

**FAGS, DYKES, AND MISFITS: THE QUEERED WARRIOR
CASTE MARKED FOR DEATH IN HOMONATIONAL TIMES**

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates contradictions that we face within the current frame of war. I use both Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics and Michael Foucault's widely circulated term biopolitics as the backdrop to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I engage in a critique of queer theory as an institution and the current discourse of LGBTIQ rights and how they work in collusion with racist, xenophobic and sexist structures to produce two types of queer citizens: queer liberal subjects of life and queer populations marked for death. I argue that within this context soldiers serving in the U.S. military are *necessarily* queered as a population marked for death. I attempt to use queerness in a way that seriously engages with anti-racist critical theory and feminist critical theory; it was my intention that my usage of queerness (both my critique and my engagement in the theory) would posit race, gender, and nationality as central to sexuality and reproduction.

Introduction

"Thank God for dead soldiers."

-Westboro Baptist Church picket sign during the protest of Matthew Snyder's funeral, a marine killed in Iraq.¹

"When those soldiers are blown up, when the symbol of America is blown to smithereens, that is God avenging himself. Because he set a standard, this nation didn't follow it, and when God does a thing such as avenging himself, and avenging his people who warned 'em not to do that, we are supposed to rejoice and that is what we're gonna do. If they don't like that then they can take it up with God."

The narration from a video on the Westboro Baptist Church's website explaining their motivation for protesting the funerals of fallen military men and women.²

In March of 2010 a far-right independent Baptist church organization came to the national spotlight. The Westboro Baptist Church was involved in a Supreme Court case reviewing whether their protest campaign, which picketed the funerals of American soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, should be protected by the First Amendment. This case put the right to free speech in question. Touted by the *New York Times* as a "tiny fundamentalist splinter group", during WBC protests of military funerals members of the church defiantly held signs reading slogans such as "Thank God for dead soldiers," and "Thank God for I.E.D.s" (in reference to the bombs that cause many of the wartime casualties).³ The organization is based in Topeka, Kansas, but members travel to funerals across the country in order to express God's disapproval of a country that condones homosexuality. With a startlingly to the point website (godhatesfags.com) and an inclination toward provocative slogans that posit America in opposition to God, justify school shootings, and praise God's work in 9/11, the group has become emblematic of 'out of touch' religious extremism in the

¹ Barnes, Robert. "Supreme Court to Rule on Anti-Gay Protests at Military Funerals," *The Washington Post*, March 9th, 2010, National News Special Reports Section.

² Westboro Baptist Church Website, "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" video clip, Westboro Baptist Church. <http://www.signmovies.net/videos/signmovies/index.html>.

³ Alvarez, Lizette. "Outrage at Funeral Protests Pushes Lawmakers to Act," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2006, U.S. Section.

U.S. Interestingly, the WBC sees a direct connection between the wars being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and the promotion of homosexuality. In fact, the group does not solely target the funerals of soldiers; they first drew national attention during their 1998 protest of Matthew Shepard's funeral – a gay man who was beaten and left to die in a Wyoming desert, and who later became an important symbol of LGBTIQ hate crime prevention. The Supreme Court case under review in March of 2010 was based on a protest from 2006 in Maryland. The WBC picketed the funeral of Marine Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder who was killed in Iraq. Snyder's family was awarded \$10 million when they took legal action against the Kansas church, but the decision was later reversed in protection of the First Amendment. In March of 2010 Snyder's family sought for an appeal against the WBC, an appeal that the Court was clearly sympathetic to despite their inability to contradict one of the tenants of the constitution on which the U.S. is politically and morally based. In a *Washington Post* article chronicling the case, the Court of Appeals is quoted as saying,

"“Notwithstanding the distasteful and repugnant nature of the words being challenged in these proceedings, we are constrained to conclude that the defendants' signs . . . are constitutionally protected," the court said, adding that the signs contained "*imaginative and hyperbolic rhetoric* intended to spark debate about issues with which the defendants are concerned."⁴ (Emphasis my own).

Despite the clear sympathy expressed for the Snyder family, by the end of March the court denied their appeal and the family was required to pay the legal fees of the WBC, a decision that infuriated Americans across the country.⁵ Many media outlets were disgusted with the distasteful and supposed extremist messages spread by the WBC; it was both the outrageousness of the claims and the impediment of a place of mourning that struck people as inherently hateful and wrong. Judge Robert B. King who represented the United States Court of Appeals explained,

⁴ Barnes, Robert. "Supreme Court to Rule on Anti-Gay Protests at Military Funerals," *The Washington Post*, March 9th, 2010, National News Special Reports Section.

