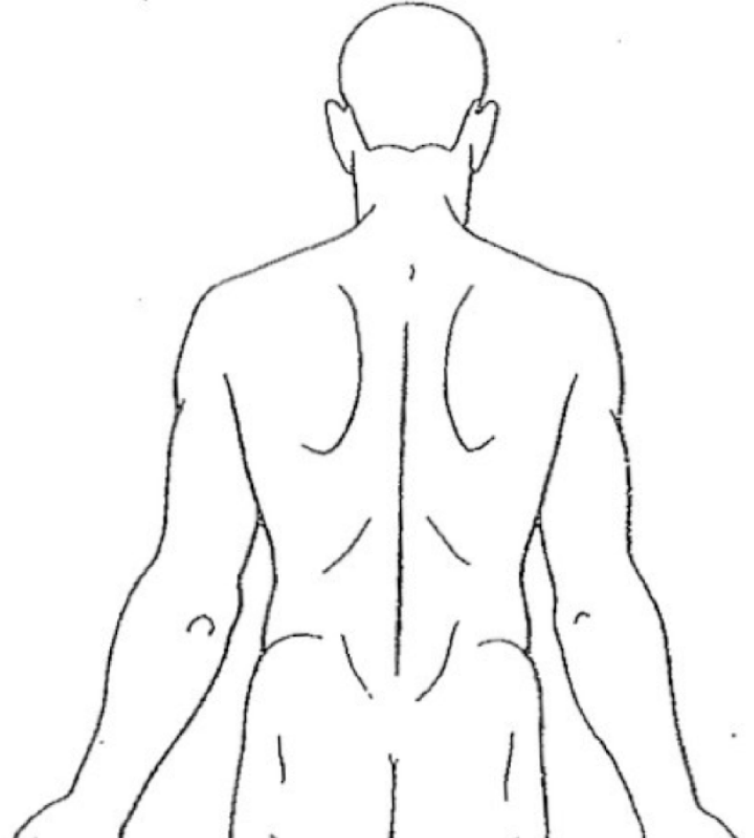
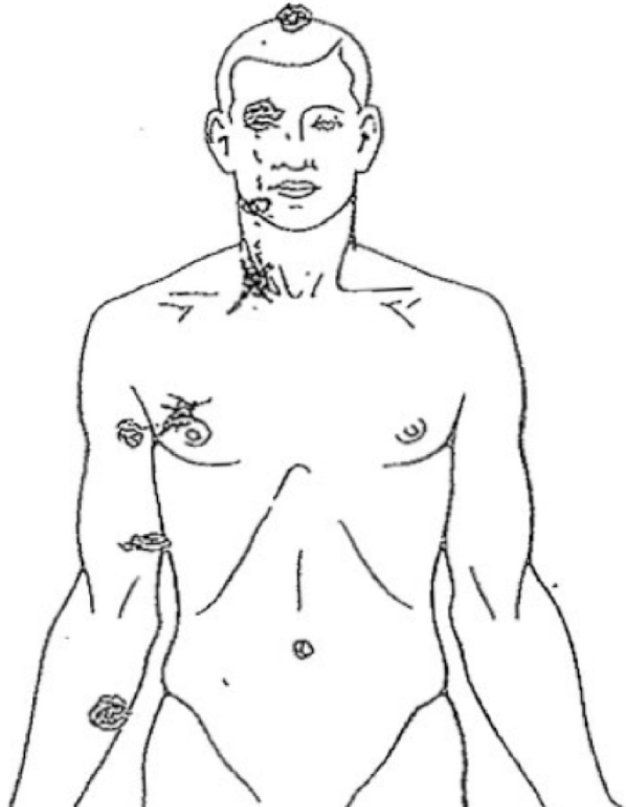
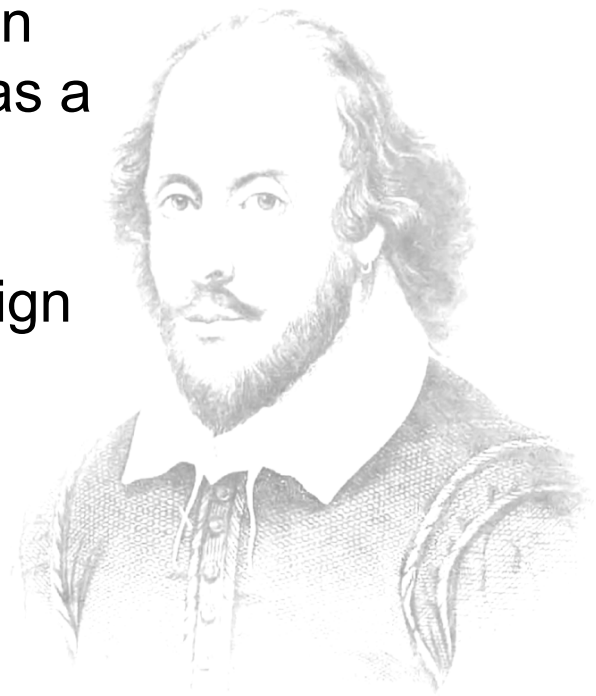


