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These are queer times indeed. The war on terror is an assemblage hooked into an array of enduring modernist paradigms (civilizing teleologies, orientalisms, xenophobia, militarization, border anxieties) and postmodernist eruptions (suicide bombers, biometric surveillance strategies, emergent corporealities, counterterrorism gone overboard). With its emphases on bodies, desires, pleasures, tactility, rhythms, echoes, textures, deaths, morbidity, torture, pain, sensation, and punishment, our necropolitical present-future deems it imperative to rearticulate what queer theory and studies of sexuality have to say about the metatheories and the “real-politiks” of Empire, often understood, as Joan Scott observes, as “the real business of politics.”¹ Queer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression in order to elaborate on nationalist, patriotic, and terrorist formations and their intertwined forms of racialized perverse sexualities and gender dysphorias. What about the war on terrorism, and its attendant assemblages of racism, nationalism, patriotism, and terrorism, is already profoundly queer? Through an examination of queerness in various terrorist corporealities, I contend that queernesses proliferate even, or especially, as they remain denied or unacknowledged. I take up these types of inquiries not only to argue that discourses of counterterrorism are intrinsically gendered, raced, sexualized, and nationalized but also to demonstrate the production of normative patriot bodies that cohere against and through queer terrorist corporealities. In the speculative, exploratory endeavor that follows, I foreground three manifestations of this imbrication. One, I examine discourses of queerness where problematic conceptualizations of queer corporealities, especially via Muslim sexualities, are reproduced in the service of discourses of U.S. exceptionalisms. Two, I rearticulate a terrorist body, in this case the suicide bomber, as a queer assemblage that resists queerness-as-sexual-identity (or anti-identity)—in other words, intersectional and identitarian paradigms—in favor of spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements. Queerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of

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retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does), it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations. Finally, I argue that a focus on queerness as assemblage enables attention to ontology in tandem with epistemology, affect in conjunction with representational economies, within which bodies, such as the turbaned Sikh terrorist, interpenetrate, swirl together, and transmit affects to each other. Through affect and ontology, the turbaned Sikh terrorist in particular, I argue, as a queer assemblage, is reshaping the terrain of South Asian queer diasporas.

Queer Narratives of U.S. Exceptionalism

As a critique, “queer liberalism” notes an unsettling but not entirely unexpected reconciliation of the radical convictions of queerness as a post-structuralist anti- and transidentity critique with the liberal demands of national subject formation. We can map out a couple of different yet overlapping genealogies of queer liberal subjects. The first is the rise of the queer consumer-citizen, hailed with force in the late 1980s and early 1990s, fueled by the fantasy of enormous disposable incomes for unburdened-by-kinship gays and lesbians. The second genealogy, of the queer liberal subject before the law, culminates with the 2003 decriminalizing of sodomy through *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*. While both consumptive and juridical lineages reflect heavily on the status of the nation, I argue that one very concise way queer liberalism is inhabited is through stagings of U.S. nationalism via a praxis of sexual othering that unwittingly exceptionalizes the identities of U.S. queernesses vis-à-vis Islamophobic constructions of sexuality in the Middle East. This is not a critique of the racisms and other constitutive exclusions of conservative lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) discourses. Rather, I am taking issue with queer theorizing that, despite (and perhaps because of) a commitment to an intersectional analytic, fails to interrogate the epistemological will to knowledge that invariably reproduces the disciplinary interests of the U.S. nation-state. Forms of U.S. sexual exceptionalism from purportedly progressive spaces have historically surfaced through feminist constructions of “third world” women; what we have now, however, is the production of a sexual exceptionalism through normative as well as nonnormative (queer) bodies. That is, queerness is proffered as a sexually exceptional form of American national sexuality through a rhetoric of sexual modernization that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic *and* perverse, and construct the imperialist center as “tolerant” but sexually, racially, and gendered normal.

Queerness colludes with U.S. exceptionalisms embedded in nationalist foreign policy via the articulation and production of whiteness as a queer norm and the tacit acceptance of U.S. imperialist expansion. For example, national LGBTQ organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) have been far more preoccupied with gay marriage and gays in the military than the war on terrorism or even the “homosexual sex” torture scandal at Abu Ghraib.² In fact, Mubarak Dahir suggests that some organizations have actually harnessed the oppression of LGBTQ Arabs to justify the war, and calls on gays and lesbians who support the war in Iraq to “stop using the guise of caring about the plight of gay Arabs to rationalize their support.”³ For Queer Left organizing not to center people of color borders dangerously on eliding a critique of the racist, imperialist war, or conversely reenacting forms of colonial and multiculturalist fetishisms, for example, in relation to queer Filipino war resister Stephen Funk, who has become the poster queer for LGBTQ antiwar sloganeering. Are LGBTQ communities addressing the war on terrorism as a “gay issue”?⁴ If so, are they articulating a politics of race, empire, and globalization?

