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American Torture and the Politics of Shame

Abstract:

Many theorists of gender, race and sexuality have analyzed the corrosive effects of shame on marginalized communities. But what happens when shame – in particular, sexual humiliation – is mobilized as a method of torture and weapon of war? In the American torture of prisoners in the War on Terror, shame has been used both to silence prisoners and to make them speak. While the Bush administration sought to distinguish humiliation from torture, and to narrow the definition of torture to the deliberately malicious infliction of the most extreme form of physical pain, I argue that the *essence* of American torture is humiliation. Furthermore, the targeted humiliation of certain racialized, gendered and sexualized Others not only serves the interests of US military forces in maintaining national security; it also does important work to produce and reproduce American national identity. In order to understand how this works, we need to analyze dynamics of shame in relation to both those who were tortured and those in whose name this torture has been done. In the end, I look to Beauvoir's response to French torture in Algeria as an (ambivalent) example of how to resist torture as one of its beneficiaries.

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"It was humiliating. We did not think that we would survive. All of us believed we would be killed."

- Hayder Sabbar Abd, former prisoner at Abu Ghraib, speaking on May 5, 2004, one week after the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib were leaked to the media (Fisher 2004).

"I am embarrassed and ashamed."

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- Army Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, former commander of Abu Ghraib prison, speaking on May 11, 2004, during a media tour of Abu Ghraib (Hermann 2004).

What, if anything, connects these two avowals of shame? Hayder Sabbar Abd was sexually humiliated, forced to masturbate for the cameras of American soldiers and to simulate fellatio with his friend and fellow prisoner. Several times, he was stripped naked and piled into pyramids with other naked men.¹ His head was beaten against walls and doors. His jaw was broken. And his face was broadcast across the world in photographs taken by his torturers and leaked to the media. Ian Fisher, reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, comments: "The shame is so deep that Hayder Sabbar Abd says he feels that he cannot move back to his old neighborhood. He would prefer not even to stay in Iraq" (Fisher 2004).

Abd's experience contrasts sharply with that of Geoffrey Miller. At the time of the interview in which he admits feeling shame and embarrassment for what happened at Abu Ghraib, Miller had just been appointed the deputy commanding general for detainee operations for Multinational Forces in Iraq, following the suspension of the prison's former commander, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski. Before taking up this position, Miller had been commander of the Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay. In August 2003, he had been sent by the Department of Defense to visit Abu Ghraib and advise Karpinski on operations at Abu Ghraib. Karpinski alleges that Miller recommended the "GTMO-izing" of Abu Ghraib, which involved intensifying interrogation procedures and treating the prisoners "like dogs;" but Miller denies this

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allegation.² Nevertheless, Miller received a Distinguished Service Medal upon retiring in 2006.

The ambiguity of shame crosses the gulf between these two men, to the point where both claim to have experienced something like shame. But the significance of shame is so different in both situations that the concept requires further analysis. What, if anything, connects the pain of humiliation and torture with the pain of being exposed to others as implicated in moral failure? More specifically, what connects the deliberate shaming of Iraqi and other Arab prisoners to the shame that many Americans felt upon viewing the photographs from Abu Ghraib, whether or not they were as directly implicated in torture as Gen. Miller? What are we to make of the expressions of shameless glee on the faces of the American soldiers depicted in these photographs: smiling over corpses, giving an enthusiastic thumbs-up, swaggering with a casually-dangling cigarette among terrified, naked prisoners?³ And now that so-called enemy combatants are finally granted the right to stand trial, and President Obama has signed an executive order to shut down the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, what do we do with the shame that still circulates, in often indirect and unacknowledged ways, around the scandal of American torture?

While the Bush administration sought to distinguish humiliation from torture,⁴ and to narrow the definition of torture to the deliberately malicious infliction of the most extreme possible form of pain,⁵ I want to argue that the *essence* of American torture is humiliation, or what Kathleen Woodward calls (in a different context) “traumatic shame” (2000, 213). This argument is supported by now-declassified CIA “coercive

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interrogation” manuals which claim that the direct infliction of physical pain is not enough to bring about the desired “regression” in the prisoner, and that a much more effective form of interrogation is to turn the prisoner’s own body, culture and subjectivity against him- or herself by targeting and exploiting his or her weak points: for example, the so-called “Arab fear of dogs” or “Arab taboo against homosexuality.”⁶ At the outset, I think it is important to acknowledge two things: first, that *anyone* is likely to feel humiliated when they are stripped naked by occupying armed forces, forcibly sodomized and photographed repeatedly; and second, that these techniques were nevertheless targeted at *Arab men in particular*, based on dubious cultural knowledge gleaned from outdated anthropological texts, such as Raphael Patai’s *The Arab Mind*.⁷ It is not as “anyone” that these men are tortured; and yet, one need not be an Arab man in order to feel the psychic and physical pain of these particular torture techniques.

In what follows, I argue that the targeted humiliation of certain racialized, gendered and sexualized Others not only serves the interests of US military forces in maintaining national security, but it also does some important work to produce and reproduce American national identity – in part through the right-wing conversion of American shame into patriotic pride, and in part through the left-wing identification with shame as the new (but disavowed) image of America. Think of the slogans, “Not in my name!” or “Not in my America!” – which suggest that America is shameful, in part because it has betrayed the promise of America. American torture cannot be understood apart from American exceptionalism: the claim that the US has a unique role in history, that it directly incarnates freedom and democracy, and that it is not bound by the restrictions of international law in the singular pursuit of its destiny.⁸ In

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this sense, American pride and American shame go hand in hand. The humiliation of “security threats” – and the widespread display of this humiliation in newspapers, books and on the internet – implicates the American public in a torture that is conducted for its own good, thus playing on the desire for collective security and exploiting the silencing effects of the shame. As Ariel Dorfman (2004) argues in his Introduction to the recent book, *Torture: A Collection*:

Torture is, of course, a crime against a body. It is also a crime committed against the imagination. Or rather, it presupposes, it requires, it craves the abrogation of our capacity to imagine others' suffering, dehumanizing them so much that their pain is not our pain. It demands this of the torturer, placing the victim outside and beyond any form of compassion or empathy, but also demands of everyone else the same distancing, the same numbness, on the part of those who know and close their eyes, those who do not want to know and close their eyes...Torture corrupts the whole social fabric because it prescribes a silencing of what has been happening between those two bodies, it forces people to make believe that nothing, in fact, has been happening, it necessitates that we lie to ourselves about what is being done not far from where we talk...Torture obliges us to be deaf and blind and mute. (8-9)

