

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

introduction:

homonationalism and biopolitics

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and telos, the paradox withered away.²¹ State of exception discourses rationalize egregious violence in the name of the preservation of a way of life and those privileged to live it. Giorgio Agamben, noting that biopolitics continually seeks to redefine the boundaries between life and death, writes, “The state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.”²² The temporality of exception is one that seeks to conceal itself; the frenzied mode of emergency is an alibi for the quiet certitude of a slowly normativized working paradigm of liberal democratic government, an alibi necessary to disavow its linkages to totalitarian governments. The state of exception thus works to hide or even deny itself in order to further its expanse, its presence and efficacy, surfacing only momentarily and with enough gumption to further legitimize the occupation of more terrain. Agamben likens the externally internal space of the state of exception to a Möbius strip: at the moment it is cast outside it becomes the inside.²³ In the state of exception, the exception insidiously becomes the rule, and the exceptional is normalized as a regulatory ideal or frame; the exceptional is the excellence that exceeds the parameters of proper subjecthood and, by doing so, redefines these parameters to then normativize and render invisible (yet transparent) its own excellence or singularity.

Sexual exceptionalism also works by glossing over its own policing of the boundaries of acceptable gender, racial, and class formations. That is, homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism; in actuality it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require. The historical and contemporaneous production of an emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of homosexual subjects, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism. Homonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms. One prime mechanism of sexual exceptionalism is mobilized by discourses of sexual repression—a contemporary version of Foucault’s repressive hypothesis—that are generative of a bio- and geopolitical global mapping of sexual cultural norms. Unraveling discourses of U.S. sexual exceptionalism is vital to critiques of U.S. practices of empire (most of

which only intermittently take up questions of gender and rarely sexuality) and to the expansion of queerness beyond narrowly conceptualized frames that foreground sexual identity and sexual acts.

Given that our contemporary political climate of U.S. nationalism relies so heavily on homophobic demonization of sexual others, the argument that homosexuality is included within and contributes positively to the optimization of life is perhaps a seemingly counterintuitive stance. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we continue to read the racial, gender, class, and national dimensions of these vilifying mechanisms. So I proceed with two caveats. First, to aver that some or certain homosexual bodies signify homonormative nationalism—homonationalism—is in no way intended to deny, diminish, or disavow the daily violences of discrimination, physical and sexual assault, familial ostracism, economic disadvantage, and lack of social and legal legitimacy that sexual others must regularly endure; in short, most queers, whether as subjects or populations, still hover amid regimes of deferred or outright death. What I am working through in this text are the manifold trajectories of racialization and un-nationalization of sexual others that foster the conditions of possibility for such violent relegation to death. The spectral resistances to gay marriage, gay adoptive and parental rights, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policies, and the privatization of sexuality entail that the protection of life granted through national belonging is a precarious invitation at best. Second, there is no organic unity or cohesion among homonationalisms; these are partial, fragmentary, uneven formations, implicated in the pendular momentum of inclusion and exclusion, some dissipating as quickly as they appear. Thus, the cost of being folded into life might be quite steep, both for the subjects who are interpellated by or aspire to the tight inclusiveness of homonormativity offered in this moment, and for those who decline or are declined entry due to the undesirability of their race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, age, or bodily ability. It also may be the case, as Barry D. Adams argues, that the United States is exceptional only to the degree to which, globally speaking, it is *unexceptional*, another angle that stresses the contingency of any welcome of queer life. In terms of legal recognition of gay and lesbian relationships, Adams notes ironically that to some extent the United States lags behind most European countries, as well as Canada, Brazil, Colombia, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa—a “backwardness” that the United States often ascribes to others in comparison to itself.²⁴ We can also say that the United States has investments in being exceptionally heteronormative even as it claims to be exceptionally tolerant of (homosexual) difference. But Adams’s reliance on

lag reinscribes a troubling teleology of modernity that, despite situating exceptionalism as a narrative that masks or fuzzes over regional differences, impels like-minded countries in a unilateral itinerary rather than multidirectional flows. Some efforts to determine whether the United States is indeed exceptional, efforts that have dominated various debates in history, American studies, and political science, among other fields, have focused on comparative empirical studies that do little to challenge or even question this telos.²⁵ With the range of discussion on American exceptionalism in mind, my intent is not to determine whether the United States is indeed exceptional—exceptionally good or ahead, or exceptionally behind or different—but to illustrate the modes through which such claims to exceptionalism are loaded with unexamined discourses about race, sexuality, gender, and class. Furthermore, exceptionalisms rely on the erasure of these very modalities in order to function; these elisions are, in effect, the ammunition with which the exception, necessary to guard the properties of life, becomes the norm, and the exceptional, the subjects upon whom this task is bestowed, becomes the normal.

Queer as Regulatory

U.S. sexual exceptionalism has its European counterparts, especially in Britain and the Netherlands, which expand, intersect, contrast, and often fuel U.S. homonormative formations. The echoes and divergences among locations are crucial to keep in mind because of the varied colonial histories, distinct migration trajectories, and class differences between U.S. Muslims and European Muslims.²⁶ In Figure 1, what could such a pronouncement—“I am a homosexual also”—signify and imply? What kinds of representational currency, cultural capital, and affective resonance does this statement, in our contemporary political landscapes, create and dispel? In this incredible photograph by Poulomi Desai, surfacing in a collection of British South Asian queer photography published in 2003, we have a Muslim cleric staging terrorist drag.²⁷ This provocative image of a figure in Osama bin Laden drag sets us anew on a disruptive queer epistemology and ontology. I use the term “drag” provisionally: despite the makeup, dress, faux beard and moustache, and the contexts (both the political landscape of Britain and the queer documentation angle of the book project itself), the term might reiterate the normative understanding of the radical incommensurability of the two subject positions staged together and graft a normative modernist gendered binary frame onto an otherwise far more complexly