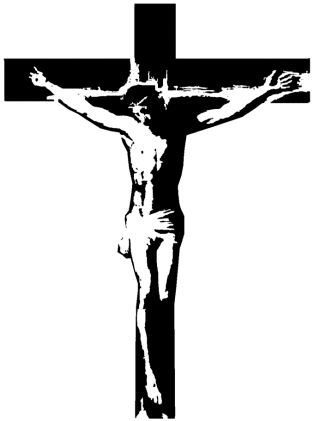
# Martyrs In American Culture: A Theoretical Vocabulary



Our collective point of convergence was on three identities that are often linked in Shakespeare's plays: the soldier, the martyr, and the traitor/terrorist. Shakespeare focused his attention on soldiers who die exceptionally brutal deaths as a result of political turmoil. These deaths turn the soldier(s) into either martyrs or traitors, but Shakespeare deliberately made it difficult to assign which label best fits the character.



The plays demonstrate that the terms “martyr” and “traitor” are highly relative and mutually constitutive; you cannot have one without the other. They also make it clear that both figures are separated from ordinary soldiers by emphasizing their otherness, specifically through tropes of race and gender.

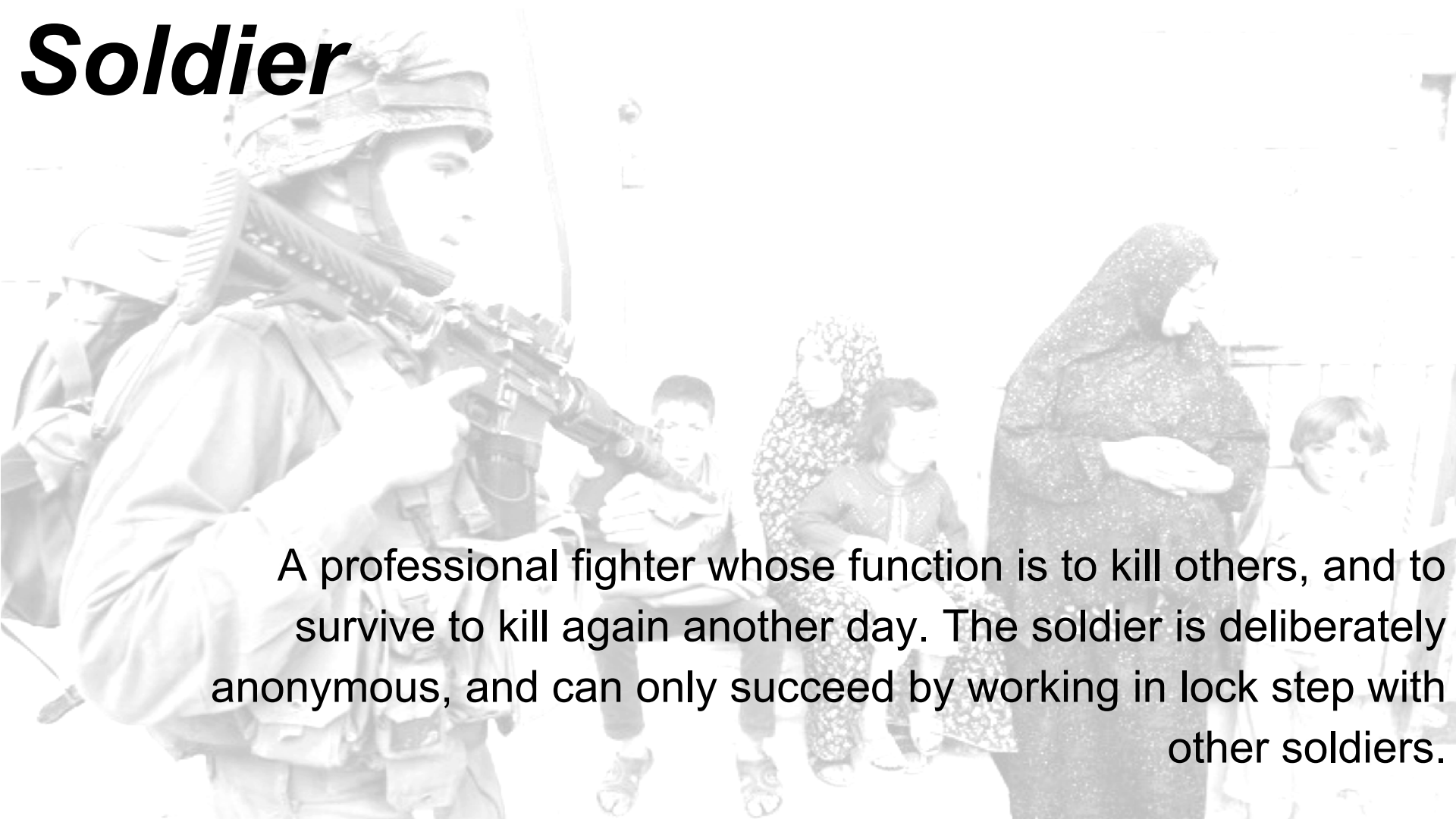


# A Theoretical Preface

*I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area. . . I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.*

**Michel Foucault**

In the spirit of Foucault's tool-box, our goal has been to create a theoretical vocabulary that can be used to illuminate the social world we currently inhabit. Again, we believe this is possible because the phenomena we now call racism, colonization, and militarization were present in a nascent form in Shakespeare's day.



# ***Soldier***

A professional fighter whose function is to kill others, and to survive to kill again another day. The soldier is deliberately anonymous, and can only succeed by working in lock step with other soldiers.

