

Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism

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We called it just another night in the desert.

—Sergeant First Class Scott Mckenzie, discharged for mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners at Camp Bucca, quoted in Douglas Jehl and Eric Schmitt, "The Military"

The torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib is neither exceptional nor singular, as many (Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the George W. Bush administration, the U.S. military establishment, and even good liberals) would have us believe. We need think only of the fact that so many soldiers who faced prosecution for the Iraqi prisoner situation came from prison guard backgrounds (reminding us of the incarceration practices within the U.S. prison industrial complex), let alone the treatment of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli army guards, or even the brutal sodomizing of Abner Louima by New York City police. Neither has it been possible to normalize the incidents at Abu Ghraib as "business as usual" even within the torture industry. As public and governmental rage alike made clear, a line had been crossed. Why that line is demarcated at the place of so-called sexual torture—specifically, violence that purports to mimic sexual acts closely associated with deviant sexuality or sexual excess such as sodomy and oral sex, as well as S/M practices of bondage, leashing, and hooding—and not, for example, at the slow starvation of millions due to UN sanctions against Iraq, the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians since the U.S. invasion in April 2003, or the plundering and carnage in Fallujah, is indeed a spectacular question. The reaction of rage, while to some extent laudable, misses the point entirely, or perhaps more generously, upstages a denial of culpability. The violence performed at Abu Ghraib is neither an exception to nor an extension of imperialist occupation. Rather, it works in concert with proliferating modalities of force, an indispensable part of the "shock and awe" campaign blueprinted by the Israelis upon the backs of Palestinian corpses. Bodily torture is but one element in a repertoire of techniques of occupation and subjugation that include assassinations of top leaders; house-to-house roundups, often involving interrogations without interpreters; the use of tanks and bulldozers in densely populated residential areas; helicopter attacks; the trashing and forced closure of hospitals and other provisional sites; and other violences that frequently go against international legal standards.

WORKS AND DAYS 57/58: Vol. 29, 2011

The sexual humiliation and ritual torture of Iraqi prisoners enabled the Bush administration to forge a crucial distinction between the supposed depravity of Abu Ghraib and the “freedom” being built in Iraq. Days after the photographs from Abu Ghraib had circulated in the domestic and foreign press, President George W. Bush stated of the abused Iraqi prisoners, “Their treatment does not reflect the *nature* of the American people.”¹ Not that I imagine the American president to be so thoughtful or profound (though perhaps his speechwriters are), but his word choice is intriguing. Which one, exactly, of the acts perpetrated by American soldiers is inimical to the “natural” tendencies of Americans? Is it the behavior of the U.S. soldiers conducting the abuse? The ones clicking the digital shutter? Or is it the perverse behaviors forcibly enacted by the captured prisoners? What *exactly* is it that is “disgusting”—a word commonly used during the first few days of the prison scandal—about these photos? The U.S. soldiers grinning, stupidly waving their thumbs in the air? The depicted “sex acts” themselves, simulated oral and anal sex between men? Or the fact that the photos were taken at all? And why are these photos any more revolting than pictures of body parts blown apart by shards of missiles and explosives, or the scene of Rachel Corrie’s death by bulldozer?² Amid Bush’s claims to the contrary, the actions of the U.S. military in Saddam’s former torture chambers certainly narrows the gap between us and them—between the patriot and the terrorist; the site, the population, and nearly sequential time periods all overlie quite nicely to drive this point home.³ But not without attempts to paint the United States as the victim: in response to the photos, Thomas Friedman frets, “We are in danger of losing something much more important than just the war in Iraq. We are in danger of losing America as an instrument of moral authority and inspiration in the world. I have never known a time in my life when America and its president were more hated around the world than today.”⁴

Bush’s efforts to refute the idea that the psychic and fantasy lives of Americans are depraved, sick, and polluted by suggesting instead that they remain naturally free from such perversions—not only would one never enjoy the infliction of such abuse, but one would never even have the mindset or capacity to think of such acts—reinstates a liberal regime of multicultural heteronormativity intrinsic to U.S. patriotism. I argue that homonationalism is consolidated through its unwitting collusions with nationalist sentiment regarding “sexual torture” in general and “Muslim sexuality” in specific. I also argue that this homonationalism works biopolitically to redirect the devaluing incident of torture toward a population targeted for death into a revitalizing life-optimizing event for the American citizenry for whom it purports to securitize. Following Giorgio Agamben, state of exception discourses surrounding these events is produced on three interrelated planes. The first is the rarity of this particular form of violence: we are overtaken by the temporality of emergency, portrayed as excessive in relation to the temporality of regularity. The second is the sanctity of “the sexual” and of the body: the sexual is the ultimate site of violation, portrayed as extreme in relation to the individual rights of privacy and ownership ac-

corded to the body within liberalism. The third is the transparency of abuse: the torture at Abu Ghraib is depicted as clear overkill in relation to other wartime violence and as defying the normative standards that guarantee the universality of the human in human rights discourses. Here is an extreme example, but indicting on all three counts nonetheless, of how these discourses of exceptionalism work in tandem. In May 2004, Rev. Troy Perry of the Metropolitan Community Church [MCC], an LGBTIQ religious organization, circulated a press release in reaction to incidents at Abu Ghraib in which he condemned “the use of sexuality as an instrument of torture, shame, and intimidation,” arguing that the fact “that prisoners were forced to perform sexual acts that violate their religious principles and personal consciences is particularly heinous.” The press release concluded by declaring, “MCC pledges to continue to work for a world in which all people are treated with dignity and equality and where sexuality is celebrated, respected and used for good.”⁵

Hardly exceptional, as Veena Das argues, violence is not set apart from sociality, nor is sociality resistant to it: “Violence is actually embedded in sociality and could itself be a form of sociality.”⁶ Rita Maran, in her study of the application of torture in the French-Algerian war, demonstrates that torture is neither antithetical nor external to the project of liberation; rather, it is part and parcel of the necessary machinery of the civilizing mission. Torture is the underside, indeed the accomplice of the civilizing mission. Furthermore, Maran, citing Roger Trinquier, notes that “torture is the particular bane of the terrorist” and that the “rational equivalency” plays out as follows: “As the terrorist resorts to extremes of violence that cause grievous individual pain, so the state replies with extremes of violence that, in turn, cause grievous individual pain.”⁷ Any civilizing mission is marked precisely by this paradox: the civilizing apparatus of liberation is exactly that which delimits the conditions of its possibility. Thus torture is at the very least doubly embedded in sociality: it is integral to the missionary and savior discourse of liberation and civilizational uplift, and it constitutes apposite punishment for terrorists and the bodies that resemble them. Neither is the practice and propagation of torture antithetical to modernity. Noting that “all major accounts of punishment subscribe to the view that as societies modernize, torture will become superfluous to the exercise of power,” Darius M. Rejali argues that even Foucault, despite arguing that penal reform actually reflected a more efficacious mode of control (and moved punishment out of public domains), falls into this trap by assuming that torture dissipated as disciplinary regimes of society developed. Rejali counters:

Does the practice of modern torture today indicate a return to the past? One might be tempted to believe this because modern torture is so severely corporeal. But it would be a mistake to let corporal violence be the sole basis for one's judgment. Modern torture is not mere atavism. It belongs to the present moment and arises out of the same notions of rationality, government, and conduct that characterize modernity as such.⁸

As Agamben demonstrates so well, state of exception discourses labor in the service of historical discontinuities between modernizing and liberalizing modalities and the regressive forces they purport to transform or overcome. As I argue in this essay, deconstructing U.S. exceptionalism, in particular sexual exceptionalism, and contextualizing the embeddedness of torture—rather than taking refuge in state of exception pretenses—entails attending to discourses and affective manifestations of sexuality, race, gender, and nation that activate torture's corporeal potency.

