

# Abu Ghraib and its Shadow Archives

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*Abstract.* The focus of this essay is on the visual conditions of possibility that underpin the Abu Ghraib torture photographs. In the course of the essay, I proceed to map the codes, conventions, technologies, aesthetics, and visual archives that enable both acts of torture and their visual representation. By situating the Abu Ghraib torture photographs within Orientalist, fascist, and white supremacist shadow archives, I analyse those points of intersection between genealogies of technopolitico-military power and visual regimes of subjugation, mastery, violence, and torture.

*Keywords:* torture, Abu Ghraib, imperialism, white supremacy, Orientalism, neofascism, homophobia, sexual assault, prisons, Pasolini, Salò, visual culture, visual archives, aesthetics

## ABU GHRAIB AND THE NEOFASCIST CODIFICATION OF TORTURE

Fascism . . . continues to spread via a desire for control in the name of ‘civil society,’ ‘justice,’ and the law.<sup>1</sup>

In his essay, “Breakdown in the Gray Room: Recent Turns in the Images of War,” David Levi Strauss perceives the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib as unprecedented and exceptional: “When I first saw the Abu Ghraib images, I didn’t quite know what I was looking at. I didn’t recognize them, because I’d never seen anything quite like them.”<sup>2</sup> My response was distinctly different as I was struck by their profound historical resonance. On seeing the Abu Ghraib images, I began to experience a visual double haunting as I involuntarily began to recall a vast, dense, historically stratified archive of images of colonial violence and torture that rendered the

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Abu Ghraib photographs only too recognisable. This visual archive encompassed everything from lynching photography, Orientalist views of the harem, fascist and white supremacist iconography, colonial and imperial photography, pornography, and certain harrowing images from the final film of the Italian director, Pier Paolo Pasolini: *Salò o le 120 Giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975). Instead of experiencing a failure “to recognise” what I was looking at, I experienced a type of frenetic visual montage in which, in my mind’s eye, I saw a constellation of recognisable archival spectres effectively superimposed one over the other. In other words, *contra* Levi Strauss’s scripting of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs as artefacts of “exceptionalism” in relation to U.S. politico-cultural production, in the course of this essay I will proceed to demonstrate that these torture photographs were enabled by an historical series of discursive practices that is constitutive of hegemonic American culture. This essay is, then, an attempt to clarify the visual conditions of possibility that underpin the Abu Ghraib torture photographs and that continue to render them culturally intelligible. My attempt to clarify the Abu Ghraib photographs’ visual conditions of possibility will be oriented by two critical questions: What are the codes, conventions, technologies, aesthetics, and visual archives that enable both acts of torture and their visual representation? How can one begin to describe those points of intersection between genealogies of techno-politico-military power and visual regimes of subjugation, mastery, violence, and torture?

In the course of this essay, I will refuse to read the tortures that were performed on the Arab prisoners in Abu Ghraib as the work of a few “aberrant” or “perverse” individuals, as so many U.S. politicians and high-ranking military personnel have attempted to argue.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, I view the regime of torture that was deployed at Abu Ghraib by the U.S. military as enabled by a violent neofascist politics indissociably tied to a codified imperial-fascist aesthetics. Kriss Ravetto, in her cinematic study of fascist aesthetics, argues that contemporary neofascism has deep roots in historical fascism, “maintaining its ideological apparatuses—its moralism, its worship of technological weapons of production and destruction, its modernizing process, its binary economy, and its creation of new evils, new enemies, cold wars, and race wars.”<sup>4</sup> I can think of no more accurate way of describing the manner in which neofascism has struck deep roots in the current U.S. regime—and its attendant lackey allies, including Australia and

Britain—thereby generating the codified violence and torture graphically captured in the images of Abu Ghraib.

Pasolini's final film, *Salò*, stages a profound meditation on the points of intersection between fascist aesthetics, torture, and wars of terror. *Salò* is set in the Republic of Salò, in a villa on the shores of Lake Garda, northern Italy. The Republic of Salò was a Nazi puppet state that became the last stronghold of the Italian fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. Within the context of this fascist state, Pasolini transposes the Marquis de Sade's controversial novel *120 Days of Sodom*, a novel in which select imprisoned victims are forced to experience unbridled brutality and sexual violence. Pasolini's film is excruciating to watch. He unfolds the atrocities inflicted upon a group of eighteen young victims, held prisoners within the villa, for the gratification of the four men of power, the "libertines," who, together with their accomplices, run this miniature fascist state. The violence that is inflicted upon the prisoners is premeditated and performed in a ritualised manner. This ritualised violence is informed by what Ravetto calls a "fascist aesthetics." Citing that trenchant critic of fascism, Walter Benjamin, Ravetto argues that one of the critical attributes of fascism is the "aestheticization of politics."<sup>5</sup>

In the course of this essay, I want to juxtapose or, more accurately, superimpose the Abu Ghraib images of torture over the representational regime of Pasolini's *Salò* in order to argue that the violence, torture, and sexual assaults that were inflicted upon the Arab prisoners in Abu Ghraib by the American military must be seen as genealogically tied to the discursive formation of fascism and its aestheticisation of politics. In tracking the genealogical continuities that inform the neofascist aestheticisation of politics and violence in a place like Abu Ghraib, I will examine the constituent parts of the regime of fascist visuality that informed the production of violence and sexual assault in Abu Ghraib. In invoking the haunting spectre of Pasolini's *Salò* in my attempt to map the violence exercised at Abu Ghraib, I want to bring into sharp focus the manner in which violence is performed through a fascist aesthetics in order politico-culturally to enable the flagrant disregard of human rights. Commenting on the governing metaphor that he saw as inflecting *Salò*, in an interview Pasolini explained: "This means that the entire film with unheard-of atrocities which are almost unmentionable, is presented as an immense sadistic metaphor of what was the Nazi-Fascist 'dissociation' from its crimes against humanity . . . . They considered them

[their victims] as objects and destroyed automatically all possibility of human relationship with them.”<sup>6</sup>

## SHADOW ARCHIVES

In his essay, “The Body and the Archive,” Allan Sekula draws attention to the historical reservoir of images that functions to construct the enabling conditions for the emergence and cultural intelligibility of any image. Sekula, in a brilliant move, names this historical reservoir of images a “shadow archive.” Encoded in this term are two critical dimensions that pivot on questions of power and the effacement of the historicity of images. Sekula succinctly articulates the intersection of these two dimensions when, in another essay devoted to examining the archive, he asks: “How is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted, and obliterated by photographic means?”<sup>7</sup> In raising this question, Sekula brings into focus what is produced and consumed within what he calls “an imaginary economy.”<sup>8</sup> This imaginary economy is inscribed by a number of intersecting axes: it is an economy of cultural and financial production and consumption; it is an imagistic economy of photographs, pictures, paintings, films, and so on; and it is also an imaginary economy that attempts, with the production of each new image, to efface the genealogy of images that is instrumental in the production of any image by arguing, for example, that the image is purely the work of the imagination.

