

TERRORIST ASSEMBLAGES

homonationalism in queer times



jasbir k. puar

terrorist assemblages

NEXT WAVE: NEW DIRECTIONS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES

A series edited by Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Robyn Wiegman

TERRORIST

ASSEMBLAGES

homonationalism in queer times

JASBIR K. PUAR

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FOR SANDEEP SINGH PUAR

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If we think of tactics as the art of assembling men and weapons in order to win battles, and of strategy as the art of assembling battles in order to win wars, then logistics could be defined as the art of assembling war and the agricultural, economic, and industrial resources that make it possible. If a war machine could be said to have a body, then tactics would represent the muscles and strategy the brain, while logistics would be the machine's digestive and circulatory systems: the procurement and supply networks that distribute resources throughout an army's body.—Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*

Do not build on the good old days, but on the bad new ones.—Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*

What do lives of privilege look like in the midst of war and the inevitable violence that accompanies the building of empire?—M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*

preface:

tactics, strategies, logistics

July 19, 2006, was declared the International Day of Action against Homophobic Persecution in Iran by two lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) organizations, the self-proclaimed militant British-based OutRage!, and the Paris-based group IDAHO (an acronym for International Day against Homophobia). Marking the one-year anniversary of the public hangings in the city of Mashad of two male Iranian youths, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, the two groups initiated a call for global protests that resulted in actions in dozens of cities across the United States, Canada, and Europe. Demonstrations in San Francisco, New York, London, Amsterdam, Moscow, Dublin, and Stockholm were joined by less predictable lo-

cales, such as Salt Lake City, Sioux Falls, Tulsa, Warsaw, Marseille, Mexico City, and Bogotá.¹ The call was also endorsed by numerous organizations, including the International Lesbian and Gay Association and the Dutch gay organization, Center for Culture and Leisure; scores of LGBTIQ activists, artists, academics, politicians, and celebrities (for example, the writer-activist Larry Kramer, the founder of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies and CUNY professor Martin Duberman, and New York State Senator Tom Duane); the Persian Gay and Lesbian Organization, a gay Iranian group with European and Canadian secretariats; the website Gay Egypt; and the editors of *MAHA*, a “clandestine gay zine in Iran,” who wrote that “international LGBT pressure on the Iranian authorities, in solidarity with Iranian LGBT people, is most vital and welcome.”² The French activist and founder of IDAHO Louis-George Tin hailed the executions as the genesis of an international gay solidarity movement, regarding the International Day of Action as “something special [that] has happened since 19 July 2005.”³

There was, however, plenty of discord among LGBTIQ organizations regarding the call for international protests. The culmination of a year-long argument regarding the facts of the execution, these disputes involved Peter Tatchell’s OutRage!; the director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) Paula Ettelbrick; Scott Long, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Project of Human Rights Watch (HRW); the *Gay City News* writer Doug Ireland; Al-Fatiha’s founder, Faisal Alam; and the usual suspects among gay commentators, such as Andrew Sullivan.⁴ In the wake of the London bombings, photos of the hangings circulating on the Internet drew international outrage. A posting about and three photos of the execution were initially released on the website of the Iranian Students’ News Agency. A translation of this article in an OutRage! press release qualified the hangings as “honor killings” of gay youth, and the story spread rapidly across LGBTIQ listservs, websites, and blogs. The scholar and LGBTIQ activist Richard Kim, however, in a meticulously detailed chronology of the events, writes in *The Nation* that it quickly became unclear whether the two had had consensual sex (with each other or others) and were the victims of antigay persecution, or if the teenagers were convicted of gang raping a 13-year-old boy.⁵ On July 22, 2005, the Human Rights Campaign, the largest lesbian and gay organization in the United States, issued a statement demanding that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice condemn the killings. Sweden and the Netherlands temporarily suspended deportations of gay Iranians and OutRage! called for the EU to institute trade sanctions against Iran at a time, Kim notes, “when

the EU was engaged in delicate negotiations with Iran over its nuclear capacity.”⁶ By July 23, according to Kim, both IGLHRC and HRW were concerned that “gay rights” were being co-opted at the expense of a broader social justice issue: execution of minors.

Whether the complex case at hand is one of “juvenile execution,” the persecution of gays, or both, many commentators note that the United States continues to resist a growing consensus that capital punishment is inhumane, having only just recently outlawed executions of those under 18 in March 2005. As Faisal Alam notes, that three Nigerian “homosexual” men were sentenced to be stoned to death earlier that summer elicited no such global indignation.⁷ Nor have these abuses elicited so much response from LGBTIQ groups in the past. Along these lines, there were no protests in May 2004 when the circulation of photos of the torture practices at Abu Ghraib exhumed the revolting homophobia of the U.S. military. As IGLHRC’s director Paula Ettelbrick asks, “Why now? Why just Iran?”⁸

Hailed as a member of the “axis of evil” by the Bush administration, and with evidence of planned U.S. military action mounting during the summer of 2005, it seems pretty clear why now, and why Iran. Further, the 2006 anniversary protests took place during the second month of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, amid escalating pressure to consider military strikes against Syria and Iran for their support of Hezbollah. The frenzied fixation on the homophobia of Iran’s state regime is thus perpetuated, in many instances, by the very same factions who are responsible for the global proliferation of protests against a future invasion of Iran. At this historical moment, this bizarre conjuncture functions as nothing less than the racism of the global gay left and the wholesale acceptance of the Islamophobic rhetoric that fuels the war on terror and the political forces pushing for an Iranian invasion, if not a tacit acceptance of the pending occupation itself.

Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times is an invitation to deeper exploration of these connections among sexuality, race, gender, nation, class, and ethnicity in relation to the tactics, strategies, and logistics of war machines. This project critiques the fostering, managing, and valorizing of life and all that sustains it, describing the mechanisms by which queerness as a process of racialization informs the very distinctions between life and death, wealth and poverty, health and illness, fertility and morbidity, security and insecurity, living and dying. Race, ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and sexuality disaggregate gay, homosexual, and queer national subjects who align themselves with U.S. imperial interests from forms of illegitimate queerness that name and ultimately propel popula-

tions into extinction.⁹ *Terrorist Assemblages* foregrounds the proliferation, occupation, and suppression of queernesses in relation to patriotism, war, torture, security, death, terror, terrorism, detention, and deportation, themes usually imagined as devoid of connection to sexual politics in general and queer politics in particular. Impelled not only by this folding of queer and other sexual national subjects into the biopolitical management of life, but by the simultaneous folding out of life, out toward death, of queerly racialized “terrorist populations,” biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and which queers die—a variable and contestable demarcation—but also *how* queers live and die. The result of the successes of queer incorporation into the domains of consumer markets and social recognition in the post-civil rights, late twentieth century, these various entries by queers into the biopolitical optimization of life mark a shift, as homosexual bodies have been historically understood as endlessly cathected to death. In other words, there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but certainly not most—homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of the “measures of benevolence” that are afforded by liberal discourses of multicultural tolerance and diversity.¹⁰ This benevolence toward sexual others is contingent upon ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity. The contemporary emergence of homosexual, gay, and queer subjects—normativized through their deviance (as it becomes surveilled, managed, studied) rather than despite it—is integral to the interplay of perversion and normativity necessary to sustain in full gear the management of life. In making this argument, I deploy “racialization” as a figure for specific social formations and processes that are not necessarily or only tied to what has been historically theorized as “race.”