The most explicit production of this queer exceptionalism can be found in numerous instances of the responsive commentary to the Abu Ghraib “sexual torture scandal.” The Abu Ghraib saga demonstrates that sexuality is at once absolutely crucial to the production of the geopolitics of American exceptionalism, and despite this critical role, or perhaps because of it, it is an undertheorized, underrated, and often avoided aspect of the debate on the war on terror. Very shortly after the first release of the photos in May 2004, the descriptions of the torture cathected within the specter of “homosexual acts,” prompting a flurry of interviews with queer theorists, organizational press releases from LGBTQ associations, and articles within the gay press, all of which, incredibly enough, demonstrated no hesitations about speaking knowledgeably of “Muslim sexuality.” In the gay press, the Abu Ghraib photos were hailed as “evidence of rampant homophobia in the armed forces,”⁵ with scarce mention of the linked processes of racism and sexism. Even more troubling was the reason given for the particular efficacy of the torture: the taboo, outlawed, banned, disavowed status of homosexuality in Iraq and the Middle East, complemented by an aversion to nudity, male-on-male contact, and sexual modesty with the rarely seen opposite sex. It is exactly this unsophisticated notion of Arab/Muslim/Islamic (does it matter which one?) cultural difference that military intelligence capitalized on to create what they believed to be a culturally specific “effective” matrix of torture techniques. What we have here, then, is the paralleling of the Pentagon’s strategies, which used among other materials an anthropology study, *The Arab Mind*,

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and the discourses that emanate from progressive queers. For example, Faisal Alam, founder and director of the international Muslim lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and questioning (LGBTIQ) organization Al-Fatiha, states that “sexual humiliation is perhaps the worst form of torture for any Muslim.” The press release from Al-Fatiha 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 the focus on the violation of proper gender norms, maintaining that the torture is an “affront to their masculinity.”⁶

I take issue with Al-Fatiha’s statements, as they along with many other statements relied on an orientalist notion of “Muslim sexuality” that foregrounded sexual repression and upheld versions of normative masculinity—that is, the feminized *passivo* 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 gay press endlessly reproduced the appropriate masculinity and sexual conservatism lines. I want to underscore the complex dance of positionality that Muslim and Arab groups such as Al-Fatiha must perform in these times, whereby a defense of “Muslim sexuality” through the lens of culture is easily co-opted into racist agendas.⁷ 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 homogenous 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. 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 resonance is met—it would have also considerably endangered a population already navigating the pernicious racist effects of the 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 their epistemological conditions of existence, are mandates of homeland security.

The point to be argued is not how to qualify the status of homosexu-

ality across the broad historical and geographic, not to mention religious, regional, class, national, and political variances, of the Middle East (a term I hesitate to use, given its area studies implications). We must consider instead how the production of “homosexuality as taboo” is situated within the history of encounter with the Western gaze. 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. For example, the queer theorist 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.⁸

The 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 presence of gay- and lesbian-identified Muslims in the “Arab world” is inconceivable. 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. Furthermore, in the uncritical face-value acceptance of the notion of Islamic sexual repression, we see the trenchant replay of what Foucault termed the “repressive hypothesis”: the notion that a lack of discussion or openness about sexuality reflects a repressive, censorship-driven apparatus of deflated sexual desire.⁹ 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 repression of the Arab prisoners that is highlighted in order to efface the rampant hypersexual excesses of the U.S. prison guards.

Given the unbridled homophobia, racism, and misogyny demonstrated by the U.S. guards, it is indeed ironic, yet predictable, that the United States nonetheless emerges exceptionally, as more tolerant of homosexuality (and less tainted by misogyny and fundamentalism) than the repressed, modest, nudity-shy “Middle East.” We have a clear view of the performative privileges of Foucault’s “speaker’s benefit”: those who are able to articulate sexual knowledge (especially of oneself, but in this case, also of others) then appear to be freed, through the act of speech, from the space of repression.¹⁰ Through the insistent and frantic manufacturing of “homosexuality” and “Muslim” as mutually exclusive discrete categories, queerness colludes with the delineation of exceptional U.S. sexual norms, produced against the intolerable forms of the sexualities of “terrorist” bodies. Furthermore, queer exceptionalism works to suture U.S. nationalism through the perpetual fissuring of race from sexuality—the race of the (presumptively sexually repressed, perverse, or both) terrorist and the sexuality of the national (presumptively white, gender normative) queer: the two dare not converge.