The many books, articles, blogs, radio and television programs, films, art installations and other contributions to the discussion of torture in the wake of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay only resist the deafness, blindness and muteness that torture inflicts to the extent that they interrogate its effects on the subjectivity of the prisoner in relation

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to the collective subjectivities of the community to which s/he belongs and the community for whose sake s/he is tortured. Among the many essays in *Torture: A Collection*, only Dorfman takes an absolute stance against torture, arguing that it is never justified under any circumstances. In what follows, I support Dorfman's argument against those who claim it may sometimes be necessary, and even justifiable, to torture some in order to save many.⁹ I argue that those for whose sake torture is committed are not left unscathed by the act, whether or not they directly participated in it, and whether or not they would have approved of it. The shame of torture spreads beyond the detention centers and so-called "black sites" where it is committed, implicating every one of us in different ways. In order to analyze these differences in their particularity, I begin by distinguishing the structures of shame and humiliation, then develop these structures through an analysis of the sexual, racial and gendered dynamics of torture, and finally conclude with some suggestions for working through the shame of being implicated in torture in a way that is conducive rather than destructive of collective ethical and political responsibility.

Shame and Humiliation

The classic phenomenological analysis of shame comes from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. I am crouched at a keyhole, positioned as pure spectator, when suddenly I hear footsteps behind me in the hallway, and I feel myself exposed to the gaze of another. It matters little if this other is empirically there or not; the feeling of exposure introduces something irrevocable into my existence, a being-for-others that triangulates my self-relation and contests my position of mastery. Suddenly, I have an outside, an

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appearance which is mine but which nevertheless escapes my own grasp, a skin which is more immediately accessible to others than to myself. Sartre articulates the structure of shame as a double relation to oneself and to the Other: "I am ashamed of myself before the Other" (2003, 296). This feeling of being stuck to myself in being exposed to another provokes two main desires: to reassert my power and centrality, or to capitulate and renounce my freedom. For Sartre, these two desires structure intersubjective life; neither project can be absolutely successful, and so we oscillate perpetually between sadism and masochism, mastery and slavery.¹⁰

Humiliation is not just a more intense version of shame, but involves a fundamentally different structure. Humiliation works by singling out this or that person as deviant, out of place, abnormal or bad, and displaying them before real or imagined others. Humiliation individuates; it isolates someone from all the others, not as a subject with agency and voice but as an object of scrutiny, scorn and possible violence. But this is an empty individuation; for even as it singles one out, humiliation negates one's singularity as *this* subject, distinct from everyone else but still within a social relation. The mechanism of individuation in humiliation singles one out as *that* rather than *this*; it marks one as that which does not belong, as that which must be expelled in order for the community to feel better. In this sense, humiliation works both to isolate the one who does not belong and to build a sense of unity and common identity among those who remain within the fold. The humiliated one is singled out as *no one* or *nothing* – but as a nothing which is visible, exposed for everyone to see, put on display as nothing of value – so that the humiliating subject can be *someone*. When humiliation is accomplished by marking someone's body, clothing or dwelling, it stamps one with a

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visible and more or less permanent sign of this isolated, expelled identity, leaving no avenues of escape or return, no possibilities for becoming otherwise. The scarlet letter, the tattoo, the yellow star – all attest to an identification of the subject with his or her isolated fault. You *are* an adulteress, a criminal, a Jew: frozen in time, fixed in a position on the margins of social life where everyone can see you but no one will hear you, condemned to a living death.

Shame also individuates the subject, but in a different way: not by singling one out for negation or exclusion, but by intensifying the ambiguity of an indissoluble relation to others. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it, shame makes a “double movement... toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality” (2003, 37). What is unassumable in the feeling of shame is not an aspect of one's own being, but rather the relation to an other to whose gaze I am exposed, but whose view of myself I cannot control. Unlike humiliation, which simultaneously subjectifies and desubjectifies, shame *intersubjectifies*; it attests to an irreducible relation to others in the midst of one's own self-relation. However painful shame may be, it confirms this relationality of the subject, and could not arise without it. In situations of structural violence, where patterns of abuse are built into the very framework of social life, such that no particular perpetrator or group of perpetrators can be isolated, shame can be a productive concept for thinking about collective responsibility beyond the alternatives of personal guilt or innocence (Calhoun 2004). And yet, the line between shame and humiliation is not stable. Many theorists of gender, race, class and sexuality have analyzed the way shame circulates within disempowered communities, mostly reinforcing patterns of silence and invisibility.¹¹ For these critics, shame operates as the background mood or

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disposition of marginalized groups whose difference is pathologized as abnormal or deviant.¹² Shame serves the social function of isolating normative subjects from non- or anti-normative subjects, thus constituting the identities of both and exposing the latter to violence and humiliation.

In her reading of Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Kathleen Woodward (2000) gives the name "traumatic shame" to the debilitating and disempowering feelings experienced by those whose subjectivities have been constituted by the experience of oppression (213). This is the black hole of humiliation, which resists narration and disrupts one's attempts to provide a meaningful context or temporal sequence for one's emotions. Traumatic shame produces a bewildering swirl of feelings, or an "affect storm" which obscures the sources of pain and undermines the resistance one might otherwise develop against systematic oppression (233). In the literary and media examples that Woodward analyzes, shame unleashes the anger that one might justifiably feel in response to oppression, but it unhinges this feeling from its source, redirecting anger and violence towards the weak and vulnerable – including oneself.¹³ For Woodward, the way beyond traumatic shame, the way of transforming its confusing, paralyzing, violent or self-harming swirl of feelings, is to narrate the affect, binding it into chains, making meaning out of it (236). I will return to this suggestion in the final section of this paper, after analyzing the particular ways in which torture also seeks to impose confusion, disintegration and paralysis on both the tortured subject and the community to which he or she belongs. In the end, I think the way beyond both traumatic shame and the trauma of torture involves some sort of narration, but that we need to be quite careful about the social pragmatics of this narration.

Humiliation: An American Tradition

In her essay, "Regarding the Torture of Others" (2004b), Sontag draws a parallel between the grinning faces of soldiers at Abu Ghraib and the grinning faces of white Americans at public lynchings of African-Americans (1-2). This parallel is not just a visual accident; it forms part of a whole constellation of legal and political parallels between the abuse of slaves, prisoners and so-called "enemy combatants," which is meticulously documented and analyzed by Colin Dayan in *The Story of Cruel and Unusual*. Dayan shows how, in different contexts and at different times, the same legal reasoning has been used to produce subjects *within the law* who are also *civilly or socially dead*. For example, the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment;" and yet, where extreme physical violence was *not unusual*, as in the punishment of slaves, it was implicitly sanctioned by the law, and so virtually impossible to contest. This sort of legal reasoning is not confined to the distant past. In a series of Supreme Court cases spanning from 1947 to the present, many prisoners in US penitentiaries who claim that their Eighth Amendment rights have been violated, have lost their cases because it was impossible to "prove" that their pain had been deliberately, cruelly and maliciously inflicted (see 59-62, 66-7 for details of these cases). This same reasoning appears in the "torture memos" of Bybee (2002) and Yoo (2003), which argue that punishment is only legally recognized as torture if it *deliberately or intentionally* inflicts severe and lasting physical or psychological pain approximating organ failure or death (see Bybee 3, Yoo 41).