⁵ Hudson, John. "The Problem with Free Speech: The Westboro Baptist Church," *The Atlantic Wire*, March 31st, 2010. <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/opinions/view/opinion/The-Problem-With-Free-Speech-Westboro-Baptist-Church-3050>

“As utterly distasteful as these signs are, they involve matters of public concern, including the issues of homosexuals in the military, the sex-abuse scandal within the Catholic Church, and the political and moral conduct of the United States and its citizens.”⁶

What interests me here is not the validity of the political messages being promoted; rather it is the insistence on the distastefulness of the protesters and their signs, and of the supposed “imaginative and hyperbolic rhetoric” that the WBC employs to promote their political agendas. Across news outlets, whether they politically stand on the right or the left, writers were in agreement about the utter extremism being performed; about the moral trespass onto the personal (and public) sites of mourning; and on the backwardness of the members of this “tiny fundamentalist splinter group”. I would like to question these claims of extremism. How does the rhetoric of the WBC diverge from the discourses on morality and the promotion of the United States as a Christian moral authority? How does the picketing of military funerals differ from the construction of military men and women as ungrievable bodies and the policies surrounding mourning? Finally, how does the WBC’s connection between the promotion of LGBTIQ rights discourse and American nationality reflect the growing discourses of homonationalism in American domestic and foreign policy? It is clear that the Westboro Baptist Church’s employment of supposedly extremist signs, slogans, and protests is part of an effort to bolster media attention; however I would like to problematize their categorization as an extremist organization and reveal some of the patterns that they reflect in the larger discourses on war, national security, terror, and homonationalism.

Queer Times

“Effectively, this is a biopolitical reordering of the negative register of death transmuted into the positive register of life, especially for U.S. homonormative subjects who, despite the egregious homophobic, racist, and misogynist behavior of the U.S. military prison guards,

⁶ Liptak, Adam. “Justices to Hear Case of Protest at Marine Funeral,” *The New York Times*, March 8th, 2010, U.S. Section.

benefit from the continued propagation of the United States as tolerant, accepting, even encouraging of sexual diversity. America is narrated by multiple progressive sectors as embodying an exceptional multicultural heteronormativity, one that is also bolstered by homonormativity.”

-Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*⁷

While debates about same sex marriage, “don’t ask, don’t tell”, and abortion legislation dominate political discourse in the U.S.⁸, the country is simultaneously positioned in a war that posits the United States as the morally superior and politically progressive global authority. In fact, as I write this thesis the U.S. is in the process of repealing DADT (“don’t ask, don’t tell”), a move that is largely being celebrated by LGBTIQ groups across the country without a critical analysis of the war they are working so hard to become a part of. In the above quote Jasbir K. Puar writes about these political debates and the role they play in the reorganization of the register of life. She details how xenophobic national security measures and legislation and queerness as regulatory mechanisms are integral to the changing formations of life and death within the biopolitical and necropolitical landscape of the United States. She sees queerness as regulatory in the sense that queer subjects are being regulated through their deviance – not despite it. This landscape, the landscape of perpetual war, is one that predates the symbolic importance of 9/11 as *the* event. It is a landscape that the United States has been engaged in far longer than the short memories of cultural critics and national news outlets will lead us to believe. Foucault recognized the need for perpetual war as one of the central aspects of biopolitics, where the elevation of the life of certain populations leads to the potential of a perpetual war machine - a permanent military apparatus. In his understanding of the governmentality of the biopolitical state, science, politics and the

⁷ Puar, Jasbir K, *Terrorist Assemblages; Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), xxv.

⁸ Abortion legislation is currently being debated in a post Roe v. Wade era, pro-life advocates have been targeting abortion rights on a State by State basis. The U.S. Senate cleared the way for “Don’t As, Don’t Tell” to be repealed at the end of May, 2010. Same sex marriage, on the other hand, has federal legislation, the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, making the fight to legalize same sex marriage on a national level much more difficult. President Obama has publicly declared each one of these issues as being central to his presidency.

military were the triad that formed what he termed the “political military complex.”⁹ Death is central to this formation, as Foucault explained in his lectures on biopower, “Death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.”¹⁰ This is why Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics, which places death at the center of sovereign power, is also vital to this landscape of perpetual war. In his essay on necropolitics Mbembe asks, “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 the enemy its primary and absolute objective?”¹¹ Puar uses both the biopolitical and necropolitical frameworks provided by Foucault and Mbembe to grapple with queerness as regulatory.

Puar’s research posits the construction of terrorist bodies in opposition to citizen bodies; she illuminates how queerness as a regulatory mechanism produces queer subjects (reproductive citizens) who benefit from homonormative structures and queer populations (terrorists) who are constructed as sexually backwards (non-reproductive), archaic, and at times, agents of death. For Puar, terrorists figure as queered because they are both racially constructed as sexually backward and they serve as the antithesis to reproduction; they are essentially messengers of death. Puar makes a connection between the suicide bomber (terrorist) and the man living with AIDS (queer). In both cases these figures represent a death of the nation coming from *within*. When writing about José Esteban Muñoz’s interpretation of a certain type of “terrorist drag” she says, “Muñoz’s description of this terrorist drag appropriately points to the historical convergences between queers and terror: homosexuals have been traitors to the nation, figures of espionage and double agents, associated with

⁹ Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (New York: Picador, 2009), 305.

¹⁰ Foucault, Michel, *“Society Must be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 244.

¹¹ Mbembe, Achille. “Necropolitics” Duke University Online Database.
<http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/icuss/pdfs/Mbembe.pdf>

communists during the McCarthy era, and, as with suicide bombers, have brought on desired death through the AIDS pandemic (both suicide bomber and gay man always figure as already dying, a decaying or corroding masculinity).”¹² For her both of these populations (PWA’s and terrorists) are queered in relation to their (un)reproductivity. Her insistence that both racialization and reproduction are central to this process of queering pivotal in my paper; how does this extend to other populations within the framework of war? How does homonationalism enable a reordering of life that simultaneously produces queer subjects who are targeted for life, and queer populations which are targeted for death? And how are soldiers implicated in this distinction between “queer subjects” and “queer populations”?