Sekula effectively demolishes this liberal humanist conceptualisation of the image by arguing that the “archive constitutes the paradigm or iconic system from which photographic ‘statements’ are constructed.”<sup>9</sup> This iconic system must be seen as supplying the conditions of possibility for the emergence and production of any image. Furthermore, through the invocation of the Foucauldian term “statement,” Sekula situates this iconic system within discursive relations of knowledge/power that function to systematize and regulate the production and consumption of images; in other words, these regimes of visibility construct both the possibility for visual enunciation and the very cultural intelligibility of the visual “statement” as such. He elaborates this constitutive function of the archive: “We can speak then of a generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain. This archive contains subordinate, territorialized archives:

archives whose semantic interdependence is normally obscured by the ‘coherence’ and ‘mutual exclusivity’ of the social groups registered within each.”<sup>10</sup> What interests me here is the manner in which the archive positions a subject within the terrain that it encompasses whilst, precisely as *shadow archive*, it effaces its constitutive role in a subject’s process of visual production and consumption: its structuring “presence” is, as shadow, barely perceived.

I have spent some time articulating the key aspects of Sekula’s thesis on the shadow archive as it enables me to situate the photographs of torture produced at Abu Ghraib within regimes of visibility that positioned the producers, victims, and consumers of these images. In addition, Sekula’s concept of the shadow archive, as structuring yet barely perceptible figure, enables me to establish points of connection between visual regimes that would appear, on the surface, to be entirely autonomous and unrelated. In light of this, I will proceed to argue that the Abu Ghraib torture photographs are inflected by a series of subordinate archives whose taxonomic distribution of images include the following genres: colonial tableaux; torture; souvenir; news-media event; evidentiary legal document; fetish; pornography; Orientalism; homophobia; misogyny; sadism; carcerality; lynchings; and so on. This seemingly disjunctive and even contradictory catalogue of genres is, of course, indicative of the constitutive polyvalence of the photographic image, a polyvalence that allows an image’s “meaning” to be reframed and resignified according to the specificity of the context within which it is positioned and consumed. The radicality of this polyvalence is perhaps best exemplified by the manner in which the Abu Ghraib photographs were simultaneously fetishistic objects of personal pleasure shared amongst the military personnel of the prison and legal documents inscribed with an evidentiary role within the court of law. In this context, I would underscore the point that, despite the fact that the Abu Ghraib photographs are digital and not analogue images, they have, in the context of a so-called post-photography digital culture, lost none of the power or force of the indexicality that characterises the traditional analogue photograph (produced with light sensitive negative and not through the calibration of a series of electronic digits). It is precisely the power of their indexicality—an event took place and it was visually recorded—that underwrites their evidentiary and testimonial qualities.

In what follows, I want to begin to name and identify the aesthetic codification of torture that inscribes the Abu Ghraib photographs. There is, of

course, a long and complex western iconographic genealogy of aestheticised torture, a genealogy that includes the entire Christian tradition of crucifixion and martyrdom. My focus in this essay, however, will be largely circumscribed by the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Situated within this historical context, I will focus on the manner in which a range of aesthetic modalities—including colonial, Orientalist, white supremacist, and penal—function to enframe the cultural production and consumption of the Abu Ghraib photographs.

### VISUAL REGIMES OF TORTURE AND TERROR

At one point in *Torture and Truth*, a text that offers a detailed account of the torture of Arab prisoners by the American military at Abu Ghraib, Mark Danner draws attention to what he appositely calls “that ultimate third party”: “the ubiquitous digital camera with its inescapable flash, there to let the detainee know that the humiliation would not stop when the act itself did but would be preserved into the future in a way that the detainee would not be able to control.”<sup>11</sup> Danner’s naming of the camera in terms of a “third party” brings into focus the voyeuristic intrusion of the camera within the relation of torturer and tortured. The camera serves to triangulate this relation. Within this schema, the camera must be seen as occupying the visual apex of this triangulated relation. Transposed spatially, the photographer at the apex of this triangulated relation is compelled to occupy a calculated distance from both torturer and tortured so as to keep the scene in focus and in order, *scenographically*, to frame her or his subjects. The voyeuristic optics of the camera as third party are reproduced in the actual material text of the digital photograph, as the ocular apex originally occupied by the photographer is reproduced by virtually every spectator who views the images: in the viewing of the photographs, the enframing and voyeuristic position of the photographer is necessarily reproduced by the viewer. In other words, the visual logic of this ocular apex—which demands both a certain keeping of distance in order to focalise the object of photographic capture and a necessary occlusion of the subject actually taking the photograph—is ineluctably productive of a voyeuristic economy. This voyeuristic economy is problematised, however, by the viewing of the photographs by the victims of torture. Their relation, as both subjects and objects of these photographs, functions to short-circuit this voyeuristic economy.

The triangulated schema of voyeurism, torture and spectatorship that inscribes the Abu Ghraib photographs is unforgettably realised in the very closing scenes of *Salò*: as the torture of the prisoners by the libertines is carried to its fatal conclusion, Pasolini begins a tracking shot that proceeds slowly to withdraw from the scene; as the camera gains distance from the violent acts of torture that are unfolding, suddenly a binocularised vision, with its attendant blacking out of peripheral vision, replaces the omniscient, full-screen vision of the camera. In this moment, Pasolini materialises the previously occluded technology of cinematic vision simultaneously as he brings into unsettling focus the very position of the spectator who, through this reflexive tactic, is compelled to register his or her complicity within this voyeuristic regime of visibility and torture: the viewer, in this moment, is compelled to occupy the position of the libertine who has commanded the torture and is now consuming it as a form of visual spectacle and entertainment.

The use of the camera in the Abu Ghraib torture photographs must be situated within the discursive matrix of visual culture practices. There is nothing “spontaneous” or “unmotivated” about these images. Rather, these photographs are all characterised by a cinematic desire, on the part of the torturers, reflexively to “shoot” and scenographically “stage” the practices of torture performed on the victims. This reflexivity on the part of the torturers, in terms of their use of the camera as a type of adjunct weapon in their arsenal of torture implements (including guns, sticks, ropes, electrical wires, and so on), is something that is repeatedly drawn attention to in the testimonies of the victims. The testimonies disclose both the intrusive and amplificatory role of the camera in the process of being tortured, and the way in which the victims feel themselves to be violently positioned as having to perform “roles” in “porn movies”:

He was helping Grainer and Davis and others whom I don't know, like they were watching a live movie of three young guys being put up by [name withheld] on top of each other. And everyone was taking pictures of this whole thing with cameras.<sup>12</sup>

They beat him a lot then they removed his clothing then they put wire up his ass and they started taking pictures of him.<sup>13</sup>

They tied him to the bed and they inserted the phosphoric light in his ass and he was yelling for God's help. . . . The female officer was taking pictures.<sup>14</sup>

I saw A[name withheld] in Room #1, who was naked and Grainer was putting the phosphoric light up his ass. [name withheld] was screaming for help . . . There was also a white female soldier taking pictures of [name withheld].<sup>15</sup>

There was a female bent over, kind of leaning over, she was in the prison, and [name withheld] was behind her. At one point the camera popped up and that is when I saw the person behind the girl and recognise [sic] that it was [name withheld] who was having sex with her. Then the camera moved to her face and I could really only see her eyes, and then it went back to showing both of them.<sup>16</sup>

After they removed the sandbags they stripped us naked as a newborn baby. Then they ordered us to hold our penises and stroke it and this was only during the night. They started to take photographs as if it was a porn movie.<sup>17</sup>