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But it's not just legal reasoning that connects slavery, the US prison system and the American use of torture. Another common thread is the use of humiliation – and often sexual humiliation – as a method of producing and maintaining the social death of certain people, mainly black- and brown-skinned people. Lynch mobs often focused on the black man's penis, pointing at it, examining it, mutilating it and cutting it off – even though they often discretely covered the man's genitalia in photographs (Wood 2001, 204-5), just as the American news media blanked out the penises and assholes of prisoners at Abu Ghraib but not their faces, thus compounding the humiliation of the prisoners while shielding the sensibilities of the American public . The use of humiliation as a form of punishment has a long history in the US, ranging from pillories, chain gangs, public executions, public lists of pedophiles and other sex offenders, and – its most recent incarnation – “shame punishment,” otherwise known as "creative punishment." If you are convicted of offenses like drunk driving or shoplifting in states such as Texas and Tennessee, you may find yourself forced to wear a signboard or orange jumpsuit emblazoned with your crime, or to make public speeches of apology; you may have your picture published in the local paper, or be forced to hang a sign in your window stating your offense (Shteir 2006).¹⁴ Such practices, and the lack of widespread, vocal opposition to them, suggest that the use of humiliation as a form of punishment for anything from adultery to terrorism, finds a broad base of support in the United States, partly constructed and partly reinforced by a legal history dating back several centuries.

Humiliation and Torture

How does this historical practice of humiliation relate to the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in particular? Mark Danner (2004) has called the photos from Abu Ghraib a “shame multiplier” because of their potential to expose the tortured and humiliated body to the gaze of countless viewers (19). In his analysis of this shame, Danner refers to the CIA’s KUBARK manual for counterintelligence interrogation (written in 1963 and revised in 1983 as the “Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual”). KUBARK explains the methods and rationale for torture or, in the words of the manual’s anonymous authors, for “coercive counterintelligence interrogation of resistant sources” (CIA 1963, 82). These methods include sleep deprivation, stress positions, blindfolding, stripping naked, searching body cavities, identifying and exploiting existing fears, and so forth. Both KUBARK and its 1983 update instruct interrogators on how to induce “regression” in the prisoner to a feeling of helplessness, disorientation and shock (CIA 1963, 83; CIA 1983, K-1).¹⁵ This regression is accompanied by a process of establishing the interrogator as the source of everything that is good, comforting and familiar – sunlight, food, water, warmth, and so forth – all of which are distributed on the condition that the prisoner co-operate.¹⁶ The KUBARK manual cites the following observations from Dr. Malcolm L. Meltzer, then a staff psychologist at the District of Columbia General Hospital:

In some lengthy interrogations, the interrogator may, by virtue of his role as sole supplier of satisfaction and punishment, assume the stature and importance of a parental figure in the prisoner’s feeling and thinking. Although there may be

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intense hatred for the interrogator, it is not unusual for warm feelings also to develop. This ambivalence is the basis for guilt reactions, and if the interrogator nourishes these feelings, the guilt may be strong enough to influence the prisoner's behavior... Guilt makes compliance more likely... (cited CIA 1963, 83; see Biderman and Zimmer 1961, 297 for fuller context)

In effect, the aim of this style of interrogation is to turn the prisoner into an overgrown infant, and the interrogator into a substitute (phallic) mother, both a source of punishment and a source of life or comfort, however limited. Scraped raw by the constant exposure to physical pain, loud music, extreme heat and extreme cold, the prisoner begins to feel guilty. But what does the prisoner feel guilty about? Being reduced to a state of helpless infancy and exposure? Feeling desire for the "comfort items" distributed by the same person who tortures him or her? Feeling warmth for the torturer him- or herself?¹⁷ Far be it for me to quibble with the CIA, but it seems to me that the feeling that torture induces and exploits is not guilt for having done something wrong, but traumatic shame for having one's corporeal and psychic vulnerability so radically exposed.

Recall that, for Kathleen Woodward, traumatic shame involves a bewildering swirl of feelings, an "affect storm" that breaks down the subject's powers of resistance, and even her ability to trace a causal network locating the source of her pain. This state of traumatic shame seems to be precisely what the good interrogator, KUBARK in hand, strives to produce in the prisoner. The trick is to inflict pain without providing the prisoner with a determinate source of pain upon which to focus his or her anger: "It has

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been plausibly suggested that, whereas pain inflicted on a person from outside himself may actually focus or intensify his will to resist, his resistance is likely to be sapped by pain which he seems to inflict on himself" (CIA 1963, 94; slightly reworded in CIA 1983, K-9). This feeling of self-inflicted pain is intensified by the use of what are now called "stress positions" in which the prisoner's own weight is used against himself, by sleep deprivation and relentless exposure to loud noise or extreme temperatures, all of which exploit the body's basic needs and vulnerabilities. More effective than pain itself is the intense fear and dread of pain. As both KUBARK and its 1983 successor observe, "Sustained long enough, a strong fear of anything vague or unknown induces regression. On the other hand, materialization of the fear is likely to come as a relief. The subject finds that he can hold out and his resistance is strengthened" (CIA 1963, 90-1; CIA 1983, K-2). The torturer need not drive pins under the nails of prisoners or approach with a dental drill and a wicked grin; the aim of torture – the regression to a state of helpless infancy – is best accomplished by turning the prisoner's own bodily needs against herself, and by depriving her of the ability to locate the source of pain.¹⁸

The most horrifying passage from the CIA torture manuals occurs in the discussion of prolonged solitary confinement, a punishment which is routine in American prisons and basic policy in supermaximum prisons, where mandatory lockdown is enforced 23 hours a day (Davis 2003, 49). KUBARK lists the typical effects of solitary confinement as superstition, hallucination, delusion, and "an intense love of any living thing" (CIA 1963 88; CIA 1983 K-6; original citation Lilly 1956, 26). What does it mean to recognize, as the effect of one's own standard operating practice, the production and exploitation of an intense love for any living thing? To produce *love* as a means of

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torture? What is the “human resource” that is ultimately being exploited here? In order to understand what is at stake, we need to think more carefully about the intimate drama which regresses the prisoner to infancy and installs the interrogator as a source of both punishment and “comfort items.”