Puar explains the connection between homonormativity and the production of queer populations, “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.”¹³ When coupled with the imperial agenda of the United States, homonormativity becomes just as reliant on racial exclusion, class oppression, patriarchy and xenophobia as it is on sexuality itself; this is when homonationalism emerges. However, Puar pays little attention to one of the major actors in her citizen/subject formulation: the men and women serving in the U.S. military, the bodies that often times physically mark the delineation between terrorist and citizen. How do their bodies fit into the register of life that Puar grapples with? In the above quote, they are described as the performers of American imperialism abroad, guards who displayed “egregious homophobic, racist, and misogynist behavior” that contrasted with the image of America as progressive. While Puar interrogates the elevation of America as the progressive political authority of the world through exposing its inherent contradictions, she is not as critical of the role that men and women serving in the U.S. military are required to play as part of the political military complex in a war against

¹² Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxiii.

¹³ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 9.

“terrorism”. In the above quote, they are constructed as politically backwards, non-progressive and amoral.

In my thesis I would like to go beyond Puar’s initial formulation of queer subjects (citizens) and queer populations (terrorists). I will interrogate the regulatory effects of queerness that reinforce and overlap with mechanisms of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and class oppression. But instead of positing *American* queer subjects in opposition to *non-American* queer populations, I will bring the scope of my research to locate a division within the United States. I will show that soldiers serving in the U.S. military occupy the precarious position as the defender’s of America’s Christian moral authority and America’s self-proclaimed progressive politics of LGBTIQ issues; two contradictory positions. More than this, soldiers do not only delineate Americans (white, progressive) who are queered in acceptable ways and Arab “others” (dark, backwards) who are queered as terrorists targeted for death; but soldiers themselves must go through processes of queering that render them as non-reproductive and non-progressive non-civilians and ultimately, targeted for death. If we set our sights on the legislation restricting the visibility of the coffins in the media, policies regarding the requirement of “embedded” journalists writing from the war front, the construction of men and women soldiers as politically and socially backwards, and policies prohibiting the reproductive potential of women serving in combat, there are some peculiar connections to the rhetoric being deployed by the Westboro Baptist Church and larger discourses on the war. This rhetoric even manages to infiltrate Puar’s critique of similar media outlets and institutionalized theoretical frameworks. Although many media outlets distance the WBC from “normal” discourses surrounding soldiers, there are many intriguing intersections that implicate larger news outlets and government policies within the very arguments that are being made by this supposed extremist splinter group.

Through the promotion of LGBTIQ rights discourse centered around homonationalism, the processes of (un)grieving fallen soldiers, policies prohibiting their reproductivity, the disproportionate recruitment of men and women of color and people from low income communities, the high number of single parents serving (a higher percentage of men than women), and the debates surrounding “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, I want to reveal how men and women serving in the U.S. military are constructed as queer populations within the political military complex who are marked for death, in opposition to (white) queer (civilian) subjects who are made to live.

Liberal Queerness and Homonationalisms

“Imagine, we have thousands of administrative hearings just to determine whether or not someone is gay or straight, when these good soldiers should be focused on missions like killing Osama bin Laden.”
-Representative Patrick Murphy.¹⁴

“Queer theorizing, as it has been institutionalized, is proper to – and property to – white bodies. Colored folk perform affect but can never theorize it. Actually, shame seemed strangely *disaffected* at the conference; U.S. race discourse stipulates that gay shame, as an experience both visceral and self-reflexive, be recuperated for whiteness. The charge of “hijacking” contains my dissent as fanaticism. But it also foregrounds queer theory’s own indivisibilities – its own unacknowledged stakes in identity. Those stakes not only include whiteness, masculinity, and even heteronormativity but perhaps also do so in uniquely American formations. The queer establishment’s desires and identifications align not-so-queerly with those of U.S. nationalism.”
-Hiram Perez, “You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It Too.”¹⁵

Representative Patrick Murphy is the first veteran of the Iraq war to serve in Congress. Murphy beat out an incumbent Republican in Eastern Pennsylvania, and is noticeably outspoken as a pro-choice candidate in the current anti-abortion political climate. As a veteran and a Democrat serving in conservative turf, his opposition to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” does not go unnoticed. Issued in 1993, DADT was a policy created as a “compromise”; in modification of the gay ban in place at the time DADT prohibits the investigation of individuals for homosexuality without due cause. Originally created to prevent the witch-hunting of homosexual individuals, the homophobic search for “due cause” and the interrogation of men and women who do not conform to gender norms continues, and has perhaps even been worsened by this policy that legally reinforces the closet. With light

¹⁴ Clines, Francis X, “Telling About Gay Warriors and Asking for Votes,” *The New York Times*, April 8th, 2010, Opinion Section.