The emergence and sanctioning of queer subjecthood is a historical shift condoned only through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted for segregation, disposal, or death, a reintensification of racialization through queerness. The cultivation of these homosexual subjects folded into life, enabled through “market virility” and “regenerative reproductivity,” is racially demarcated and paralleled by a rise in the targeting of queerly raced bodies for dying. If the “turn to life” for queer subjects is now possible, how queerness folds into racialization is a crucial factor in

whether and how that turn to life is experienced, if it is experienced at all. Further, the rise of these nonnormative national subjects is linked in no uncertain terms to the racialized populations that come into being through the assignment of queerness, an assignment disavowed by the queer subject embraced by biopolitical incitement to life. *Terrorist Assemblages* thus attends to the connectivities that generate queer, homosexual, and gay disciplinary subjects while concurrently constituting queerness as the optic through which perverse populations are called into nominalization for control. That is, this recasting of queerness as that optic—and the operative technology—in the production, disciplining, and maintenance of populations drives the analyses in this book. This disjuncture of the regulating and regulated queer, homosexual, gay disciplinary subjects and the queered darkening of terrorists marks the surprising but not fully unexpected flowering of new normativities in these queer times.

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, my primary interest is in this process of the management of queer life at the expense of sexually and racially perverse death in relation to the contemporary politics of securitization, Orientalism, terrorism, torture, and the articulation of Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian sexualities. I argue that during this historical juncture, there is a very specific production of terrorist bodies against properly queer subjects. The questions that have fueled this project include but are not limited to the following: What are the historical linkages between various periods of national crisis and the pathologizing of sexuality, the inflation of sexual perversions? What are the heteronormative assumptions still binding the fields and disciplines of security and surveillance analyses, peace and conflict studies, terrorism research, public policy, transnational finance networks, human rights and human security blueprints, and international peacekeeping organizations such as the United Nations? How do we conceptualize queer sexualities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other parts of the “Middle East”—a term I hesitate to use given its area studies origins—without reproducing neocolonialist assumptions that collude with U.S. missionary and savior discourses? Given the mechanics of scapegoating sexual minorities as well as South Asians, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans, what kinds of discursive and material strategies are queer Muslims and queer Arabs using to resist state and societal violence?¹¹

The import of these questions is suggested by the changing demographics of HIV transmission, prevention funding, and pharmaceutical industry exploitation; the decriminalization of sodomy in the United States; the global (albeit uneven) incorporation of various versions of legalized gay

marriage and domestic partnership; the rise of a global gay right wing anchored in Europe and attaining credibility very pointedly through Islamophobic rhetoric; flourishing gay and lesbian representation (in the U.S. mainstream) such as *The L Word* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*; normativizing gay and lesbian human rights frames, which produce (in tandem with gay tourism) gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly nations; the queer “market virility” that can simulate heteronormative paternity through the purchase of reproductive technology; the return to kinship and family norms implicit in the new lesbian “global family,” complete with transnational adoptee babies; and market accommodation that has fostered multibillion-dollar industries in gay tourism, weddings, investment opportunities, and retirement. In large part, the conversation that has dominated sexuality studies of the post-civil rights era is a fatigued debate about the advances and merits of civil legitimization—legalization of sodomy, gay marriage, and gay adoption—in contrast to the sold-out politics embedded within market interpellations of LGBTIQ subjects, with the question of resistance always at the core of this polarity. Rather than emphasizing the resistant or oppositional, I seek to exhume the *convivial* relations between queernesses and militarism, securitization, war, terrorism, surveillance technologies, empire, torture, nationalism, globalization, fundamentalism, secularism, incarceration, detention, deportation, and neoliberalism: the tactics, strategies, and logistics of our contemporary war machines.

Tactics: A Word on Method

The correspondence between nonnormative sexualities, race, and pathologized nationality has been examined and interrogated by theorists working on transnational sexualities and queer diasporic identities, sexual citizenship, consumption practices in relation to legislative gains and civil liberties, the workings of global LGBTIQ nongovernmental organizations and sexual rights, and the reproduction of kinship and normative familial structures in globalization.¹² Reflective of an ongoing push to articulate queer theories beyond their origins in literary studies, as well as a challenge to unprobed assumptions of whiteness and citizenship privilege, the import of this work remains relatively unaddressed in contemporary political dialogues. *Terrorist Assemblages* continues this critical mandate to disrupt certain dialogues when they refuse to take into account feminist, queer, and transnational contributions to these conversations by highlighting heteronormative framings and absent analytics.

In the spirit of such disruptions, *Terrorist Assemblages* engages a range of different theoretical paradigms, textual materials, and tactical approaches that are reflective of a queer methodological philosophy. Queerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission: there is no exact recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tidy vessel. The texts I have assembled are governmental texts on counterterrorism technologies; films, documentaries, and television shows; print media (especially LGBTIQ regional, national, and international newspapers and magazines); organizational press releases and manifestos; and ethnographic data (including participant-observation at numerous pivotal LGBTIQ political events and meetings and interviews with prominent LGBTIQ community organizers and activists). I have also examined what might be constituted as circuits of alternative press (postings from listservs such as professorsforpeace.org and portside.org, and numerous websites and news services such as the Pacifica News Service and opendemocracy.net) and representational and cultural artifacts (photos, consumables, visual depictions). Assembling these varied and often disjunctive primary sources is crucial to countering the platitudinous and journalistic rhetoric that plagues those public discourses most readily available for consumption. By considering those sources within the frame of this study, I hope to contribute to the building of an alternative historical record, archive, and documentation of our contemporary moments. However, I veer away from the instinctual, the natural, or the commonsensical as the basis of a queer sensibility. On the contrary, I am interested in the unexpected, the unplanned irruptions, the lines of flight, the denaturalizing of expectation through the juxtaposition of the seemingly unrelated, working to undo the naturalized sexual scripts of terror that become taken-for-granted knowledge formations.

My analyses draw upon more than five years of research conducted in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut involving community-based organizations, activist events, meetings, protests, teach-ins, and panels, as well as pamphlets, educational materials, propaganda, and press releases from both alternative and mainstream media. The methodologies employed in this work involve formal interviews, participant-observation at meetings and events, discursive analyses of mainstream and alternative media, and readings of legal decisions. A film project on which I am currently working, about the participation since the early 1990s of South Asian progressive organizations in the annual New York City India Day Parade, titled *India Shining*, also forms the backdrop of this manuscript and informs my analy-

ses. More than 150 hours of footage for the film, including interviews with over sixty South Asian community activists, artists, and community members, visually portray the political conundrums written about here.