Terrorist Corporealities

José Esteban Muñoz’s writing on the “terrorist drag” of the Los Angeles-based performance artist Vaginal Davis harks back to another political era—bizarrely as if it were long ago, although in measured time we are talking about the mid-1990s—when the notion of the terrorist had a trenchant but distant quality to it.¹¹ Muñoz argues that Davis’s drag performances, encompassing “cross-sex, cross-race minstrelsy,” is terrorist on two levels. Aesthetically, Davis rejects glamour-girl feminine drag in favor of “ground level guerrilla 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.” It is imperative in a post-9/11 climate of counterterrorism to note that guerrillas and terrorists have vastly different racial valences, the former bringing to mind the phantasmic landscapes of Central and South America, while 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, this orientalist legacy.

Muñoz’s description of this terrorist drag points to the historical con-

vergences between queers and terror—homosexuals have been the traitors to the nation, figures of espionage and double agents, associated with Communists during the McCarthy era, and, as with suicide bombers, bring on and desire death (both are figured as always already dying, although for homosexuals it is through the AIDS pandemic). More recent exhortations place gay marriage as “the worst form of terrorism” and gay couples as “domestic terrorists.”¹² 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 through the war on terrorism 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 Web site.¹³ 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 cataloging of unknowables. It is not, then, 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, deformity. 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 versus queerness already existing within the subject (and thus dissipating the subject as such) allows for both the temporality of being and the temporality of always becoming.

As there is no entity, no identity to queer, rather queerness coming forth at us from all directions, screaming its defiance, suggests to me a move from intersectionality to assemblage. The Deleuzian assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect. As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can

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be thus disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. Intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative of identification: you become an identity, yes, but also timelessness works to consolidate the fiction of a seamless stable identity in every space. As a tool of diversity management, and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism, intersectionality colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance—in that “difference” is encased within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid. Displacing queerness as an identity or modality that is visibly, audibly, legibly, or tangibly evident, assemblages allow us to attune to intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities. Intersectionality privileges naming, visuality, epistemology, representation, and meaning, while assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information. Most important, given the heightened death-machine aspect of nationalism in our contemporary political terrain—a heightened sensorial and anatomical domination described by Achille Mbembe as “necropolitics”—assemblages work against narratives of U.S. exceptionalism that secure empire, challenging the fixity of racial and sexual taxonomies that inform practices of state surveillance and control, and befuddling the “us versus them” of the war on terror. For while intersectionality and its underpinnings—an unrelenting epistemological will to truth—presupposes identity and thus disavows futurity, assemblage, in its debt to ontology and its espousal of what cannot be known, seen, or heard, or has yet to be known, seen, or heard, allows for becoming/s beyond being/s.¹⁴

Queer assemblages appear in Mbembe’s devastating and brilliant meditation on the necropolitics of our current infinite war positioning. Mbembe argues for a shift from biopower to necropolitics (the subjugation of life to the power of death), noting that the historical basis of sovereignty that is reliant on a notion of (Western) political rationality begs for a more accurate framing: that of life and death.¹⁵ He asks, “What place is given to life, death, and the human body (especially the wounded or slain body)?” Mbembe attends to the informational productivity of the (Palestinian) suicide bomber. In pondering the queer modalities of this kind of terrorist, one notes a pastiche of oddities: a body machined together through metal and flesh, an assemblage of the organic and the inorganic; a death not of the self or of the other, but both simultaneously; self-annihilation as the ultimate form of resistance and self-preservation. This body forces a reconciliation of opposites through their inevitable collapse—a perverse

habitation of contradiction. As a figure in the midst of always already dying even as it is in the midst of becoming, like the homosexual afflicted with HIV, the suicide bomber sutures his or her status as sexually perverse.¹⁶ Mbembe also points to the queer becomings of a suicide bomber—a corporeal experiential of “ballistics.” The dynamite strapped onto the body of a suicide bomber is not merely an appendage; the “intimacy” of weapon with body reorients the assumed spatial integrity (coherence and concreteness) and individuality of the body that is the mandate of intersectional identities: instead we have the body-weapon. The ontological affect of the body renders it a newly becoming body, queerly:

The candidate for martyrdom transforms his or her body into a mask that hides the soon-to-be-detonated weapon. Unlike the tank or the missile that is clearly visible, the weapon carried in the shape of the body is invisible. Thus concealed, it forms part of the body. It is so intimately part of the body that at the time of its detonation it annihilates the body of its bearer, who carries with it the bodies of others when it does not reduce them to pieces. The body does not simply conceal a weapon. The body is transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in a truly ballistic sense.¹⁷

Temporal narratives of progression are upturned as death and becoming fuse into one: as one’s body dies, one’s body becomes the mask, the weapon, the suicide bomber, not before. Not only does the ballistic body come into being without the aid of visual cues marking its transformation, it also “carries with it the bodies of others.” Its own penetrative energy sends shards of metal and torn flesh spinning off into the ether. The body-weapon does not play as metaphor, or in the realm of meaning and epistemology, but rather forces us ontologically anew to ask: what kinds of information does the ballistic body impart? These bodies, being in the midst of becoming, blur the insides and the outsides, infecting transformation through sensation, echoing knowledge via reverberation and vibration. The echo is a queer temporality; in the relay of affective information between and amid beings, the sequence of reflection, repetition, resound, and return (but with a difference, as in mimicry), and brings forth waves of the future breaking into the present. Gayatri Spivak, prescient in drawing our attention to the multivalent textuality of suicide in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” reminds us in her latest ruminations that suicide terrorism, as a relay of affective information, is a modality of expression and communication for the subaltern:

Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed on the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other. For you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on.

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Because no matter who you are, there are no designated killees in suicide bombing. No matter what side you are on, because I cannot talk to you, you won't respond to me, with the implication that there is no dishonor in such shared and innocent death.¹⁸

We have the proposal that there are no sides, and that the sides are forever shifting, crumpling, and multiplying, disappearing and reappearing—unable to satisfactorily delineate between here and there. The spatial collapse of sides is due to the queer temporal interruption of the suicide bomber, projectiles spewing every which way. As a queer assemblage—distinct from the “queering” of an entity or identity—race and sexuality are denaturalized through the impermanence, the transience of the suicide bomber; the fleeting identity replayed backward through its dissolution. This dissolution of self into other/s and other/s into self not only effaces the absolute mark of self and other/s in the war on terror, it produces a systemic challenge to the entire order of Manichaean rationality that organizes the rubric of good versus evil. Delivering “a message inscribed on the body when no other means will get through,” suicide bombers do not transcend or claim the rational or accept the demarcation of the irrational. Rather, they foreground the flawed temporal, spatial, and ontological presumptions on which such distinctions flourish.

The body of Mbembe's suicide bomber is still, however, a male one and, in that universalized masculinity, ontologically pure regardless of location, history, and context. Whereas, for Mbembe, sexuality—as the dissolution of bodily boundaries—is elaborated through the ballistic event of death, for female suicide bombers, sexuality is always announced in advance: the petite manicured hands, mystical beauty (“beauty mixed with violence”), and features of her face and body are commented on in a manner not requisite for male suicide bombers; the political import of the female suicide bomber's actions are gendered out or into delusions about her purported irrational emotional and mental distress.¹⁹ Female suicide bombers disrupt the prosaic proposition that terrorism is bred directly of patriarchy and that women are intrinsically manifesting peace. This rationale is reinscribed, however, when observers proclaim that women cast out of or shunned by traditional compositions of gender and sexuality (often accused of being lesbians) are most likely predisposed toward violence. These discursive and bodily identity markers reflect the enduring capacities of intersectionality—we cannot leave it completely behind—but also its limitations.

Mbembe and Spivak each articulate, implicitly, how queerness is constitutive of the suicide bomber: delinked from sexual identity to signal instead temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms, queerness is installed within as a prerequisite for the body to function symbolically, pedagogi-