In her impressive study of torture in Algeria,¹⁹ *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*, Marnia Lazreg (2008) describes a different, but related exploitation of the scene of infancy and birth, this time imagining the tortured body not as an adult regressing to infancy, but as a woman giving birth:

One of the images used by torturers evokes labor pains preceding the birth of a child, an image at odds with the gender of its users who, in the Algerian War, happen to all be men.²⁰ Nevertheless, in their minds their actions facilitate the release of information. A prisoner is subjected to extreme pain, just like a pregnant woman must endure labor pains as she gives birth to a child. The body of the prisoner must be worked over, and worked through. The imagery used by the torturer helps him to appropriate the ownership of the information he seeks to get. Because it is he who inflicts pain and suffering, and makes the prisoner “labor,” *he* has *produced* the information. The pregnancy metaphor enables the torturer to look upon his actions as producing life. After all he is involved in a life-giving process that marks the familiar justification of torture: It saves lives. The metaphor also denotes a trivialization of the prisoner and the information he is assumed to carry in the recesses of his being. The prisoner is but a vessel through which the torturer works. (Lazreg 2008, 132-3)

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In this way of imagining the scenario of torture, the torturer is like a midwife who “delivers” the secret information from the sweating, screaming, suffering body of the prisoner. But he is also the husband, the symbolic owner of the delivered information, and – given that much torture happens whether or not the prisoner has information to give up – the torturer sometimes literally “produces” the secret to be delivered. When a confession is already written, waiting to be signed, torture is both a process of extracting information from the prisoner's body and of planting it there in the first place. The classical image of the pregnant woman's body as a mere vessel for the homunculus planted in her by the man fits neatly with this fantasy of torture as a birth scene staged on the prisoner's body but fully produced by the torturer himself.²¹

But information is not the only product of this scenario. The political identity of both the torturer and the tortured are (re)produced, in different ways, through the labor of torture. In her insightful essay, “On Torture: Abu Ghraib,” Jasbir Puar (2005) argues that, while feminist postcolonial theorists have typically focused on the third world woman's body as a site for the reproduction of national culture, “in the case of terrorism the line of transmission seems always to revert to the male body. The locus of reproductive capacity is, momentarily, expanded from the female body to the male body” (27). She draws on Brian Keith Axel's study of the torture of Sikh men in Punjab to argue that, in many national struggles against populations labeled as “terrorist,” the tortured body of the male terrorist becomes a site for the reproduction of national-normative sexuality and the repression of antinational sexuality.²² The terrorist poses a threat to both the boundaries of the nation state and the bodies of its citizens; to counter this threat, it is necessary not only to stop this or that individual terrorist, but to prevent

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terrorists from reproducing themselves, and to assert the power of national-normative modes of reproduction – even if this means deploying the illegal violence associated with terrorism in the name of national security.²³ The non-normative, anti-national body of the terrorist becomes coded, in Puar's words, as a "monsterterroristfag," even (or especially) as soldiers and military police sodomize them with broomsticks and chemical lights (Puar 2005, 28).

Puar argues that it is not so much a female sex that is imposed on the tortured male body but a feminine gender and a queer sexuality: "This feminizing divests the male body of its virility and, thus, compromises its power not only to penetrate and reproduce its own nation ("our" women) but to contaminate the Other's nation ("their" women) as well" (Puar 2005, 27).²⁴ The body of the male terrorist is imagined as excessively virile; it can explode anywhere at any time, threatening our bodies, our identity, and our "way of life."²⁵ But through torture, this body can be feminized; it can be put in the service of life, like a maternal body which bears and delivers the information required to reproduce the very national-normative identity that it has threatened.²⁶ These sexual dynamics are not confined to the torture chamber; they are dispersed across the population in whose name this torture is being done. Muneer Ahmad reports the circulation of flyers in New York immediately after September 11, 2001, which "depicted Osama bin Laden being sodomized by the World Trade Center, with the caption "You like skyscrapers, bitch?" The Associated Press distributed a picture of a bomb intended for Afghanistan on which an American sailor had written, "Hijack this, faggots!" (cited Ahmad 2002, 109). Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai refer to a (now inactive) website where "with a series of weapons at your disposal, you can torture

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Osama bin Laden to death, the last torture being sodomy" (Puar and Rai 2002, 126). Even the 2001 poet laureate of the U.S., Billy Collins, proclaimed on National Public Radio after 9/11, "Now the U.S. has lost its virginity" (cited in Puar and Rai 2002, 124), as if the attack on the World Trade Center had been the traumatic deflowering of a feminized America, the shame of which produced oddly consistent fantasies of attacking, sodomizing and sexually humiliating its perpetrators.

When viewed in this light, it seems clear that the photos of torture from Abu Ghraib do not depict isolated incidents of abuses by a few unsupervised and undertrained Military Police. Rather, these photographs are just one of the many sites where American power, and even American family values, are reproduced through the feminizing and "faggotizing" humiliation of male, Arab, and apparently terrorist bodies (Puar 2007, 100). These bodies are *displayed* as terrorist precisely through their humiliation. After all, why else would they need to be tortured? But at the same moment that they are displayed as terrorists, they are also revealed as passive, penetrated, submissive objects of American power. In other words, the photos both prove the threat posed by the would-be terrorist ("he must have done something bad to deserve such horrible punishment!") and also prove the extinction of this threat ("thankfully, our troops have subdued the terrorist and deprived him of his power"). The representation of torture puts forth "evidence" both that the torture was justified and that it has been effective. But even when this evidence fails to convince the American viewer – who was only one of its intended audiences, the other being the "Arab world" before whom it was assumed the prisoner would feel even greater humiliation (Hersh 2004a) – the depiction of Arab shame and American shamelessness in these

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photographs still works to construct and support American national identity. We *know* that we are normal, in part because we can see that *they* are not. We are not “bad apples” with sadomasochistic fantasies. And we are not – *Thank God!* – tortured and humiliated Arabs. But we can still reap the benefits of what our courageous and honorable troops are doing, in spite of the dishonorable few, and in spite of our own horror and repulsion at the very idea of a torture done in our name.