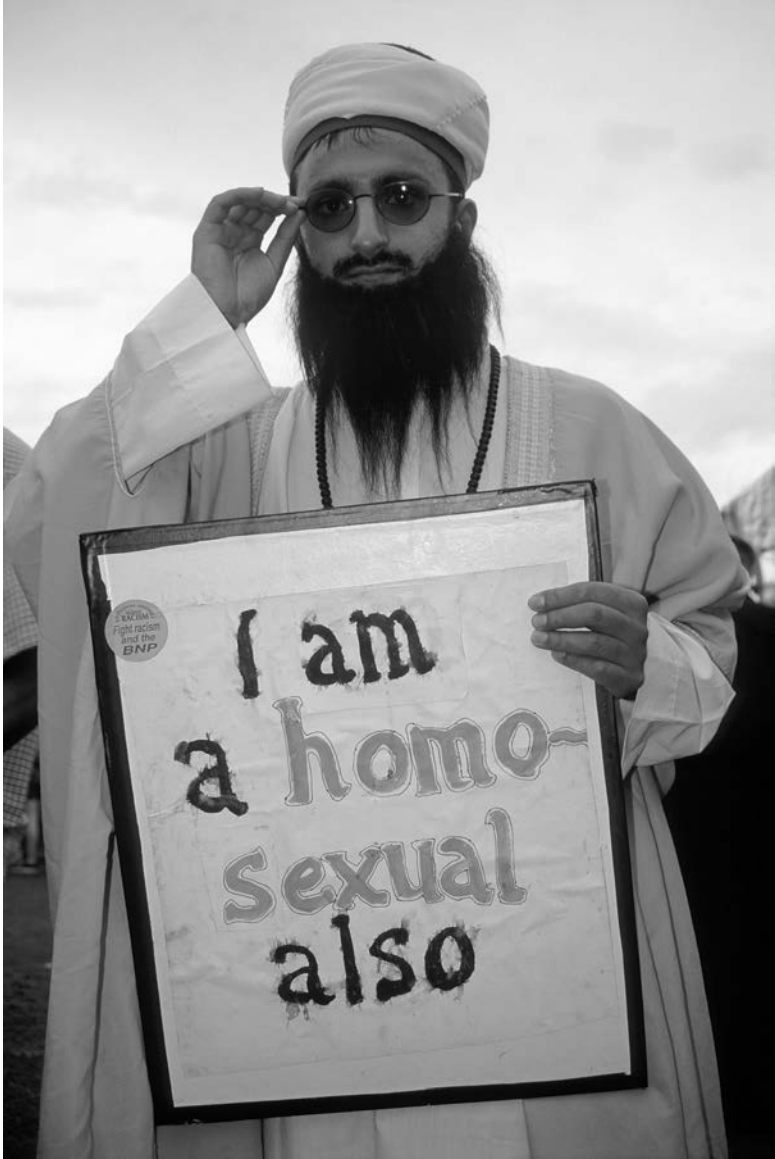


FIGURE 1. Poulomi Desai, *I Am a Homosexual Also*. From Poulomi Desai and Parminder Sekhon, *Red Threads: The South Asian Queer Connection in Photographs*. London: Diva Books, 2003. Reprinted with the artist's permission.

related sex-gender-desire triad. The garb of Muslim clerics is both naturalized as the fundamentalist dress of Osama bin Laden and reclaimed as a site of queer desires and queerly desiring subjects, interrupting both conventional epistemological and ontological renderings of this body.

The image is startling, to say the least, to the queer liberal imaginary at play in contemporary discourses of terrorism and counterterrorism: resolutely secular, unforgiving in its understanding of (irrational, illogical, senseless) religion, faith, or spirituality as the downfall of any rational politics. Queer secularity demands a particular transgression of norms, religious norms that are understood to otherwise bind that subject to an especially egregious interdictory religious frame. The queer agential subject can only ever be fathomed outside the norming constrictions of religion, conflating agency and resistance.

To Muslims and queers who disavow the practices of queer religiosity, the sign conveys: I too am you, and I am within you. Queer Arabs and Muslims, doubly indicted for the fundamentalist religion they adhere to or escape from and for the terrorist bodies that religion produces, are either liberated (and the United States and Europe are often the scene of this liberation) or can only have an irrational, pathological sexuality or queerness. These entanglements, debatably avoidable to an extent for queers from other traditions such as Judeo-Christian, plague Muslim queers because of the widespread conflation of Muslim with Islamic and Arab: Muslim = Islam = Arab. Religion, in particular Islam, has now supplanted race as one side of the irreconcilable binary between queer and something else. For queer Arabs and Muslims the either/or plight thickens: queer secularity understands observance of religious creed, participation in religious public spaces and rituals, devotion to faith-based or spiritual practices, and simply residence within an Islamic nation-state (floating upon the supposition of the separation of church and state in non-Islamic nation-states; for example, the denial of Christian fundamentalism as a state practice in the United States) as marks of subjugated and repressed sexuality void of agency. But regardless of complex affinities with Islam, Arab nation-states, and Muslim identity, the agency of all queer Muslims is invariably evaluated through the regulatory apparatus of queer liberal secularity.²⁸ This further contributes to apolitical readings typically ascribed to the refusals of western modernity that may be enacted by Islamic followers. Finally, queer secularity most virulently surfaces in relation to Islam because Islam, the whole monolith of it, is often described as unyielding and less amenable to homosexuality than Christianity and Judaism, despite exhortations by some queer Muslims

who “insist their religious and family struggles are not much different from those of their Christian or Jewish counterparts.”²⁹ As with the question of exceptionalism, my interest is not to determine the truth or falsity of these claims, but to examine the resilience and stranglehold of this discourse, its operating logic, the myths and realities it manufactures.

Why “homosexual,” a clinical term that resonates with the medicalization of homosexuality in the west and intimates an immature version of queerness in an anthropological sense as well as within universal rights discourses? The secular gay and lesbian human rights framing of Islamic sexual repression mistakes or transposes state repression for sexual repression, essentially denying any productive effects of juridical structures (replaying again the repressive hypothesis Foucault warns against). This contemporary version of repression does not contradict colonial fantasies of Orientalist sexual excess, perversity, and pedophilia. Working in tandem, the proper modern gay or lesbian Muslim subject is foreclosed, while the terrorist is forever queer, improperly sexual, embedded in an “always already homosexualized population.”³⁰ In this rendition, male homosociality is linked to pedophilia, ascribed to the perceived lack of sexual contact with women, or continually misread as faggotry or homosexuality. In contrast, female homosociality, sequestered out of view, is presumed to signal gender and sexual oppression.³¹ The claim to homosexuality counters two tendencies: the colloquial deployment of Islamic sexual repression that plagues human rights, liberal queer, and feminist discourses, and the Orientalist wet dreams of lascivious excesses of pedophilia, sodomy, and perverse sexuality. At the intersection of the body and the population, Desai’s image challenges the perverse pathological sexualization of terrorist look-alike populations by claiming a modernist subject identity—through religion, not despite it—that is typically reserved for homonormative (white, western or westernized) bodies. While the claim to modernist sexual subjecthood is enacted, a subjecthood often credited to the homogenizing forces of globalization, the unsettling, monstrous terrorist corporeality that inhabits this sexual subjecthood challenges the terms upon which it is policed.

Visually, the body reclaims the faggotry, the effeminacy, the failed masculinity, always already installed in the naming of the terrorist, staging further defiance in the face of such easily rendered accusations of being a terrorist. The (white) secular norms by which queerness abides contributes greatly to (racist) Islamo- and homophobic representations of terrorists. That is, the queer transgressive subject accrues its legitimacy and currency

at this historical juncture through an inability to disentangle these representations via a broader articulation of queer religiosity. Queer secularity is constitutive of and constituted by the queer autonomous liberal subject against and through the reification of the very pathological irrational sexualities that are endemic to discourses of terrorist culpability.