¹⁵ Perez, Hiram, “You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!,” *Social Text* Vol. 23, Nos. 3-4, Fall-Winter 2005: 174.

blue eyes, a bright smile, and the credentials to counter the typical dismissals of naiveté, Murphy is precisely the type of ally that those who want to repeal DADT need. As a veteran his insistence on the importance of “desegregating” the military carries much weight; as a married heterosexual father of two children, his voice carries much further. When justifying his opposition to DADT, Murphy explains, “Now is the exact time to do it. We desegregated the military during the Korean War when half the nation was still racially segregated.”¹⁶ His analogy to racial segregation is one that is often used to counter DADT, one of the liberal black marks that has shadowed Bill Clinton’s presidency. However the conflation of racial desegregation with the repeal of DADT is one that ignores the long history of the forceful recruitment of people of color, a history that precedes Harry Truman’s historic executive order of integration, a violent legacy that dates back to the civil war where black men were forced to fight without recognition.

In the above quote Hiram Perez, a queer theorist, outlines the queer academy’s investment in forms of U.S. nationalism and identity politics. Upon attending a conference entitled “Gay Shame” he was shocked at the scarcity of queers of color included in the dialogue. The lack of non-white queer theorists led him to question queer theory’s complicity in exclusionary identity formations such as whiteness, masculinity and heteronormativity. He predicates this complicity on absence; the absence of what he terms as “brown” bodies. He extends his critique of queer theorizing to a military analogy, something that quite appropriately ties into Murphy’s insistence of DADT as being analogous to desegregation, but his story diverges from Murphy’s in several key ways. “The abolition of the draft in 1973, despite ongoing U.S. militarism, saved the nation’s white elite by sacrificing its black, brown, and poor white populations. Gay Shame’s absent black and brown bodies constitute queer theory’s missing in action – quite literally,” he goes on to

¹⁶ Clines, Francis X, “Telling About Gay Warriors and Asking for Votes,” *The New York Times*, April 8th, 2010, Opinion Section.

explain, “Gay Shame’s resistance, then, to thinking race needs to be understood within the context of the military’s ever-browning warrior caste and the continuing siege on affirmative action. Queer theorizing also needs to more critically regard historical criminalizations of race.”¹⁷ He not only releases a scathingly accurate critique of the institution of queer theory, but Perez also reveals the absencing that Murphy, along with other proponents of DADT enact when they insist on delineating a history of military integration that loses sight of the brown bodies who have been cast into the “warrior caste” they so desperately seek to desegregate. Perez lifts the term warrior caste from a *New York Times* article published ten days after the initial invasion of Iraq that outlined exactly *who* we were sending into the line of fire. There is a strange double-meaning to “military integration” when you have an institution that disproportionately represents minorities and people from low-income communities. More than this, the *New York Times* article pointed to what it terms as a type of “voluntary segregation” within the U.S. military, “But if the military has become the most successfully integrated institution in society, there is also a kind of voluntary segregation: while whites and blacks seek out careers in communications, intelligence, the medical corps and other specialties in roughly equal numbers, blacks are two and a half times as likely to fill support or administrative roles, while whites are 50 percent more likely to serve in the infantry, gun crews or their naval equivalent.”¹⁸

It is clear that the “integration” that some proponents of DADT uncritically aspire to is weighed down with legacy of a “brown warrior caste”; a class of people who are economically and socially more likely to fight in - and more significantly die - in the wars that the U.S. wages. These structural inequalities that affect who fights in the front lines is something that the repeal of DADT does not adequately address. Whether it is through the segregation within military ranks, the disproportionate recruiting methods employed in low-

¹⁷ Perez, “You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!,” 175.

¹⁸ Halbfinger, David M. and Steven A. Holmes, “Military Mirrors Working-Class America,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2003.

income communities, or issues of gender-based discrimination and violence, the repeal of DADT would do little to combat these issues. For LGBTIQ men and women belonging to communities that are targeted for discrimination and violence because of their race or class, these issues may even be exacerbated. More than this, the comparison between the repeal of DADT and racial desegregation in the military attempts to construct a problematic liberatory desegregation teleology. But when one considers the usage of racialized bodies in wars that predated official desegregation and the continuing disproportionate recruitment of men and (more specifically) women of color, then it seems that this comparison becomes weighed down with the racial baggage that some proponents of the LGBTIQ agenda in the U.S. would rather not dirty their hands with. I am not arguing that DADT in itself is not a flawed and highly homophobic act that is practiced in collusion with the racism, sexism and classism that permeates the U.S.'s social politics. Who, after all, is subject to the type of institutionalized and legalized closet that men and women serving in the military are? Studies have shown that the people who are disproportionately affected within the military by DADT are people of color and women.¹⁹ Instead I want to show two emerging strands of homonationalism that uncritically embrace or benefit from existing national identity formations; the discourses surrounding LGBTIQ rights in the U.S. and the queer academy as an institution. There are many competing discourses within these highly pluralized strands of political and academic thought; however I would like to bring to light some of the ways that seemingly the liberatory rhetoric of queerness and LGBTIQ rights is actually complicit in queerness as a regulatory institution.