My point is not that American shame-responses to Abu Ghraib are inappropriately narcissistic and ought to be more “authentic,” but that *the mechanisms of shame and its disavowal have been part of what (re)produces a national identity for Americans to be proud of*. Not only is the humiliation of Iraqis carefully targeted at (an outdated anthropological view of) their cultural and religious identity, but this humiliation – and the variety of responses it elicits in the American public – are part of what constitutes national pride. American identity is founded on the humiliation of marginalized others – of slaves, prisoners, “enemy combatants”, even shoplifters – and on the uneasy but stable dynamic between a partial disavowal of shame and a partial narcissistic investment in it. The American use of torture has been an open secret in American society since 2005 – indeed, much earlier, if you consider that the CIA's KUBARK manual was already leaked to the public in 1997 (see Cohn et al 1997).²⁷ This torture was largely accepted by the public (or the “white world” (Hersh 2004a)) as long as it was conducted far away and hidden from view, and it is still accepted within the nation's own prison system.²⁸ Some – not all – Americans have expressed shame for the torture done in their name in the War on Terror, especially now that this ugly chapter in American seems to be closing with the end of the Bush administration and

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the dawning of a new era of hope and change. But if I am correct in my analysis of torture as a mechanism of national self-reproduction, it will take more than the closure of Guantanamo Bay to transform the dynamics of shame, pride and humiliation that have haunted the US for much longer than the current War on Terror.

Working Through the Shame of Torture: Simone de Beauvoir and Djamila

Boupacha

How do we begin to alter the gender, racial and sexual dynamics of torture from a position within the community for whose sake this torture has been done? How do we respond to the shame of torture in a way that goes beyond the embarrassed apology of Gen. Geoffrey Miller? I take my cue from Simone de Beauvoir, who writes of the French torture of Algerians in her memoir, *Force of Circumstance*:

I know that I am a profiteer, and that I am one primarily because of the education I received and the possibilities that it opened up for me. I exploit no one directly; but the people who buy my books are all beneficiaries of an economy founded upon exploitation. I am an accomplice of the privileged class and compromised by this connection; that is the reason why living through the Algerian war was like experiencing a personal tragedy. When one lives in an unjust world there is no use hoping by some means to purify oneself of that injustice; what is necessary is to change the world, and I don't have the power. (Beauvoir 1964, 652; cited in Kruks 2005, 196)

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Beauvoir claims, perhaps too modestly, that she does not have the power to change the world; and yet her response to torture in Algeria provides an instructive example of how to contest structural privilege from within by using the profiteer's shame against her own power.²⁹ Beauvoir compares the Algerian war to a "personal tragedy" – and some of us may bristle at what seems, and may very well be, a narcissistic way of referring to a war in which up to a million Algerians died³⁰ and countless people were tortured, leaving behind a legacy of violence and conflict that continues to this day. One may wonder if the profiteer is more outraged at the violence itself, or at the unfairness of being implicated in this violence without having chosen or consented to it. But Beauvoir's articulation of *collective responsibility* for crimes committed in her name – without her approval, but nevertheless to her benefit – transforms the shame of the profiteer into a starting-point for ethical, political and legal action. Beauvoir responded to this sense of collective responsibility by personally interceding on behalf of Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian woman who was arrested and tortured by the French in 1959. On June 3, 1960, Beauvoir published an article in *Le Monde*, "In Defense of Djamila Boupacha," which was considered so incendiary, and so anti-French, that all copies of the paper in Algeria were confiscated, and both Beauvoir and Boupacha's lawyer, Gisele Halimi, received death threats from political opponents. In 1962, Beauvoir and Halimi published a book on Boupacha's case including a preface by Beauvoir, Boupacha's own statement, details of her imprisonment and trial narrated by Halimi, and statements by other French intellectuals and activists. While the book was mainly authored by Halimi, Beauvoir added her name as co-author in order to share legal responsibility for the book, and for the retributive violence it might unleash. Boupacha remained in a French

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prison until the Evian agreement of March 1962, which granted amnesty to Algerian prisoners but also to French officials accused of abusing their power; and so, while the false charges against her were dropped, Boupacha's torturers were never prosecuted. Boupacha returned to Algeria after the trial, apparently brought there by the FLN against her will; she got married in Algeria and began working at the Department of Education.³¹

In her article in *Le Monde*, Beauvoir emphasized the shame brought upon the French by the contradiction between their own freedom and the colonial oppression carried out in their name:

For whether we choose our rulers willingly, or submit to them against our natural inclination, we remain their accomplices whether we like it or not. When the government of a country allows crimes to be committed in its name, every citizen thereby becomes a member of a collectively criminal nation. Can we allow our country to be so described? The Djamila Boupacha affair is the concern of every person in France. (1962, 197, cited Murphy 282)

On one hand, this emphasis on French shame operates as a potentially effective rhetorical device, a way of convincing otherwise indifferent citizens that the case of this one girl, whom they have never met, concerns them – that as long as torture is conducted by French occupying forces in Algeria, the reputation of every French citizen, however distant, is stained. As such, it might be exactly what the average French reader needs to hear in order to be provoked to care about torture in Algeria, and to recognize it as a situation for which they are collectively responsible, even if they have done nothing as individuals to produce or directly support it. But on the other hand, this

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sort of reasoning – that torture is to be opposed because it reflects poorly on otherwise innocent French citizens – misses the mark to the extent that it quietly reinforces the colonial situation rather than challenging it as such.³² As Fanon writes in *Toward the African Revolution*: “The gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of French honor... Such shutting out of the Algerian... belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French” (cited in Murphy, 282). The violated third world woman, the rapacious and ignorant colonial man, and the gallant, sympathetic anti-colonialist profiteer, form an all-too familiar triangle. To what extent does Beauvoir break out of this triangle, or at least complicate it? And what can we learn from her own ambiguous success?

The success of Beauvoir's response to torture turns on her negotiation of the ethics and politics of shame, in which she discerns collective responsibility in the personal feeling of shame and uses this shame to motivate collaborative political action. In her public writing, Beauvoir invoked French shame as a way of provoking the public to care about the torture of a woman far away, in a country which their own military occupied, and where – in some cases – their own sons risked their lives. But in her memoirs, Beauvoir explores her own feelings of shame, seeking to articulate the tensions between her political commitments, her intellectual life, and her privilege as a white, middle-class French woman. Her writing sets an example for how to *take on* the shame of being implicated in torture without letting this shame *take over*. Beauvoir acknowledges shame as a feeling which does not simply disappear after a few good deeds, and yet she resists identifying with this shame absolutely.³³ For if I *become* my

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shame, if shame consumes who I am, I have no way of resisting it and addressing that which is shameful. The horror of torture lies in part in its capacity to force this identification on others, to un-make subjectivity, leaving no distinction between one's pain and oneself. The temptation of liberal shame is to take on this identification willingly, albeit vicariously, to be so overwhelmed by one's own complicity in torture that one becomes speechless and unable to act. But the hypocrisy of liberal shame is that one may just as easily identify with this shame or walk away from it and get on with one's life. This is the luxury of the beneficiary: the luxury of not having to feel either one's own pain or the pain of others. Beauvoir's secret is both to *feel* the shame of being a beneficiary and *not to identify with that feeling*, to incorporate the feeling of shame into her autobiography, to narrate it – but not to *become* it. Beauvoir sustains the ambiguity of shame, precisely by contextualizing it in relation to her life story as a feeling that has marked her and moved her to action, a feeling which may never leave her, but which *is* not her. If the real aim of torture is, as Sironi and Branche argue, “not to make people talk, but to make them keep quiet” (2002, 539), then perhaps the best way to resist torture from the standpoint of its beneficiaries, is to follow Beauvoir's example in narrating one's complicity, acknowledging one's collective responsibility, and translating this responsibility into collective political and legal action.