The “also” of “I am a homosexual also,” a sort of “deal with it” kind of insistence, signals to multiple audiences the conjuncture of Muslim and queer identities, thus challenging the mutually exclusive Orientalist versions of Muslim and homosexual. The singularity of the Muslim or gay binary has been amplified, in the United States as well as globally, since September 11, 2001. Groups such as the U.S.-based LGBTIQ Al-Fatiha Foundation (from the first line of the Koran, meaning “the beginning”) have been probed like curious specimens, a queer anomaly.³² The queer Muslim filmmaker Parvez Sharma, currently working on a documentary titled *In the Name of Allah*, flags a particularly emblematic example of this trend by pointing to the following description of his work and activism: “In the wake of Sept. 11th . . . [Sharma’s work] seemed hard to imagine for many U.S. commentators: Muslim, sexual diversity, community, voice, and rights.”³³ Mubarak Dahir reports on queer Muslim lives after the attacks: “‘It’s bad enough to be hated for being gay,’ says Mahmoud, a Muslim living in Pittsburgh who asked that his real name not be used. ‘But now I’m also hated for being Muslim. That mistrust seems to emanate from all Americans too. I’d hoped that my gay friends—themselves the target of so much prejudice—would be more likely to question the stereotypes. But my gay friends are no better than anyone else.’” Later in the article Mahmoud says, “Since September 11, I’ve had to lean more than ever on my religious community for strength.”³⁴ Ifti Nazim from SANGAT/Chicago (“a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organization and support group for people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Burma, and rest of the South Asian countries”) concurs, saying that many heterosexual Muslims in Chicago became more willing to view him as a community leader: “A lot of conservative Muslim leaders are reaching out to mainstream gay organizations now. . . . I am very happy about this and shocked because I never knew they would be like this. It’s all due to September 11th.”³⁵ These comments are significant at the very least because queer secularity, and queer transgressive subjecthood in general, is also underpinned by a powerful conviction that religious and racial communities are more homophobic than white mainstream queer communities are racist. Those caught in the interstices, queers of color, presumably engage with

white mainstream queer folks, politics, social spaces, erotic entanglements, and community events with vastly greater ease than they do in their respective religious or racial communities, families, churches, rituals, celebrations, weddings (where the liberal coming-out telos functions as the barometer of acceptance). By implication, a critique of homophobia within one's home community is deemed more pressing and should take precedence over a critique of racism within mainstream queer communities. (One interpretation of the "Fight Racism and the [British National Party]" sticker is that it functions as an explicit challenge to the white and citizenship privileges implicit within queer liberalism.)

A prime conundrum demonstrating this point is the debate over the decision to hold World Pride 2006 in Jerusalem. "No Pride without Palestinians," a queer coalition based in New York City, sought to move World Pride to another location, arguing that Palestinian queers (and many Arabs from neighboring countries) would be banned from the celebrations, and those already present risked intensified surveillance, policing, harassment, and deportation. The organizers called for "moving World Pride to a place where all queers can celebrate real freedom" and noted that the Israeli state has on many occasions deported "queer human rights activists working to end the occupation of Palestine." Their website declared, "World Pride is supposed to be a celebration of queer freedom. Holding World Pride in Jerusalem—a city under occupation, a party hosted by the violent occupier—is a slap in the face to freedom. . . . It's not 'World' Pride without Palestinian and Arab queers, and we refuse to pit our queer celebrations against Palestinians' freedom."³⁶ InterPride, the organization that coordinates World Pride, is based in the United States and run predominantly by North Americans and some Europeans. Israel's decision to host World Pride was irritatingly strategic, as the event would showcase Israel as a tolerant, diverse, and democratic society, further submerging its dismal human rights record. (The violence and tensions between ultra-Orthodox, other conservative Jewish sects, and queer Jews that are typically effaced was highlighted by the June 2005 stabbing of three gay pride parade participants by "a man in ultra-Orthodox attire.")³⁷ From the circuits of "transnational queerdom," this decision covertly impelled collusion with oppressive Israeli state policy toward Palestinians while also encouraging and sanctioning overt anti-Palestinian sentiments.³⁸ It also reiterated that Israeli queers can be legitimated by the Israeli state as well as by transnational queerdom through the quest for and right of sovereignty, while Palestinian queers are teleologically read through the fanatic lens of Islamic fundamentalism

rather than the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and statehood, an interest in progressive queer politics, or even a liberal humanist exegesis of desire.³⁹ It is utterly important that queer Jewish and queer Palestinian activists, among others, lobbied together to cancel or alter the location of World Pride 2006.⁴⁰ It is also imperative that these coalitional efforts reject queer missionary, liberatory, or transcendent paradigms that might place Palestinian queers in a victim narrative parallel to that propagated by the Israeli state they are battling against.

Another trap lies in the valorization of victims as vanguard by elevating them to heroism. The activities of the British-based queer group OutRage! border dangerously on this thin line. Calling for a “queer fatwa” (a rather moronic appropriation of the term “fatwa”) against the United Kingdom’s “Islamic fundamentalist” leader Omar Bakri Mohammed during a rally in London on International Women’s Day (March 8, 2005), OutRage!’s posters claimed “Solidarity with Islamic Women” and mandated “No Islamic State No Shar’ia Law.”⁴¹ This latter conviction reflects queer secularity; it is inconceivable that women or queers could negotiate or have agency within an Islamic state. At the Free Palestine rally in London on May 21, 2005, OutRage! carried placards commanding “Israel: stop persecuting Palestine! Palestine: stop persecuting queers!” and “Stop ‘honour’ killing women and gays in Palestine.” This seemingly innocuous and politically correct messaging, stemming from the group’s commitment to protest “Islamophobia and homophobia,” unfortunately reaffirms the modernity of Israel and Judaism and the monstrosity of Palestine and Islam. Delineating Palestine as the site of queer oppression—oppression that is equated with the occupation of Palestine by Israel—effaces Israeli state persecution of queer Palestinians. Israeli state persecution of queer Israelis—because Israel is hardly exempt from homophobic violence toward its own citizens regardless of religious or ethnic background—is erased in this trickle-down model of sloganeering. This dialectical analogy, whereby the persecution of Palestinians by Israel is “like” Palestinian persecution of queers, does a tremendous disservice to the incommensurate predicaments at stake and refuses any possible linkages between the two, indeed refuses that one form of oppression might sustain or even create the conditions of possibility for the other. Further, this analogy eviscerates vital connections: between the disciplinary liberationist paradigms of gay and lesbian human rights and escalating Islamic state repression of nonnormative sexualities, the solidification of gender binaries in modernity and its imposition on differently gendered societies,⁴² and the histories of economic and cultural domination of colonialism and neocolo-



FIGURE 2. OutRage! founder Peter Tatchell with “Queer Fatwa” sign. Photograph by Piers Allardyce (for OutRage!). Reprinted with the artist’s permission.

nialism and the endless navigation of these power networks by colonized peoples. Ironically, the very logic that feeds the Israeli state’s rationalization and justification of its occupation of Palestine and its horrific treatment of Palestinians—the purported barbarity and unhumanness of the backward, fundamentalist Muslim-Palestinian suicide-bomber-terrorist—is reinscribed by OutRage!’s messaging at a Free Palestine rally. The differential treatment of queers in these transnational contexts is heavily dependent on national and racial belonging and dis/enfranchisement.