cally, and performatively as it does. The dispersion of the boundaries of bodies forces a completely chaotic challenge to normative conventions of gender, sexuality, and race, disobeying normative conventions of “appropriate” bodily practices and the sanctity of the able body. Here then is a possible rereading of these terrorist bodies, typically understood as culturally, ethnically, and religiously nationalist, fundamentalist, patriarchal, and, often even homophobic, as queer corporealities. The political import of this queer rereading should not be underestimated: in the upheaval of the “with us or against us” rhetoric of the war on terror, queer praxis of assemblage allows for a scrambling of sides that is illegible to state practices of surveillance, control, banishment, and extermination. These nonexceptional, terrorist bodies are nonheteronormative, if we consider nation and citizenship to be implicit in the privilege of heteronormativity, as we should. Following from Cathy Cohen’s argument that heteronormativity is as much about (white) racial and (middle- to upper-) class privilege as it is about sexual identities, identifications, and acts,²⁰ the (American imperialist) nation also figures as an important axis of psychic and material identification, repeatedly casting these bodies into the spotlight of sexual perversity. Through the reclamation of the nation’s perverse beings across homo-hetero divides, the tenor of queerness is intrinsically antinationalist. In attending to affective corporeal queernesses, ones that foreground normativizing and resistant bodily practices beyond sex, gender, and sexual object choice, queerness is expanded as a field, a vector, a terrain, one that must consistently, not sporadically, account for nationalism and race within its purview, as well as insistently disentangle the relations between queer representation and queer affectivity. What does this rereading and rearticulation do to Cohen’s already expansive notion of queer coalitional politics? What types of affiliative networks could be imagined and spawned if we embrace the already queer mechanics and assemblages—threats to nation, to race, to sanctioned bodily practices—of terrorist bodies?

Affective Queerness

These bodies are old, no doubt, but their queernesses are suggested by the intense anxieties they provoke; they trouble the nation’s perimeters, from within and also from the outside, and appear to be rife with, as well as generative of, fear and danger. Why, in the name of a secular state, ban the use of head scarves for Muslim women in France, with allusions to the next targets: turbans and beards?²¹ What kinds of monstrous bodies are visualized when daily the papers are plastered with turbaned al-Qaeda operatives? Why scream, “Take that turban off, you fucking ter-

rorist”?²² What is lost, gained, and retained in the act of shaving Saddam Hussein’s beard off just hours after his purported capture? (See also the picture “Saddam’s Queer Eye Makeover” and “Queer Eye for Saddam,” aka “Queer Eye for the Hopeless Guy.”)²³ Who is appeased through the motions of shaving the facial and head hair of prisoners before they are taken to Guantánamo Bay? These bodies are not only being commanded to the restoration of the properly visible. (The name of the detention site, Camp X-Ray, suggests in itself a profound yearning for the transparency of these bodies, the capacity to see through them and render them known, taciturn, disembodied.) In the act of removing Hussein’s battered, overgrown beard, Hussein’s monstrosity is renewed. We do not recognize in him the decrepit, worn, tired man found in a hole, a man whose capture has more symbolic than material utility and entails the erasure of decades of U.S. imperialist violence in the “Middle East.” But do not look too closely at his eyes, for his familiarity may be lost. And it is the reterritorialization of the body that must be performed through the ritual of cutting and shaving hair, the prodding medical examinations, the prayer quarters proximate to arrows pointing to Mecca, and other forms of apparently “humane” incarceration tactics that supplement those of torture. The “detained body” is thus a machination of ceremonial scrutiny and sheer domination.

Terrorist look-alike bodies may allude to the illegible and incommensurable affect of queerness—bodies that are in some sense machined together, remarkable beyond identity, visuality, and visibility, to the realms of affect and ontology, the tactile and the sensorial. Brian Massumi concisely pinpoints the effect of affect: “The primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between content and effect: it would appear that the strength or duration of an image’s effect is not logically connected to the content in any straightforward way. This is not to say there is no connection and no logic.”²⁴ Beyond what the body looks like, then, this is also about what the queer body feels like, for the embodied and for the spectator. Reworking Michael Taussig’s notion of “tactile knowing,”²⁵ May Joseph eloquently asserts,

For cultures whose forms of social knowledge have been fragmented and mutated by multiple experiences of conquest and cultural contact . . . tactile practices are difficult to read and contain multiple meanings. Such exchanges are frequently informal events intrinsic to everyday life through which cultural knowledge gets cited, transmitted or re-appropriated. The senses acquire texture.²⁶

As that which “immerses the senses beyond the structuring logic of vision and dislodges memory as the fascia of history,”²⁷ tactile knowledges install

normativizing traces of danger, fear, and melancholia into the bodies of racialized terrorist look-alikes. The turban, for example, is not merely an appendage to the body. It is always in the state of becoming, the becoming of a turbaned body, the turban becoming part of the body. The head scarf, similarly (along with the burka and the hijab, often decried as masks), has become a perverse fetish object—a point of fixation—a kind of centripetal force, a strange attractor through which the density of anxiety accrues and accumulates. For the wearer, the rituals and sensations attached to these parts of the body—the smells during the weekly starching of the linens, the stretching of yards of coarse fabric to induce some softening, the wrapping and pinning of the turban into place—these are experiences in the midst of becoming qualitatively different than before.