The temptation of American politics today is to let the shame of being implicated in torture subside with the end of the Bush presidency and the inauguration of Obama. The executive order to close Guantanamo Bay and CIA black sites around the world, to forbid the rendition of US prisoners to nations that practice torture, and to enforce compliance of all US personnel with the Geneva Conventions and the Convention

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against torture, is an important step in the right direction; but it is not in itself a solution to the problem of American torture. Precisely now, we need to think seriously about how to negotiate the shame and humiliation generated by this torture, and to foster new relations with the Arab world, and with the many Arab-Americans, Sikhs and others who have been the targets of racial profiling and vigilante violence for nearly a decade. We all share collective responsibility for this process of negotiation and renewal, but we are not all personally guilty of crimes against humanity. Will there be legal prosecution of high-ranking officials such as Gen Geoffrey Miller and Donald Rumsfeld, both of whom have been identified by a bipartisan Senate Armed Forces Commission as responsible for sanctioning and even instructing the use of torture?³⁴ And without the conversion of at least some of the shame of American torture into legal culpability, where is this shame most likely to settle and to fester? How might the feeling of shame, compounded with the desire to disavow this feeling, rebound on those who are already most exposed to legal and illegal violence in the prisons, jails, super-maximum penitentiaries and immigrant detention centers that the United States still runs under the banner of freedom?

Now is the time to reflect on the American use of torture under the Bush administration, not as a temporary exception in the otherwise glorious history of the U.S., but rather in the context which made it possible and even popular. We need to reflect on the work done by practices of torture to support American national identity, and by the feelings of shame and pride that many Americans experienced in relation to this torture. American values such as freedom, democracy and justice were used to underwrite the War on Terror during the Bush administration. What makes us think that

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these values can be reclaimed without irony, and without reinscribing the very logic of American exceptionalism that made the War on Terror politically possible? It is indeed a time of cautious optimism in the United States; but both the caution and the optimism require a critical practice which refuses to forget what we have done and continue to do in the name of American values.

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Notes

¹ See Mirzoeff (2006, 29).

² A good deal of mystery still surrounds Miller's role at Guantanamo Bay and his degree of responsibility for the abuses at Abu Ghraib, to the point where the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee delayed his

retirement and required him to pledge in writing that he would testify truthfully if called upon after his retirement. For more details on Miller's role in "intensifying" interrogation procedures at Guantanamo Bay, see for example Otterman 2007, 145, 154, 167-8, 173.

³ My analysis will not focus on these photographs, in part because so much good work has already been done on them, and in part because I want to concentrate on the undertheorized issues of shame and humiliation without compounding the shame of those whose naked bodies and faces they depict. For admirable analyses of the photographs, see Apel 2005, Berger 2007, Carby 2004, Mirzoeff 2006, Oliver 2007, Puar 2005, and Sontag 2004.

⁴ As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said in a press conference, "My impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture. I don't know if it is correct to say what you just said, that torture has taken place, or that there's been a conviction for torture. And therefore I'm not going to address the torture word" (cited Blumenthal 2004).

⁵ The Bybee Memo (2002) redefines torture as the intentional infliction of severe physical pain "of an intensity akin to that which accompanies serious physical injury such as death or organ failure" or severe mental pain which produces "lasting psychological harm, such as seen in mental disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder" (46). It distinguishes torture from "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" (46) and insists on the "specific intention" (3) of the interrogator to cause such severe pain as a necessary criterion for calling something torture.

⁶ Jasbir Puar points out the irony of associating the taboo against homosexuality with Arab cultures in particular when consensual adult sodomy was only decriminalized in the United States in 2003. See Puar 2007, especially 114-165.

⁷ *The Arab Mind* was first published in 1973, but revised and reprinted in 2002 with a new foreword by Norvell B. DeAtkine, Director of Middle East Studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg. It claims to unravel "the mysteries of Arab societies to help us understand an ancient people" – just in time for the Global War on Terror (Patai 2002, back cover). One of Seymour Hersh's informants calls *The Arab Mind* "the bible of the neocons on Arab behavior," claiming that two main themes emerge from their reading of the book: "one, that Arabs only understand force and, two, that the biggest

weakness of Arabs is shame and humiliation” (Hersh 2004a, 42). Hersh quotes from the 25-page chapter on sex in Arab society: “The segregation of the sexes, the veiling of the women . . . and all the other minute rules that govern and restrict contact between men and women, have the effect of making sex a prime mental preoccupation in the Arab world... [A]ny indication of homosexual leanings, as with all other expressions of sexuality, is never given any publicity. These are private affairs and remain in private” (42).

⁸ Bush’s speeches abound with celebrations of American exceptionalism: “This is our calling. This is the calling of the United States of America, the most free nation in the world. A nation built on fundamental values that rejects hate, rejects violence, rejects murderers, rejects evil” (Bush 2001); “We have a special responsibility to defend freedom” (Bush 2002a). While Obama’s politics are clearly very different from Bush, and while his confidence in “the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny”(Obama 2009) is more tempered than Bush’s conviction that “we’ve been called to a unique role in human events” (Bush 2002b), his rhetoric of “reclaim[ing] the American dream” in a “new spirit of patriotism” (Obama 2008) does not problematize America’s claim to being “the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth” so much as prepare the way for America to “lead once more” (Obama 2009). I note the proximity of Obama’s rhetoric to Bush’s not in order to minimize the substantial differences between them, but rather to underscore the urgency of working through the relations between American pride, American shame and the humiliation of non-Americans and non-normative Americans, in a way that does not replicate the basic structure of these relations.

⁹ Apologists of torture include Dershowitz 2004, Elshtain 2000, Ignatieff 2004, and Walzer 2004. For an excellent philosophical refutation of the so-called “ticking time bomb argument” upon which most of these defenses rely, see Brecher 2007.