OutRage! has been accused of using a queer platform to propagate anti-Muslim rhetoric, not an unfounded fear given the evidence.⁴³ OutRage!’s most prominent activist, Peter Tatchell, warned of Islamic fundamentalism in 1995, saying its ascendancy “has ushered in an era of religious obscurantism and intolerance,” which he refers to as the “New Dark Ages.”⁴⁴ Exemplary of paranoia as well as the ubiquitous polarization of Muslim and gay subjectivities, in 1998 he wrote, “The political consequences for the gay community could be serious. As the fundamentalists gain followers, homophobic Muslim voters may be able to influence the outcome of elections in 20 or more marginal constituencies.”⁴⁵ In regard to OutRage!’s protests

against “Islamic fundamentalist” Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s visit to Britain in summer 2004, the mayor of London Ken Livingstone writes that a “wave of Islamophobia” has overshadowed the purpose of al-Qaradawi’s trip, a conference on the rights of women to choose to wear the Muslim headscarf (motivated by the ban on headscarves in French schools). A second letter, signed by the National Assembly against Racism, the National Union of Students Black LGB, the Lesbian and Gay Coalition against Racism, and Operation Black Vote, echoes similar sentiments (“We must express our concern at the tenor and pitch of the campaign by OutRage! and others, in relation to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, which we believe fits in with what is a rising wave of anti-Muslim hysteria”), citing “a powerful and dangerous campaign to insist that Muslim fundamentalism is the most serious threat facing the world” emanating from Western Europe and the United States.⁴⁶ OutRage!, for its part, points out that Dr. al-Qaradawi’s website, Islamonline, sanctions the burning and stoning to death of homosexuals and violence against women.⁴⁷

My intent is not to delve into the intricate political organizing history of OutRage!, nor to berate its multifaceted work: coalitions with the Black Gay Men’s Advisory Group, the Queer Youth Alliance, and the Green Party; rallies against the same-sex marriage ban, the Vatican and the Catholic religion, the homophobic lyrics of Caribbean musicians Beenie Man, Vybz Kartel, Bounty Killer, Elephant Man, and Buju Banton, the torture and execution of gays in Saudi Arabia, the deportation of gay asylum seekers Algerian Ramzi Isalam and Belorussian Vadim Selyava, and Mugabe’s dictatorship in Zimbabwe; and vigils for murdered Jamaican gay activist Brian Williamson and Sierra Leonean lesbian activist Fannyann Eddy—and surely the list goes on.⁴⁸ Rather, the Free Palestine rally serves as an example of displays of solidarity with other queers, often well-intentioned gestures of inclusion and acknowledgment of multicultural diversity, that may unwittingly replicate the very neocolonial assumptions OutRage! seeks to dislodge.

But there is something more insidious going on here. The Muslim or gay binary mutates from a narrative of incommensurate subject positionings into an “Islam versus homosexuality” tug of populations war: a mutation that may reveal the contiguous undercurrents of conservative homonormative ideologies and queer liberalism. For example, the gay Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn of the Netherlands pledged to terminate immigration and asylum and used anti-Muslim rhetoric to propel his political party, Lijst Pim Fortuyn, to a twenty-six-seat presence in Parliament; he was murdered

by an animal rights activist nine days before the victory.⁴⁹ Yoshi Furuhashi comments, “The rise of Pim Fortuyn . . . signaled a new era of white gay male politics. By promoting anti-immigrant politics vigorously and marketing it with anti-Muslim prejudice demagogically, Fortuyn showed that right-wing populism can very well be gay and enormously popular to boot.” Unlike right-wing white gay male politicians working “against their own interests,” who have faced ostracization and banishment by fellow right-wingers, Furuhashi implies that the right to marry will accord even more credibility and legitimacy to these gay politicians.⁵⁰ In the aftermath of the July 7, 2005 London bombings, the perpetrators of which were not sleeper-cell terrorists from some remote country who had infiltrated the sacred homeland but home-grown British Muslims, Sandip Roy notes that Europe is symbolically bifurcated into one arena where legalizing same-sex marriage is a priority (Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, the United Kingdom) and another where Islamic fundamentalism, responsible for the death of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, for instance, purportedly reigns.

Gay marriage, “less about gay rights and more about codifying an ideal of European values,”⁵¹ has become a steep but necessary insurance premium in Europe, whereby an otherwise ambivalent if not hostile populace can guarantee that extra bit of security that is bought by yet another marker in the distance between barbarism and civilization, one that justifies further targeting of a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population (pedophilic, sexually lascivious and excessive, yet perversely repressed) who refuse to properly assimilate, in contrast to the upright homosexuals engaged in sanctioned kinship norms. Gay marriage reform thus indexes the racial and civilizational disjunctures between Europeans and Muslims, while effacing the circuits of political economy (class, immigration) that underpin such oppositions. While the conflict is increasingly articulated as one between queers and Muslims, what is actually at stake is the policing of rigid boundaries of gender difference and the kinship forms most amenable to their maintenance.⁵²

Shortly after the bombings, OutRage! claimed that it had received death threats from various Muslim organizations.⁵³ Among other groups, OutRage! is codifying, for Europeans but also implicitly for Americans, that Muslims are an *especial threat* to homosexuals, that Muslim fundamentalists have deliberately and specifically targeted homosexuals, and that the parameters of this opposition correlate with those of the war on terror: civilization versus barbarianism. As with both Fortuyn and OutRage!, we are witnessing, from vastly different corners, the rise of homonormative Is-



FIGURE 3. Imaan float at EuroPride 2006, London. Photograph by Liz Van Gerven. Reprinted with the artist's permission.

lamophobia in the global North, whereby homonormative and queer gay men can enact forms of national, racial, or other belongings by contributing to a collective vilification of Muslims.⁵⁴

To return once more, for a moment, to our photograph of the Muslim fundamentalist-cum-perverse terrorist-cum-homosexual, this oscillation from an individuated dilemma of subjectivity—Are you Muslim, or are you gay?—to a war of mutually exclusive populations confirms the absolute sense of the irreconcilably stubborn natures of unassimilating and unassimilatable (working-class European) Muslims. The disciplined homosexual subject and the sexually pathological terrorist figure wedded to its populace remain suspended together, refusing to condone conflation of the two, a collapsing of one into the other or the shunting into one over the other. The text modifies image, directs our interpretation of it, but cannot fully domesticate the saturation of Orientalist tropes endowed to this body.

Some may strenuously object to the suggestion that queer identities, like their “less radical” counterparts, homosexual, gay, and lesbian identities,

are also implicated in ascendant white American nationalist formations, preferring to see queerness as singularly transgressive of identity norms. This focus on transgression, however, is precisely the term by which queerness narrates its own sexual exceptionalism. While we can point to the obvious problems with the emancipatory, missionary pulses of certain (U.S., western) feminisms and of gay and lesbian liberation, queerness has its own exceptionalist desires: exceptionalism is a founding impulse, indeed the very core of a queerness that claims itself as an anti-, trans-, or unidentity. The paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives: about the greater homophobia of immigrant communities and communities of color, about the stricter family values and mores in these communities, about a certain prerequisite migration from home, about coming-out teleologies. We have less understanding of queerness as a biopolitical project, one that both parallels and intersects with that of multiculturalism, the ascendancy of whiteness, and may collude with or collapse into liberationist paradigms. While liberal underpinnings serve to constantly recenter the normative gay or lesbian subject as exclusively liberatory, these same tendencies labor to insistently recenter the normative queer subject as an exclusively transgressive one.

Queerness here is the modality through which “freedom from norms” becomes a regulatory queer ideal that demarcates the ideal queer. Arguing that “more reflection on queer attachments might allow us to avoid positing assimilation or transgression as choices,” Sara Ahmed notes, “The idealization of movement, or transformation of movement into a fetish, depends on the exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*.”⁵⁵ Individual freedom becomes the barometer of choice in the valuation, and ultimately, regulation, of queerness.