Video and digital cameras, in this context, must be seen as technologies deployed to capture what I have elsewhere termed the “event-trauma of the carceral post-human,” in which victims of the so-called “war on terror,” including the prisoners held at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, are inscribed within traumatising carceral contexts; within these carceral contexts, their human rights are effectively suspended, even as they are simultaneously mobilised in terms of politico-mediatized figures of spectacle.<sup>18</sup> The scenographic framing of the victims of torture in the Abu Ghraib photographs that I broached above needs to be historically contextualised in order to draw out its enmeshment within visual regimes of Orientalism and their shadow archives. The Orientalist shadow archives would here include the Hollywood film industry, with its long history of racist representations of Arabs—as so many mad, bad, and fanatical characters.<sup>19</sup>

At the schematised level of visual regimes, the Abu Ghraib photographs reproduce the colonial tableaux of nineteenth-century imperial photography, in which the colonised natives, naked and shackled, are choreographed in terms of mute trophies of imperial conquest.<sup>20</sup> The Abu Ghraib photographs compel the viewer to bear testimony to the deployment and enactment of absolute U.S. imperial power on the bodies of the Arab prisoners through the organising principles of white supremacist aesthetics that intertwine violence and sexuality with Orientalist spectacle. In keeping with the gendered power relations of Orientalism, the bodies of Arab men are phallogcentrically transgendered and theatrically arranged into the passive and available feminised bodies that, in the

western visual imaginary, belong to what Malek Alloula calls the “phantasm of the harem.”<sup>21</sup> Alloula articulates what is at stake in the transcription of space and bodies in terms of the phantasm of the harem: “What is remembered about the harem . . . are the sexual excess to which it gives rise and which it promotes. A universe of generalised perversion and of absolute limitlessness of pleasure.”<sup>22</sup>

Inscribing the Abu Ghraib photographs are the Orientalist tableaux that represent the Arab subject in terms of the manacled slave, the erotic slave, the vanquished enemy as corpse-trophy and so on. In the context of the visual genres of Orientalist representation, the pyramid of nude male Arab bodies, lasciviously intertwined, reproduces the Abu Ghraib equivalent of Orientalist visions of the harem, with their excess of naked and pornographically arranged Arab women’s bodies. The transposition of this phantasm of the harem onto the space of the Abu Ghraib prison visually evidences the points of intersection between multiform colonial relations of power invested with the production of subaltern subjects “where bodies are taken without any possibility of refusal.”<sup>23</sup> As phantasm of the harem, Abu Ghraib embodies what Alloula calls in her analysis of the colonial dynamics of the harem “the very space of the orgy: the one that the soldier and colonizer obsessively dream of establishing on the territory of the colony, transformed for the occasion into a bordello.”<sup>24</sup> In Pasolini’s *Salò*, the fascist equivalent of the bordello, in which violence and torture are intertwined with sex, is named precisely as the “Orgy Room.”

I want to underscore, at this critical juncture, the dangers of coding the tortures perpetrated by the U.S. military at Abu Ghraib in purely culturalist terms that are divorced from material relations of political power. I have in mind here Angela Davis’s incisive exposé of the reductive and unreflexively racist assumptions that would proceed to script U.S. personnel at Abu Ghraib as “using Islamic culture as a weapon, using a person’s Islamic culture as a sensibility that can be tortured.”<sup>25</sup> In response to this sort of reductively culturalist explanation, Davis replies:

First of all, I would say that I am always suspicious when culture is deployed as a strategy or an answer, because culture is so much more complicated. The apparent cultural explanation of these forms of torture reveals a very trivial notion of culture. Why is it assumed that a non-Muslim man approached by a female interrogator dressed as dominatrix, attempting to smear menstrual

blood on him, would react any differently from a Muslim man? These assumptions about culture are themselves racist.

When critics of the tortures carried out under the auspices of the Bush administration cavalierly assume that the tortures are simply exploiting the fact that Islamic culture is inherently more sexist than what we call western culture, the critics themselves participate in this violence.<sup>26</sup>

The fascist aesthetics of this Orientalist genre of torture photographs is evidenced when juxtaposed against the *Salò* image of heaped naked bodies being inspected by the libertines in a competition to discover who, of the grouped victims, has the most beautiful arse. The system of relations between these Abu Ghraib images and fascist visual regimes is graphically underscored by the discursive practices performed upon both sets of victims. In *Salò*, the libertines shine their torches up the arses of their victims; in the Abu Ghraib photographs, this is taken one step further. One of the victims at Abu Ghraib details the torture he was compelled to witness: "They put sheets again on the doors. Grainer and his helper they cuffed one prisoner in Room #1, named A[censored], he was Iraqi citizen. They tied him to the bed and they inserted the phosphoric light in his ass and he was yelling for God's help."<sup>27</sup> As I will argue in more detail below, these homophobic practices of anal rape upon the Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel must not be seen as "aberrant" practices that can somehow be delimited to Abu Ghraib; on the contrary, these violent practices must be seen as institutionally enabled by the very culture of military organizations in the U.S. William Pinar documents as much in his analysis of same-sex rape in U.S. military institutions. Pinar describes the sexual assault of a Marine at Camp Lejeune that, precisely because it is a discursively instituted and enabled practice, parallels what unfolded at Abu Ghraib: the sexual assault entailed, amongst other things, "the assailants rub[bing] a mini-flashlight across the Marine's rectum."<sup>28</sup>

As in the majority of the Abu Ghraib photographs, the naked group of victims in *Salò* have their heads covered in hoods. In keeping with the unequal relations of power reproduced by fascio-orientalist visual regimes, the victim that is being photographed is rarely allowed to stare back into the camera and, by implication, agentically address the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer; rather, the victim's gaze is either entirely occluded by hoods or, alternatively, she or he is compelled to be photographed with an averted look that vitiates the power (a)symmetrically to return the gaze and thereby

disrupt an unequal relation of visual power.<sup>29</sup> In foreclosing the possibility for the victim of torture to return the gaze, a univocal relation of scopic power is preserved, whilst the victim is positioned as an emblematic figure of Orientalist capture. By formally foreclosing the possibility for the torture victim to return the gaze, what is effectively precluded is the right of acknowledgement, if not appeal, that would be enunciated in the eyes of the victim—a right of acknowledgement regarding their ontological status as also human. Situated in Levinasian terms, the refusal to acknowledge the face of the victim guarantees their reduction to a subhuman status: in the denial of the face of the other is inscribed the violation and destruction of every ethical relation.<sup>30</sup> This denial of the face of the other (as also human) prepares the ground for the unleashing of violence upon the (subhuman) victim of torture.