“Queer bodies may be disallowed, yet there is room for the absorption and management of homosexuality – temporally, historically, and spatially specific – when advantageous for the nation. As homonormativity is on of a range of “compartmental sexualities that are tolerated or encouraged,” the management is not consistent and is often

¹⁹ Bello, Marisol, “‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ Affects Women, Minorities More,” *USA Today*, May 28th, 2010.

directed only toward certain audiences. As a “proximity that serves as surveillance procedures,” homonormativity is both disciplined by the nation and its heteronormative underpinnings and also effectively surveils and disciplines those sexually perverse bodies that fall outside its purview. Thus the nation not only allows for queer bodies, but it actually disciplines and normalizes them; in other words, the nation is not only heteronormative, but also homonormative.”

-Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*²⁰

In *Terrorist Assemblages* Puar outlines how homonormativity is not only regulated through discourses of the nation, but how it in turn operates as a regulatory mechanism. She reveals the ways that homonormative discourses act in collusion with state mechanisms of power and produce homonationalist discourses that uncritically overlap with the racist, imperialist and classist formations of national belonging, something that I have attempted to demonstrate earlier in this chapter. In the above quote, with the help of Foucault, Puar explains that through the nation’s biopolitical management of sexuality, *certain* types of queerness are normalized and promoted, while “those perverse bodies that fall outside its purview” are disciplined and regulated by the very non-normative sexualities that fall within homonormativity and homonationalism; what Puar terms as “queer subjects”. It is precisely through and by non-normativity that these bodies regulate and are regulated, something that flies in the face of much of American multiculturalist rhetoric that attempts to celebrate the liberatory potential of difference and the celebratory embrace of non-normativity that many queer theorists embrace. Puar see queerness as regulatory in two significant ways; 1.) the construction of the celebratory queer liberal subject in opposition to queer populations marked for death and stripped of subjecthood, 2.) queerness’s required identity transgression operates in collusion with national identity formations (whiteness, maleness, Americanness). Puar’s critical analysis of queerness as regulatory focuses on feminist theory, the liberal television series *Southpark* and LGBTIQ writing on tourism and transnational movement; not

²⁰ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 50.

only on the conservative LGBTIQ discourses that are traditionally accepted as potentially loaded in terms of race, class and even gender. However I would like to set my scope on queer theory's complicity in queerness as regulatory. I have evoked conservative and liberal discourses on DADT that do not purport to embrace queer theory's critique on identity politics; but I have only done so to illuminate how queer theory is not so separated from the tradition of LGBTIQ discourses that it so desperately seeks to distance itself from. I also am not attempting to produce a tidy definition of queer theory. Rather, I would like to show how some strands of thought in queer theory that fall into Puar's framework of queerness as regulatory. And within the framework of the biopolitical war on terror, I would like to seriously engage in unpacking precisely *which* queer populations are targeted for death in contrast to the celebratory queer liberal subject of life.

In 2005 *Social Text* published an issue dedicated to interrogating queer theory as an institution, it was titled "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?". *Social Text*, which has previously devoted issues to queerness and queer theorizing, set out to open a dialogue about queerness within the current political climate of LGBTIQ rights discourse in the U.S. The space was specifically opened to scholars who were not necessarily part of the cannon; two of the theorists whose work has greatly aided in my own thesis research were featured, Jasbir K. Puar and Hiram Perez. Although many of the theorists featured attempted to show how queer theory was a relevant critical tool in many disparate areas (political, social, academic), many also set out to critique and illuminate the emergence of queer liberalism.²¹ Queer liberalism falls in line with homonationalism in that it benefits from the very structures that it seeks to dismantle; structures of racism, classism and sexism are just a few. This issue of *Social Text* sought to show how queer politics and theory is necessary in order to interrogate these structures of power, and many of the articles published within made connections between

²¹ Eng, David L., Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* Vol. 23, Nos. 3-4, Fall-Winter 2005: 1.

queerness and these other structures of power; something that often time goes ignored. In the introduction the editors explain, “The various essays gathered here insist that considerations of empire, race, migration, geography, subaltern communities, activism , and class are central to the continuing critique of queerness, sexuality, sexual subcultures, desire, and recognition. At the same time these essays also suggest that some of the most innovative work on globalization, neoliberalism, cultural politics, subjectivity, identity, family, and kinship is happening in the realm of queer studies.”²²

The editor’s insistence that queer studies can be a site for serious critical engagement is one of the reasons that I so adamantly insist on using a queer framework to interrogate the structures of power that contribute to what I term as the “queering” of soldiers, but what one could also call the construction of soldiers as ungrievable life, as bare life, or ultimately, as killable bodies. Initially established to seriously challenge the norms that regulate everything from sexuality to gender performance, queerness’s rejection of *one* identity category makes it a critical tool that for me, has the potential to engage with questions of sovereignty, class, citizenship and race as much as it deals with sexuality as an institution. I especially consider reproduction as central to the production of ungrievable life - to queerness as regulatory. Queerness allows us to take sexuality and reproduction as central to questions of racialization in ways that critical race theory fails to do. In this chapter I have attempted to show some of the ways that LGBTIQ rights discourse and the queer academy contribute to the very structures of power that I believe queerness has the *potential* to dismantle, challenge, and interrogate. On the flipside of queerness as regulatory, I also see the queer potentiality of the men and women serving in the U.S. military. These men and women are required to house a certain type of heteronormativity within the public imagination; they are the impenetrable border that is deployed in order to protect the very notion of *Americanness*. To imagine queer

²² Eng, “What is Queer About Queer Studies Now?,” 2.