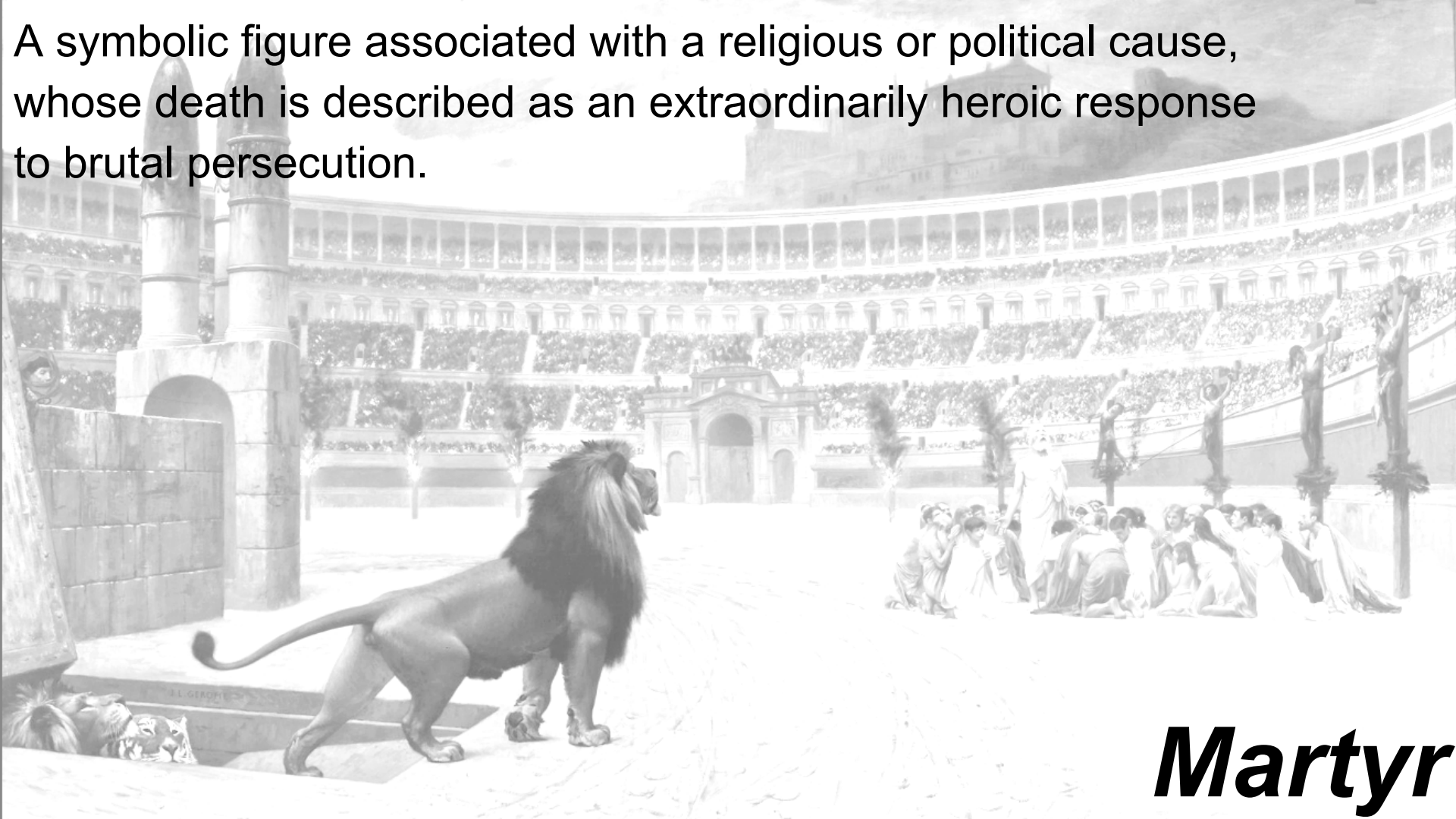
Our analysis of the role of the soldier quickly moved from the pages of Shakespearean plays to current events. What was the role of the soldier during the Elizabethan period? How has this changed today?





The soldier remains the same: a fighter for a legitimized state who is willing to risk their life without committing to death. This understanding became important when we attempted to determine how contemporary characters labelled as martyrs, terrorists, or traitors are culturally re/produced.

A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as an extraordinarily heroic response to brutal persecution.