Ahmed’s post-Marxian frame focuses on the material, cultural, and social capital and resources that might delimit “access” to queerness, suggesting that queerness can be an elite cosmopolitan formulation contingent upon various regimes of mobility. Ironically, “those that have access” to such cultural capital and material resources may constitute the very same populations that many would accuse of assimilation, living out queerness in the most apolitical or conservatively political ways. I am thinking of queerness as exceptional in a way that is wedded to individualism and the rational, liberal humanist subject, what Ahmed denotes as “attachments” and what I would qualify as deep psychic registers of investment that we often cannot account for and are sometimes best seen by others rather than ourselves. “Freedom from norms” resonates with liberal humanism’s authorization of

the fully self-possessed speaking subject, untethered by hegemony or false consciousness, enabled by the life/stylization offerings of capitalism, rationally choosing modern individualism over the ensnaring bonds of family. In this problematic definition of queerness, individual agency is legible only as resistance to norms rather than complicity with them, thus equating resistance and agency. Both Saba Mahmood and Ahmed critique this conflation and redirect their attention to agency that supports and consolidates norms, but even this turn presupposes some general universal understanding of what counts as norm, resistance, and complicity. As Mahmood asks, “[Is it] possible to identify a universal category of acts—such as those of resistance—outside of the ethical and political conditions within which such acts acquire their particular meaning?”⁵⁶ The rhetoric of freedom is also of course a mainstay in philosophies of liberal democracy and is indeed a foundational tenet of American exceptionalism. But finally, queerness as transgression (which is one step ahead of resistance, which has now become a normative act) relies on a normative notion of deviance, always defined in relation to normativity, often universalizing. Thus deviance, despite its claims to freedom and individuality, is ironically cohered to and by regulatory regimes of queerness—through, not despite, any claims to transgression.

While Ahmed also looks to queerness as a challenge predominantly to heteronorms, queer theorists such as Cathy Cohen implicate queer politics in an intersectional model that should also ideally challenge race and class norms as they intersect with heteronorms.⁵⁷ Other queer theorists might articulate queerness as a poststructuralist endeavor that deconstructs not only heteronorms, but the very logic of identity itself. In the first version of queerness, resistance to heteronorms may be privileged in a way that effaces the effects of this resistance in relation to possible complicities with other norms, such as racial, class, gender, and citizenship privileges. Queer intersectional analyses challenge this regulatory queerness, but in doing so may fail to subject their own frames to the very critique they deploy. In this second formulation, queer of color and queer immigrant communities (not to mention queer of color critique) are always beyond reproach, an untenable position given the (class, religious, gender-queer, national, regional, linguistic, generational) tensions within, among, and between queer diasporic, immigrant, and of color communities, thus obfuscating any of their own conservative proclivities. Conversely, it also holds queer of color organizing and theorizing to impossible standards and expectations, always beholden to spaces and actions of resistance, transgression, subversion. In

the last instance, all (of one's) identities (not just gender and sexual) must be constantly troubled, leading to an impossible transcendent subject who is always already conscious of the normativizing forces of power and always ready and able to subvert, resist, or transgress them. It is precisely by denying culpability or assuming that one is not implicated in violent relations toward others, that one is outside of them, that violence can be perpetuated. Violence, especially of the liberal varieties, is often most easily perpetrated in the spaces and places where its possibility is unequivocally denounced.

What is at stake in defusing queer liberal binaries of assimilation and transgression, secularity and religiosity? If we are to resist resistance, reading against these binaries to foreground a broader array of power affiliations and disaffiliations that are often rife with contradiction should not provide ammunition to chastise, but rather generate greater room for self-reflection, autocritique, and making mistakes. It is easy, albeit painful, to point to the conservative elements of any political formation; it is less easy, and perhaps much more painful, to point to ourselves as accomplices of certain normativizing violences. In sum, what we can say about the mechanics of queerness as a regulatory frame of biopolitics includes the following:

1. Queerness as automatically and inherently transgressive enacts specific forms of disciplining and control, erecting celebratory queer liberal subjects folded into life (queerness as subject) against the sexually pathological and deviant populations targeted for death (queerness as population).
2. Within that orientation of regulatory transgression, queer operates as an alibi for complicity with all sorts of other identity norms, such as nation, race, class, and gender, unwittingly lured onto the ascent toward whiteness.
3. Allowing for complicities signals not the failure of the radical, resistant, or oppositional potential of queernesses, but can be an enabling acknowledgment.
4. But conundrums abound even with the fluidity of resistances and complicities, for intersectional models cannot account for the simultaneous or multifarious presences of both or many.

The Ascendancy of Whiteness

Rey Chow, drawing on Foucault's work in *The Order of Things*, proposes that "Foucault's discussion of biopower can be seen as his approach, albeit oblique, to the question of the ascendancy of whiteness in the modern world." Engendered through scientific observation, classification and tax-

onomy, the production of data, detail, and description, leading to the micromanagement of information and bodies, all attempt to “render the world a knowable object.” This objectification and honing for the purposes of management and domestication is paralleled, according to Chow, by an increasing mystification and obscuring of the primary beneficiaries of this epistemological project: European subjectivities. This simultaneity of specification and abstraction is the very basis of distinctions between subjects and objects (and populations), or, for Chow, between those who theorize and those who are theorized about.⁵⁸

For Chow, in contemporary times, the “ascendancy of whiteness” in biopower incorporates the multiplication of appropriate multicultural ethnic bodies complicit with this ascendancy. Part of the trappings of this exceptional citizen, ethnic or not, is the careful management of difference: of difference within sameness, and of difference containing sameness. We can note, for example, that the multicultural proliferation of the cosmopolitan ethnic à la Chow has some demanding limitations in terms of class, gender, and especially sexuality. That is, what little acceptance liberal diversity proffers in the way of inclusion is highly mediated by huge realms of exclusion: the ethnic is usually straight, usually has access to material and cultural capital (both as a consumer and as an owner), and is in fact often male. These would be the tentative attributes that would distinguish a tolerable ethnic (an exceptional patriot, for example) from an intolerable ethnic (a terrorist suspect). In many cases, heteronormativity might be the most pivotal of these attributes, as certain Orientalist queernesses (failed heteronormativity, as signaled by polygamy, pathological homosociality) are a priori ascribed to terrorist bodies. The twin process of multiculturalization and heterosexualization are codependent in what Susan Koshy denotes as the “morphing of race into ethnicity,” a transmogrification propelled by the cultivation of “white privilege as color-blind meritocracy.” (This morphing has also inspired the politicization of the designation “people of color.”) While Chow does not explicitly discuss why racial frames lose their salience (and retain denigrated status) in relation to market-driven ethnicity, Koshy adds “the accommodation of new immigrants and the resurgence of white ethnicity” as compelling factors that “obscure the operations of race and class” in transnational contexts.⁵⁹

These “operations” involve what Koshy describes as “class fraction projected as the model minority” produced through “changed demographics, class stratifications, new immigration, and a global economy . . . thereby enabling opportunistic alliances between whites and different minority

groups as circumstances warrant . . . project[ing] a simulacrum of inclusiveness even as it advances a political culture of market individualism that has legitimized the gutting of social services to disadvantaged minorities in the name of the necessities of the global economy.” Koshy argues that fractioning allows “an ethnic particularist position” to “escape scrutiny” because the distance it impels from whiteness in cultural terms is abrogated through its proximity to “whiteness as power through . . . class aspirations,” enabling “a seemingly more congenial dispensation that allows for cultural difference even as it facilitates political affiliations between whites and some nonwhites on certain critical issues such as welfare reform, affirmative action, and immigration legislation.”⁶⁰ Thus, for the ethnic with access to capital, both in terms of consumption and ownership, the seduction by global capital is conducted through racial amnesia, among other forms of forgetting. This fractioning, or disassembly into fractals, is contiguous with state racism in that it too promotes “caesuras within the biological continuum” necessary to simultaneously particularize and homogenize populations for control.⁶¹