Through queerly affective and tactile realms, the Sikh *pagri*, or turban, is acquiring the inscriptions of a (terrorist) masculinity, much in the way that veiling has been read as indicative of an other femininity. The turbaned man, no longer merely the mark of a durable and misguided tradition, a resistant antiassimilationist (albeit patriarchal) stance, now inhabits the space and history of monstrosity, that which can never become civilized. The turban is not only imbued with the nationalist, religious, and cultural symbolics of the other. The turban both reveals and hides the terrorist. Despite the taxonomies of turbans, their specific regional and locational genealogies, their placement in time and space, their singularity and their multiplicity, the turban as monolith profoundly troubles and disturbs the nation and its notions of security. Since 9/11, Sikh men wearing turbans, and mistaken for kin of Osama bin Laden, have been disproportionately affected by backlash racist hate crimes targeting Muslims and other South Asians. As a sign of guilt and also the potential redemption of that guilt, the elusive, dubious character of the turbaned man or woman could drive the onlooker crazy. It is not for nothing that in one hate crime incident after another, turbans are clawed at viciously, and hair is pulled, occasionally even cut off. The intimacy of such violence cannot be overstated. The attack functions as a double emasculation: the disrobing is an insult to the (usually) male representative (Sikh or Muslim) of the community, while the removal of hair entails submission by and to normative patriotic masculinities. The turban insinuates the constant sliding between that which can be disciplined and that which must be outlawed. Sometimes death ensues.

In relation to Sikhs, misnamed “Hindoo” during the first migrations of Sikhs to the Northwest and California in the early 1900s and now mistaken as Muslim, the hypothesis of mistaken identity as the main causal factor for post-9/11 hate crimes has been embraced by conservative and progressive factions alike. The Bush administration and progressive Sikh

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advocacy groups have promoted education as the primary vehicle through which to ameliorate this situation. The notion of mistaken identity relies on multiple premises: that the viewer is open to and willing to discern the visual differences between Sikh turbans and Muslim turbans; that the ideals of multiculturalism as promulgated by liberal education acknowledges that differences within difference matter. The focus on mistaken identity favors the visual experience of the turban over its affective experience, one that hails historical formations of orientalism and elicits fear, loathing, and disgust. Tactile economies reassert ontological rather than epistemological knowing and highlight touch, texture, sensation, smell, feeling, and affect over what is assumed to be legible through the visible. Furthermore, the turban wearer, usually male, bears the typically female burden of safeguarding and transmitting culture and of symbolizing the purity of nation. But this does not automatically or only feminize him; instead, the fusion of hair, oil, cloth, skin, the organic with the nonorganic, renders the turban a queer part of the body. It is this assemblage of visibility, affect, feminized position, and bodily nonorganicity that accounts for its queer figuration in the execution of a hate crime.

This queer assemblage of the turbaned terrorist speaks to the prolific fertilization and crosshatching of terrorist corporealities amid queer South Asian diasporas, bodies that must be reclaimed as queer. South Asian queer diasporas may mimic forms of (U.S.) model minority exceptionalism that posit queerness as an exemplary or libratory site devoid of nationalist impulses, an exceptionalism that narrates queerness as emulating the highest transgressive potential of diaspora. But the tensions—and overlaps—between the now-fetishized desi drag queen and the turbaned or otherwise Sikh or Muslim terrorist temper this exceptionalism. Brian Keith Axel, in his ground-clearing essay “The Diasporic Imaginary,” poses two radical modifications to the study of diaspora as it has been conceived in anthropology, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary forums. Referencing his study of Sikh diasporas, he argues that “rather than conceiving of the homeland as something that creates the diaspora, it may be more productive to consider the diaspora as something that creates the homeland.”²⁸ Axel is gesturing beyond the material locational pragmatics of the myth of return, the economic and symbolic importance of the NRI (nonresident Indian), Khalistan and Hindutva nationalist movements funded by diasporic money, or the modalities of homeland that are re-created in the diaspora. The homeland, he proposes, “must be understood as an affective and temporal process rather than a place.”²⁹ But if not the fact of place, what impels a diasporic sensibility or collectivity?