***Martyr***

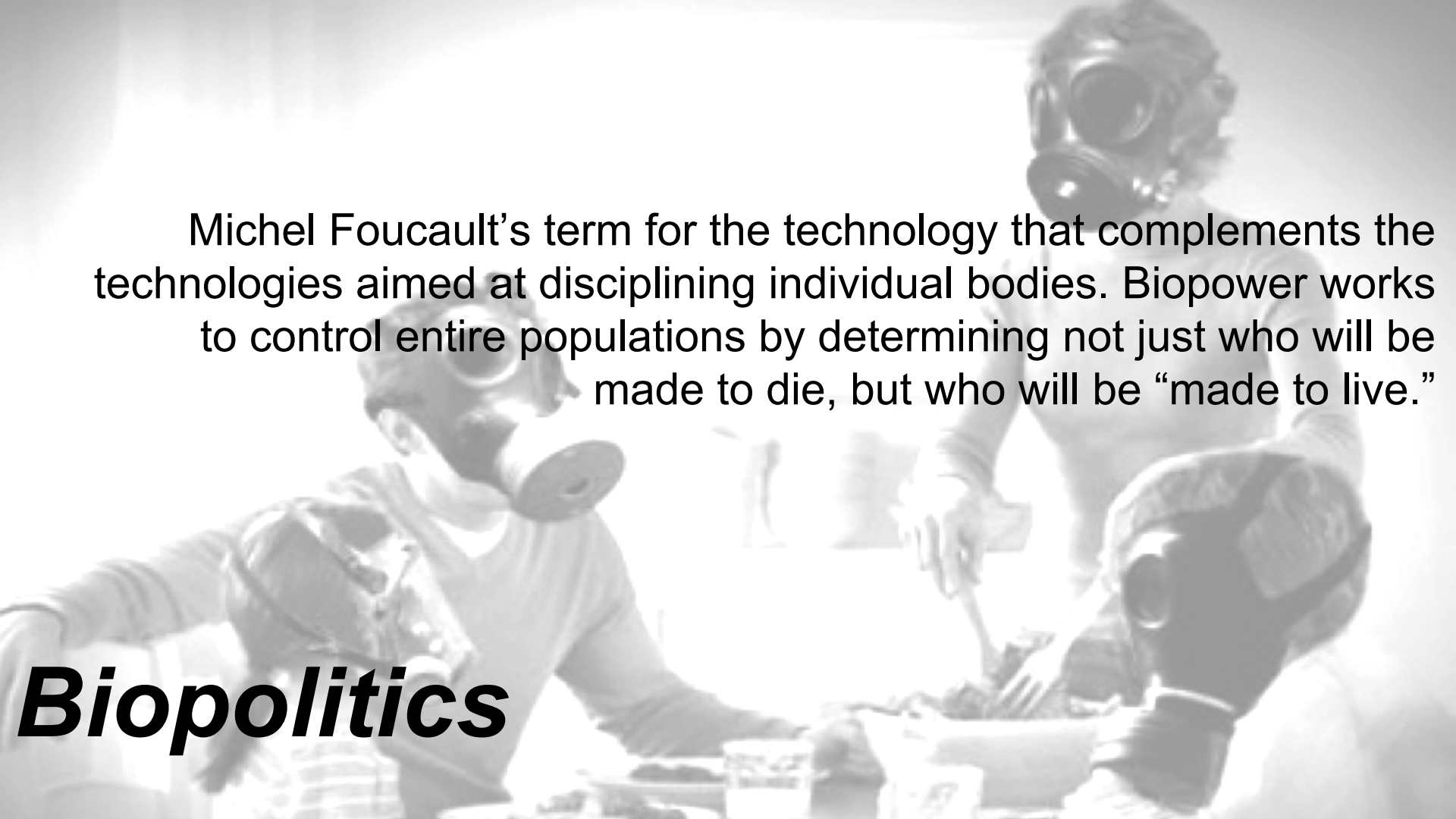


The American power structure rarely uses the term *martyr* unless describing the plight of early Christians. Martyrdom is seen as something left to history -or- a term used only political and religious “fanatics.” However, there remains considerable slippage between the meanings of words like hero and martyr in American culture.





When soldiers die, the state typically canonizes them as *heroes* but shies away from claiming *martyrdom*. A similar, yet divergent scenario is developing in the struggle against racism and police violence. We further explore this phenomenon in relation to Mike Brown in our *Case Studies* presentation.

A black and white photograph showing three individuals wearing gas masks and eating at a table. The person on the left is seated and looking towards the right. The person in the center is standing and leaning over the table, using a fork and knife. The person on the right is seated and looking down at their food. The background is bright and out of focus.

Michel Foucault's term for the technology that complements the technologies aimed at disciplining individual bodies. Biopower works to control entire populations by determining not just who will be made to die, but who will be “made to live.”