The Production of the Muslim Body as Object of Torture

"Such dehumanization is unacceptable in any culture, but it is especially so in the Arab world. Homosexual acts are against Islamic law and it is humiliating for men to be naked in front of other men," Bernard Haykel, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at New York University, explained. "Being put on top of each other and forced to masturbate, being naked in front of each other—it's all a form of torture," Haykel said.

—Seymour Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," May 10, 2004

Those questioned for their involvement, tacit and explicit, in torture at Abu Ghraib cited both the lack-of-training and the cultural-difference arguments to justify their behavior: "If we had known more about them, about their culture and their way of life," whines one soldier plaintively on the U.S. news, "we would have been better able to handle the situation." The monolith of Muslim culture constructed through this narrative (performatively reiterated by Bush's tardy apology for the Abu Ghraib atrocities, bizarrely directed at the token Muslim visiting at the time, King Abdullah of Jordan) aside, the cultural-difference line has also been used by conservative and progressive factions alike to comment on the particularly intense shame with which Muslims experience homosexual and feminizing acts. For this, the prisoners receive vast sympathy, for a split second, from the general public. The taboo of homosexuality in Islamic cultures figures heavily in the equation for why the torture has been so "effective"; this interpretation of sexual norms in the Middle East—sexuality is repressed, but perversity is just bubbling beneath the surface—forms part of a centuries-long Orientalist tradition, an Orientalist phantasm that certainly informed photographs of the torture at Abu Ghraib. In "The Gray Zone," Seymour Hersh delineates how the U.S. military made particularly effective use of anthropological texts to determine effective torture methods:

The notion that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation became a talking point among pro-war Washington conservatives in the months before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. One book that was frequently cited was *The Arab Mind*, a study of Arab culture and psychology, first published in 1973, by Raphael Patai, a cultural anthropologist who taught at, among

other universities, Columbia and Princeton, and who died in 1996. The book includes a twenty-five-page chapter on Arabs and sex, depicting sex as a taboo vested with shame and repression. "The segregation of the sexes, the veiling of the women . . . and all the other minute rules that govern and restrict contact between men and women, have the effect of making sex a prime mental preoccupation in the Arab world," Patai wrote. Homosexual activity, "or any indication of homosexual leanings, as with all other expressions of sexuality, is never given any publicity. These are private affairs and remain in private." The Patai book, an academic told me, was "the bible of the neocons on Arab behavior." In their discussions, he said, two themes emerged—"one, that Arabs only understand force, and two, that the biggest weakness of Arabs is shame and humiliation." The government consultant said that there might have been a serious goal, in the beginning, behind the sexual humiliation and the posed photographs. It was thought that some prisoners would do anything—including spying on their associates—to avoid dissemination of the shameful photos to family and friends. The government consultant said, "I was told that *the purpose of the photographs was to create an army of informants, people you could insert back in the population.*" The idea was that they would be motivated by fear of exposure, and gather information about pending insurgency action, the consultant said. If so, it wasn't effective; the insurgency continued to grow.⁹

I quote this passage at length to display how the intricate relations among Orientalist knowledge production, sexual and bodily shame, and espionage informed the torture at Abu Ghraib. As Yoshie Furuhashi astutely points out, Patai's *The Arab Mind* actually surfaced in Edward Said's *Orientalism* as an example of contemporary conduits of Orientalism, which also include the knowledge formations of foreign and public policy, terrorism studies, and area studies.¹⁰ (We should add to Said's list the interrogation and intelligence gathering industry: Titan Corporation and CACI International, two U.S.-based security firms, have been accused of "outsourcing torture" to Iraq and refining, honing, and escalating torture techniques in order to demonstrate proven results, thus winning lucrative U.S. government contracts and ultimately directing the illegal conduct at Abu Ghraib.)¹¹ Patai, who also authored *The Jewish Mind*, writes of the molestation of the male baby's genitals by doting mothers, the routine beatings and stabbings of sons by fathers, the obsession with sex among Arab students (as compared to American students), and masturbation: "Whoever masturbates . . . evinces his inability to perform the active sex act, and thus exposes himself to contempt." *The Arab Mind* constitutes a mainstay text in diplomatic and military circles, and the book was reissued in November 2001 with an introduction by Norvell B. De Atkine, director of Middle East studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.¹² Clearly, not only is the lack of knowledge with respect to cultural difference irrelevant (would knowing have ended or altered the use of these torture tactics?), but it is precisely through this knowledge

that the U.S. military has been diplomatically instructed. It is exactly this unsophisticated notion of Arab/Muslim/Islamic cultural difference—in the singular—that military intelligence capitalized on to create what it believed to be a culturally specific and thus “effective” matrix of torture techniques. Furthermore, though originally the photographs at Abu Ghraib had a specific information-retrieval purpose (i.e., for blackmail), they clearly took on a life of their own, informed by what Slavoj Žižek recalls as the “‘unknown knowns’—the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values.”¹³

In another example of the transfer of information, the model of terrorism used by the State Department swerves between a pyramid structure and a network structure. The former represents a known, rational administrative format, one that is phallic and hence castratable; the latter represents chaotic and unpredictable alliances and forces. The pyramid form also appears in the *Battle of Algiers* (1967, English subtitles), viewed for brainstorming purposes by the Pentagon in September 2003; in the film the French describe the rebels by stating, “They don’t even know each other. To know them we can eliminate them.” It is not, however, important to discern if it is mere coincidence that in several of the Abu Ghraib photos, Iraqi prisoners are arranged naked in human pyramids, simulating both the feminized prone position, anus in the air, necessary to receive anal sex, and the “activo” mounting stance of anal sex. Should the sexual connotations of the pyramid be doubted, Adel L. Nakhla, an Arabic translator working for the U.S. security firm Titan Corporation, stated of the pyramid in the Taguba report:

They made them do strange exercises by sliding on their stomach, jump up and down, throw water on them and made them some wet, called them all kinds of names such as “gays” do they like to make love to guys, then they handcuffed their hands together and their legs with shackles and started to stack them on top of each other by insuring that the bottom guy’s penis will touch the guy on top’s butt.¹⁴

What is significant here, however, is not whether the meaning of the pyramid has been understood and translated from one context to another, but that the transfer of information and its mimicry does not depend on contextual meaning to have symbolic and political effect. As an assemblage of entities, the pyramid simultaneously details fusion and hierarchy, singularity and collectivity.

Such transnational and transhistorical linkages—including unrelated but no less relevant examples drawn from Israeli surveillance and occupation measures (indeed, there are reports that at least one Israeli interrogator was working at Abu Ghraib), the behavior of the French in Algeria, and even the 2002 Gujarat pogrom in India—surge together to create the Muslim body as a particular typological object of torture.¹⁵ During the Algerian war, for instance, one manner of torture of Arabs “consisted of suspending them, their hands and feet tied behind their backs . . . with their head upwards. Un-

derneath them was placed a trestle, and they were made to swing, by fist blows, in such a fashion that their sexual parts rubbed against the very sharp pointed bar of the trestle. The only comment made by the men, turning towards the soldiers present: 'I am ashamed to find myself stark naked in front of you.'¹⁶ This kind of torture directed at "the supposed Muslim terrorist" is subject to the normativizing knowledges of modernity that mark him (or her) both as sexually conservative, modest and fearful of nudity (and it is interesting how this conceptualization is rendered both sympathetically and as a problem), as well as queer, animalistic, barbarian, and unable to control his (or her) urges. Thus the shadow of homosexuality is never far. In *Brothers and Others in Arms: The Making of Love and War in Israeli Combat Units*, Danny Kaplan, looking at the construction of hegemonic masculinity and alternative sexual identities in the Israeli military, argues that sexualization is neither tangential nor incidental to the project of conquest but, rather, is central to it: "[The] eroticization of enemy targets . . . triggers the objectification process." This eroticization always inhabits the realm of perversion:

An instance where the image of mehablim [literally, "saboteurs," a general term for terrorists, guerrilla soldiers, or any Arab groups or individuals that operate against Israeli targets]—in this case, Palestinian enemy men—merges with another image of subordination, that of actual homosexual intercourse. It seems that the sexual-targeting drive of masculinarity [sic] soldier could not resist such a temptation. This is one way to understand Shaul's account of one of the brutalities he experienced in the Lebanon War. During the siege on Palestinian Liberation Organization forces in Beirut, he was stationed next to a post where Israeli snipers observed PLO activity in city houses. Suddenly, something unusual appeared in the sniper's binoculars:

"One of them said to me, 'Come here; I want you to see something.' I looked, and I saw two mehablim, one fucking the other in the ass; it was pretty funny. Like real animals. The sniper said to me, 'And now look.' He aims, and puts a bullet right into the forehead of the one that was being fucked. Holy shit, did the other one freak out! All of a sudden his partner died on him. It was nasty. We were fucking cruel. Cruelty—but this was war. Human life didn't matter much in a case like this, because this human could pick up his gun and fire at you or your buddies at any moment."

Kaplan concludes this vignette by remarking that despite the episode's brutal ending, the gender position of the active partner is what was ultimately protected: "It is striking that even in this encounter it is the passive partner who gets the bullet in his ass, while the active partner remains unscathed."¹⁷ Violence is naturalized as the inexorable and fitting response to nonnormative sexuality.

But not only is the Muslim body constructed as pathologically sexually deviant and as potentially homosexual, and thus read as a particularized object for torture, but the torture itself is constituted on

the body as such: as Brian Axel has argued, “The performative act of torture produces its object.”¹⁸ The object, the tortured Muslim body, spins out repetitively into folds of existence, cohering discourse, politics, aesthetics, affectivity. Thus, the body informs the torture, but the torture also forms the body. That is, the performative force of torture not only produces an object but also proliferates that which it names.¹⁹ This sutures the double entrenchment of perversion into the temporal circuitry of always-becoming. I question whether it is politically astute to denote the acts of torture as simulating gay sex acts, a conundrum I discuss later. But the veracity of this reading nonetheless indicates, in the eyes of the perpetrators and in our own, that the torture performs an initiation into or confirmation of what is already suspected of the body, or even, in moments, breaking with the double temporality at play, a telling conversion. Furthermore, the faggot Muslim as torture object is splayed across five continents, predominantly in Arab countries, through the “transnational transfer of people” in a tactic called “renditions,”²⁰ the U.S. practice of transporting terrorist suspects to third country locations, such as Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and, most recently, Syria, where practices of torture may be routine and systemic. Thus the tortured Muslim body sustains a “worldwide constellation of detention centers,” which renders these citizenship-stripped bodies, about whom the United States can deny having any knowledge, “ghost detainees.”²¹

As the space of “illicit and dangerous sex,”²² the Orient is the site of carefully suppressed animalistic, perverse, homo- and hypersexual instincts. This paradox is at the heart of Orientalist notions of sexuality that are reanimated through the transnational production of the Muslim terrorist as torture object. Underneath the veils of repression sizzles an indecency waiting to be unleashed. The most recent invocation of the perverse deranged terrorist and his naturalized proclivities is found in this testimony by one of the prisoner guards at Abu Ghraib: “I saw two naked detainees, one masturbating to another kneeling with its mouth open. . . . I saw [Staff Sergeant] Frederick walking towards me, and he said, ‘Look what these animals do when you leave them alone for two seconds.’ I heard PFC England shout out, ‘He’s getting hard.’ ”²³ Note how the mouth of the Iraqi prisoner, the one in fact kneeling in the submissive position, is referred to not as “his” or “hers,” but “its.” The use of the word “animals” signals both the cause of the torture and its effect. Identity is performatively constituted by the very evidence—here, getting a hard-on—that is said to be its results. (Because you are an animal you got a hard-on; because you got a hard-on you are an animal.) Contrary to the recent public debate on torture, which foregrounds the site of detention as an exemplary holding cell that teems with aggression, this behavior is hardly relegated to prisons, as an especially unnerving moment in Michael Moore’s documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) reveals. A group of U.S. soldiers are shown loading a dead Iraqi, presumably recently killed by them, covered with a white sheet onto a stretcher. Someone yells, “Look, Ali Baba’s dick is still hard!” while others follow in disharmonized chorus, “You touched it, eeewww you touched it.” Even in death the muscular

virility of the Muslim man cannot be laid to rest in some humane manner; not only does the Orientalist fantasy transcend death, but the corpse's sexuality does too; it rises from death, as it were. Death here becomes the scene of the ultimate unleashing of repression.

Whither Feminism?

Despite the recurring display of revulsion for attributes associated with the feminine, the United States apparently still regards itself as the arbiter of feminist civilizational standards. For example, Kelly Cogswell worries about homophobic and misogynist backlash, as if the United States had not already demonstrated its capacity to perpetuate their most extreme forms. Writing in *The Gully*, an LGBTIQ political news forum, she states:

Images of men forced to wear women's underwear over their faces and engage in homosexual activity will also inflame misogyny and homophobia. Forget about Bush's anti-gay marriage stand in the United States. By tolerating this behavior in Iraq and elsewhere, his administration has made homosexuality abhorrent worldwide. The image of an American woman holding a prisoner's leash will be used as a potent argument against modernization and the emancipation of women.²⁴

Barbara Ehrenreich expresses comparable concerns:

It was England we saw with a naked Iraqi man on a leash. If you were doing PR for al Qaeda, you couldn't have staged a better picture to galvanize misogynist Islamic fundamentalists around the world. Here, in these photos from Abu Ghraib, you have everything that the Islamic fundamentalists believe characterizes Western culture, all nicely arranged in one hideous image—imperial arrogance, sexual depravity, and gender equality.²⁵

It is surely wishful thinking to assume that U.S. guards, female or not, having forced prisoners to wear women's underwear, among other derogatory "feminizing" acts, would then be perceived by the non-west as a product of the west's gender equality. In fact, misogyny is perhaps the one concept most easily understood by both captor and captive. Former prisoner Dhia al-Shweiri notes, "We are men. It's OK if they beat me. Beatings don't hurt us; it's just a blow. But no one would want [his] manhood to be shattered. They wanted us to feel as though we were women, the way women feel, and this is the worst insult, to feel like a woman."²⁶

The picture of Lynndie England, dubbed "Lynndie the Leasher," leading a naked Iraqi on a leash (also referred to as "pussy whipping") has now become a surface on which fundamentalism and modernization, apparently dialectically opposed, can wage war. The image is about both the victories of liberal feminism, which argues that women should have equal opportunities within the military, and its failures to adequately theorize power and gender beyond male-female dichotomies that situate women as less prone to violence and

as morally superior to men. Writes Zillah Eisenstein, "When I first saw the pictures of the torture at Abu Ghraib I felt destroyed. Simply heartbroken. I thought 'we' are the fanatics, the extremists; not them. By the next day as I continued to think about Abu Ghraib I wondered how there could be so many women involved in the atrocities?"²⁷ Why is this kind of affective response to the failures of Euro-American feminisms, feminisms neither able to theorize gender and violence nor able to account for racism within its ranks, appropriate to vent at this particular moment—especially when it works to center the (white) Euro-American feminist as victim, her feminism having fallen apart? Another example: brimming with disappointment, Ehrenreich pontificates, "Secretly, I hoped that the presence of women would over time change the military, making it more respectful of other people and cultures, more capable of genuine peacekeeping. . . . A certain kind of feminism, or perhaps I should say a certain kind of feminist naiveté, died in Abu Ghraib."²⁸ Patrick Moore articulates the death of a parallel yearning, as if gay male sexuality had never chanced upon its own misogyny: "The idea that female soldiers are as capable as men of such atrocities is disorienting for gay men who tend to think of women as natural allies."²⁹ Nostalgically mourning the loss of the liberal feminist subject, this emotive convergence of white liberal feminists and white gay men unwittingly reorganizes the Abu Ghraib tragedy around their desires.