In both her autobiography and a recent interview, Janis Karpinski, the former Commander in charge of rebuilding the civilian prison system in post-Saddam Iraq, including Abu Ghraib prison, describes how Major General Geoffrey Miller, Commander, Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, was “sent to Abu Ghraib to review prison interrogation procedures.”<sup>31</sup> Arriving August 31, 2003, he declared “he was going to ‘Gitmoize’ the operation; that meant he was going to extend his procedures [for interrogation of prisoners] at Guantanamo Bay to Abu Ghraib specifically.”<sup>32</sup> Evidenced here is the official transposition of Guantanamo Bay interrogation techniques to Abu Ghraib. Miller’s transposition of techniques of torture from Guantanamo Bay to Abu Ghraib was effectively enabled by the U.S. government’s formal suspension of the Geneva Conventions, prohibiting the use of torture on prisoners of war, in the wake of President Bush’s declaration of a “new paradigm . . . ushered in not by us, but by terrorists.”<sup>33</sup> This “new paradigm” declared all prisoners captured in the “war on terror” to be “unlawful combatants” and thus beyond the legal purview of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>34</sup> In the face of “an extraordinary emergency,” that is seen to render the Geneva Conventions “obsolete and quaint,”<sup>35</sup> a “state of exception,”<sup>36</sup> to use Agamben’s term, is declared. Peter Goodrich identifies this move as “the first moment of the new casuistry,” in which “politics is suspended, and with it law—legal right, judicial competence, review of decisions—is placed on hold. A certain standstill or legal lull marks the shift in jurisdictions, the move to theocratic possibilities and their accompanying discourse of faith and faith alone.”<sup>37</sup> The Legal Counsel to the President,

Alberto R. Gonzales, in one of his memos to President Bush justifying the U.S. military's use of torture, invokes the category of "faith," here "good faith," as that which "would negate the specific intent element of torture, it is a complete defense to such a charge."<sup>38</sup> As Goodrich sardonically remarks, in the context of the new casuistry, "*sola fide* or faith alone can justify many things."<sup>39</sup>

Karpinski quotes Major General Miller as declaring, soon after his arrival at Abu Ghraib: "Look, the first thing you have to do is treat these prisoners like dogs. If they ever get the idea that they're anything more than dogs, you've lost control of your interrogation."<sup>40</sup> Miller's canine directive was translated into literal practice in Abu Ghraib, as Iraqi prisoners were collared, leashed, and led like dogs through the prison. This fascist exercise of power upon the bodies of the Iraqi prisoners has its shadow equivalent in Pasolini's *Salò*, where the prisoners are stripped naked and then collared, leashed and ordered to walk on hands and knees, bark and pant like dogs for the entertainment of the libertines. The testimonies of the Iraqi prisoners echo the violent canine performatives represented in *Salò*: "And they treated us like animals . . . as if we were dogs";<sup>41</sup> "they forced us to walk like dogs on our hands and knees. And we had to bark like a dog and if we didn't do that, they start hitting us hard on our face and chest with no mercy";<sup>42</sup> "[they] make sit like a dog . . . and bark like a dog."<sup>43</sup>

The scenographic visual coding that inscribes the Abu Ghraib torture photographs is exemplified by the repeated use of the colonial genre of the tableaux. The colonial genre of the tableaux is a hyper-real genre that is self-conscious of its own staged and choreographed effects. It is a genre that theatricalises its subject and renders it as spectacle.<sup>44</sup> The discursive dimensions of this visual aesthetic are constituted by the intertwining of torture, pain, sexuality and death in the service of spectacle and entertainment. As Brigadier General Janis Karpinski explained in one of the investigation interviews, "I think it became a sport," specifically a spectator sport:

. . . they were enjoying what they were doing and the MPs who saw this opportunity—seized this opportunity. I don't know if they shared the ideas with MIs or whatever they did, but there was definitely agreement, and—then some of the procedures they were following, they just elaborated on. And—and I would imagine and I don't know this to be a fact, but would imagine it went something like this—in the DFAC or when they were sitting around the Internet Café. 'Oh yeah, you should see what we do to the prisoners sometime.' 'Can I come and watch?' 'Oh yeah. How about Thursday.' And because we had

a clerk over there who was thoroughly enjoying all of this sport, and the pictures anyway, and she was the girlfriend of the guy who was one of the kingpins in this.<sup>45</sup>

Karpinski's conjecture regarding the swapping of the images of torture at the Internet Café is in fact substantiated by many of the other soldiers who were interviewed by the official investigative committees, and who remarked that all the images had been burned onto a CD and that there was an active trade in the pictures: "I know that people from MI have them because they were swapping pictures."<sup>46</sup> This trade in the images of torture extended well beyond the confines of Abu Ghraib, as military personnel admitted to sending the pictures home and sharing them with family and friends. The transmuting of torture into "sport" is enabled precisely by a virulent commodifying logic driven by economies of spectacle and entertainment.

The desire to produce images, in this context, augments the physical rituals of torture as the victim is compelled to "hold a pose" whilst undergoing the torture in order for the image to be produced. The testimony of one of the victims evidences as much:

On the third day, after five o'clock, Mr. Grainer came and took me to Room #37, which is the shower room, and he started punishing me. Then he brought a box of food and he made me stand on it with no clothing, except a blanket. Then a tall black soldier came and put electrical wires on my fingers and toes and on my penis, and I had a bag over my head. Then he was saying 'which switch is on for electricity.' And he came with a loudspeaker and he was shouting near my ear and then he brought a camera and he took some pictures of me, which I knew because of the flash of the camera. And he took the hood off and he was describing some of the poses he wanted me to do.<sup>47</sup>

Here the victim of torture is compelled to participate in what goes by the name of "no-touch torture," wherein the victim is so positioned as to self-generate his or her own intense and crippling pain.<sup>48</sup> In keeping with this codification of torture-as-violent-aesthetics, the victim of torture is compelled to participate in the theatricalisation of his or her own torture as he or she is commanded to assume specific poses by the torturer for the benefit of the camera. The Iraqi prisoner is positioned in terms of a subhuman subject who cannot possibly experience the same level of pain, hurt or humiliation as his or her "human" torturer. In the demand to "hold the pose" whilst

being tortured, there is operative an asymmetrical system of value: the pleasure of the torturer/spectator is procured and secured through the logic of diminishing the possibility that the other has an equivalent capacity to feel pain. The victim is also compelled to experience the very objectification of their tortured body as a type of visual commodity put to use for the gratification of the torturers and their fellow spectators.

The camera, in this context, is instrumentalised into another weapon of torture, as it extends the duration of the regime of torture for the sake of producing the perfect picture. The camera and the flash are here mobilised within a regime of absolute power predicated on maximum visibility. The flash of the camera symbolically amplifies the stripping naked of the victim of torture as it produces an inescapable regime of hypervisibility. In Abu Ghraib, the flash of the camera immobilises its victims simultaneously as it transfixes them within a hypervisible regime of complete exposure that underscores their vulnerability and object-status.

One of the torture victims describes a regime of torture that included being bashed, being sat upon, then spat upon and urinated on by one of the military police, who “was pissing on me and laughing.”<sup>49</sup> The torture session concludes with the anal rape of the prisoner by one of the MPs using his police baton—and “Then they broke the glowing finger [a fluorescent tube] and spread it on me until I was glowing and they were laughing. . . . And they were taking pictures of me during all these instances.”<sup>50</sup> After the multiple violences performed on his body, the victim of torture is finally instrumentalised into a light-emitting object that renders the flash of the camera redundant: he becomes his own source of radiant light in a scopic regime that demands absolute exposure and visibility of the tortured body. The closing statement of this man’s testimony, “And they were taking pictures of me during all these instances,” serves to indict the role of the camera as one more weapon of torture deployed against him by his torturers; this is a weapon that will be productive, during and after the brutal fact of torture itself, of an ongoing secondary trauma. This is the secondary trauma of knowing that the images that bear testimony to the victim being reduced to the status of objecthood will have taken on a life of their own, endlessly circulating the spectacle of the victim’s torture and pain within globalised circuits of visual consumption.