In situating “different bodies or corporeal images and historical formations of sexuality, gender and violence” as deeply and equally constitutive

of the diasporic imaginary as the place of the homeland, Axel's formulation can be productively reworked to further queer the habitus of nation and its geographic coordinates. The notion of queer diaspora retools diaspora to account for connectivity beyond or different from sharing a common ancestral homeland.³⁰ That is, to shift away from origin for a moment allows other forms of diasporic affiliative and cathartic entities, for Axel (and also Mbembe) primarily that of bodies and the traumas that haunt them, to show their affiliative powers. Furthermore, an unsettling of the site of origin, that is, nation as one of the two binding terms of diaspora, de facto punctures the homeland-to-diaspora telos and wrenches ancestral progression out of the automatic purview of diaspora, allowing for queer narratives of kinship, belonging, and home. The sensation of place is thus one of manifold intensities cathected through distance. The diaspora, then, for Axel, is not represented only as a demographic, a geographic place, or primarily through history, memory, or even trauma. It is cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops, and recursive folds and feelings, coalescing through corporealities, affectivities, and, I would add, multiple and contingent temporalities: not through an identity but an assemblage.

The corporeal images in question for Axel are the tortured bodies, not unlike those of Abu Ghraib, of Sikh male Amritdharies, those caught in civil unrest in Punjab in the mid-1980s to early 1990s and arbitrarily incarcerated by the Indian government. Again we have the appearance of the turbaned Sikh male. Axel details the mechanics of the torture:

Often the first act is to cast off the detainee's turban. . . . For many victims, the displacement of the turban, along with the use of the hair to tie the victim down, is one of the deepest gestures of dishonor (beizatti). But after surrender and dishonor are enacted on the head, focus shifts to the genitals and anus, which become the objects of taunts and violation.³¹

Collectively, the turban, genitals, and anus take on the force of the phallus: the sexual shaming begins with the nakedness of the head and use of the otherwise pride-engendering hair to subjugate, then continues on to the habitual objects of sex. In particular, torture of the anus seeks to simulate anal sex and, thus, arouse the specter of homosexuality. The turbaned male body, now the tortured deturbaned body, is effectively rendered religiously impotent and unable to repeat its threat to national boundaries:

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-normative

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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”).³²

Sexual violence, not place, is the dominant constitutive factor of Axel’s diasporic imaginary. This violence is performative in that queerness of the body is confirmed on several fronts: first, there is the queer inversion of reproductive capacity to the male terrorist body, away from the normative focus on women as reproducers of nation and culture; second, the body is symbolically stripped of its reproductive capacities, propelled into the queer realm of an antinational sexuality; temporality is re-planned because the assumption of normative familial kinship forms as engendered by generational continuity is ruptured. But, third, in line with the queer figuration of the turbaned Sikh body, this body already appears as queer, and thus the torture performs, in the citational sense, the very queer assemblage that instantiates it. The assemblage is possible not through the identity markers that encapsulate this body—Sikh, male, turbaned, heterosexual but perverse—but, rather, the temporal and spatial reorderings that the body reiterates as it is tortured. There is the doubling of time and space as the body is simultaneously refashioned for normative (Indian) national aesthetics yet cast from the nation as its reproductive capacity is castrated. Spatially situated both within and outside nation, temporally always becoming both national and its antithesis, the assemblage is momentary, fleeting even, and gives way to normative identity markers even in the midst of its newly becoming state.

It is this shift from national and regional origin to corporeal affectivity—from South Asia as unifying homeland to the assemblage of the monster-terrorist-fag³³—in South Asia and in the diasporas, as they work together, that dislodges identity-based notions of queerness, thus problematizing queer diasporic exceptionalisms but also motivating their exponential fortification and proliferation in the first place. Queer occupation of the turbaned Sikh male and other terrorist assemblages not only counters sexual exceptionalisms by reclaiming perversion—the nonexceptional—within the gaze of national security. In the comingling of queer monstrosity and queer modernity, it also creatively, powerfully, and unexpectedly scrambles the terrain of the political within organizing and intellectual projects. These terrorist assemblages, a cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity and even queer anti-identity narratives, bypass entirely the Foucauldian “act to identity” continuum that informs much global LGBTIQ organizing, a continuum that privileges the pole of identity as the

evolved form of Western modernity. Yet reclaiming the nonexceptional is only partially the point, for assemblages allow for complicities of privilege and the production of new normativities even as they cannot anticipate spaces and moments of resistance. Opening up to the fantastical wonders of futurity is the most powerful of political and critical strategies, whether it be through assemblage or to something as yet unknown, perhaps even forever unknowable.