But the sight of England with her leash also hints at the sexual perversions associated with S/M, something not mentioned at all in the popular press. The comparisons proffered between the depraved, cigarette-toting, dark-haired, pregnant and unmarried, racialized England (now implicated in making a pornographic film with another guard), and the heroic girl-next-door Jessica Lynch, informed by their working-class similarities but little else, speak also of the need to explain away the presence of female Abu Ghraib torturers as an aberration.³⁰ While the presence of women torturers may at least initially give us pause, it is a mistake to exceptionalize these women; the pleasure and power derived from these positions and actions cannot be written off as some kind of false consciousness or duping by the military, nor as the work of what Eisenstein refers to as "white female decoys."³¹ If, as Veena Das argues, violence is a form of sociality, then women are not only the recipients of violence, but are actually connected to and benefit from forms of violence in myriad ways, regardless of whether or not they are the perpetrators of violence themselves.³² That is to say, the economy of violence produces a circulatory system whereby no woman is strictly an insider or outsider. Women can be subjects of violence but also agents of it, whether it is produced on their behalf or perpetuated directly by them.³³ In this regard three points are at stake: How do we begin to understand the literal presence of women, and possibly of gay men and lesbians, in both the tortured and the torturer populations? How should one explore the analytic of gender positionings and sexual differentiation beyond masculine and feminine? And finally, what do we make of the participation of U.S. guards in the photos, behind the cameras, and in front of computer screens, and ourselves, as curious and disturbed onlookers?

Gay Sex?

Male homosexuality is deeply shameful in Arab culture; to force naked Arab prisoners to simulate gay sex, taking pictures you could threaten to show, would be far worse than beating them.

—Gregg Easterbrook, “Whatever It Takes”

Deploying a parallel homophobic logic, conservative and progressive pundits have both claimed that the illegal status of homosexual acts in Islamic law demarcates sexual torture in relation to the violence at Abu Ghraib as especially humiliating. Republican senator Susan Collins of Maine, for example, was skeptical that the U.S. guards elected to inflict “bizarre sexual humiliations that were specifically designed to be particularly offensive to Muslim men,” while others remarked that sexual humiliation is constituted as “a particular outrage in Arab culture.”³⁴ But from a purely military security perspective, the torture was very effective and therefore completely justified.³⁵ The Bush administration claims that the torture was particularly necessary and efficacious for interrogation because of the ban against homosexuality in Islam. That “nakedness, homosexuality and control by a woman might be particularly humiliating in Arab culture” has been a sentiment echoed by many.³⁶

Madhi Bray, the executive director of the Muslim American Society, a nonprofit Islamic organization located in Virginia, says that Islam calls for “modesty in dress,” “being seen naked is a tremendous taboo and a tremendous humiliation in Muslim culture,” and that homosexuality, considered a sin, “only becomes a problem when it is flaunted, affecting the entire society.” Faisal Alam, founder and former director of the international Muslim LGBTIQ organization Al-Fatiha, issued a press release stating, “Sexual humiliation is perhaps the worst form of torture for any Muslim.” The press release continues, “Islam places a high emphasis on modesty and sexual privacy. Iraq, much like the rest of the Arab world, places great importance on notions of masculinity. Forcing men to masturbate in front of each other and to mock same-sex acts or homosexual sex, is perverse and sadistic, in the eyes of many Muslims.” In another interview Alam reiterates that the torture of the prisoners is an “affront to their masculinity.”³⁷

I want to underscore the complex dance of positionality that Muslim and Arab groups such as the Muslim American Society and especially Al-Fatiha must perform in these times, during which a defense of “Muslim sexuality” through the lens of culture easily becomes co-opted into racist agendas. The gay conservative Andrew Sullivan, for example, capitalizes on the cultural difference discourse, nearly claiming that the repressive culture of Muslim extremism is responsible for the potency of the torture, in effect blaming the victims. Islamophobia has become central to the subconscious of homonormativity.³⁸ I do take issue with Al-Fatiha’s statements, as they, along with many others’, relied on an Orientalist notion of Muslim sexuality that foregrounded sexual repression and

upheld versions of normative masculinity; that is, being in the feminized “passive” positioning is naturalized as humiliating, producing a muscular nationalism of sorts. In displays of solidarity, Al-Fatiha’s comments were uncritically embraced by various queer sectors: the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies newsletter used them to authenticate its perspective through that of the native informant, while the U.S. gay press endlessly reproduced the appropriate masculinity and sexual conservatism lines. However, given their place at the crossroads of queerness and Arabness, Al-Fatiha was, and still is, under the most duress to authenticate Orientalist paradigms of Muslim sexuality, thus reproducing narratives of U.S. sexual exceptionalism. Reinforcing a homogeneous notion of Muslim sexual repression vis-à-vis homosexuality and the notion of modesty works to resituate the United States, in contrast, as a place free of such sexual constraints, thus confirming the now-liberated status of the formerly repressed diasporic Muslim. This captive/liberated transition is reflected in what Rey Chow terms “coercive mimeticism—a process (identitarian, existential, cultural, or textual) in which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected . . . to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imaginings.” Unlike a (Bhabhaian) version of mimesis that accentuates the failed attempts of the Other to imitate the Self, Chow’s account claims that “the original that is supposed to be replicated is no longer the white man or his culture but rather an image, a stereotyped view of the ethnic.” The ethnic as a regulatory device sustains the fictive ideals of multicultural pluralism.³⁹ For Al-Fatiha to have elaborated on the issues of Islam and sexuality more complexly would have not only missed the Orientalist resonance so eagerly awaited by the mass media; that is, there is almost no way to get media attention unless this mimetic resonance is met. It would have also considerably endangered a population already navigating the pernicious racist effects of the USA PATRIOT Act: surveillance, deportations, detentions, registrations, preemptive migrations and departures. Thus Al-Fatiha’s performance of a particular allegiance with American sexual exceptionalism is the result of a demand, not a suggestion. The proliferation of diverse U.S. subjects, such as the Muslim American and even the queer Muslim American, and their epistemological conditions of existence are mandates of homeland security, ones that produce and regulate homonationalism.

In a very different context, Patrick Moore, author of *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sex*, opines:

Because “gay” implies an identity and a culture, in addition to describing a sexual act, it is difficult for a gay man in the West to completely understand the level of disgrace endured by the Iraqi prisoners. But in the Arab world, the humiliating techniques now on display are particularly effective because of Islam’s troubled relationship with homosexuality. This is not to say that sex between men does not occur in Islamic society—the

shame lies in the gay identity rather than the act itself. As long as a man does not accept the supposedly female (passive) role in sex with another man, there is no shame in the behavior. Reports indicate that the prisoners were not only physically abused but also accused of actually being homosexuals, which is a far greater degradation to them.⁴⁰

The Foucauldian “act to identity” telos spun out by Moore delineates the west as the space of identity (disregarding the confusion of act-identity relations at the heart of U.S. homosexualities), while the Arab world is relegated, apparently because of “Islam’s troubled relationship to homosexuality,” to the backward realm of acts. The fiction of identity, one based on the concept of progressive coherence, effaces, for example, men who have sex with men, or those on the down low, so that the presence of gay- and lesbian-identified Muslims in the “Arab world” becomes inconceivable. Dare one mention Christianity’s troubled relationship with homosexuality? But let us follow Moore’s logic to its conclusion: since the acts are allegedly far more morally neutral for Muslims than they are for men in the west, being forced to do them in the obvious absence of an avowed identity should actually prove not so humiliating. Given the lack of any evidence that being called a homosexual is much more degrading than being tortured, Moore’s rationalization reads as an Orientalist projection that conveys much more about the constraints and imaginaries of identity in the west than anything else.