This book spans South Asian, Arab American, and Muslim racial formations, centering what are currently being termed West Asian formations as well as Arab American and Muslim identities in the study of Asian American and South Asian American historical and contemporary processes of racialization and sexualization, promoting a linking of Arab American and Asian American studies. While there is a clear focus on U.S. sexual exceptionalisms, I draw together discrete state projects that radiate outward, tracing other national sexual exceptionalisms—in Britain and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands—via the growing cohesion of a global gay Islamophobia. Clearly the scales of place and space in this project are unruly and perhaps at times too specific: New York City, for example, and the tristate area beyond it (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut) are a key focus of some of the LGBTIQ organizing and news coverage. Nevertheless, the expansive geographical boundaries of this project, both real and imagined, reflect both an unhomed interdisciplinarity as well as mediated tensions and deliberate blurring between area studies knowledge formations and ethnic, diaspora, and transnational studies. In the age of what Rey Chow hails as the “world target”—the world as an object to be destroyed—the mandate to envision alternatives to “target fields” (the conventional organization of postwar military area studies geographies that are “fields of information retrieval and dissemination . . . necessary for the perpetuation of the United States’ political and ideological hegemony”) only intensifies. This project may fail in fully displacing the self-referential eye/I that Chow argues is the crux of U.S. practices of targeting the world. By not playing by the disciplinary rules, however, I can offer alternative and submerged geographies—the United States from decidedly underresourced, nonnormative vantage points—exposing the United States not only as targeting but also as the target, as targeted.¹³

Strategies: On Speed—Hauntings, Timings, Temporalities

The present as an experience of a time is precisely the moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future).—Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*

The accelerated state tends to be exuberant in invention and fancy, leaping rapidly from one association to the next, carried along by the force of its own impetus. Slowness, in contrast, tends to go with care and caution, a sober and critical stance, which has its uses no less than the “go” of effusion.—Oliver Sacks, “Speed: Aberrations of Time and Movement”

The time is out of joint. The world is going badly. It is worn but its wear no longer counts. Old age or youth—one no longer counts in that way. The world has more than one age. We lack the measure of the measure. We no longer realize the wear, we no longer take account of it as of a single age in the progress of history. Neither maturation, nor crisis, nor even agony. Something else. What is happening is happening to age itself, it strikes a blow at the teleological order of history. What is coming, in which the untimely appears, is happening to time but it does not happen in time. Contretemps. *The time is out of joint.*—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

The tempo of always-becoming is in part what Achille Mbembe, writing about Africa as an anachronistic void, elucidates in his usage of “emerging time,” “time that is appearing,” “passing time,” and “the time of entanglement.” In his critique of telos, unilateral directionality, and the cyclical pattern of stability and rupture, Mbembe wants not only to claim time as nonlinear, an always already apropos move, but insufficient, he argues, given that nonlinearity has been embraced as chaos. Ultimately, he seeks to destabilize the opposition between stability and chaos, such that chaos is discharged from its semiotic resonance with violence, upheaval, anarchy.¹⁴ It is not to normativize chaos per se, nor to mark its production as aberrant, but to allow for what might issue forth from it, what it might produce, rather than to seek the antidote that would suppress it. It is also to disentangle political and social chaos from the terms of its conventional response, that of political urgency.

This notion of political urgency, a temporality that problematically resuscitates state of exception discourses, suggests a particular relationship to temporality and change, inasmuch as it cuts across or runs against the grain of the ideal of laborious, ponderous, leisurely production of intellectual scholarship that can thrive only in the stable confines of a “room of one’s own” or a political climate that is not disruptive or tumultuous. No doubt this is, or was, a western concept of intellectual labor, mired in modernist

yearnings for and fantasies about work, leisure, temporality, and spatiality. If we say that events are happening fast, what must we slow down in order to make such a pronouncement? If we delineate time as having a steady rhythm, what disjunctures must we smooth out or over in order to arrive at that conclusion? If we feel that things are calm, what must we forget in order to inhabit such a restful feeling?

Foregrounding the political urgency of this project reifies certain events: in this case, September 11, 2001, commonly 9/11, as a particular turning point or a central generator of desires for expediency, rapidity, political innovativeness, caught in a binary debate of rupture versus continuity.¹⁵ As metaphor, 9/11 reflects particular spatial and temporal narratives and also produces spatializing and temporalizing discourses.¹⁶ September 11, when invoked, is done so cautiously, as an event in the Deleuzian sense, privileging lines of flight, an assemblage of spatial and temporal intensities, coming together, dispersing, reconverging. The event-ness of September 11 refuses the binary of watershed moment and turning point of radical change, versus intensification of more of the same, tethered between its status as a “history-making moment” and a “history-vanishing moment.”¹⁷ On behalf of his conceptualization of September 11 as a “snapshot”—a break and an explosion—Nilüfer Göle argues that “understanding September 11th requires building a narrative starting from the terrorist moment as an instance, that is an exemplary incident which, in one moment, allows different temporalities to emerge, and with them, a range of issues hitherto suppressed.” For Göle, the snapshot encompasses the temporalities of the instant and the image, of fast-forwarding, rewinding, and shuttering, rather than being strictly anchored to the past, present and future.¹⁸ Less wedded to visual metaphor is David Kazanjian’s reworking of Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on memory and history in relation to flashes, *aufblitz*, “flashpoints,” what he defines as a “burst[ing] into action and being, not out of nothing, but transformed from one form to another; and . . . the powerful effects of that transformation or emergence.”¹⁹ Flashpoints signal a procedural becoming-time for Kazanjian, a centripetal turbulence of illumination so powerful that it may blind the past even as it spotlights the present and lights up the future.

Terrorist Assemblages emerges as a story about various events that operate as both snapshots and flashpoints: of September 11, torture at Abu Ghraib, the decriminalization of sodomy in the United States, the spate of racial backlash crimes against Muslims and Sikhs, the detention and deportation of suspected terrorists, and post-9/11 organizing. But both frames—snap-

shot, through its relation to history making and history vanishing, and flashpoint, as a concretized movement from one incarnation of being to another—rely on the paradigms of past, present, and future, a before and an after, even if their inherent periodizations spill over, foreshadow and stalk each other, loop back recursively, return and relay, and scramble their attendant spatializing effects. As with all narratives of telos and periodization, such as those embedded in and endemic to modernity, to heterosexuality, to adulthood, temporal qualifications work to determine the intelligible sphere of scholarly legitimacy. How, then, to reassess the valuation of scholarly production emergent from apparent notions of stability, longevity, depth? Such a rethinking of the assumed shapes and temporalities of the labor of thinking and writing contributes to a broader global vision that does not erase profoundly uneven materialities of production in their manifold constellations. This is not to advocate a postmodern fetishization of anything quick, fleeting, and superficial, nor to deny that there is stillness in this writing. I have struggled to situate becoming-time as a collapsing of the binary frame of urgency, expediency, and politicality versus stability and calm, and move to a notion of becoming-time that allows for the force of the present in the ways of which Mbembe speaks, embracing the heteroglossia of public intellectual and intellectual activist modalities.