The ascendancy of whiteness for Koshy, as for Chow, is ensconced in (neo)liberal ideologies of difference—market, cultural, and convergences of both—that correspond to “fitness-within-capitalism” and ultimately promise “incorporation into the American Dream.”⁶² That this promise always appears almost on the verge of fulfillment, but is never quite satisfied, is what Sara Ahmed alludes to in her claim that “love may be especially crucial in the event of the failure of the nation to deliver its promise for the good life.” For Ahmed, national love is a form of waiting, a lingering that registers a “stigma of inferiority” that epitomizes the inner workings of multiculturalism.⁶³ Unrequited love keeps multicultural (and also homonormative) subjects in the folds of nationalism, while xenophobic and homophobic ideologies and policies fester. Through this dynamic the benevolence of the state (and also of the market) can appear boundless while still committed to the anti-gay marriage amendment and the USA PATRIOT Act, as just two examples. Furthermore, the market is a foil for the state, producing consumer subjects (as well as highly skilled laborers) that simulate (and experience simulated) affective modes of belonging to the state, modes that assuage the angst of unrequited love. Thus the nation-state maintains its homophobic and xenophobic stances while capitalizing on its untarnished image of inclusion, diversity, and tolerance. Concomitantly, multicultural (and homonormative) subjects reorient their loyalty to the nation through market privileges, a remasculinization that Heidi Nast terms “market virility,”⁶⁴ that

masquerade as forms of belonging to the nation and mediate the humiliation of waiting for national love. Multiculturalism is the accomplice to the ascendancy of whiteness, reproducing the biopolitical mandate to live through the proper population statistics; channeled through the optics of gender and class are their attendant attributes and valuations of longevity, illness, health, environment, fertility, and so on. Through the pining for national love, the temporality of multicultural model minority discourses is one of futurity, an endlessly deferred or deflected gratification, mirroring biopower's constant march forward, away from death, where the securitization for today funnels back through guarantees of the quality of life for tomorrow. This requires gender and sexual normativity and the reproduction of the hybrid multicultural body politic in exchange for lucrative possibilities within the global economy.

But is multiculturalization unequivocally heteronormativization? What are the stakes in rigid sexual and gendered dynamics of this multiculturalism, for those who can sustain this unrequited love, and for those who cannot, dare not, begin to imagine its possibility? A foregone conclusion might be that multiculturalism as heteronormativization works to police sexual and gender relations and embodiments similar to its classist gate-keeping logic. But the history of capitalist developments and kinship forms (the move from subsistence labor to waged labor in the late 1800s and early 1900s that allowed for gay male urban subcultures) intimates that capitalism is ambivalent: the very workings of capital that instantiate the heterosexual nuclear family as pivotal for the reproduction of the labor force, the relegation of women to free labor in the house or as underwaged surplus workers, and the family as the basic social unit of intimacy that mediates the brutalities of the working world are factors that have freed (predominantly white male) workers to form alternative sexual and kinship communities and networks.⁶⁵ Both consolidation and rupturing of traditional heterosexual family forms are possible, but in our present-day global economy the prerequisite mobility is, as it was before, constrained by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and citizenship. As Ann Pellegrini writes, "The invention of homosexuality was also, then, the invention of heterosexuality, and family has shifted from site of production to site of consumption."⁶⁶

If we follow Koshy's lead on the "political culture of market individualism," access to capital—"market virility"—mediates national belonging and the folding into life for multicultural ethnic subjects, homonormative subjects, and possibly even some of those subjects positioned at the intersection of the two.⁶⁷ For the ethnic, heteronormativity is mandated by the nation-

state yet negotiable through the market, that is, conspicuous consumption and high-skilled labor; for the homonormative, whiteness is mandated by the state but negotiable through the market, again both for labor and consumption. The figure of the queer or homonormative ethnic is crucial for the appearance of diversity in homonormative communities (arriving as the difference of culture rather than as the simulacra of capital) and tolerance in ethnic and racialized immigrant communities (marked as an entrance of alternative lifestyle rather than through the commonalities of capital). Ironically, the queer ethnic is also a marker of the homophobia (and the claim that homosexuality reflects the taint of the west) of his or her racial/ethnic/immigrant community while in homonormative spaces, perhaps more so than a marker of the racism of homonormative communities while in one's home community. (This might be so because the benevolent [U.S] state has to date made more concessions to the ethnics—a folding into life—than to the homos, at least in terms of civil rights and its historical trajectory.)

The factioning, fractioning, and fractalizing of identity is a prime activity of societies of control, whereby subjects (the ethnic, the homonormative) orient themselves as subjects through their disassociation or disidentification from others disenfranchised in similar ways in favor of consolidation with axes of privilege. The queer or homonormative ethnic is a crucial fractal in the disaggregation of proper homosexual subjects, joining the ranks of an ascendant population of whiteness, from perversely sexualized populations. As with the class fraction that projects a model minority, we have here a class, race, and sexual fraction projected to the market as the homonormative gay or queer consumer. This is a consumer without kin, the best kind, projected to the state as a reproducer of heteronorms, where associations with white national hetero- and homonormative bodies trump the desire for queer alliances across class, race, and citizenship. But what of racialized immigrants or people of color who fall outside the class parameters of the model minority ethnic, of the homonormative, or who inhabit the intersection of the two: the queer (immigrant) of color? As Lisa Duggan reminds us, neoliberalism's privatizing agenda from the 1970s onward has dismantled an already minimal welfare state.⁶⁸ She notes that welfare downsizing nearly mandates heterosexual conjugal marriage; this downsizing, epitomized by the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, also resulted in a number of policies that linked the promotion of heterosexual marriage through welfare reform as it sought to produce more stable traditional kinship configurations, the "politics of privatization" of heterosexual marriage.⁶⁹

Duggan argues that aside from the moralizing agendas of the "family

values” cohort, there are obvious economic benefits for the state in pushing heterosexual marriage. Further, moralizing arguments, entrenched within the rubric of culture, obscure economic exploitation: “The effort to promote marriage among low-income populations works at the rhetorical level to shift blame for economic hardship onto the marital practices of the poor rather than on the loss of jobs, employment benefits or government services,”⁷⁰ those marital practices coded as problematic cultural and racial anomalies (polygamy, matriarchy, gender segregation) or coded as failures due to cultural and racial attributes (black welfare queen). Likewise, immigration policies hinge on family reunification and sponsorship from family members, not to mention reliance on family for opportunities for employment, housing, language, and vital community and religious networks that aid in acculturation and cushion against racist and classist state practices and everyday racism.