soldiers is to imagine penetrability, anal sex, a lower-class version of homosexuality that they are just not *allowed* to embody (the repeal of DADT would not necessarily challenge this, as many queer theorists have pointed out, there is a difference between “good gays” and “bad queers” – and DADT seems to promote a type of “good gayness”)²³. If we consider queer soldiers we may move beyond the identity based political discussions of tolerance that saturate the discourse on DADT. The recognition of queerness also requires a certain type of subjecthood. It requires on the part of the Left, to imagine soldiers as subjects, as queer subjects, that are able to critically participate in an institution that is so easily critiqued by academics, politicians, and writers, without allowing the soldiers to maintain a subjecthood of their own. To talk about queer soldiers allows them to occupy the space of individuality. Although the activist group Queer Nation envisioned a type of “queer army”, to actually imagine the military as queer would dismantle the border that separates soldier from civilian. However, instead of imaging soldiers as queer subjects, I argue that the military is queered as a population. This type of queering is dependent on structures of racism, classism, sexism, and xenophobia that are all part of rendering soldiers ungrievable. Ultimately I seek to explore the question that Judith Butler asked in relation to 9/11, a question that I more critically engage in later in this text. Within the framework of a biopolitical war where life is so elevated that men and women die *every day* to protect it, this is a question that we must engage in. “What *makes for a grievable life*?”²⁴

²³ Michael Warner talks about the distinction between “good gays” and “bad queers” in his article “Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage.” His argument is that gay marriage will not by default benefit *all* queer populations, but rather it has the potential to draw a line of distinction in the queer community between acceptable, married homosexuals, and deviant, backwards non-reproductive queers. I think this type of critique could also be applicable to the drive to repeal DADT.

²⁴ Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 20.

Fags, Dykes, and Misfits: The Queered Bodies of the U.S. Military

“We are prepared to give testimony that in our documented experience, the U.S. military is filled top to bottom with fags and dykes and misfits of every kind. It is a lie that our military consists of brave, competent, self-sacrificing young patriots. They are incompetent cowards and bullies. They’re not fighting for First Amendment rights; they’re fighting for the perverts of this nation to murder their babies, to “marry” their fag partners, and to commit whoredoms & abominations of every kind. The Lord no longer builds the American house; nor does the Lord watch over and protect America. These soldiers are dying for the homosexual and other sins of America.”

-Westboro Baptist Church Group Memorial Day New Release, April 28th, 2010.

“The military invests much of its energy into transforming civilians into soldiers (whether through boot camp routines or initiation ceremonies intended to certify that transformation).

It works hard to acculturate individuals used to thinking for themselves as free and independent so that they deny self-interest and work as a team within the chain of command.

It consciously constructs a culture that trains nonviolent individuals to execute violence on command. Compared with the efforts to transform the civilian into soldier, the military invests relatively little effort into reversing the process.”

-Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-And-Tight*²⁵

There is a clear distinction between civilian and soldier in the U.S. imaginary; although there is the underlying knowledge that one is not born a soldier, to imagine the two classes of people as one and the same is quite an impossible task. The transition from civilian to soldier is thus vital to the military industrial complex that is at work in the United States; imagining civilians abroad murdering Iraqi’s and Afghani’s would violate the rules of war; in fact when many soldiers are tried outside of war circumstances in civilian courts the occupy this liminal position between trusted soldier who is impenetrable and who protects the nation, and civilian who is subject to making mistakes, experiencing trauma, and ultimately committing murder. This transformation is so important that goarmy.com, the recruiting website used by the U.S. Army, features an interactive segment of the site entitled “Basic Training” where you can “see the transition from civilian to soldier.”²⁶ A webcast is available

²⁵ Burke, Carol, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-And-Tight* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), xvii.

²⁶ Go Army Website, “Basic Training,” Go Army. <http://goarmy.com/#/?channel=careers&marquee=officership>

for you to watch the different procedures and tests that a civilian must go through in order to acquire the status of soldier. Perhaps it is important to ask; Why is this transformation so important in delineating between civilians and soldiers? Why are all of these legal, social, economic, and bodily markers necessary to draw a distinction between these two classes of people? This is a transformation that not only trains civilians to be capable of operating under wartime circumstances and committing acts that few people imagine themselves capable of doing, but this transformation is also allows us to imagine soldiers as a different *type* of person. How else could politicians justify war? When the most common excuse for the necessity of war is to protect the citizens of a nation, there must be an attempt to construct soldiers as somehow existing outside of this definition of citizen. There must be an attempt to construct soldiers as marked for death in opposition to the citizens of life that they die protecting.

In her book, *Camp All-American*, Carol Burke who works as an academic folklorist, explores military culture and folklore, and details one of the most central processes of this transformation: basic training. She outlines the tactics that the military uses in order to transform individuals into team players; people who cannot simply think for their own personal well-being. She explains how recruits are treated like children and are purposefully put in disorienting situations that make them dependent on their superiors, “On the face of it, you would thin an institution that so prizes order (every minute planned, every recruit under constant surveillance) would have no use for confusion; yet confusion is a state that drill instructors intentionally induce in their recruits. Planned confusion increases the dependence of recruits on their harsh taskmaster. Only the drill instructor, the god of their universe and the architect of their transformation, can erase their confusion.”²⁷ The disciplining of civilians into soldiers who are part of a larger population is something that Foucault pointed to in his

²⁷ Burke, *Camp All-American*, 26.

now famous study of the military and other institutions of the state. In theory any person can be transformed into a soldier; one does not need to be born into a certain class, body type or gender (although gender does present some problems in the military) in order to achieve this transformation. Foucault argued that any body can be turned into a docile body, into a violent agent of the state, into a soldier. But when operating under the existing structures of power within the biopolitical state, where certain subjects are targeted for life, there is more at work in deciding *which* bodies are most easily transformed into soldiers, and the processes they undergo act in collusion with very institutions that delineate which populations abroad are targeted for death.