The futures are much closer to us than any pasts we might want to return to or revisit. What does it mean to be examining, absorbing, feeling, reflecting on, and writing about the archive as it is being produced, rushing at us—literally, to entertain an unfolding archive? This question may lend an immediacy to the work, or it may emit a hollow ringing of the past that no longer feels pertinent; even more bizarrely, it may mean that the present is still unrecognizable to us. So while this is not a historical project, it is indeed a historicization of the contemporary moment, historicizing biopolitics of the now. This has meant in part less emphasis on historicization, or on the historicity of the biopolitical modes of surveillance, terror, war, securitization, torture, empire, and violence examined in this text, and a move toward collecting, shaping, and interrogating an archive that will be available for future historicization.

This project is thus profoundly impelled by an anticipatory temporality, a modality that seeks to catch a small hold of many futures, to invite futurity even as it refuses to script it, distinct from an anticipatory “paranoid temporality” that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick critiques. Sedgwick writes of paranoia, “No time could be too early for one’s having-already-known, for its having-already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen. And no

loss could be too far in the future to need to be preemptively discounted.”²⁰ Paranoid temporality is thus embedded in a risk economy that attempts to ensure against future catastrophe. This is a temporality of negative exuberance—for we are never safe enough, never healthy enough, never prepared enough—driven by imitation (repetition of the same or in the service of maintaining the same) rather than innovation (openness to disruption of the same, calling out to the new).

A paranoid temporality therefore produces a suppression of critical creative politics; in contrast, the anticipatory temporalities that I advocate more accurately reflect a Spivakian notion of “politics of the open end,”²¹ of positively enticing unknowable political futures into our wake, taking risks rather than guarding against them. In that sense it is also ensconced in an antedating temporality, an example of which is as follows: “The runner’s belief that he consciously heard the gun and then, immediately, exploded off the blocks is an illusion made possible . . . because the mind antedates the sound of the gun by almost half a second.”²² This book is an attempt at antedating the sound of the gun—that is, not only or primarily anticipating the future, but also recording the future that is already here, yet unknown but for a split second. Writing that “haunting is a constituent element of modern social life,” Avery Gordon asks us to contemplate “the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces which makes its mark by being there and not being there at the same time, cajoling us to reconsider . . . the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present, force and shape.”²³

Here, “ghostly matters” signal the primacy of the past and our inheritance of the past: its hauntings, its demands, its present absences and absent presences. However, in part what I mean to highlight through an antecedent temporality are the ghosts of the future that we can already sniff, ghosts that are waiting for us, that usher us into futurities. Haunting in this sense defuses a binary between past and present—because indeed the becoming-future is haunting us—while its ontological debt to that which once was nevertheless cautions against an easy privileging of the fetish of innovation, of what might otherwise be demeaned as an unthinking reach for that which is trendy or cutting-edge. Haunting, as Gordon implies, is also a methodological approach that keeps an eye out for shadows, ephemera, energies, ethereal forces, textures, spirit, sensations: “Haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit

magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality that we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.”²⁴

To understand how we experience such transformative recognition, I turn to the neurologist Oliver Sacks, who has brilliantly written on the “wild range of speeds” experienced by the human brain. In his exposition he details other ways of measuring time outside of the past-present-future triad and their scrambling, as an intensification or de-intensification of the experience of time, as one of “registering larger or smaller numbers of events in a given time.” Relationships between speed (how fast or slow time feels), pace (the tempo, rate, or intervals of registering events within time), and duration (the length of time within which these events are registered) alter and are altered. Sacks quotes William James: “Our judgment of time, our speed of perception, depends on how many ‘events’ we can perceive in a given unit of time.” The speeding up of time involves “a foreshortening, a telescoping of time,” a contraction or compression of time whereby less is registered in shorter time units but time is lived faster. Slowing down time enables an “enlargement, a microscopy of time,” an expansion of time during which more is registered, but time is lived as slow, or slowed, “increased speed of thought and an apparent slowing down of time” resulting in an “enlarged and spacious timescape.” As Sacks explains, “The apparent slowing of time in emergencies . . . may come from the power of intense attention to reduce the duration of individual frames.”²⁵ So, in the midst of the frenetic speeds of crisis and urgency, a slowing of time happens, and with it, a deeper scrutiny of every single experienced moment. Like an enlarged timescape, this text is also a slowing down of a particular historical moment of crisis, a matching of increased speed of thought that accompanies responses to crisis with the slowing down of individual frames necessary to really comprehend and attend to that crisis. History, at least what one might conventionally think of as history, is secondary to the enlarged timescape—that is, the time of entanglement—of this book.

In proposing what Elizabeth Freeman calls a “deviant chronopolitics,” one that envisions “relations across time and between times” that upturn developmentalist narratives of history,²⁶ I would add that time must be conjured not only as nonlinear, but also as nonmetric. Manuel De Landa describes metric temporality as that which “take[s] for granted the flow of time already divided into identical instants bearing such close resemblance to one another that the flow may be regarded as essentially homogenous.” Nonmetric time deconstructs the naturalization of the administrative units

of measurement of the “familiar, divisible, and measurable time of everyday experience” and challenges the assumption that the repetition of these units, these “stable oscillators” at different scales, is “composed of identical instants.”²⁷ Quite simply, one second is not the same as another second. Following both De Landa and Sacks, the chronopolitics of any text must also be seen to be resonant with affective modalities of speed, duration, and pace. Excavating the schisms between clock time and personal time, “not constrained by external perception or reality,”²⁸ Sacks suggests that speed, pace, and duration are ontological properties rather than temporal qualifications, raising the following questions: What kinds of times are we living? How are we living time in these times? That is, what is the relation of historical time to lived time, to temporalities of living? Each work has its own time, and times within itself: the time of its writing, the time of its release (times to which it belongs), and the time of the text, of the words themselves, of times and temporalities that intersect with its audience’s times (times that it impels); that is, temporalities of production and absorption. There are a multitude of times embedded in any enunciation, act, or articulation. The time of any text remains a mystery, a chance encounter with a moment, a reader, an assemblage of all of these converging; to borrow from Shakespeare (like Derrida), the time is out of joint: something is happening *to* time, not *in* time, revamping an encounter with time. And so this book is an assemblage of temporalities and movements—speed, pace, duration—which is not strictly bound to developmentalist or historical telos or their disruption, and an assemblage of theoretical interests, meaning that there is not one or several main strands that thread through this book, but rather ideas that converge, diverge, and merge. For example, the book takes a turn in the middle: the introduction and chapters 1 and 2 focus primarily on representational problematics and subject formation, while the last two chapters take up complications of the efficacy of representational praxis with issues of affect, ontology, and biopolitical control, foregrounding population construction. Proliferating here are multiple and layered temporalities, multiple histories and futures, within all these of these: snapshots, flashpoints, and assemblages.