We have here all the makings of the discourse attached to immigrant populations and communities of color about a more overt disapproval of homosexuality and a more deeply entrenched homophobia, this homophobia cast as properly conservative and traditional when it serves the political right and the state, cast as unc cosmopolitan and hopelessly provincial when it can fuel anti-immigrant, counterterrorist, and antiwelfare discourses. But also, heteronormative multiculturalism and gay and lesbian liberation are frames that are indebted to the understanding of immigrant families and communities of color as more homophobic than white mainstream American families. The descriptor “homophobic culture” elides the workings of economic disparities and the differentiation between cosmopolitan ethnicity and pathological racialization, a feature of neoliberalism’s reproduction of the separation of economic justice from identity politics.⁷¹ Where it appears palpable or deemed locatable, empirically and experientially, the designation of homophobia produces a geopolitical mapping of neoliberal power relations in the guise of cultures of sexual expression and repression. Debates regarding which communities, countries, cultures, or religions are more, less, equally, similarly, or differently homophobic miss a more critical assessment regarding the conditions of its possibility and impossibility, conditions revolving around economic incentives, state policies on welfare and immigration, and racial hierarchy, rather than some abstracted or disengaged notion of culture per se. Gay marriage, for example, is not simply a demand for equality with heterosexual norms, but more importantly a demand for reinstatement of white privileges and rights—rights of property and inheritance in particular —while for others, gay marriage and

domestic partnership are driven by dire needs for health care. For George W. Bush during the 2004 election season, opposition to gay marriage spawned otherwise elusive photo ops in African American churches, supplementing right-wing forays into churches in communities of color.⁷² The right wing relies on poor immigrant labor for its hegemonic ideological base—family values, faith-based initiatives, anti-gay marriage, anti-gay adoption rights, antichoice—and reproduces the economic and political conditions of compulsory heterosexuality and thus is the breeding ground for homophobia.

Most critiques of homonormative political formations observe the complexity of heteronorms of gender and kinship without noting their reproduction of racial and national norms (if another norm is noticed, it is often class). Through the ascendancy of heteronormativity there are implicit and increasingly explicit interests in the ascendancy to whiteness and attendant citizenship privileges (gay marriage is the most pertinent example of this), a variant of which Heidi Nast terms “queer white patriarchy.”⁷³ In a highly contentious essay, Nast maintains that “there is substantial room for discussion about white patriarchal privilege outside heterosexual confines.” She expounds on a trenchant point about the displacement of white heterosexual male beneficiaries of capitalism by white gay males who “hold a competitive edge: With no necessary ideological-material ties to biologically based house-holding and the attendant mobility frictions these entail, they share the potential for considerable, if ironic, patriarchal advantage that is relational and cuts across lines of class.”⁷⁴ While Lisa Duggan refuses the paralleling or equalizing of homonormativity to heteronormativity, pointing out that dominant heteronormative social, political, and economic structures are ultimately impossible to trump regardless of homonormative privilege,⁷⁵ from a neo-Marxist approach Nast marks the privileges of queer patriarchy through “market virility” and the paternal control of “the products of reproduction.” Folded into life and reproducing life, an aspirant class of wealthy white gay males who can simulate the biopolitical mandate to reproduce and regenerate may actually have it better than their hetero counterparts, perhaps even significantly so.⁷⁶

Implicating white lesbians as part of this scenario (of paternity?) via the global circuits of transnational adoption, David Eng writes, “[Transnational adoption] is becoming a popular and viable option not only for heterosexual but also—and increasingly—for homosexual couples and singles seeking to (re)consolidate and (re)occupy conventional structures of family and kinship.” Noting a historical and political shift from discourses and practices of disaffiliation from homophobic families to modes of assembling

homosexual kinship norms, he states, “Gays and lesbians today are no longer eccentric to structures of family and kinship.” Further, through a reading of a John Hancock commercial featuring two white American lesbians at a major U.S. airport ushering their newly adopted Chinese baby girl through immigration and customs, Eng contends that white American lesbians with capital are “an emerging consumer niche group.” Querying the “ethics of multiculturalism,” not to mention flexible accumulation, global capital, and exploitation immanent to the contemporary emergence of the “new global family,” Eng ponders, “How is this respectable lesbian couple with money being positioned as the idealized inhabitants of an increasingly acceptable gay version of the nuclear family?”⁷⁷ His argument intimates that Chinese adoptees (and other nationalities and ethnicities that are not black) have become, and need to be turned into, surrogate white children.

Queer liberalism embraces these spaces of diversity through what Chow names the “white liberalist alibi.” Paraphrasing Robyn Wiegman, she writes of “the particular formation of the contemporary, politically correct white subject, who imagines that he has already successfully disaffiliated from his culture’s previous, more brutal forms of racism.”⁷⁸ To be excused from a critique of one’s own power manipulations is the appeal of white liberalism, the underpinnings of the ascendancy of whiteness, which is not a conservative, racist formation bent on extermination, but rather an insidious liberal one proffering an innocuous inclusion into life.⁷⁹ These two examples from Nast and Eng suggest that the capitalist reproductive economy (in conjunction with technology: *in vitro*, sperm banks, cloning, sex selection, genetic testing) no longer exclusively demands heteronormativity as an absolute; its simulation may do.

To summarize, the ascendancy of whiteness, rendering both disciplinary subjects and population norms, is not strictly delimited to white subjects, though it is bound to multiculturalism as defined and deployed by whiteness. The ethnic aids the project of whiteness through his or her participation in global economic privileges that then fraction him or her away from racial alliances that would call for cross-class affinities even as the project of multiculturalism might make him or her seem truly and authentically representative of his or her ethnicity. Neither is the ascendancy of whiteness strictly bound to heterosexuality, though it is bound to heteronormativity. That is to say, we can indeed mark a specific historical shift: the project of whiteness is assisted and benefited by homosexual populations that participate in the same identitarian and economic hegemonies as those hetero subjects complicit with this ascendancy. The homonormative aids the proj-

ect of heteronormativity through the fractioning away of queer alliances in favor of adherence to the reproduction of class, gender, and racial norms. The ascendancy of heteronormativity, therefore, is not tethered to heterosexuals; neither is it discretely delimited to white people, though it is bound to whiteness. This is where the good ethnic comes in. While the good (straight) ethnic has been a recipient of “measures of benevolence,”⁸⁰ that is, folded into life, for several decades now, the (white) homonormative is a more recent entrant of this benevolence (civil rights and market) that produces affective be/longing that never fully rewards its captives yet nonetheless fosters longing and yearning as affects of nationalism. I belabor these stiff emplotments, well aware of the dangerous communion of descriptive and prescriptive narrative, to elucidate the manufacture of figures (and communities) and their attendant mythologies. Taken together, these figures play and are played off each other to cohere a pernicious binary that has emerged in the post–civil rights era in legislative, activist, and scholarly realms: the homosexual other is white, the racial other is straight.

Queer Necropolitics

In 1992, Judith Butler, faulting Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* for his “wishful construction: death is effectively expelled from Western modernity, cast *behind* it as a historical possibility, surpassed or cast *outside* it as a non-Western phenomenon,” asks us to reevaluate biopolitical investment in fostering life from the vantage point of homosexual bodies that have been historically cathected to death, specifically queer bodies afflicted with or threatened by the HIV pandemic.⁸¹ For Foucault, modern biopower, emerging at the end of the eighteenth century, is the management of life—the distribution of risk, possibility, mortality, life chances, health, environment, quality of living—the differential investment of and in the imperative to live. In biopower, propagating death is no longer the central concern of the state; staving off death is. Cultivating life is coextensive with the sovereign right to kill, and death becomes merely reflective, a byproduct, a secondary effect of the primary aim and efforts of those cultivating or being cultivated for life. Death is never a primary focus; it is a negative translation of the imperative to live, occurring only through the transit of fostering life. Death becomes a form of collateral damage in the pursuit of life.

