But Iraq will survive." Aziz's comments are taken from the BBC Radio series *Voices in the Storm*, which marked the fifth anniversary of the First Gulf War (PBS n.d.). With regard to narratives of progress, similar claims to negate civilizational progress were articulated by Curtis LeMay, then chief of the US Air Force, who said of Vietnam in the 1960s that, rather than negotiating, the US should "bomb them back to the stone age . . . until we have destroyed every work of man in North Vietnam."

CHAPTER 1. THINGS WORSE THAN DEATH

1 Mattis was later appointed secretary of defense by President Trump during his first administration.

2 The weaponization of oppressor's tears, sometimes called "crocodile tears," speaks to the ways practitioners or beneficiaries of coercive regimes legitimize violence by centering their emotional experience as either equated to or eclipsing material hegemonic consequences. In this case, Mattis is a crocodile, whose sharp teeth and tears arrived in Iraq contemporaneously. Ellison (1999) explores the genealogy of this civic masculinity and the politics of public emotion.

3 Founded in 1993, expansion of the Department of Defense Non-Lethal Weapons Program is mirrored by private-sector production of less-lethal, non-lethal, and less-than-lethal weapons. See JIFCO (n.d.).

4 Critics of structural harm refer to this as gaslighting (Grandia 2020; Murphy 2018).

5 The phrase "worse than death" is political speech poking holes in the idea that non-killing is less violent.

6 For example, Colonel Michael Steele promoted the motto, "We give the enemy the maximum opportunity to give his life for his country." It is speculated that were it not for disobedience by soldiers under his command, the civilian death toll of Operation Iron Triangle in 2006 would have been much higher.