Logistics: Mapping the Text

José Esteban Muñoz’s writing on the “terrorist drag” of the Los Angeles-based performance artist Vaginal Davis bizarrely harks to another political era, as if it were long ago, when the notion of the terrorist had a trenchant

but distant quality to it. Muñoz argues that Davis's drag performances, encompassing "cross-sex, cross-race minstrelsy," are terrorist on two levels. Aesthetically, Davis rejects glamour-girl feminine drag in favor of "ground level guerilla representational strategies" such as white supremacist militiamen and black welfare-queen hookers, what Muñoz calls "the nation's most dangerous citizens." This alludes to the second plane of meaning, the reenactment of the "nation's internal terrors around race, gender, and sexuality."²⁹ It is imperative to note that guerrillas and terrorists have vastly different national and racial valences, the former bringing to mind the phantasmatic landscapes of Central and South America, and the latter, the enduring legacy of Orientalist imaginaries. In the context of these geographies it is notable that Davis as the white militiaman astutely brings terrorism home—to Oklahoma City, in fact—and in doing so dislodges, at least momentarily, the Orientalist legacy of terrorism.

Muñoz's description of this terrorist drag appropriately points to the historical convergences between queers and terror: homosexuals have been traitors to the nation, figures of espionage and double agents, associated with communists during the McCarthy era, and, as with suicide bombers, have brought on and desired death through the AIDS pandemic (both suicide bomber and gay man always figure as already dying, a decaying or corroding masculinity). More recent exhortations place gay marriage as "the worst form of terrorism" and gay couples as "domestic terrorists."³⁰ Clearly, one can already ask: What is terrorist about the queer? But the more salient and urgent question is: What is queer about the terrorist? And what is queer about terrorist corporealities? The depictions of masculinity most rapidly disseminated and globalized at this historical juncture are terrorist masculinities: failed and perverse, these emasculated bodies always have femininity as their reference point of malfunction, and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body—homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease. We see, for example, the queer physicality of terrorist monsters haunting the U.S. State Department counterterrorism website.³¹ With the unfurling, viruslike, explosive mass of the terrorist network, tentacles ever regenerating despite efforts to truncate them, the terrorist is concurrently an unfathomable, unknowable, and hysterical monstrosity, and yet one that only the exceptional capacities of U.S. intelligence and security systems can quell. This unknowable monstrosity is not a casual bystander or parasite; the nation assimilates this effusive discomfort with the unknowability of these bodies, thus affectively producing new normativities and exceptionalisms through the cataloguing of un-

knowables. Concomitantly, masculinities of patriotism work to distinguish, and thus discipline or incorporate and banish, terrorist from patriot. It is not that we must engage in the practice of excavating the queer terrorist, or queering the terrorist; rather, queerness is always already installed in the project of naming the terrorist; the terrorist does not appear as such without the concurrent entrance of perversion, deviance. The strategy of encouraging subjects of study to appear in all their queernesses, rather than primarily to queer the subjects of study, provides a subject-driven temporality in tandem with a method-driven temporality. Playing on this difference, between the subject being queered and queerness already existing within the subject (and thus dissipating the subject as such), allows for both the temporality of being (ontological essence of the subject) and the temporality of always-becoming (continual ontological emergence, a Deleuzian *becoming without being*).

The introduction, “Homonationalism and Biopolitics,” details three pertinent frames of the book project: sexual exceptionalism, regulatory queerness, and the ascendancy of whiteness. These frames act as an interlocking nexus of power grids that map the various demarcations of race, gender, class, nation, and religion that permeate constructions of terror and terrorist bodies. I argue that in the United States at this historical juncture an opportunity for forms of LGBTIQ inclusion in the national imaginary and body politic rests upon specific performances of American sexual exceptionalism vis-à-vis perverse, improperly hetero- and homo- Muslim sexualities. To elucidate forms of regulatory queerness, I discuss forms of queer secularity that attenuate constructions of Muslim sexuality. In particular, sites of queer struggle in Europe—Britain, the Netherlands—have articulated Muslim populations as an especial threat to LGBTIQ persons, organizations, communities, and spaces of congregation. Finally, I review the emergence of a global political economy of queer sexualities that—framed through the notion of the “ascendancy of whiteness”—repeatedly coheres whiteness as a queer norm and straightness as a racial norm.

Chapter 1, “The Sexuality of Terrorism,” elaborates on the rise of U.S. homonationalism, the dual movement in which certain homosexual constituencies have embraced U.S. nationalist agendas and have also been embraced by nationalist agendas. I argue that discourses of counterterrorism are intrinsically gendered, raced, and sexualized and that they illuminate the production of imbricated normative patriot and terrorist corporealities that cohere against and through each other. I survey the schizophrenic domestication and expulsion of queer sexualities via the normalizing im-

pulses of patriotism after September 11, 2001. I examine the field of terrorism studies, and its growth over the last several decades, to narrate its investments in a western romance of the heteronormative family coupled with the assumed sexual pathologies of terrorists. I highlight the propensity for recent feminist and queer theorizing on terrorist subjectivities to unwittingly reproduce these investments. Using Edward Said's *Orientalism* to read various episodes of the satirical cartoon comedy show *South Park*, I demonstrate that the U.S. formation of the homonational subject of rights discourses works in conjunction with patriotic propaganda to produce populations of "queer terrorists." Through an assessment of these multiple texts, I argue that the contemporary U.S. heteronormative nation actually relies on and benefits from the proliferation of queerness, especially in regard to the sexually exceptional homonational and its evil counterpart, the queer terrorist of elsewhere. These fleeting invitations into nationalism indicate that U.S. nation-state formations, historically reliant on heteronormative ideologies, are now accompanied by—to use Lisa Duggan's term—homonormative ideologies that replicate narrow racial, class, and gender national ideals.

Building on this frame of U.S. homonationalism, in chapter 2, "Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism," I demonstrate homonationalism's deployment in a transnational frame, whereby a claim is made to a proper modern homosexual exceptional identity in relation to an Orientalist version of Muslim male sexuality. Surveying the critical commentary generated by feminist and queer theorists—such as Barbara Ehrenreich, Patrick Moore, Zillah Eisenstein, and Slavoj Žižek—during the aftermath of the release of the Abu Ghraib photos in May 2004, I maintain that Muslim masculinity is simultaneously pathologically excessive yet repressive, perverse yet homophobic, virile yet emasculated, monstrous yet flaccid. This discourse serves to rearticulate the devitalization of one population sequestered for dying—Iraqi detainees accused of terrorist affiliations—into the securitization and revitalization of another population, the American citizenry. Effectively, this is a biopolitical reordering of the negative register of death transmuted into the positive register of life, especially for U.S. homonormative subjects who, despite the egregious homophobic, racist, and misogynist behavior of the U.S. military prison guards, benefit from the continued propagation of the United States as tolerant, accepting, even encouraging of sexual diversity. America is narrated by multiple progressive sectors as embodying an exceptional multicultural heteronormativity, one that is also bolstered by homonormativity.