These accounts by LGBTIQ progressives are perhaps an unintended side effect of the focus on homosexuality, which, in the effort to disrupt homophobia, tends to reproduce misogyny, the erasure of women, and the demeaning of femininity. Any singular-axis identity analysis will reiterate the most normative versions of that identity, in this case, those that center privileged (white) gay men. Furthermore, we see the trenchant replay of what Foucault termed the “repressive hypothesis”: the notion that a lack of discussion or openness regarding sexuality reflects a repressive, censorship-driven apparatus of deflated sexual desire. In the face of the centrality of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* to the field of queer studies, it is somewhat baffling that some queer theorists have accepted at face value the discourse of Muslim sexual repression. That is not to imply that Foucault’s work should be transparently applied to other cultural and historical contexts, especially as he himself perpetuates a pernicious form of Orientalism in his formulation of the *ars erotica*. Rather, Foucault’s insights deserve evaluation as a methodological hypothesis about discourse. Thus the point to be argued is not how to qualify the status of homosexuality across the broad historical and geographical, not to mention religious, regional, class, national, and political variances of the Middle East. We must consider instead how the production of homosexuality as taboo is situated within the history of encounters with the western gaze. While in Said’s *Orientalism* the illicit sex found in the Orient was sought out in order to liberate the Occident from its own performance of the repressive hypothesis, in the case of Abu Ghraib, conversely, it is the (perverse) repression of

the Arab prisoners that is highlighted in order to efface the rampant hypersexual excesses of the U.S. prison guards. The Orient, once conceived in Foucault's *ars erotica* and Said's deconstructive work as the place of original release, unfettered sin, and acts with no attendant identities or consequences, now symbolizes the space of repression and perversion, and the site of freedom has been relocated to western identity.

Given the unbridled homophobia (among other phobias) demonstrated by the U.S. guards, it is indeed ironic, yet predictable, that the United States nonetheless emerges as sexually exceptional: less homophobic and more tolerant of homosexuality (and less tainted by misogyny and fundamentalism) than the repressed, modest, nudity-shy Middle East. Through feminist, queer, and even conservative reactions to the violence at Abu Ghraib, we have a clear view of the performative privileges of Foucault's "speaker's benefit": an exemplar of sexual exceptionalism whereby those who are able to articulate sexual knowledge (especially of themselves) then appear to be freed, through the act of speech, from the space of repression. Foucault describes it thus: "There may be another reason that makes it so gratifying for us to define the relationship between sex and power in terms of repression: something that one might call the speaker's benefit. If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression."⁴¹ As Sara Ahmed notes, this hierarchy between open (liberal democracy) and closed (fundamentalist) systems obscures "how the constitution of open cultures involves the projection of what is closed onto others, and hence the concealment of what is closed and contained 'at home.'"⁴² Thus those who appear to have the speaker's benefit not only reproduce, through a geopolitical mapping of homophobia and where it is most virulent (a mapping that mirrors open/closed, tolerant/repressed dichotomies), the hegemonic ideals of U.S. exceptionalism; the projection of homophobia onto other spaces enacts a clear disavowal of homophobia at "home."

What, then, is closed and what is contained at home? In the American gay press, the Abu Ghraib photos are continuously hailed as "evidence of rampant homophobia in the armed forces;" Aaron Belkin decries "the most base, paranoid, or extreme elements of military homophobia;" Paula Ettelbrick, the executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, maintains that "this sort of humiliation" becomes sanctioned through the operation of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, as if therein lies the brunt of the military establishment's cruelty, and not in the murders of thousands of civilian Iraqis.⁴³ Humiliation becomes sanctioned because the military functions as a reserve for what is otherwise seen as socially unacceptable violence, sanitizing all aggression in its wake under the guise of national security. In these accounts, the homophobia of the U.S. military is pounced upon, with scarce mention of the linked processes of racism and sexism. Moore, who himself says the photos "evoked in me a deep sense of shame as a gay man," in particular sets up the (white) gay male subject as the paradigmatic victim of the assaulting images, stating that "for closeted gay men and lesbians

serving in the military, it must evoke deep shame."⁴⁴ Is it really prudent to unequivocally foreclose the chance that there might be a gay man or lesbian among the perpetrators of the torture at Abu Ghraib? To foreground homophobia over other vectors of shame—this foregrounding functioning as a key symptom of homonormativity—is to miss that these photos are not merely representative of the homophobia of the military; they are also racist, misogynist, and imperialist. To favor the gay male spectator—here, presumably white—is to negate the multiple and intersectional viewers implicated by these images, and oddly, is also to privilege as victim the identity (as fictional progressive coherence) of white gay male sexuality in the west (and those closeted in the military) over the signification of acts, not to mention the bodies of the tortured Iraqi prisoners themselves. In another interview Moore complicates this audience vectorship: "I felt the government had found a way to use sexuality as a tool of humiliation both for Arab men and for gay men here." The drawing together of (presumably straight) Arab men and (presumably white) gay men is yet another moment where the sexuality of Arab men is qualified as repressed and oriented toward premodern acts, the precursor to the identity-solidified space of "here," thus effacing the apparently unfathomable presence of queer Arabs (particularly those in the United States).⁴⁵

Mubarak Dahir, writing for the *New York Blade*, intervenes in a longstanding debate among LGBTIQ communities about whether the war on terrorism is a gay issue by underscoring gay sex as central to the images: "The claim by some members of the gay and lesbian community that the invasion and occupation of Iraq is not a 'gay' issue crumbled last week when photos emerged of hooded, naked Iraqi captives at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad being forced to simulate gay sex acts as a form of abuse and humiliation." And later: "As a gay man and as a person of Arab descent, I felt a double sting from those pictures. Looking at the blurred-out photos of hooded Iraqi prisoners being forced to perform simulations of gay oral sex on one another, I had to wonder what it was that my fellow Americans in uniform who were directing the scene found the most despicable: the fact that the men were performing gay sex, or that they were Arabs."⁴⁶ If we return to the construction of the faggot Muslim body as object of torture and the performative force of torture, the answer to Dahir's query would be both. Of course, the attention that Dahir draws to the intersectional vectors of Arab and gay is also an important intervention in the face of widespread tendencies to construct homosexuality and Muslim sexuality as mutually exclusive. Given the resounding silence of national and mainstream LGBTIQ organizations, currently obsessed by the gay marriage agenda, the political import of Dahir's response on the war on terror in general and on Abu Ghraib in particular should not be dismissed. In fact, on May 28, 2004, in the midst of furious debate regarding sexual torture, the Human Rights Campaign, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, and the American Veterans for Equal Rights jointly released "Fighting for Freedom," a press statement highlighting brave and patriotic "LGBT" soldiers in the military and announcing the release of *Documenting Courage*, a book on LGBT veterans. Driven by

“stories [that] go unmentioned,” both the statement and the book privilege the testimonial voice of authenticity. In the absence of any commentary about or position on Abu Ghraib, this might be read as a defensive move to restore honor to U.S. soldiers while reminding the public of the struggles LGBT soldiers face in the military, thus shifting the focus of victimhood away from Iraqi prisoners.⁴⁷