In other words, the effect of image-as-augmentation-of-torture is amplified, in turn, by the networks of circulation, exchange and consumption

within which these images are inscribed. Inserted within U.S. networks of circulation and visual consumption, these images of torture become, like the white-supremacist photographs of the lynching of African Americans, “souvenirs” of symbolic violence that effectively legitimate the actual acts of physical violence and torture through the interpellation of an imperial anti-Arab spectatorship that will appreciate the “sport” and get the “joke”—and I refer here to the unforgettable words of one of the participants in the torture of the Iraqi prisoners who, when questioned, remarked that they tortured their victims at Abu Ghraib “just for the fun of it.”<sup>51</sup>

### THE SPECTRE AND SPECTACLE OF LYNCHING

The practices of torture perpetrated at Abu Ghraib must be seen, through their ritualised and codified repetition, as reproducing historical regimes of visibility predicated on white supremacist violence-as-spectacle. “The spectacle,” Guy Debord writes, “is not a collection of images; it is a social relation among people that is mediated by images.”<sup>52</sup> The fact that the photographs of torture were circulated both within the prison and in the U.S. amongst families and friends of U.S. military personnel underscores the manner in which these images were invested with a power to reproduce the spectacle of a vanquished and humiliated nation, metonymically signified by the bodies of the tortured Iraqi soldiers. The production of a visual spectacle of torture at Abu Ghraib evokes the practice of lynching African Americans in the U.S., in which the torture of blacks was staged for the entertainment of the white spectators who often gathered in mass at public lynchings, thanks to advance advertising of the lynching in local newspapers and through word-of-mouth. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck write: “At times lynching acquired a macabre, carnival-like aspect, with the victim being tortured and mutilated for the amusement of onlookers.”<sup>53</sup> Often a lynching mob “prolonged the grisly ordeal by submitting the victim to unthinkable torture for the entertainment of the spectators.”<sup>54</sup> In unsurprising, because discursively constituted and regulated, parallels with Abu Ghraib, during the lynching ritual, the agents of torture “would sometimes interrupt the torture ‘to pose with their victims so that photographs could be taken.’”<sup>55</sup> In the context of lynching’s shadow archive and its codified practices of torture and spectacle, this practice of momentarily suspending the

torture in order for the agent of torture to strike a pose for the camera with the victim is replicated across many of the Abu Ghraib images.

In the Abu Ghraib images, the smirking agents of torture must be seen as metonymically inscribing the spectating locus of a larger white American public that will also consume these photos in terms of spectacle and entertainment. Here the Abu Ghraib photographs fall within that genealogy of lynching photographs that were sold, exchanged and sent to family members in other U.S. states in the form of postcards and souvenirs.<sup>56</sup> Consistently present at the lynchings of African Americans was the technology of the photographic camera. The camera was used to record and aestheticise the spectacle of torture. Its presence at the lynchings enabled the images of torture to enter domestic circuits of exchange and consumption. One eye-witness account of the lynching of Thomas Brooks in Fayette County, Tennessee, in 1915, captures the role of photography in this white supremacist festival of torture: “Hundreds of kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the lynching. . . . Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of the lynched Negro.”<sup>57</sup> The video recordings of torture at Abu Ghraib must be tracked back to this shadow archive of lynchings; this archive is also constituted by the gramophone records that recorded the screams of the victims of lynchings; these gramophone records were sold and distributed within white supremacist economies of consumption of torture as entertainment.<sup>58</sup>

The scenographic and theatricalised staging of torture at Abu Ghraib, once it is located within this shadow archive of U.S. lynchings, emerges as another form of racist “public theatre, a participatory ritual of torture and death, a voyeuristic spectacle prolonged for as long as possible . . . for the benefit of the crowd.”<sup>59</sup> As many historians and cultural critics have observed, the lynchings of African Americans by white supremacists were often staged in terms of grand public theatre. Philip Dray, to cite one example, describes the lynching of Henry Smith at Paris, Texas, February 3, 1893, in terms of “major public spectacle”: “The townspeople clearly intended to maximize the event’s theatricality and demonstrate that they were capable of putting on a grand show.”<sup>60</sup> The staging of this “grand show” included the use of floats, stage-like platforms and theatre props—all deployed to theatricalise and maximise the spectacle of the torture of Henry Smith, who was repeatedly poked with hot irons that seared his flesh to the bone before finally being soaked in oil and set alight. “Almost immediately afterward the

scouring of the area for buttons, teeth, and other mementos began, and continued through the night.”<sup>61</sup> The shadow archive of staging torture as theatre and spectacle is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in the lynching of an African American, Will Porter, in Livermore, Kentucky, April 1911. In this case, the lynching mob actually occupied a theatre:

Kicking aside scenery, they tied Porter to a pole center stage and informed the crowd waiting for the culprit to be carried outside and put to death that the lynching would take place inside the theater. Two different kinds of seats would be sold for the ‘performance.’ An orchestra seat would allow the patron to empty a six-shooter at Porter, while those in the balcony would be limited to one shot. . . . Fifty men paid the admission and quickly found seats . . . . The sound of fifty weapons blazing in an empty theater was so earsplitting, dozens of frightened rats went scurrying across the stage as Porter’s body was perforated by gunfire.<sup>62</sup>

I draw attention to this theatricalised history of lynching and torture in order to underscore the performative manner in which torture has been aesthetically codified in the U.S. The materiality of this white supremacist shadow archive of theatricalised, aestheticised, and racialised torture belies claims that what happened at Abu Ghraib was somehow merely an aberrant instance of violence that was due to the “predilections” of a few “deviant” individuals. On the contrary, the material existence of this white supremacist shadow archive points to the very historical, discursive and performative politico-cultural conditions of possibility that both enabled and informed the exercise of torture at Abu Ghraib. The now iconic image of the hooded Iraqi prisoner with his arms splayed in a crucifix-like position evokes the Ku Klux Klan’s Christian-inflected iconographic repertoire of aestheticised techniques and conventions of white-supremacist torture.