While the first two chapters foreground conservative homonormative formations, chapter 3, “Intimate Control, Infinite Detention: Rereading the *Lawrence* Case,” continues the examination of the proliferation of sexual exceptionalism through queer liberal subject formations. The historic *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* ruling decriminalized sodomy between consensual adults in the United States in June 2003. The language of the *Lawrence* decision imagines the homosexual subject as a queer liberal one, invested in consumption, property ownership, and intimate, stable sexual relationships, relying on an archaic formulation of public/private divides that has little utility for daily living. It also assumes that being accorded the right to the private realm is adequate compensation for the intrusions of public surveillance. Finally, the ruling posits the capacity for intimacy as the barometric measure of which sexual actors, more so than sexual acts, are worthy of protection.

Through a deconstruction of the celebratory readings of the ruling, I argue that such readings are only possible through the erasure of the contemporary politics of surveillance, racial profiling, detention, and deportation. I reread the privacy and intimacy debates of *Lawrence* through a different set of optics: the 1996 Immigration and Welfare Reform Act, the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act), and the subsequent spatial politics and practices of detention and deportation. The *Lawrence* decision is emblematic of legislative incorporation for queer liberal and homonormative subjects. Further, intimacy for queerly racialized populations (demarcated for neglect, disposal, and death), rather than residing in the private or mismanaged in the public, appears as circulating points of exchange and contact within a biopolitical control economy. This economy is mediated by surveillance, systems of information gathering and monitoring, and aggregations of statistics, such that the spatial and representational public and private domains of liberal personhood remain meaningful only insofar as they demarcate subjects of privilege. Thus I rearticulate intimacy as a register beyond the disciplinary subject, embedded in control societies as a mode of population disaggregation between those incited to life and those consigned to death.

Chapter 4, “‘The Turban Is Not a Hat’: Queer Diaspora and Practices of Profiling,” extends this analysis of queer liberal formations to queer diasporic subjects. Ironically, South Asian queer diasporic subjects are under even greater duress to produce themselves as exceptional American subjects, not necessarily as heteronormative but as homonormative, even as the

queernesses of these very bodies are simultaneously used to pathologize populations of terrorist look-alike bodies. As contagions that trouble the exceptionalisms of queer South Asian diasporas, male turbaned Sikh bodies, often mistaken for Muslim terrorist bodies, are read as patriarchal by queer diasporic logics and placed within heteronormative victimology narratives by Sikh American advocacy groups focused on redressing the phenomenon of “mistaken identity.” Both queer diasporic and Sikh American logics are indebted to visual representations of corporeality. Hence, I reread these bodies as affectively troubling—generating affective confusion and interdeterminancy—in terms of ontology, tactility, and the combination of organic and nonorganic matter. Reading turbans through affect challenges both the limits of queer diasporic identity that balks at the nonnormativity of the turbaned body (even as it avows the pathological racial and sexual renderings of terrorist bodies) while simultaneously infusing the “mistaken identity” debates with different methods of comprehending the susceptibility of these bodies beyond heteronormative victimology narratives.

In the conclusion, “Queer Times, Terrorist Assemblages,” I survey the chapters to argue for new directions in cultural studies that critically reassess the use of intersectional models. I turn to affective, ontological, and assemblage paradigms to challenge the limits of identity-based narratives of queerness, especially those reliant on visibility politics. Thus the book concludes with a strong political and intellectual mapping for the futurity of queer critique and its relevance to global forces of securitization, counterterrorism, and nationalism.

Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times offers a new paradigm for the theorization of race and sexuality. The book marks the powerful emergence of the disciplinary queer (liberal, homonormative, diasporic) subject into the bountiful market and the interstices of state benevolence—that is, into the statistical fold that produces appropriate digits and facts toward the population’s optimization of life and the ascendancy of whiteness: full-fledged regulatory queer subjects and the regularization of deviancy. Further, this sexually exceptional subject is produced against queerness, as a process intertwined with racialization, that calls into nominalization abject populations peripheral to the project of living, expendable as human waste and shunted to the spaces of deferred death. Reflective of my desire for responsive political and pedagogical strategies that, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s words, produce an “uncoercive rearrangement of desires,”³² this book is my modest contribution to that mandate. I hope it will spur more questions and dilemmas than it necessarily resolves, spark debate, and invite

such uncoercive rearrangements rather than situate itself or be situated as masterly, correcting, or prescriptive. The guiding question for this endeavor remains: Can we keep our senses open to emergent and unknown forms of belonging, connectivity, intimacy, the unintentional and indeterminate slippages and productivities of domination, to signal a futurity of affective politics?

“People are now coming out of the closet on the word empire,” said the conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer. “The fact is no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the Roman Empire.” The metaphor of coming out is striking, part of a broader trend of appropriating the language of progressive movements in the service of empire. How outrageous to apply the language of gay pride to a military power that demands that its soldiers stay in the closet.—Amy Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today”

introduction:

homonationalism and biopolitics

Both Krauthammer and his critic, the American studies scholar Amy Kaplan, highlight the confluence of American sexuality and politics.¹ The coming out metaphor, which Kaplan later states is invoked incessantly by U.S. neocons to elaborate a burgeoning ease with the notion of the United States as an empire, is striking not only for its appropriative dissemination, but for what the appropriation indexes. On the one hand, the convergence marks a cultural moment of national inclusion for homosexuality, alluding to a particular kind of parallel possibility for the liberated nation and the liberated queer. This sanctioning of the lingua franca of gay liberation hints that the liberation of American empire from its closets—an empire already known but concealed—will and should result in pride, a proud American empire. In this incisive piece, Kaplan astutely points to the necessary elisions of Krauthammer’s pronouncement, but unfortunately enacts another effacement of her own. From a glance at the demographics, one could deduce that those most likely to be forced into closeting by the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, given their disproportionate percentage of enlistment in the U.S. military, are men and women of color.² Thus, any affinity with nonnormative sexual subjects the nation might unconsciously intimate is vigilantly circum-

scribed by a “military power that demands that its soldiers stay in the closet.” This proviso is implicitly racially inflected, demarcating the least welcome entrants into this national revelation of pride to be queer people of color. Moreover, in this reclamation of exceptionalism, both Krauthammer and Kaplan execute a troubling affirmation of the teleological investments in “closeting” and “coming out” narratives that have long been critiqued by poststructuralist theorists for the privileged (white) gay, lesbian, and queer liberal subjects they inscribe and validate.