Declaring that the acts are simulations of gay sex, however, invites other consequences, such as the response from Egyptian protestors in Cairo calling for the removal of the “homosexual American executioners,”⁴⁸ which reaffirmed that homosexuality is an unwanted import from the west. Such an accusation feeds nicely into Bush’s anti-gay marriage agenda and reflects a curious tryst between the gay marriage debate and the discussion about homosexuality and the Abu Ghraib photos, both of which send a very clear message about the desires of the Bush administration to sanction and disseminate homophobia. Right-wing organizations such as Concerned Women for America have similarly condemned the torture as a direct result of homosexual cultural depravity. But are the acts specifically and only referential of gay sex (and here, “gay” means “sex between men”)? And is it the case that, as Moore argues, homosexuality has been employed as the “ultimate tool of degradation” and as a “military tactic [that] reaches new levels of perversity”?⁴⁹ Certainly this rendition evades a conversation about what exactly constitutes the distinction between gay sex and straight sex and also presumes some static normativity about gender roles. Saying that the simulated and actual sex scenes replicate gay sex is an easy way for all—mass media, Orientalist anthropologists, the military establishment, LGBTIQ groups and organizations—to disavow the supposedly perverse proclivities inherent in heterosexual sex and the gender normativity immanent to some kinds of gay sex. It should be noted that Amnesty International is among the few that did not mention homosexuality, homosexual acts, or same-sex sexuality in its press release condemning the torture.⁵⁰

These readings reproduce what Gayle Rubin calls the “erotophobic fallacy of misplaced scale.” “Sexual acts,” Rubin argues, “are burdened with an excess of significance”;⁵¹ this excess produces a misreading and perhaps even an exaggeration of the scale by which the significance of sex is measured, one that continually privileges humiliation (mental, psychic, cultural, social) over physical pain. In fact, it may well be that these responses by westerners reveal what we might deem the worst form of torture—that is, sexual torture and humiliation rather than extreme pain—more than any comprehension of the experiences of those tortured. The simulated sex acts must be thought of in terms of gendered roles rather than through a universalizing notion of sexual orientation. But why talk about sex at all? Was anyone having sex in these photos? One could argue that in the photos, the torturers were turned on, erotically charged, and looked as one does when having sex. As Trishala Deb and Rafael Mutis point out:

Women’s rights advocates in the U.S. have made the distinction between sex and rape for a long time. By defining rape and sexual assault as an act of violence and not

sex, we are placing the validity in the voice of the assaulted, and accepting their experience as central to the truth of what happened. . . . What we understand by centering the perspective of the assaulted people is that there was no sex happening regardless of the act.⁵²

The focus on gay sex also preempts a serious dialogue about rape, both the rape of Iraqi male prisoners but also, more significantly, the rape of female Iraqi prisoners, the occurrence of which appears neither news- nor photograph-worthy. Indeed, there has been a complete underreporting of the rapes of Afghani and Iraqi women both inside and outside of detention centers. Major General Anthony Taguba's report notes that among the eighteen hundred digital photos there are unreleased pictures of females being raped and women forced at gunpoint to bare their breasts, as well as videotape of female detainees forced to strip and rumors of impregnated rape victims.⁵³ Why are there comparatively few photos of women, and why have they not been released? Is it because the administration found the photos of women even more appalling? Or has the wartime rape of women become so unspectacular, so endemic to military occupation as to render its impact moot? Or could these photos finally demolish the line of reasoning that the United States is liberating Muslim women, a fantasy so crucial to the tenets of American sexual exceptionalism? How, ultimately, do we begin to theorize the connections and disjunctures between male and female tortured bodies, and between masculinities and femininities?

Although feminist postcolonial studies have typically theorized women as the bearers of cultural continuity, tradition, and national lineage, in the case of terrorism, the line of transmission seems always to revert to the male body. The locus of reproductive capacity is, momentarily, expanded from the female body to include the male body. This expansion does not mark a shift away from women as the victims of rape and pawns between men during wartime. But the principal and overriding emphasis on rape of women as a weapon of war can displace the importance of castrating the reproductive capacities of men; furthermore, this line of inquiry almost always returns us to an uninterrogated heteronormative frame of penetration and conduction. In this particular case, it is precisely masculinity, the masculinity of the terrorist, that threatens to reproduce itself. Writing about the genital and anal torture of Sikh men in Punjab, Brian Keith Axel argues that torture produces sexual differentiation not as male and female, but rather what he calls national-normative sexuality and antinational sexuality:

I propose that torture in Punjab is a practice of repeated and violent circumscription that produces not only sexed bodies, but also a form of sexual differentiation. This is not a differentiation between categories of male and female, but between what may be called national-normative sexuality and antinational sexuality. . . . National-normative sexuality provides the sanctioned heterosexual means for reproducing the nation's community, whereas antinational sexuality interrupts and threatens that community. Torture casts national-norma-

tive sexuality as a fundamental modality of citizen production in relation to an antinational sexuality that postulates sex as a "cause" of not only sexual experience but also of subversive behavior and extraterritorial desire ("now you can't be married, you can't produce any more terrorists"). The form of punishment corresponds to the putative source of transgression: sexual reproduction, identified as a property of masculine agency within the male body.⁵⁴

It is important to emphasize, of course, that there exist multiple national-normative sexualities and likewise, multiple antinational sexualities, as well as entities that make such distinctions fuzzy. It is equally important to recognize that, for all of its insights, Axel's formulation cannot be entirely and neatly transposed onto the Abu Ghraib situation, as Punjabi Sikh detainees form part of the Indian nation and are also branded as the religious fundamentalist terrorists that threaten to undo that nation. In other words, for Punjabi detainees, torture works to finalize expulsion from the nation-state. What I find most compelling is Axel's formulation of national differentiation as sexual differentiation. However, I argue that it is precisely feminizing (and thus not the categories of male and female, as Axel notes), and the consequent insistence on mutually exclusive positions of masculine and feminine, that strips the tortured male body of its national-normative sexuality. This feminizing divests the male body of its virility and thus compromises its power not only to penetrate and reproduce its own nation (our women), but to contaminate the other's nation (their women) as well. Furthermore, the perverted sex of the terrorist is a priori cast outside the domain of normative national sexualities: "the form of punishment," that is, meddling with penis and anus, "corresponds to the putative source of transgression" not only because of the desire to truncate the terrorist's capacity to sexually reproduce, but also because of the (homo)sexual deviancy always already attached to the terrorist body. These two attributes, the fertility of the terrorist (in the case of Muslim men, interpreted through polygamy) and the (homo)sexual perversions of the terrorist, are rendered with extra potency given that the terrorist is also a priori constituted as stateless, lacking national legitimization and national boundaries. In the political imagination, the terrorist serves as the monstrous excess of the nation-state.

Torture, to compound Axel's formulation, works not merely to dis-aggregate national from antinational sexualities—for those distinctions (the stateless monster-terrorist-fag) are already in play—but also, in accordance with nationalist fantasies, to reorder gender and, in the process, to corroborate implicit racial hierarchies. The force of feminizing lies not only in the stripping away of masculinity, the fag-gotizing of the male body, or in robbing the feminine of its symbolic and reproductive centrality to national-normative sexualities; it is the fortification of the unenforceable boundaries between masculine and feminine, the rescripting of multiple and fluid gender performatives into petrified sites of masculine and feminine, the regendering of multiple genders into the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and feminine, and the interplay of it all within and through racial, impe-

rial, and economic matrices of power. This is the real force of the torture.