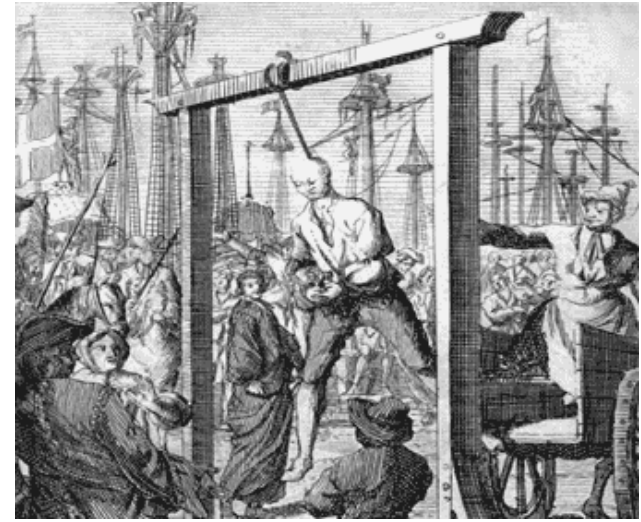
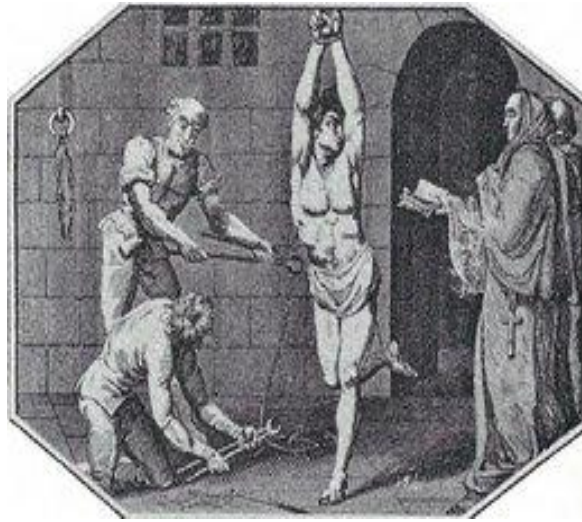
***Biopolitics***

In other words, the function of the state is to offer life to those it deems necessary to live.

Individuals who must live are given freedom of movement, are assured provisions and allowed to conduct their business in a way that benefits the state.



Foucault's notion of biopolitics rooted our theoretical positioning of the Soldier, Martyr, and Traitor/Terrorist in the pre-modern period. In the Elizabethan time religious minorities were persecuted not as such. Instead, they were sent to the gallows guilty of a contrarian political ideology which was in direct relation to their religious practices. Queen Elizabeth's political allies, who just so happened to be protestants, were assured their lives would be protected by the state. The primary task was not determining who should die but who was allowed to live.





Some may argue that this period predates the modern state, that Elizabeth's government was hardly powerful enough for Foucault's biopolitics to apply.

However, these pre-modern ruling apparatuses were essential to the formation of future states. They are fully entrenched in the period of primitive accumulation. With this in mind the application of biopolitics is entirely appropriate.

# ***Necropolitics***



Achille Mbembe's term for the condition that exists under colonialist occupation. When occupied populations are reduced to a permanent state of injury, the only recourse is for the militant to bring death into spaces of everyday life, thus exploding the boundaries biopower seeks to establish. If biopower seeks to regulate death with the aim of determining who should live, necropower locates agency within death itself.