National recognition and inclusion, here signaled as the annexation of homosexual jargon, is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary. At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of national homosexuality, what I term “homonationalism”—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. There is a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness that is implicated in the propagation of the United States as empire as well as the alliance between this propagation and this brand of homosexuality. The fleeting sanctioning of a national homosexual subject is possible, not only through the proliferation of sexual-racial subjects who invariably fall out of its narrow terms of acceptability, as others have argued, but more significantly, through the simultaneous engendering and disavowal of *populations* of sexual-racial others who need not apply.

In what follows I explore these three imbricated manifestations—sexual exceptionalism, queer as regulatory, and the ascendancy of whiteness—and their relations to the production of terrorist and citizen bodies. My goal is to present a dexterous portrait, signaling attentiveness to how, why, and where these threads bump into each other and where they weave together, resisting a mechanistic explanatory device that may cover all the bases. In the case of what I term “U.S. sexual exceptionalism,” a narrative claiming the successful management of life in regard to a *people*, what is noteworthy is that an exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity, in other words, homonationalism. Collectively, they continue or extend the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion endemic to the war on terror. The terms of degeneracy have shifted such that homosexuality is no longer a priori excluded from nationalist formations. I unearth the forms of regulation im-

plicit in notions of queer subjects that are transcendent, secular, or otherwise exemplary as resistant, and open up the question of queer re/production and regeneration and its contribution to the project of the optimization of life. The ascendancy of whiteness is a description of biopolitics proffered by Rey Chow, who links the violence of liberal deployments of diversity and multiculturalism to the “valorization of life” alibi that then allows for rampant exploitation of the very subjects included in discourses of diversity in the first instance. I elucidate how these three approaches to the study of sexuality, taken together, suggest a trenchant rereading of biopolitics with regard to queerness as well as the intractability of queerness from biopolitical arrangements of life and death.

U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism

One mapping of the folding of homosexuals into the reproductive valorization of living—technologies of life—includes the contemporary emergence of “sexually exceptional” U.S. citizens, both heterosexual and otherwise, a formation I term “U.S. sexual exceptionalism.” Exceptionalism paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority), suggesting a departure from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress. Exception refers both to particular discourses that repetitively produce the United States as an exceptional nation-state and Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of the sanctioned and naturalized disregard of the limits of state juridical and political power through times of state crisis, a “state of exception” that is used to justify the extreme measures of the state.³ In this project, this double play of exception speaks to Muslim and Sikh “terrorist” corporealities as well as to homosexual patriots. The “sexual torture scandal” at Abu Ghraib is an instructive example of the interplay between exception and exceptionalism whereby the deferred death of one population recedes as the securitization and valorization of the life of another population triumphs in its shadow. This double deployment of exception and exceptionalism works to turn the negative valence of torture into the positive register of the valorization of (American) life, that is, torture in the name of the maximization and optimization of life.

As the U.S. nation-state produces narratives of exception through the war on terror, it must temporarily suspend its heteronormative imagined community to consolidate national sentiment and consensus through the recognition and incorporation of some, though not all or most, homosexual

subjects. The fantasy of the permanence of this suspension is what drives the production of exceptionalism, a narrative that is historically and politically wedded to the formation of the U.S. nation-state. Thus, the exception and the exceptional work in tandem; the state of exception haunts the proliferation of exceptional national subjects, in a similar vein to the Derridean hauntology in which the ghosts, the absent presences, infuse ontology with a difference.⁴

Through the transnational production of terrorist corporealities, homosexual subjects who have limited legal rights within the U.S. civil context gain significant representational currency when situated within the global scene of the war on terror. Taking the position that heterosexuality is a necessary constitutive factor of national identity, the “outlaw” status of homosexual subjects in relation to the state has been a long-standing theoretical interest of feminist, postcolonial, and queer theorists. This outlaw status is mediated through the rise during the 1980s and 1990s of the gay consumer, pursued by marketers who claimed that childless homosexuals had enormous disposable incomes, as well as through legislative gains in civil rights, such as the widely celebrated 2003 overturning of sodomy laws rendered in the *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* decision. By underscoring circuits of homosexual nationalism, I note that some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them. Further, a more pernicious inhabitation of homosexual sexual exceptionalism occurs through stagings of U.S. nationalism via a praxis of sexual othering, one that exceptionalizes the identities of U.S. homosexualities vis-à-vis Orientalist constructions of “Muslim sexuality.” This discourse functions through transnational displacements that suture spaces of cultural citizenship in the United States for homosexual subjects as they concurrently secure nationalist interests globally. In some instances these narratives are explicit, as in the aftermath of the release of the Abu Ghraib photos, where the claims to exceptionalism resonated on many planes for U.S. citizen-subjects: morally, sexually, culturally, “patriotically.” This imbrication of American exceptionalism is increasingly marked through or aided by certain homosexual bodies, which is to say, through homonationalism.

What is nascent is not the notion of exceptionalism, nor of a gender exceptionalism that has dominated the history of western feminist theoretical production and activism. Current forms of exceptionalism work or are furthered by attaching themselves to, or being attached by, nonheterosexual, homonormative subjects. Exceptionalism is used not to mark a break with

historical trajectories or a claim about the emergence of singular newness. Rather, exceptionalism gestures to narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism, a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity, “stuck,” as Sara Ahmed would say, to various subjects.⁵ Discourses of American exceptionalism are embedded in the history of U.S. nation-state formation, from early immigration narratives to cold war ideologies to the rise of the age of terrorism. These narratives about the centrality of exceptionalism to the formation of the United States imply that indoctrination à la exceptionalism is part of the disciplining of the American citizen (as it may be to any nationalist foundation).⁶ Debates about American exceptionalism have typically mobilized criteria as far ranging as artistic expression, aesthetic production (literary and cultural), social and political life, immigration history, liberal democracy, and industrialization and patterns of capitalism, among others.⁷ However, discussions of American exceptionalism rarely take up issues of gender and sexuality. While for the past forty years scholars have been interrogating feminist practices and theorizations that explicitly or implicitly foster the consolidation of U.S. nationalism in its wake, a growing cohort is now examining queer practices and theorizations for similar tendencies. Forms of U.S. gender and (hetero)sexual exceptionalism from purportedly progressive spaces have surfaced through feminist constructions of “other” women, especially via the composite of the “third world woman.”⁸

Inderpal Grewal, for example, argues against the naturalization of human rights frames by feminists, noting that the United States routinely positions itself “as the site for authoritative condemnation” of human rights abuses elsewhere, ignoring such abuses within its borders. Grewal alludes to the American exceptionalism that is now requisite common sense for many feminisms within U.S. public cultures: “Moral superiority has become part of emergent global feminism, constructing American women as saviors and rescuers of the ‘oppressed women.’”⁹ The recent embrace of the case of Afghani and Iraqi women and Muslim women in general by western feminists has generated many forms of U.S. gender exceptionalism. Gender exceptionalism works as a missionary discourse to rescue Muslim women from their oppressive male counterparts. It also works to suggest that, in contrast to women in the United States, Muslim women are, at the end of the day, unsavable. More insidiously, these discourses of exceptionalism allude to the unsalvageable nature of Muslim women even by their own feminists, positioning the American feminist as the feminist subject par excellence.¹⁰