Axel writes, "Torture casts national-normative sexuality as a fundamental modality of citizen production." But we can also flip these terms around: national-normative sexuality casts torture as a fundamental modality of citizen production. One could scramble this line further still: citizen production casts national-normative sexuality as a fundamental modality of torture—and so on. The point is that in the metonymic chain linking torture, citizen production, and national-normative sexualities, torture surfaces as an integral part of a patriotic mandate to separate the normative-national genders and sexualities from the antinational ones. Joanna Bourke elaborates:

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, for some of these Americans, creating a spectacle of suffering was part of a bonding ritual. Group identity as victors in an increasingly brutalised Iraq is being cemented: this is an enactment of comradeship between men and women who are set apart from civilian society back home by acts of violence. Their cruel, often carnivalesque rites constituted what Mikhail Bakhtin called "authorised transgression."⁵⁵

The bonding ritual, culminating in an authorized transgression, is authorized not from above but between actors seeking to redirect animosity toward each other. In this sense the bonding ritual of the carnival of torture—discussing it, producing it, getting turned on by it, recording it, disseminating the proof of it, gossiping about it—is the ultimate performance of patriotism. As Sara Ahmed so incisively expounds, (torture-as-) patriotism is driven not merely by hatred of the Other, but also by love: "Hate is renamed as love, a renaming that 'conceals' the ambivalence that it exercises (we love *rather than* hate)." As a nascent arena of multicultural nationalist normativity, the military is a prime site of this love for the nation, a love that, for those who fail to meet the standards of the ideal citizen (i.e., working classes, people of color, immigrants), remains unrequited. Ahmed theorizes this "national love as a form of waiting," whereby the "failure of return extends one's investment."⁵⁶ One can only imagine what this failure of return entails for those being prosecuted for these crimes.

It is likewise horrifically telling that Lynndie England and Charles A. Graner became romantically involved while in Iraq; sharing torture functions to instigate and heighten sexual chemistries or release them or both. What is the relationship between the kinds of sex they were having with each other and the kind of corporeal experiences of sexual domination they were jointly having with the prisoners? While torture elevates the erotic charge and intensity for those already ready to fuck each other, it externalizes the hatred between those ready to kill each other. Here all internal tensions and hostilities (the working-class, "white trash" Lynndie, the African American sergeant Ivan Frederick, and so forth) are defused outward, toward the hapless bodies in detention, so that a united front of American multicultural heteronormativity can be not only performed, but, more important, affectively felt. Within the interstices of what is seen

and what is felt, how it looks and how it feels, the photos emanate most powerfully the patriotic ties that bind.

Notes

¹ Shanker and Steinberg, "Bush Voices 'Disgust.'"

² Rachel Corrie was killed on March 16, 2003, when she was run over by an Israeli bulldozer that was razing homes in the Gaza Strip.

³ Bush administration memoranda photocopies are available at "Primary Sources: The Torture Debate." See also Danner, *Torture and Truth*. Danner's book collects a range of documents on U.S. torture practices, from Bush administration memoranda on the treatment of detainees and torture/"interrogation practices" to prisoner depositions and the Red Cross report. It concludes with the Taguba report, which was submitted in early March 2004 and was the basis of Seymour Hersh's breaking the Abu Ghraib story; the Schlesinger report, an "investigation of the investigations"; and the Fay/Jones report, which included an interview "notably with Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of Iraq" (277-78). The Taguba report acknowledged that there were credible reports of

breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees . . . threatening detainees with a charged 9mm pistol . . . pouring cold water on naked detainees . . . beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair . . . threatening male detainees with rape . . . allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell . . . sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick . . . using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, and in one instance actually biting the detainee. (293)

The Schlesinger report states, "Abuses of varying severity occurred at differing locations under differing circumstances and context. They were widespread and, though inflicted on only a small percentage of those detained, they were both serious in number and in effect" (331). This statement is followed by a disavowal of any promulgation of abuse on the part of "senior officials or military authorities," but does argue that "there is both institutional and personal responsibility at higher levels" (331). The report also includes tables on the interrogation policies in Guantánamo, Afghanistan, and Iraq as well as techniques used in Guantánamo (392-93). The Fay/Jones report includes charts of "Allegations of Abuse Incidents, the Nature of Reported Abuse, and Associated Personnel" (532-44). The charts list the categories "Nudity/Humiliation, Assault, Sexual Assault, Use of Dogs, The 'Hole,' and Other."

A much larger collection of documents is Greenberg and Dratel, *The Torture Papers*. The authors introduce the text by stating, "The memos and reports in this volume document the systematic attempt of the U.S. government to authorize the way for torture techniques and coercive interrogation practices, forbidden under international law, with the concurrent express intent of evading liability in the aftermath of any discovery of these practices and policies." It includes major sections of memoranda and reports, as well as appendixes on torture-related laws and conventions and legal cases relevant to the incidences of torture. Both books have stylized cover art of the hooded detainees: *Torture and Truth* has the person in the

infamous “Vietnam,” and *The Torture Papers* has a person draped over what appears to be a fence.

⁴ Friedman, “Restoring Our Honor.” OpenDemocracy.net offers a series of articles on the Arab response to the Abu Ghraib tortures, including: Khouri, “Abu Ghraib in the Arab Mirror”; Kazmi, “Shame”; and Ghousoub, “Abu Ghraib: I Do Not Know Where to Look for Hope.” The articles offer perspectives on the meaning of these acts, the U.S. war on terror, and the publicity, all of which are effaced in analyses such as Friedman’s. Khouri’s article discusses “how the events appear to ordinary Arab citizens. For them, the horrors inflicted in the prison are not primarily about the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers. They are, rather, about autocratic power structures that have controlled, humiliated, and ultimately dehumanised Arab citizens for most of the past century of modern statehood—whether those powers were European colonial administrations, indigenous Arab elites, occupying Israeli forces, or the current Anglo-American managers of Iraq.” The Pakistani American Kazmi comments, “Last week I read a letter from a mother who felt sorry for the young soldiers who were thrown into a war they didn’t understand and were inadequately trained to handle the situation surrounding them. I would like to ask this mother: exactly how much training does a 21-year old require before he or she realizes that it is not alright [sic] to tie a leash around a man’s neck and drag him like a dog, or strip men naked and pile them on top of each other like animals then pose for photographs mocking them?” Ghousoub, a European Arab, states, “The family of a woman soldier shown abusing prisoners have released a picture of her holding tenderly a young Iraqi child. It is meant to show that she is a loving person who cares for the Iraqis. She was told to obey orders, declare her family. Another familiar story! You may love children, be sweet and caring but the rules of war are special and they turn you into something particularly ugly. The secrecy of occupying armies turns soldiers into little gods shaping and coercing peoples’ bodies.” Clearly, none of these authors read the Abu Ghraib tortures as any less than part of a larger story about how Arabs have experienced colonialism and war, and how these acts demonstrate a disregard for the humanity of those held in Abu Ghraib that cannot be isolated to just those who carried out these specific acts.

⁵ Perry, “A Pastoral Statement.”

⁶ Cushman, “A Conversation with Veena Das.”

⁷ Maran, *Torture*, 82, citing Trinquier, *Modern Warfare*, xv.

⁸ Rejali, *Torture and Modernity*, 15.

⁹ Hersh, “The Gray Zone,” 42, emphasis mine. Hersh’s reporting on Abu Ghraib is notably tied to his earlier work. According to Frank Rich, “It was in November 1969 that a little-known reporter, Seymour Hersh, broke the story of the 1968 massacre at My Lai, the horrific scoop that has now found its match 35 years later in Mr. Hersh’s *New Yorker* revelation”; “The War’s Lost Weekend.”

¹⁰ See Said, *Orientalism*, 308-9, 311, 312, 349; Furuhashi, “Orientalist Torture.”