¹⁰ For a more developed discussion of Sartre’s phenomenology of shame, see [title suppressed for purposes of blind review].

¹¹ For example, see Manion 2003 on gendered shame, Warner 1999 on queer shame, Fanon 1968 on black shame, and Felski 2000 on class shame.

¹² Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) writes that, for members of marginalized communities, “shame is not so much a particular feeling or emotion (although it involves specific feelings and emotions) as a pervasive

affective attunement to the social environment,... a profound mode of disclosure both of self and situation" (85).

¹³ Woodward analyzes the case of Pecola, a character in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, an eleven-year-old African-American girl who is raped by her father (who was himself forced to rape a young black girl by two armed white men). Rather than live in a world where such horrible violence is directed at her and exposed, for all to see, in her pregnancy, Pecola annihilates herself, sinking into a mad fantasy that she has blue eyes, like a white girl, that will protect her from further violence and shame.

¹⁴ Some recent examples of "shame punishment" are truly absurd: "Take Ohio Municipal Court Judge Michael A. Cicconetti in Painesville for example. Teens had yelled "Pigs" to some local police officers. He had the teens stand on a busy street corner with a pig and a sign reading, "This is not a police officer." He had three men who were arrested for soliciting prostitution wear chicken suits and carry a sign with them that read, "There is no chicken ranch in Painesville." He also sentenced a couple who stole a baby Jesus statue from a manger to dress up as the Virgin Mary and Joseph and walk around Painesville with a donkey at their side" (Law 2007). Some public schools in Texas are also adopting the practice of "shame punishment" by forcing students who break the school dress code to wear prison jumpsuits (Local 6 News 2008). But the issues are more serious than they may seem from these absurd examples. See, for example, the legal debates around strip searches in public schools and prisons (Kaufman 1986, Shapiro 2007).

¹⁵ See Otterman 2007, 200-15, plus Otterman's website, www.americantorture.com, for the full text of both CIA manuals. See also Cohn et al 1997 for the Baltimore Sun article which forced these manuals into the public domain. See Klein 2007 for an analysis of the relation between the use of torture to "shock" and disorient prisoners and neoliberal economic policies which capitalize on the shock and disorientation of whole populations.

¹⁶ See Otterman 2007 (146, 153).

¹⁷ Meltzer himself suggests that the cause of guilty feelings in the prisoner is that he or she "may begin to feel that he is taking advantage of the interrogator and may feel some guilt for misleading the one person who seems to be interested in him and who is looking after his welfare" (in Biderman and Zimmer 1961,

297). I find this explanation unconvincing on its own, especially given the lack of further development of this point in the text. Isn't it just as likely that the prisoner feels guilty or ashamed precisely because s/he is being degraded, exposed, forcibly "regressed," pressured to betray something that is important to them? The fact that the prisoner may not have done anything wrong, but has only been wronged by others, does not rule out feelings of shame but often produces them (see Shapiro 2003).

¹⁸ See also Scarry 1985 on the use of ordinary, domestic objects to break down the prisoner's sense of a coherent world, and to isolate him or her in the painful body, as if one were betrayed by one's own source of power and agency.

¹⁹ See MacMaster 2004 and Lazreg 2008 (10-11, 253-69) for a detailed and compelling argument that American strategists borrowed heavily from counter-terrorist techniques used by the French against Algerians from 1954-62, in particular the use of sexualized torture.

²⁰ This is not true, as Lazreg acknowledges later in the book by analyzing the use of rape as a form of torture, as well as the torture of Djamila Boupacha, Louise Ighilahriz and other women active in the FLN. See Lazreg 2008, 145-69.

²¹ See Lazreg 2008, 111-169 for a complex analysis of the gendered and sexual dynamics of torture in Algeria. For example, one French intelligence officer described his technique as follows: "An interrogation is like making love. An essential rule is to take your time, know how to hold yourself long enough till you reach the crucial moment, keep up the pain till it reaches its climax. Most of all do not go beyond this threshold or your partner will die on you. If you can motivate him, he'll talk. Well, you know, orgasm. Otherwise, he'll pass out. If you love women, lieutenant, you should understand" (cited Lazreg 2008, 127).

²² Liz Philipose and others have traced a specific historical connection between the use of torture and the punishment of non-citizens or anti-nationals. In Classical Greece, torture was reserved for slaves, whom Aristotle thought were deprived of reason and so could only testify in court by having the "truth" painfully extracted from their bodies. After the Enlightenment, torture was reserved for non-citizens, a move which served to reinforce the distinction between us and them, nationals and aliens, and to encourage national bonding through violence against others. Today, torture is (nominally) reserved for terrorists, for those

whose violence threatens the nation state and arises from non-state-based sources (see Philipose 2007b, 1062).

²³ “Torture in Punjab is a practice of repeated and violent circumscription that produces not only sexed bodies, but also a form of sexual differentiation. . . . National-normative sexuality provides the sanctioned heterosexual means for reproducing the nation’s community, whereas antinational sexuality interrupts and threatens that community. Torture casts national-normative sexuality as a fundamental modality of citizen production in relation to an antinational sexuality that postulates sex as a “cause” of not only sexual experience but also of subversive behavior and extraterritorial desire (“now you can’t be married, you can’t produce any more terrorists”...). The form of punishment corresponds to the putative source of transgression: sexual reproduction, identified as a property of masculine agency within the male body” (cited Puar 2005, 27).

²⁴ The sexual dynamics of torture at Abu Ghraib, and the equation of femininity and penetration with powerlessness, seems to be a view shared by some of its former prisoners. For example, Dhia al-Shweiri states: “We are men. It’s OK if they beat me. Beatings don’t hurt us; it’s just a blow. But no one would want [his] manhood to be shattered. They wanted us to feel as though we were women, the way women feel, and this is the worst insult, to feel like a woman.” (Faramarzi 2004, see also Puar 2005, 20).

²⁵ See Puar’s excellent analysis of the sexual dynamics of torture as a response to terrorism, both here and elsewhere (Puar 2004, 2005; Puar and Rai 2002): “These two attributes, the fertility of the terrorist (in the case of Muslim men, always interpreted through polygamy) and the (homo)sexual perversions of the terrorist, are rendered with extra potency given that the terrorist is also a priori constituted as stateless, thus lacking national legitimization or national boundaries. In the political imagination, the terrorist serves as the monstrous excess of the nation-state” (Puar 2005, 28).