## **PENAL ARCHIVES: “INTERNAL GULAGS” AND THE U.S. EXPORT OF VIOLENCE**

From a strictly political point of view fascism and Nazism have not been overcome, and we still live under their sign.<sup>63</sup>

The white supremacist history, and its attendant shadow archives, that I have been tracking needs to be located within foundational moments of

colonial violence that continue to shape and inform the contemporary U.S. nation. The Cherokee historian and cultural theorist, Andrea Smith, tracking the violent history of genocide against Native Americans, writes: “the U.S. is built on a foundation of genocide, slavery, and racism.”<sup>64</sup> Situated in this context, what becomes apparent in the scripting of the 9/11 attacks as the worst acts of terrorism perpetrated on U.S. soil is the effective erasure of this foundational history of state-sponsored terrorism on the First Nation peoples of the U.S. In a parallel manner, this historicidal erasure is what has also been enacted in the Australian context, where Australia’s own violent history of state-sponsored terrorism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been white-washed out of official existence in discussions of contemporary acts of terror. This historicidal act of whitewashing effectively clears the ground for contemporary acts of violence against the nation to be chronologically positioned as the “first” or hierarchically ranked as the “worst” in the nation’s history. Underpinning these white acts of historicidal erasure in both the U.S. and Australian contexts is official—government, media, and academic—positioning of Indigenous peoples in term of a “permanent ‘present absence’” that, in Smith’s words, “reinforces at every turn the conviction that Native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified.”<sup>65</sup>

In her work, Smith establishes critical points of connection between the “war on terror” being waged in places like Iraq and the issue of Indigenous sovereignty within the context of the US nation: “it is important to understand that the war against ‘terror’ is really an attack against Native sovereignty, and that consolidating U.S. empire abroad is predicated on consolidating U.S. empire *within* U.S. borders. For example, the Bush administration continues to use the war on terror as an excuse to support anti-immigration policies and the militarisation of the U.S./Mexico border.”<sup>66</sup> In the Australian context, these political and legislative overlaps between the “war on terror” and anti-immigration policies have been documented in painstaking detail by Suvendrini Perera;<sup>67</sup> and both Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Irene Watson have brought into sharp focus the critical points of intersection between the issue of Indigenous sovereignty and the colonial relations of power that continue to inscribe the Australian nation.<sup>68</sup>

The U.S. military’s scripting of the sexual violence and torture that was perpetrated at Abu Ghraib in terms of the aberrations of a few deviant

individuals becomes untenable when situated within this larger colonial framework of state-sponsored terrorism and legislated violence:

White supremacy, colonialism, and economic exploitation are inextricably linked to U.S. democratic ideals rather than aberrations from it. The “freedom” guaranteed to some individuals in society has always been premised upon the radical unfreedom of others. Very specifically, the U.S. could not exist without the genocide of indigenous peoples. Otherwise visitors coming to this continent would be living under indigenous forms of governance rather than under U.S. empire.<sup>69</sup>

Situated in this context, the acts of sexual violence and torture that were committed at Abu Ghraib must be viewed as reproducing, within the extended locus of empire, foundational moments of colonial rule. As Antonia Castañeda documents in her “Sexual Violence in the Politics of Conquest” in the context of the establishment of the state of California, “the sexual and other violence toward Amerindian women in California can best be understood as ideologically justified violence institutionalised in structures and relations of conquest initiated in the fifteenth century. In California as elsewhere, sexual violence functioned as an institutionalised mechanism for ensuring subordination and compliance. It was one instrument of sociopolitical terrorism and control—first of women and then of the group under conquest.”<sup>70</sup> As I argue below, the foundational violence of these white supremacist practices of colonialism are precisely what remain, to paraphrase Castañeda, institutionalised in contemporary structures and relations of ongoing imperial conquest.

At Abu Ghraib, the military rape of Arab women instantiates the contemporary reproduction of this colonial violence as a form of sociopolitical terrorism and control, precisely as the reach of this sexual violence is expanded to encompass the phallogcentrically transgendered bodies of conquered Arab men. Operative in this geopolitics of conquest, violence and continuing state terrorism is a double movement that situates the borders of whiteness as both internal and external to the U.S. and Australian nations. Securing white hegemony at home is predicated on extending imperial white supremacist relations of power abroad. As I have argued elsewhere, this unsettling of seemingly distinct categories—inside/outside—ramifies precisely along overlapping axes of national sovereignty and borders.<sup>71</sup> If the war in Iraq illustrates anything, it is that the integrity of national sovereignty is only selectively respected and that national borders become flexible and moveable

according to the politico-economic-military power that the aggressor nation can exercise. I am referring here to the U.S. administration's imperial doctrine that the borders of the U.S. begin wherever its national interest is at stake.

The U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, articulates the violent dynamics of this double logic of security through the exercise of war: "Outlining a series of initiatives implemented to make the country more secure . . . Ridge said the reason terrorists have lashed out in Iraq and elsewhere is not because the United States is failing in its efforts to defeat terrorism, but because it is succeeding. 'These successes remind us why we fight,' he said, 'because every single victory in a faraway land makes us safer here at home.'" <sup>72</sup> The attenuating fable of the "faraway land" serves to relegate the lived reality of the lands in the violent grip of U.S. imperial war to the status of innocuous myth. The imperial scope of this search for security manifests itself in the colonising *outward* sweep of the U.S. military: "That's why," explains Ridge, "we work so hard to extend our zone of security outward. So that our borders are the last line of defense, not our first line of defense. And that's why we built security measures that begin thousands of miles away." <sup>73</sup>

The African American death row prisoner and radio commentator, Mumia Abu-Jamal, has drawn attention to other officially effaced histories that are also constitutive of contemporary U.S. white supremacist violence. Since the public release of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, Abu-Jamal has broadcast a number of searing analyses that insistently situate the Abu Ghraib torture of Iraqi prisoners within the context of U.S. penal policies and practices. In his radio essay, "In the Shadow of Abu Ghraib Prison," Abu-Jamal incisively identifies the U.S. penal archive that informed the acts of torture at the Iraqi prison: "Many of the Americans working in the prisons of Iraq, especially in the reserves, are cops or prisons guards in their civilian lives. Indeed, one of the men identified as a suspect in the brutal mistreatment of people in Abu Ghraib, indeed a corporal in the Army, works here, at SCI-Greene [Green County state correctional institution, southwestern Pennsylvania]! The horrific treatment of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib has its dark precedents in the prisons and police stations across America." <sup>74</sup> In his sardonically titled "True American Values," Abu-Jamal, after underscoring the critical suspension by the U.S. government of the Geneva Conventions because of the "new paradigm" generated by the "war on terror," proceeds to track the genealogy of U.S. penal violence that was operative in the exercise of torture at Abu Ghraib:

The government . . . selected a man named Lane McCotter, a private prison company executive, to run the now notorious Abu Ghraib gulag on the outskirts of Baghdad. The U.S. chose a man who worked for a company that was under investigation by the U.S. Justice Department following the brutality charges against Management and Training Corporation [M & T]. Before his career at M & T took off, McCotter headed the Utah state prison system, until a scandal forced him to resign from his post in 1997. A naked prisoner was shackled to a chair in one of his prisons for 16 hours, until he died. . . . When McCotter joined M & T, it was the nation's third largest prison company, with 13 prisons online, and an unenviable record of brutality. Whatever can be said of McCotter, it can't be said that he wasn't qualified for the violence and depredations that would emerge at Abu Ghraib. Who better to run this colonial outpost of brutality, than one who ran internal gulags, both for the state and for the Dollar?