¹¹ The Center for Constitutional Rights has filed a lawsuit against private firms participating in the “torture conspiracy.” See Center for Constitutional Rights, “CCR Files Lawsuit.” Trishala Deb and Rafael Mutis elaborate on the implications of outsourcing torture:

CACI is a corporation that generates over \$930 million in profit a year, 65% of its budget coming from government contracts. The question remains how these private contractors are accountable to U.S. and international laws, not to mention the international public. Given the restrictions on access to information about the function-

ing of the war machine since the establishment of the PATRIOT Act and Department of Homeland Security, we have even less access to information and accountability regarding some of the most important and dangerous aspects of this permanent war. The relevance of this information is that it exposes one of the most insidious sides to this story—the cycle of government expenditures on private contractors as enforcement agents in this war, and profits made by U.S. corporations which are awarded those contracts. In this way the prison industrial complex is at once exposed and expanded, not only were severe crimes against humanity committed but at least one corporation has profited from those crimes. For those corporations who are being paid to provide interrogators and intelligence, war crimes are not a consideration, just a consequence. (“Smoke and Mirrors” 5)

According to the *Financial Times* correspondent Peter Spiegel, no private contractors have been prosecuted for Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse despite evidence that they were involved; “No Contractors Facing Abu Ghraib Abuse Charges.”

¹² Emram Qureshi, “Misreading The Arab Mind.”

¹³ Žižek points out that it is not the known knowns, the known unknowns, nor the unknown knowns that matter most here, but the unconscious, the knowledge that doesn’t know itself; “What Rumsfeld Doesn’t Know.”

¹⁴ The full text of the Taguba report can be found on numerous websites, for instance, NBC News, “U.S. Army Report.”

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, “Israeli Interrogator.” During February and March 2002, over two thousand Muslims were killed and tens of thousands more were displaced from their homes in rioting by Hindus; the police were complicit with this violence, and the Hindu nationalist Bharat Janata Party (BJP) is accused of premeditated orchestration of the pogroms. In regard to Muslim masculinity, the International Initiative for Justice writes in *Threatened Existence*:

Muslim men, in the Hindu Right discourse, are not seen as “men” at all: they are either “oversexed” to the extent of being bestial (they can satisfy four wives!) or they are effeminate and not masculine enough to satisfy their women. . . . [The Muslim man is] a symbol of the “sexual superiority” the emasculated Hindu man must recover by raping and defiling Muslim women. . . . There have been calls to Hindu men to join gyms and develop muscular bodies to counter the “animal” attraction of the over-sexualized Muslim man. Of course, when Hindu men commit rape and assault their actions are not seen as bestial or animal-like but are considered signs of valor. Simultaneously, there is an attempt to show that Muslim men are not real men, but rather homosexuals or *hijras* (eunuchs)—considered synonymous and undesirable and are therefore unable to satisfy their women. As a VHP [Vishva Hindu Parishad] leaflet called *Jihad* (holy war) boasts:

We have untied the penises which were tied till now
 Without castor oil in the arse we have made them cry
 Those who call religious war, violence, are all fuckers
 We have widened the tight vaginas of the bibis (women) . . .
 Wake up Hindus there are still Miyas (Muslim men) left alive around you
 Learn from Panvad village where their mother was fucked
 She was fucked standing while she kept shouting
 She enjoyed the uncircumcised penis. (29-30)

¹⁶ Horne, *A Savage War*, 197-98.

¹⁷ Danny Kaplan, *Brothers and Others*, 193, 193-94, 194.

¹⁸ Axel, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 420.

¹⁹ Judith Butler notes this process in the viewing of the Rodney King videotapes, where the "racist episteme of seeing" produces the object being beaten—the subjugated black male body—as imminently dangerous and threatening. See "Endangered/Endangering."

²⁰ Mayer, "Q&A."

²¹ Priest and Stephens, "Secret World of U.S. Interrogation." See also Brody, "What about the Other Secret U.S. Prisons?"

²² Said, *Orientalism*, 167.

²³ Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib," May 10, 2004, 44.

²⁴ Cogswell, "Torture and America."

²⁵ Ehrenreich, "Prison Abuse."

²⁶ Crea, "Gay Sex."

²⁷ Eisenstein, "Sexual Humiliation."

²⁸ Ehrenreich, "Prison Abuse."

²⁹ Moore, "Gay Sexuality."

³⁰ "Most Americans believe the abuses were isolated instances, not common occurrences. They believe the perpetrators were acting on their own, not following orders. And by an overwhelming margin, the public sees the abuses as a violation of military policy, rogue crimes, not a policy. As a result, most Americans blame the soldiers who carried out the abuses and the officers supervising them, not Secretary Rumsfeld or President Bush"; Schneider, reporting for *Insight*. Interestingly, media coverage such as Dao *et al.*, "Abuse Charges," centralized the heterosexual families of the Abu Ghraib perpetrators. For example, the images on page 20 of the article include the following captions: "Staff Sgt. Ivan Frederick, one of the American soldiers who are expected to face courts-martial in the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, is shown with Iraqi police officers in a photograph that he sent his family"; "Sergeant Fredericks, Martha, joined by her daughters, spoke to television journalist by phone Tuesday"; "Pfc. Lynndie R. England, who flashed a thumbs-up sign for the Abu Ghraib photos, relaxing at her parents' home last year." The heterosexual family is idealized: England comfortably smiling in her parents' kitchen, families receiving photos of their loved ones in Iraq. Abu Ghraib is a tragedy for these families, as Martha Fredericks seems distraught as she stands, arms crossed, on the phone, while her one daughter slouches on the couch with her hand supporting her head, and her other daughter leans over to the couch, perched on a chair, resting her head in her hands. All three women have blank or saddened expressions, contrasting sharply with the smiles of Ivan Frederick and England in the photos above and below them.

³¹ Eisenstein, "Sexual Humiliation."

³² Cushman, "A Conversation with Veena Das."

³³ In her interview, Das says:

A very good example of this is the idea that a woman gets higher status in society by being the hero's mother; or there are other examples in which a woman's honor may depend on the son's or husband's valiant performance in the world. There is a very subtle exchange of maleness and femaleness in these kinds of formations. So that, yes, you can get forms of sociality where violence is an exclusively male form of sociality from which women might be excluded or other forms of sociality in which she is incorporated within male forms of violence. (Ibid.)

³⁴ Shrader and Shogren, "Officials Clash"; Al-Fatiha Foundation, "Al-Fatiha Condemns Sexual Humiliation." Al-Fatiha's founder and director Faisal Alam opines, "As queer Muslims, we must condemn in the most forceful terms, the blatant acts of homophobia and sexual torture displayed by the U.S. military. These symbolic acts of abuse represent the worst form of torture."

³⁵ Stout, "Rumsfeld Offers Apology."

³⁶ Fuoco and Lash, "A Long Way."

³⁷ Crea, "Gay Sex."

³⁸ Sullivan, "Daily Dish."

³⁹ Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic*, 107.

⁴⁰ Moore, "Gay Sexuality."

⁴¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 6.

⁴² S. Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 134.

⁴³ Crea, "Gay Sex." Osborne, "Pentagon Uses Gay Sex as Tool." See also OutRage!, press release.

⁴⁴ Osborne, "Pentagon Uses Gay Sex as Tool."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Dahir, "Gay Sex and Prison Torture."

⁴⁷ Jacques et al., "Fighting for Freedom."

⁴⁸ Letellier, "Egyptians Decry 'Gay' Abuse."

⁴⁹ Moore, "Gay Sexuality."

⁵⁰ Amnesty International, "USA: Pattern of Brutality and Cruelty."

⁵¹ Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 11.

⁵² Deb and Mutis, "Smoke and Mirrors," 5. For a similarly politically astute analysis, see S. P. Shah and Young, "A 'Morning After Prescription.'"

⁵³ Harding, "The Other Prisoners."

⁵⁴ Axel, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 414. Axel is quoting Mamood, *Fighting for Faith*, 40.

⁵⁵ Bourke, "Torture as Pornography."

⁵⁶ S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 123, 131.

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E-ISSN: 1545-6943

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