²⁶ “Torture, to compound Axel’s formulation, works not merely to disaggregate national from antinational sexualities—for those distinctions (the stateless monsterterroristfag) are already in play—but also, in accordance with nationalist fantasies, to reorder gender and, in the process, to corroborate implicit racial hierarchies. The force of feminizing, then, lies not only in the stripping away of masculinity, the “faggotizing” of the male body, or in the robbing of the feminine of its symbolic and reproductive centrality

to national-normative sexualities. Rather, it is the fortification of the unenforceable boundaries between masculine and feminine, the rescripting of multiple and fluid gender performatives into petrified sites of masculine and feminine, the regendering of multiple genders into the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and feminine, and the interplay of it all within and through racial, imperial, and economic matrices of power. That is the real force of torture” (Puar 2005, 28).

²⁷ Americans had good reason to suspect that their government would use, or was using, torture in the War on Terror. Neil MacMaster (2004) documents the way in which, already in the days after September 11, the mainstream media began preparing the American public for the use of torture against potential terrorists. He cites multiple examples of media pundits from both sides of the political spectrum making arguments as early as October 21, 2001, that it might be “time to think about torture” (3). Already on Nov 8, 2001, Alan Dershowitz began publishing legal arguments for the use of “torture warrants” to allow for the legal use of torture by American forces in approved cases (see MacMaster 2004, 4). A Christian-Science Monitor/TIPP poll taken in November 2001, found that 1 in 3 Americans could accept the use of torture against terrorism suspects, and 1 in 4 could even accept the use of nuclear weapons to fight terrorism (McLaughlin 2001). Not only was there a general media preparation for the “discovery” of torture, but there were already reliable reports released as early as July 23, 2003 from organizations such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross alleging that torture was being conducted in Iraq by American forces (Macmaster 2004, 13).

²⁸ Angela Davis (2005) argues that there is a “symbiotic” connection between abuses at Abu Ghraib and in the domestic prison system, especially but not exclusively in supermaximum penitentiaries (25; see also 49, 114, 124). “My point is that the normalization of torture, the everydayness of torture that is characteristic of the supermax may have a longer staying power than the outlaw military prison. In the supermax, there is sensory deprivation and so little human contact that prisoners are often driven to the point where they resort to using their bodily excretions – urine and feces – as means of exercising agency and freedom. This regularization, this normalization may be even more threatening, especially since it is taken for granted and considered not worthy of media attention” (124). For further connections between prisons, torture and slavery, see Davis 2003.

²⁹ The connection between the American torture of Iraqi and other Arab men, and the French torture of Algerians, goes beyond my own appeal to Beauvoir as an example of how to respond well to the torture done in one's name. See note 20.

³⁰ This figure comes from the Algerian government; the French recognize only 350,000 Algerian deaths, and did not acknowledge their military operations in Algeria as a *war* until 1999.

³¹ Boupacha's lawyer, Gisele Halimi, was disappointed in Beauvoir's lack of interest or willingness to meet Boupacha in person, and also her refusal to intercede on behalf of Boupacha with the FLN, who took Boupacha back to Algeria against her will. Halimi wrote of Beauvoir, "I expected a sister-in-arms" but "I discovered more and more an entomologist... For her, Djamilia was one victim among thousands, a useful 'case' in the battle against torture and war" (cited Murphy 283). On this last point, Sonia Kruks argues (and I agree), that it is one thing to use French privilege against itself in order to provoke moral outrage and political action among the French, and quite another to use this privilege to push for outcomes in the very context from which one is attempting to withdraw colonial power (well-intentioned or otherwise). As Kruks (2005) puts it, Beauvoir "would speak out for another against her own government, but not against a Third World independence movement that she supported" (193).

³² This sort of objection to torture also exerts a wide and durable appeal in American media and political discourse, often crossing the line between left and right. For example, Republican Senator Susan M. Collins remarked on May 7, 2004, after the release of photos from Abu Ghraib: "Worst of all, our nation, a nation that, to a degree unprecedented in human history, has sacrificed its blood and treasure to secure liberty and human rights around the world now must try to convince the world that the horrific images on their TV screens and front pages are not the real America, that what they see is not who we are" (cited in MacMaster 2004, 2). In a similar spirit of narcissism, but motivated by very different political commitments, *Washington Post* reporter Tom Shales writes in a sympathetic review of the film, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*: "It could easily be argued that it was the torturers and not the tortured who suffered the most as a result of what happened at Abu Ghraib. The damage done to the reputation of the United States was critical and criminal, and the torture that occurred can be seen as but a symptom of a much larger

corruption: the pursuit of the war itself and the fallacious "evidence" fed to the American people to justify it" (Shales 2007).

³³ In *Force of Circumstance*, Beauvoir writes: "I'm French. The words scalded my throat like an admission of a hideous deformity. For millions of men and women, old men and children, I was just one of the people who were torturing them, machine-gunning them, slashing their throats, starving them; I deserved their hatred because I could still sleep, enjoy a walk or a book" (FC 384; cited Murphy 284). And further: "I needed my self-esteem to go on living, and I was seeing myself through the eyes of women who had been raped twenty times, of men with broken bones, of crazed children: A French Woman" (FC 369, cited Murphy 282). In both passages, Beauvoir's words hover between outrage at the violence done to others, and outrage at the damage this violence does to her own image of herself. She acknowledges the personal need to find a way of living with herself as a French woman, but she also acknowledges that this personal sense of ease can only come through political change, such that Frenchness no longer signifies oppression because the French no longer oppress.

³⁴ On December 11, 2008, the Senate Armed Services Committee led by Carl Levin and John McCain released a report which concluded that the abuse and torture of detainees in Guantanamo, Iraq and Afghanistan at Abu Ghraib, was not just the work of a few unsupervised individuals, but could be traced to the words and actions of senior officials including Gen. Geoffrey Miller, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and even President George Bush (McCain and Levin 2008, 17, 19, 16). Since then, Vice President Dick Cheney has admitted in a television interview (on ABC television, Dec. 15, 2008) that he was not only aware that the CIA used techniques such as waterboarding, but that he was "involved in helping get the process cleared" (Miller 2008). This frank admission comes in the absence of any official pardons of senior officials from the outgoing President Bush. After all, why would anyone need a pardon if they haven't done anything wrong? As Jonathan Turley put it in an interview with Keith Olbermann: "If someone commits a crime, and everyone's around to see it and does nothing, is it still a crime? I think that's really the argument of this administration: 'It can't be a crime because no one's prosecuted us for it.'" (Turley 2008). This puts the ethical and political burden on the new administration to criminally prosecute senior officials in the Bush administration rather than simply leave the past behind in the spirit

of bipartisanship; and it puts the burden on the American public to advocate for both an end to torture and the legal prosecution of its architects. Without a commitment to both shared ethical responsibility and personal legal culpability, the shame of Abu Ghraib will continue to haunt American politics and society for years to come.