In January 2004, McCotter, in an interview, announced that Abu Ghraib 'is the only place we agreed as a team was truly closest to an American prison.' And so it was, with violence, brutality, beatings, torture, and state-sponsored sadism. It is, pre-eminently, America's cultural gift to the people of Iraq. It demonstrates U.S. domination, U.S. repression, U.S. violence, and U.S. contempt.<sup>75</sup>

In his series of radio essays, Abu-Jamal proceeds systematically to unfold the imperial lines of penal connection between Abu Ghraib and America's own "internal gulags" by drawing attention to what Angela Davis identifies as the military-prison-industrial complex: that carceral conglomerate that mixes penal punishment and violence with the drive for corporate profits through the increasing privatisation of prisons, and the consequent reconfiguration of prisons as sources of cheap, non-unionised labour for multinational corporations.<sup>76</sup> Situated in this context, Davis argues that the tortures perpetrated at Abu Ghraib "cannot be dismissed as anomalies. They emanate from techniques of punishment deeply embedded in the history of the institution of the prison."<sup>77</sup> Abu-Jamal situates the military-prison-industrial complex, and its attendant institutional regimes of violence, within global economies of U.S. imperial export of penalty and colonisation. In his essay, "When the Prison Nation Goes International: Attica to Abu-Ghraib," he tracks the manner in which the U.S. prison template, Attica, established the conditions of possibility for the export of U.S. penal violence to Iraq:

Big Black, the late veteran of Attica, told stories of the torture and beatings that he endured, as he was naked, and held under gunpoint. It is an eerie precursor

of the treatment of Arab prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Nor is it mere coincidence that some of the most brutal, most vicious actors at Abu Ghraib were U.S. Reserves, who, in their civilian lives, were prison guards. How else could they learn it? One of the most infamous was from SCI-Greene, in Southwestern Pennsylvania, named Charles Graner. . . . Welcome to U.S. 'corrections' as the Prison Nation goes Global.<sup>78</sup>

Abu-Jamal's tracking of this genealogy of penal violence has been validated by a recent United Nations Report Against Torture. The U.N. report describes how, between 1971 and 1992, a section of Chicago's jails known as Area 2 "was the epicentre for what has been described as the systematic torture of dozens of African American males by Chicago police officers. In total, more than 135 people say there were subjugated to abuse including having guns forced into their mouths, bags placed over their heads, and electric shocks inflicted to their genitals. Four men have been released from death row after government investigators concluded torture led to their wrongful convictions."<sup>79</sup> This "legal" use of torture in U.S. prisons must be understood in the larger context of the legalised killings performed in U.S. prisons through the ongoing use of capital punishment. In *Salò*, Pasolini situates the ritualised killings that close the film within the institutionalised context of state-sanctioned executions: "in the executions, for example, I have used the four modes of killing still practiced by our legal institutions: hanging, shooting, the garrotte and the electric chair."<sup>80</sup> In the context of the institutionality of this penal violence, I want to examine the complex enmeshing of the discursive practices of racism, homophobia, misogyny, and sexual assault, as they were transposed from the U.S. penal system to Abu Ghraib, in order to unpack the relations of power that inscribe this penal violence.

## NECROPHILIAC CAMP AND THE HETERO-FASCIST EROTICISATION OF TORTURE

Repeated throughout both the Abu Ghraib torture photographs and the documented testimonies of the victims is what Lee Edelman calls the "spectacle of sodomy."<sup>81</sup> The rape and sexual assault of the male Iraqi prisoners by the U.S. guards must be seen as homophobically transcoding homosexuality: in other words, sexual practices (sodomy) and sexualities (homosexuality) that challenge regimes of heteronormativity are violently transcoded as

“aberrant” and “perverse” and are thus absorbed into a hetero-fascist eroticisation and aestheticisation of torture that targets the homosexual, the cross-dresser, the feminized Oriental male, and so on. “[T]he aesthetic linkage of nazism and fascism to sado-masochism, impurity, degeneration, decadence, femininity, and homosexuality,” Ravetto argues, “overwrites the image of the Nazi or fascist with the image of woman and the sexual deviant”<sup>82</sup> and, I would add, the racialised other.

In this economy of homophobic and phallogocentric violence, anal penetration is performed in order to debase and humiliate the prisoners: “To be penetrated,” writes Leo Bersani, “is to abdicate power”; its intended effects are a “radical disintegration and humiliation of the self.”<sup>83</sup> Operative in this homophobic and phallogocentric scripting of anal penetration are both gendered and racialised inflections: the subject of anal penetration is marked as “feminine” in being positioned as “passive” and “receptive” and this marking is, in turn, overcoded by Orientalist fantasies designed to render the Arab male a “woman.” This charged intersection of Orientalism, homophobia, and misogyny was evidenced by the way the prison guards forced the male prisoners to wear women’s underwear over their heads. The transcoding of homosexual sexual desire into acts of homophobic violence, that are still compelled to reproduce homoerotically-coded practices (for example, anal penetration), enables the violent disavowal of this self-same desire: “mutilation and sadism,” Steve Neale argues, “are marks both of the repression involved and of a means by which the male body may be disqualified, so to speak, as an object of erotic contemplation and desire.”<sup>84</sup> In the context of the U.S. military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy on homosexuality, and its institutional history of homophobia, the Orientalist encoding of Abu Ghraib—as space of “perverted” behaviour and “limitless orgy”—effectively enabled the unhindered exercise of violent forms of homophobia.

The naming of the Arab prisoners as “sand niggers” must also be seen, in this context, as activating a long and entrenched U.S. racialised history predicated on sexualised violence exercised against African Americans in the contexts of both the public lynchings and the systemic sexual assault in prisons, as documented by Abu Jamal-Mumia and the latest revelations concerning Chicago’s Area 2. Angela Davis underscores these intersecting histories in her discussion of torture at Abu Ghraib, wherein she identifies “a very revealing parallel between the sexual coercion and sexual violence

within the Abu Ghraib context and the role sexual violence plays in lynching.<sup>85</sup> Reflecting on this intersection of sexual assault, race, colonialism and homophobia, Kobena Mercer raises this critical question:

Why does sodomy, or anal rape, come to acquire such an overdetermined and intolerable emotional significance in representations of colonisation? This requires more than an understanding of sexualization in a Foucauldian sense, and the way in which, through slavery and imperialism, the black body is opened up for power, primarily through the gaze, by being constituted as a specular object for the other who is also master.<sup>86</sup>

The “opening up for power” that Mercer draws attention to in his analysis of sexualised/racialised colonial practices resonates with the cases of anal rape of Iraqi prisoners perpetrated by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib. In marking the bodies of Arab prisoners as coextensive with the imperially invaded territory of Iraq, anal rape is resignified, homophobically, as another instantiation of opening up the occupied territory for power. William Pinar, in his exhaustive analysis of the racialised, gendered and sexualised dimensions of the history of lynchings in the U.S., brings into sharp focus precisely what was at stake in the practices of sexual mutilation of black men that accompanied lynchings: “the definitive element of rape centers around male-defined loss, not coincidentally also upon the way men define loss of exclusive access.”<sup>87</sup> The rape of both female and male Arab prisoners in Abu Ghraib is predicated—once the bodies of the prisoners are seen as symbolically and metonymically charged within colonial and imperial matrices of territorial invasion and occupation—on continuing to exercise the imperial prerogative of “exclusive access” in the face of resistance and contestation by those at the receiving end of this imperial power. In the context of Abu Ghraib, these gendered, sexualised and racialised points of intersection need to be complicated, as they can be seen to construct and mobilise subjectivities that cut across discrete identificatory categories in order to continue to reproduce hegemonic relations of power.<sup>88</sup> For example, the male-identified female soldier, Lyndie England, costumed in military fatigues and performatively wielding her weapons in the face of the Iraqi prisoners, exemplifies a type of “genderfuck” that crosses phallogenically coded “male” and “female” categories only in order to consolidate white supremacist, heteronormative and homophobic relations of power.