This distancing from death is a fallacy of modernity, a hallucination that allows for the unimpeded workings of biopolitics. In “*Society Must Be Defended*” Foucault avers, “Death was no longer something that suddenly

swooped down on life, as in an epidemic. Death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.”⁸² Butler, transposing the historical frame of Foucault’s elaboration of biopower onto the context of contemporary politics of life and death, notes the irony of Foucault’s untimely death in 1984 due to causes related to AIDS, at that time an epidemic on the cusp of its exponential detonation.⁸³ Thus, Butler’s 1992 analysis returns bodies to death, specifically queer bodies afflicted with or threatened by the HIV virus.⁸⁴

With a similar complaint, albeit grounded in the seemingly incongruous plight of colonial and neocolonial occupations, Achille Mbembe redirects our attention from biopolitics to what he terms “necropolitics.” Mbembe’s analysis foregrounds death decoupled from the project of living—a direct relation to killing that renders impossible any subterfuge in a hallucinating disavowal of death in modernity—by asking, “Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of its enemy its primary and absolute objective?”⁸⁵ For Foucault, massacres are literally vital events;⁸⁶ for Mbembe, they are the evidence of the brutality of biopower’s incitement to life.

For a millisecond, we have an odd conflation and complicity, rendering necropolitical death doubly displaced: first by biopolitical antennae of power, and second by the theorist who describes them. Laboring in the service of rational politics of liberal democracy, biopolitical scopes of power deny death within itself and for itself; indeed, death is denied through its very sanction. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault, himself ensnared in the very workings of biopolitics, a disciplinary subject of biopolitics, denies death within biopolitics too. However, in “*Society Must be Defended*,” he contends that the “gradual disqualification of death” in biopolitical regimes of living stigmatizes death as “something to be hidden away. It has become the most private and shameful thing of all (and ultimately, it is now not so much sex as death that is the object of a taboo).” This privatization of death, Foucault indicates, signals that in the quest to optimize life, “power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death.”⁸⁷

Mbembe’s “death-worlds” of the “living dead,” on the other hand, may cohere through a totalizing narrative about the suffocation of life through the omnipotent forces of killing.⁸⁸ In the face of daily necropolitical violence, suffering, and death, the biopolitical will to live plows on, distributed and redistributed in the minutiae of quotidian affairs not only of the capacity of individual subjects but of the capacity of populations: health, hygiene,

environment, medicine, reproduction and birthrates (and thus fertility, child care, education), mortality (stalling death, the elongation of life), illness (“form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population” in order to regulate labor production and productivity), insurance, security. These “technologies of security” function to promote a reassuring society, “an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers,” and are thus implicated in the improvement of the race through purification, and the reignition and regeneration of one’s race.⁸⁹

While questions of reproduction and regeneration are central to the study of biopolitics, queer scholars have been oddly averse to the Foucauldian frame of biopolitics, centralizing instead *The History of Sexuality* through a focus on the critique of psychoanalysis and the repressive hypothesis, implicitly and often explicitly delegating the study of race to the background. Rey Chow notes the general failure of scholars to read sexuality through biopower as symptomatic of modernist inclinations toward a narrow homosexual/heterosexual identitarian binary frame that favors “sexual intercourse, sex acts, and erotics” over “the entire problematic of the reproduction of human life that is, in modern times, always racially and ethnically inflected.”⁹⁰ I would add to this observation that the rise of the centrality of *The History of Sexuality* in queer studies has been predominantly due to interest in Foucault’s disentanglement of the workings of the “repressive hypothesis” and his implicit challenge to Freudian psychoanalytic narratives that foreground sexual repression as the foundation of subjectivity. (In other words, we can trace the genealogic engagements of *The History of Sexuality* as a splitting: scholars of race and postcoloniality taking up biopolitics, while queer scholars work with dismantling the repressive hypothesis. These are tendencies, not absolutes.)⁹¹ It is also the case, however, that scholars of race and postcoloniality, despite studying the intersections of race and sexuality, have only recently taken up questions of sexuality beyond the reproductive function of heterosexuality.⁹² While Chow’s assessment of western proclivities toward myopic renditions of sexuality is persuasive, the relegation of the sexual purely to the realm of (heterosexual) reproduction seems ultimately unsatisfactory. In the case of Chow’s project, it allows her to omit any consideration of the heteronorms that insistently sculpt the parameters of acceptable ethnics. Moreover, nonnormative sexualities are rarely centered in efforts elaborating the workings of biopolitics, elided or deemed irrelevant despite the demarcation of perversion and deviance that

is a key component of the very establishment of norms that drive biopolitical interests.⁹³

Many accounts of contemporary biopolitics thus foreground either race and state racism or, as Judith Butler does, the ramification of the emergence of the category of “sex,” but rarely the two together.⁹⁴ In this endeavor I examine the process of disaggregating exceptional queer subjects from queer racialized populations in contemporary U.S. politics rather than proffer an overarching paradigm of biopolitical sexuality that resolves these dilemmas. By centering race and sexuality simultaneously in the reproduction of relations of living and dying, I want to keep taut the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics. The latter makes its presence known at the limits and through the excess of the former; the former masks the multiplicity of its relationships to death and killing in order to enable the proliferation of the latter. The distinction and its attendant tensions matter for two reasons. First, holding the two concepts together suggests a need to also attend to the multiple spaces of the deflection of death, whether it be in the service of the optimization of life or the mechanism by which sheer death is minimized. This bio-necro collaboration conceptually acknowledges biopower’s direct activity in death, while remaining bound to the optimization of life, and necropolitics’ nonchalance toward death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim. Following Mbembe, who argues that necropolitics entails the increasingly anatomic, sensorial, and tactile subjugation of bodies—whether those of the detainees at Guantánamo Bay or the human waste of refugees, evacuees, the living dead, the dead living, the decaying living, those living slow deaths—it moves beyond identitarian and visibility frames of queerness to address questions of ontology and affect.⁹⁵

Second, it is precisely within the interstices of life and death that we find the differences between queer subjects who are being folded (back) into life and the racialized queernesses that emerge through the naming of populations, thus fueling the oscillation between the disciplining of subjects and the control of populations. Accountable to an array of deflected and deferred deaths, to detritus and decay, this deconstruction of the poles of bio- and necropolitics also foregrounds regeneration in relation to reproduction. We can complicate, for instance, the centrality of biopolitical reproductive biologism by expanding the terrain of who reproduces and what is reproduced, dislodging the always already implicit heterosexual frame, interrogating how the production of identity categories such as gay, lesbian, and even queer work in the service of the management, reproduction, and regenera-

tion of life rather than being predominantly understood as implicitly or explicitly targeted for death. Pressing Butler on her focus on how queers have been left to die, it is time to ask: How do queers reproduce life, and Which queers are folded into life? How do they give life? To what do they give life? How is life weighted, disciplined into subjecthood, narrated into population, and fostered for living? Does this securitization of queers entail deferred death or dying for others, and if so, for whom?