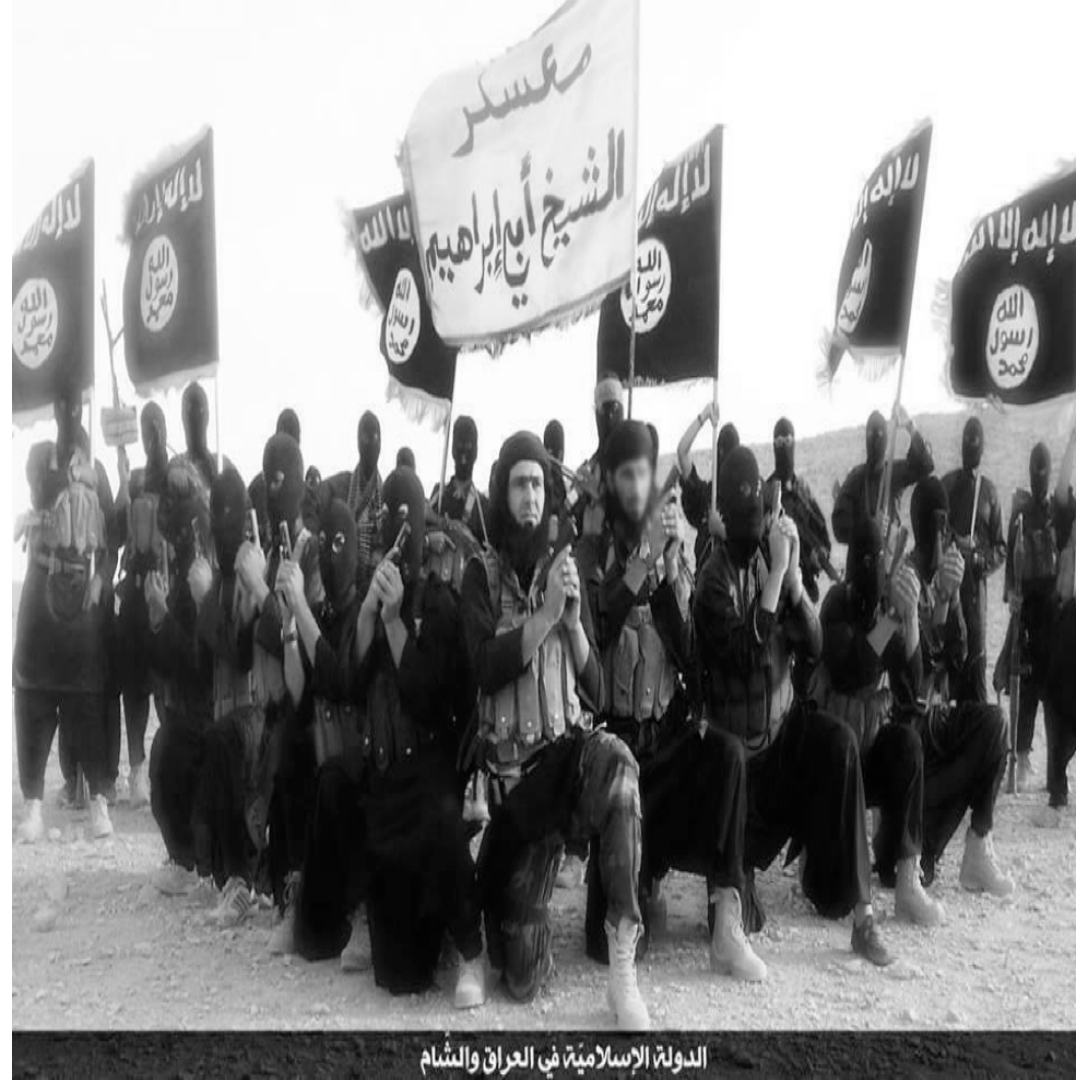


We expanded our understanding of the temporality of necropolitics, as inspired by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.

With Puar, we investigated the exact moment between life and death. How does this moment transform the insurgent from person into weapon? What happens in this moment when necropolitics literally explodes outward to transform lively bodies associated with the ruling class into corpses marked by physical resistance?



This summer one could turn on the television any given day and see necropolitics. Israel's war on Gaza. The resistance in the West Bank. The rockets fired by Hamas. The many hundreds of unaffiliated Palestinians who lost their lives for the political gain of others. The geographic explosion of the Islamic State (which has further problematized the definitions of *soldier, martyr and traitor/terrorist*).



To conclude, our exploration of this theoretical vocabulary has not only shed light on proto-capitalist Europe.



It has offered us tools to understand what is happening in our world today.