This queer criss-crossing of identitarian categories in the context of Abu Ghraib also serves to disclose what Andrew Ross terms the “necrophiliac economy that underpins camp,” an economy driven by the desire to recuperate the “unsalvageable material” of “history’s waste.”<sup>89</sup> Many of the Abu Ghraib photographs are choreographed by a camp aesthetic inscribed with the violence of this necrophiliac economy. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly evidenced than in the image of a smirking young female soldier holding the “thumbs up” sign over the supine and visibly bruised corpse of an Iraqi prisoner semi-shrouded in his black plastic body bag. This image evokes the shadow archive of Hollywood war films, in which the hero bomber turns to the camera, smiles and gives a “thumbs up” after scoring a successful hit on the enemy target. In the Abu Ghraib images, this iconic moment is transmuted into a camp gesture that is literally predicated on a necrophiliac economy in which the *memento mori* of vanquished Iraqi corpses are compelled to signify history’s waste in the face of the smirking imperial victors.

## GEOCORPOGRAPHIES IN THE SHADOW OF THE ARCHIVE

Weak, chained creatures, destined for our pleasure, I hope you don’t expect to find here the ridiculous freedom granted to you by the outside world. You are beyond the reach of any legality. No one on Earth knows you are here. As far as the world is concerned, you are already dead.<sup>90</sup>

In this attempt to delineate the complex operation of imperial power within Abu Ghraib, I coin the term “geocorpographies” in order to encapsulate in one word the following thesis: that the body, in any of its manifestations, is always geopolitically situated and graphically inscribed by signs, discourses, regimes of visibility, and so on. Its geopolitical markings can only be abstracted through a process of symbolic and political violence. The geopolitical significations that invest the body are constitutive of its cultural intelligibility. In arguing that what was perpetrated at Abu Ghraib prison was a geocorpography of torture, my aim is to bring into focus the violent enmeshment of the flesh and blood of the body within the geopolitics of war and empire.

In the context of the imperial war unsuccessfully being waged outside of Abu Ghraib prison, the prison itself must be read as a space that was mobilised by the U.S. in order to reproduce, at a micro level, another theatre of war. As theatre of war, in which the Geneva Conventions were politically suspended, Abu Ghraib operated in terms of a space where absolute power to torture and kill could be exercised with impunity. Abu Ghraib must be understood in the same terms that Frantz Fanon deployed in order to describe what he called the “colonized sector.” In the “colonized sector,” writes Fanon, “you die anywhere, from anything. It’s a world of no space. . . . The colonized sector is a sector that crouches and covers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It’s a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads.”<sup>91</sup> The violence of colonial occupation evacuates space: there is no space; rather, in the colonised sector, bodies become coextensive of space as such: they are the ground upon which military operations of occupation are performed and through which control of the colonised country is secured.

Within the confines of Abu Ghraib prison, the geocorpographies of the Iraqi prisoners became metonymic adjuncts of the external terrain of Iraq—as territory to be raped, mutilated into submission and conquered. Every act of insurgency exercised by Iraqis outside the prison could be, in a specular and symbolic manner, contained within the prison through the literal punishment and torture of the Iraqi prisoners. “Torture,” writes Elaine Scarry, “is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama . . . because the reality of power is so highly contestable, the regime is so unstable, torture is being used.”<sup>92</sup> In the face of the violent instability of the U.S. imperial occupation of Iraq, a dense and stratified shadow archive of violence is discursively deployed by the U.S. military. This shadow archive, as what informs discursive practice, enables the codification and ritualised enacting of violence. As such, it generates an illusory sense of compensatory stability in the face of insurgency, even as it produces, through its theatricalisation of violence, a space for imperial spectacle and neofascist entertainment. Commenting on the intertwining of fascist politics with an aesthetics of spectacle in the context of Mussolini’s regime, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi argues that it served to give “pre-eminence to the pursuit of total aims without any limits from laws, tradition, or ethical values.”<sup>93</sup> Viewed in this politico-cultural light, the tortures perpetrated at Abu Ghraib, their aesthetic and ritualised codification and the subject and object positions they made available, must be

viewed as driven by this fascist pursuit of total aims of imperial war unhindered by the limits of law.

1. Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmasking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 23.
2. David Levi Strauss, "Breakdown in the Gray Room: Recent Turns in the Images of War," in *Abu Ghraib: The Politics of Torture*, no. ed., 87–101 (Berkeley: The Terranova Series, 2004), 87.
3. See Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth* (London: Granta, 2005), 323 and 328.
4. Ravetto, *supra* note 1 at 15.
5. *Id.*, at 2.
6. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "A Mad Dream," <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/salo/foreword.html> (accessed May 14, 2005).
7. Allan Sekula, "Reading the Archive: Photography Between Labor and Capital," *Visual Culture*, Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, eds., 181–192 (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications in association with The Open University, 1999), 182.
8. *Id.*
9. *Id.*, at 184.
10. Allan Sekula, "The Body in the Archive," 39 *October* 3–64 (1986), at 10.
11. Danner, *supra* note 3 at 19.
12. Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, eds. *The Torture Papers* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 508.
13. *Id.*, at 511.
14. *Id.*, at 504.
15. *Id.*, at 506.
16. *Id.*, at 514.
17. *Id.*, at 516.
18. Joseph Pugliese, "The Event-Trauma of the Carceral Post-Human," 17 *Social Semiotics*, 63–86 (March 2007).
19. Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001) and Tim Jon Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).
20. See, for example, Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).
21. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 4. See also: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991), 188; Medya Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73; Jasbir K. Puar, "On Torture: Abu Ghraib," 93 *Radical History Review*, 13–38 (Fall 2005) and Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Bodies," 72 *Social Text*, 117–147 (Fall 2002). I am grateful to Goldie Osuri for bringing the Puar and Rai articles to my attention.
22. Alloula, *id.*, at 95.
23. *Id.*, at 122.
24. *Id.*, at 22.
25. Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 58.
26. *Id.*
27. Greenberg and Dratel, *supra* note 12 at 504.

28. William F. Pinar, *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 843.
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36. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
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38. Greenberg and Dratel, *supra* note 12 at 179.
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41. Danner, *supra* note 3 at 228.
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43. *Id.*, at 239.
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45. Greenberg and Dratel, *supra* note 12 at 530–31.
46. *Id.*, at 527.
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48. See Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 9. In his book, McCoy tracks the institutionalisation of torture in American culture, including the development of torture techniques by the CIA. See also, Kristian Williams, *American Methods: Torture and the Logic of Domination* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006) and Jennifer K. Harbury, *Truth, Torture and the American Way* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).
49. Danner, *supra* note 3 at 240.
50. *Id.*
51. *Id.*, at 323.
52. Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, Ken Knabb trans. (London: Rebel Press, n.d.), 2.
53. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 23. The title of Tolnay and Beck's book on lynching is invested with profound Nietzschean resonances, despite the fact that they do not reference his work. In his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage, 1969), 65–67, Nietzsche draws attention to the theatrical and even festive dimensions of punishment and torture: "Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches—and in punishment there is so much that is festive!"
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