One pertinent example is culled from the interactions of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) with the Feminist Majority Foundation, which ended with an accusation of appropriation and erasure of RAWA's efforts by the foundation. A letter written on April 20, 2002 condemns the foundation's representation of its handiwork as having "a foremost role in 'freeing' Afghan women" while failing to mention RAWA's twenty-five-year presence in Afghanistan (indeed, failing to mention RAWA at all), as if it had "single-handedly freed the women of Afghanistan from an oppression that started and ended with the Taliban." Calling the Feminist Majority Foundation "hegemonic, U.S.-centric, ego driven, corporate feminism," RAWA notes that it has "a longer history than the Feminist Majority can claim" and cites multiple instances of the foundation's erasure of RAWA's political organizing. RAWA also berates the Feminist Majority for its omission of the abuse of women by the Northern Alliance, atrocities that at times were more egregious than those committed by the Taliban, stating that "the Feminist Majority, in their push for U.S. political and economic power, are being careful not to anger the political powers in the U.S."¹¹

The ranks of "hegemonic U.S.-centric" feminists enamored with the plight of Afghan women under Taliban rule included the Feminist Majority Foundation, which had launched "Our Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan" in 1996.¹² This campaign arguably led to commodity fetishes such as Eve Ensler's v-Day benefit with her "tribute to Afghan women," a monologue entitled "Under the Burqa" performed by Oprah Winfrey at New York City's largest arena, Madison Square Garden, to a sold-out audience in February 2001.¹³ The event also promoted the purchase, in remembrance of Afghan women, of a "burqa swatch," meant to be worn on one's lapel to demonstrate solidarity with Afghan women through the appropriation of a "Muslim" garment. While these forms of celebrity feminism might provide us momentary sardonic amusement, they are an integral part of U.S. feminist public cultures and should not be mistaken as trivial. Their agendas are quite conducive to that of serious liberal feminists in the United States such as those in the ranks of the Feminist Majority, and in the age of professionalized feminism these purportedly divergent circuits divulge their imbrication through various modes of commodification. These feminists, having already foregrounded Islamic fundamentalism as the single greatest violent threat to women, were perfectly poised to capitalize on the missionary discourses that reverberated after the events of September 11. Despite their active stance against the invasion of Afghanistan,

they were caught in a complicitous narrative of U.S. exceptionalism in regard to the removal of the Taliban.¹⁴ As Drucilla Cornell notes, the silence of the Feminist Majority Foundation on the replacement of the Taliban by the Northern Alliance “forces us to question whether the humanitarian-intervention discourse of the U.S. government was not a particularly cynical effort to enlist U.S. feminists in an attempt to circumscribe the definition of what constitutes human rights violations—to turn the Feminist Majority into an ideological prop that delegitimizes the political need for redressing human-rights violations.” Cornell basically implies that mainstream U.S. feminists traded RAWA’s stance against punitive state laws penalizing women who refuse to wear the burqa (but not against women wearing burqas, an important distinction) for the celebratory media spectacle of unveiling rampant in the U.S. media after the “successful” invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁵ Under the burqa indeed. But as a final comment, it is worth heeding Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s observation, “We will see, every time, the narrative of class mobility.” Complicating any indigenous positioning of RAWA, she writes, “It is the emergence of [the] middle class that creates the possibility for the kind of feminist struggle that gives us a RAWA. And this middle class, the agent of human rights all over the world, is altogether distant from the subaltern classes in ‘their own culture,’ epistemically.”¹⁶ Despite RAWA’s feud with the Feminist Majority, invariably they remain complicit with a displacement of other Afghan women’s organizations that cannot so easily enter the global feminist stage. Spivak’s caution is a reminder that the dominant reception of feminist discourses on Muslim women is a tokenistic liberal apology that often leaves uninterrogated a west/Islam binary.

With the United States currently positioning itself as the technologically exceptional global counterterrorism expert, American exceptionalism feeds off of other exceptionalisms, particularly that of Israel, its close ally in the Middle East. The exceptional national security issues of Israel, and the long-term “existential” threat it faces because of its sense of being “entangled in a conflict of unparalleled dimensions,” for example, proceeds thus: “exceptional vulnerability” results in “exceptional security needs,” the risks of which are then alleviated and purportedly conquered by “exceptional counterterrorism technologies.”¹⁷ In this collusion of American and Israeli state interests, defined through a joint oppositional posture toward Muslims, narratives of victimhood ironically suture rather than deflate, contradict, or nullify claims to exceptionalism. In other words, the Israeli nation-state finds itself continuously embroiled in a cycle of perceived exceptional

threats of violence that demand exceptional uses of force against the Palestinian population, which is currently mirrored by U.S. government officials' public declarations of possible terror risks that are used to compel U.S. citizens to support the war on terror.

Reflecting upon contemporary debates about the United States as empire, Amy Kaplan notes, "The idea of empire has always paradoxically entailed a sense of spatial and temporal limits, a narrative of rising and falling, which U.S. exceptionalism has long kept at bay." Later, she states, "The denial and disavowal of empire has long served as the ideological cornerstone of U.S. imperialism and a key component of American exceptionalism."¹⁸ Thus, for Kaplan the distancing of exceptionalism from empire achieves somewhat contradictory twofold results: the superior United States is not subject to empire's shortcomings, as the apparatus of empire is unstable and ultimately empires fall; and the United States creates the impression that empire is beyond the pale of its own morally upright behavior, such that all violences of the state are seen, in some moral, cultural, or political fashion as anything but the violence of empire. U.S. exceptionalism hangs on a narrative of transcendence, which places the United States above empire in these two respects, a project that is aided by what Domenico Losurdo names as "the fundamental tendency to transform the Judeo-Christian tradition into a sort of national religion that consecrates the exceptionalism of American people and the sacred mission with which they are entrusted ('Manifest Destiny')."¹⁹ Kaplan, claiming that current narratives of empire "take American exceptionalism to new heights," argues that a concurrent "paradoxical claim to uniqueness and universality" are coterminous in that "they share a teleological narrative of inevitability" that posits America as the arbiter of appropriate ethics, human rights, and democratic behavior while exempting itself without hesitation from such universalizing mandates.²⁰

Whether one agrees that American exceptionalism has attained "new heights," Kaplan's analysis perfectly illustrates the intractability of state of exception discourses from those of exceptionalism. Laying claim to uniqueness (exception = singularity) and universality (exceptional = bequeathing teleological narrative) is not quite as paradoxical as Kaplan insists, for the state of exception is deemed necessary in order to restore, protect, and maintain the status quo, the normative ordering that then allows the United States to hail its purported universality. The indispensability of the United States is thus sutured through the naturalized conjunction of singularity