In the above quote from the Westboro Baptist Church's Memorial Day press release, they outline how they see the military as containing some of what they see as the lowest members of American society. They challenge the notion of the honorable soldier by claiming that they are amoral, backwards, and that the military is filled with "fags and dykes and misfits of every kind". The type of rhetoric that WBC uses in criticizing the U.S. military is heavily criticized in the media. How dare this extremist hate group slander the names of men and women who sacrifice their lives to protect the values of America? How dare they suggest that the U.S. military is filled with misfits, with dykes and fags? WBC cites the military as not fighting for the American values that they themselves respect, but for the "perverts" of the Nation, soldiers are fighting for the right to abortion, for gay marriage and gay adoption. While the WBC is openly homophobic, racist and sexist, it seems like much of what this press release sets out to prove is not so far off from the policies of the U.S. government and the construction of soldiers in the media. They site rights that are emblematic to progressive politics as being what the soldiers truly defend. How far off is it to argue that this is what soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan protect when one of the major tenants of

the War on Terror launched by the Bush administration was women's liberation?²⁸ How far off is it to suggest that the soldiers protect the rights of queer American citizens when countries like Malawi are condemned for prosecuting homosexuality?²⁹ And, perhaps most importantly, how is it so far off to label soldiers as being fags, dykes and misfits of every kind? It seems that the WBC is on to something. They effectively argue that soldiers defend the reproductive rights of civilians within the U.S., while they themselves are fags, dykes and misfits – they defend rights that they themselves do not have access to. Although this may seem like a huge contradiction, I see this ambivalence between which rights are protected and how those who protect rights are treated as being part of queerness as regulatory within the context of a biopolitical war against terror. Soldiers ultimately fight (partially) in the name of protecting the (reproductive) rights of the queer liberal civilian subjects of life, while they themselves are fags, dykes and misfits – they are queer populations who are marked for death, populations that do not have access to the rights that they defend and who are ultimately constructed as ungrievable.

In terms of reproductive rights the military sends contradictory messages. In December of 2009 Major General Tony Cucolo received national attention for making pregnancy a punishable offence for troops serving under his command. He argued that both women and men should be held accountable for the decisions that they made; and that ultimately it was not the place of soldiers (men or women) to become pregnant or cause pregnancy – even if the couples were married.³⁰ His policy would have made it possible for both men and women to be issued a Court Martial for violating his rules. Essentially, Cucolo criminalized pregnancy. The general reaction of the media was shock: most people thought that Cucolo's measures were extreme. After the controversy was stirred up the military was

²⁸ Eltahawy, Mona. "Iraq's Elections II: Will Women be the Biggest Losers?", *The New York Times*, January 29, 2005, Opinion Section.

²⁹ MaFarquhar, Neil. "United Nations: Sentence for Malawi Gay Couple Condemned," *The New York Times*, May 24, 2010, World Section.

³⁰ Ryan, Missy, "U.S. Military Defends Pregnancy Punishment in Iraq," *Reuters*. December 22, 2009.

careful not to allow Cucolo's policy to extend to the military at large; restrictions like this were not placed on soldiers who became pregnant. However, it is clear that pregnancy complicates the role of soldiers; how can we expose the mother's of our nation, and worse than that, how can we allow potential future generations to stand in the way of harm?

The *New York Times* recently published a series of articles entitled "Women at Arms". This series chronicled the problems that women faced when enlisting in the military, as veterans, and in combat situations. In this series various writers covered topics such as violence against women (often sexual) and the difficulties of fitting into traditionally all-male units and professions. One of the pieces entitled "Wartime Soldier, Conflicted Mom" featuring various military mother's who had children before they were deployed. Lizette Alvarez who authored the article saw motherhood as one of the issues posed one of the greatest obstacles to women serving in the military. She explains, "More than 100,000 female soldiers who have served in the wars are mothers, nearly half the number of women who have been deployed. The vast majority are primary caregivers, and a third are single mothers. Like men, they turn to the military for all sorts of reasons. The pay is good, particularly in a war zone, the benefits are excellent and the jobs offer financial security and career advancement — all of which is good for their children."³¹ Single parent households proliferate in the military; there are also a substantial amount of single parent father's serving in the military as well. Although there is no shortage of parents serving abroad, it is apparent that the majority come from non-normative family structures, family units that do not exist within the confines of the heterosexual mother/father equation. In the article Alvarez points out that the military struggles to support these type of family structures; often times when single parents deploy the children are left with grandparents and other extended family members. It is clear that members of the military (both men and women) are reproductive

³¹ Alvarez, Lizette, "Wartime Soldier, Conflicted Mom," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2009, U.S. Section.

citizens; however I want to argue that they do not possess the *right* reproductive qualities to be considered subjects of life. Coming from low economic classes without higher education, and (in the case of women) made up of a majority of non-white populations, soldiers are unable to fall within the queer liberal subject of life category.

