

Book Review: Schrader, Benjamin (2019). *Fight to Live, Live to Fight: Veteran Activism after War*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Sarah Naumes*

Benjamin Schrader writes in the conclusion of *Fight to Live, Live to Fight: Veteran Activism after War* that “there is often too much, and yet not enough, written on the topic of veterans [...] (154).” Starting with his own experience of recruitment on the brink of 9/11 and his subsequent deployment to Iraq, Schrader illustrates through storytelling the limits of a discipline that is concerned with war, but that has historically included few narratives from veterans themselves. In a style that couples his own truth, or Foucauldian parrhesia, with interviews conducted with individual veteran activists, Schrader asks his readers to see veteran activists as agentive forces focused on sometimes righting a wrong and other times, making visible pain and trauma that has been rendered illegible through militarization. Coupling social theory with a narrative approach, *Fight to Live, Live to Fight* is a readable book that appeals to a wide audience and, hopefully, prompts greater dialogue between veterans and social scientists.

Schrader’s decision to self-reflexively insert himself into his work allows readers to understand both the contributions and limitations of his study. While Schrader comes across throughout the text as a veteran activist who is himself proud of the work he has done, he is also cognizant that there are dissimilar forms of veteran activism within the United States. These include “the alt-right, the KKK, and other militias (151).” Rather than dismissing them as fringe groups, Schrader compels his reader to see such veteran activism as vocalizing something that must be understood about the structures of power globally and within the United States.

Although *Fight to Live, Live to Fight* admits that veteran activism comes in many forms, Schrader focuses almost exclusively on progressive veteran activism. The chapters imbricate shared and divergent histories of groups such as Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) with programs like Winter Soldier, the Warrior Writers, and Combat Paper Project. Schrader enters into many of his accounts of collective efforts through the stories of individuals, including: Chelsea Manning, Shamar Thomas, Scott

*Sarah Naumes is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate Program in Political Science at York University in Toronto. Her current research focuses on the ways that pain and trauma are theorized and experienced in the Canadian and US militaries. She is the author of “Is all ‘I’ IR?” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 3 (2015): 820-832 and the co-author of “Vignettes of the Banal” *Journal of Narrative Politics* 3, no. 2 (2017): 152-168. She is also the co-author of *The Sublime of the Political: Narrative & Autoethnography as Theory*, with Dean Caivano. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2020. She can be reached at naumes@yorku.ca

Olsen, Garrett Reppenhagen, Jon Gensler, Jessica Kenyon, Brian Lewis, Hector Barajas, Jules Tindungan, and Matt Zeller. In each activist narrative, Schrader recounts the veteran's impulse to join the military, their experience with homecoming, and their ensuing activism. These stories are told by Schrader with care to illuminate different experiences in a neutral light while still maintaining transparency that he is the narrator.

Schrader locates his work within the emerging (sub)field of critical military studies (CMS), which he writes, "is often drawing from a wide range of theoretical backgrounds from modern schools of thought such as postcolonial feminism to classic fields of study such as Marxism (4)." Schrader's approach raises important questions about the methodological constraints necessitated by any academic discipline and what is possible when "critical" is part of the title.

I found the stories, both biographical and autobiographical, the most compelling part of *Fight to Live, Live to Fight*. While the social theory present throughout legitimizes the text as academic, the narrative components richly illustrate the concepts. Although Schrader enters a middle ground wherein he incorporates storytelling and social theory in a way that is understandable to various audiences, his approach raises questions about how CMS should enter into these conversations in the future. Do these stories have political theoretic potential when told without the coupling of Foucault and others?

While I do not expect Schrader to answer the above question in *Fight to Live, Live to Fight* or elsewhere, the publication of a text that illuminates the necessity of foregrounding veteran voices in social and political thought inherently prompts deliberation on this point. In this way, Schrader's work not only opens a dialogue between veterans and social scientists, but also illustrates the methodological and pedagogical potential of storytelling.