Notes

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1. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 28–52.

2. In an article titled "Highlighting the Q in Iraq" ("Letters from Camp Rehoboth," 18 October 2002, www.camprehoboth.com/issue10_18_02/capitalletters.htm), Hastings Wyman argues that "for gay groups such as HRC, NGLTF, and others to take a position on a major issue that affects gay people no differently from the rest of society ultimately divides our community, dilutes our resources, and risks undermining our standing with the public."

3. Mubarak Dahir, "Stop Using Gay 'Liberation' as a War Guise," *Windy City Times*, 23 April 2003. Noting that the "forces that are supposedly emancipating our downtrodden GLBT brethren are themselves hyper-homophobic," Dahir asks, "How can anyone seriously argue that the United States military is an instrument for glbt liberation?" According to Dahir, "gay hawks" have pointed out the oppressiveness toward homosexuality of regimes in Syria and Iraq while conveniently forgetting those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Claiming that the lives of gays and lesbians in Iraq will change very little regardless of the ousting of Hussein, Dahir writes: "The final and perhaps most personally infuriating aspect of the hypocrisy around the argument that we are invading foreign countries in the interest of freeing gay people is the way we treat gay Arabs and gay Muslims here in the United States."

4. On gay issue versus not-gay issue organizing, see Michael Bronski, "Gay Goes Mainstream," *Boston Phoenix*, 16–23 January 2003, www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/other_stories/documents/02653048.htm.

5. Joe Crea, "Gay Sex Used to Humiliate Iraqis," *Washington Blade*, 7 May 2004.

6. Ibid.

7. Andrew Sullivan, "Daily Dish," www.andrewsullivan.com (accessed 4 May 2004).

8. Patrick Moore, "Gay Sexuality," *Newsday*, 7 May 2004.

9. In the face of the centrality of Foucault's *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 Islamic 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.

10. But are the acts specifically and only referential of gay sex (and here, gay means sex between men)? 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 as well. Amnesty International is among the few that did not mention homosexuality, homosexual acts, or same-sex sexuality in its press release condemning the torture. See "USA: Pattern of Brutality and Cruelty—War Crimes at Abu Ghraib," web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR510772004.

11. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 108.

12. "Bauer Compares Vermont Gay Rights Decision to Terrorism," 27 December 1999, [www.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/storeis/12/27/campaign.wrap/Concerned Women of America](http://www.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/storeis/12/27/campaign.wrap/Concerned%20Women%20of%20America) (accessed 2 April 2003; this site is no longer available).

13. See usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/. For a detailed analysis of this Web site, see Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, "The Remaking of a Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles under the Spectre of (Counter)Terrorism," *Social Text*, no. 80 (2004): 75–104.

14. This is not to disavow or minimize the important interventions that intersectional theorizing makes possible and continues to stage, or the feminist critical spaces that gave rise to intersectional analyses.

15. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15 (2003): 11–40.

16. Judith Butler, in "Sexual Inversions," writes: "The male homosexual is figured time and time again as one whose desire is somehow structured by death, either as the desire to die, or as one whose desire is inherently punishable by death" (Butler, "Sexual Inversions," in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Donna Stanon [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992], 83).

17. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 36.

18. Gayatri Spivak, "Class and Culture in Diaspora" (conference keynote address, "Translating Class, Altering Hospitality," Leeds University, England, June 2002).

19. Sudha Ramachandran, "Women Suicide Bombers Defy Israel," *Asia Times*, 25 October 2003, www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/EJ25Ak02.html; www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,428563,00.html.

20. Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437–65.

21. *Times of India*, 23 January 2004.

22. From *Targeting the Turban: Sikh Americans and the Aversion Spiral after September 11* (2002), a documentary about hate crimes against Sikh Americans since 9/11, directed by Valarie Kaur Brar.

23. See politicalhumor.about.com/library/images/blsaddamqueereye.htm.

24. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 24.

25. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

26. May Joseph, "Old Routes, Mnemonic Traces," *UTS Review* 6, no. 2 (2000): 46.
27. Ibid.
28. Brian Keith Axel, "The Diasporic Imaginary," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 426.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 420.
32. Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues With Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 40, quoted in Axel, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 420.
33. See Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster-Terrorist-Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text*, no. 72 (2002): 117–48.