The other side to reproductive rights and health is access to birth control and abortion. In their press release the Westboro Baptist Church disdainfully proclaims abortion as one of the (in their mind sinful) American values that soldiers defend. However, access to safe and legal abortions for women serving abroad in Afghanistan and Iraq is not necessarily guaranteed. In fact, the topic of sex and sexuality is something that has a controversial history in the U.S. military. As recently as 2008 having sex in a war zone was considered a punishable offense; a policy that automatically criminalizes abortion and the women who seek it. Additionally sexual assault is a huge issue in the military, a problem that they have repeatedly been criticized for not adequately addressing through policy change or training methods. Earlier this year, in March of 2010, the Obama administration passed a new health care bill, one that the president claimed would revolutionize health care in the United States. In order to get the votes needed to pass the bill, huge restrictions were put in place on how abortions would fit into this new health care system. The Hyde amendment, which was passed in 1976, was extended to the new bill. This amendment barred the usage of certain federal funds for abortions, a move that disproportionately affects low-income women by barring abortion coverage through federal health insurance programs like Medicaid. More than this, federal government employees who require the procedure are forced to pay for abortions entirely out of their own pockets. Taking it one step further, the language within the amendment actually did not allow for women serving in the military to have any access to abortion. On the Center for Reproductive Rights website they attempt to outline the significant repercussions of the Hyde amendment, “Many other women who rely on the

federal government for health coverage—including women in federal prisons, federal employees, and Native American women—have also been deprived of their right to abortion. Washington, DC is prohibited by federal law from using even its own funds to cover abortion services for poor women. And women serving in the military can't get abortions on their bases even with their own money.”³² In effect, the women fighting wars abroad do not benefit from the same rights that they attempt to defend; although this amendment is one step short of criminalizing abortion, it seriously hinders women's reproductive choices, making abortions almost completely impossible. Although as WBC points out they are fighting for the right to “murder” babies, and a significant tenant of the initial invasion of Iraq was to spread “women's liberation” (something that critical feminist and anti-racist scholars have criticized Bush for), these women are not privy to the reproductive freedoms that engender a democratic society. In the face of a military industrial complex that normalizes and even promotes sexual violence, this lack of choice can have deadly results. Like low-income women, women living on reservations and women serving time in prison, the women of the military constitute a class of people who are not allowed the same protection as other civilians. This class of people is produced through mechanisms of state racism, sexism, and classism. This class of people is queered as a population who is not worth protecting, a population that is ultimately ungrievable. The queered warrior caste of the military is ultimately marked for death in the era of biopolitical warfare.

³² Center For Reproductive Rights, “Take Action Against the Hyde Amendment, <http://reproductiverights.org/en/feature/take-action-against-the-hyde-amendment>

Ambivalent Defenders of Christian Moral Authority

“And we must make it clear to every man, woman and child around the world who lives under the dark cloud of tyranny that America will speak out on behalf of their human rights, and tend to the light of freedom and justice and opportunity and respect for the dignity of all peoples. That is who we are. That is the source, the moral source, of America’s authority.”
-President Barack Obama, during an address to the nation announcing the addition of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan.³³ (Emphasis my own).

"God is punishing this nation with a grievous, smiting blow, killing our children, sending them home dead, to help you connect the dots. This is a nation that has forgotten God and leads a filthy manner of life."
-Shirley Roper-Phelps, spokeswoman for the Westboro Baptist Church.³⁴

During his now historic run for presidency of the United States Barack Obama continually redefined his version “American” identity during speeches and campaign rallies, evoking a diverse group of individuals across lines of race, class and sexuality. These individuals all represented the same “America” and all shared Obama’s “tenacity of hope”.³⁵ Through his rhetoric, through his politics, and perhaps least significantly (but not to be ignored) through his own identification, Obama is successfully queering the national imaginary in a way that many have never before thought possible. And yet. As many scholars, including Judith Butler and Jasbir K. Puar, have shown, the accepted queering of certain American populations happens in concert with imperial, racist, and homophobic processes that target other queer populations for invisibility, or worse for death³⁶. I would like to argue that this targeting is not only happening for those living in what Giorgio Agamben terms a *state of exception*, but for American citizens as well. There is a high level of moral anxiety within the borders of the U.S. and an effort is being made to construct queer bodies

³³ Obama, Barack, “Obama’s Address on the New Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The New York Times*, 10/12/2009, Middle East Section.

³⁴ Alvarez, Lizette. “Outrage at Funeral Protests Pushes Lawmakers to Act,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2006, U.S. Section.

³⁵ One of Obama’s prominent campaign slogans.

³⁶ Both Butler in *Precarious Life* and Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* write about the implications of which populations are targeted for life or for death within the biopolitical state.

that disrupt American *moral*, heterosexist and racist norms into invisible subjects, culturally and times legally as well.

On December 2nd, 2009, the same President who called for change and hope addressed the United States, and the rest of the world, as he announced the addition of 30,000 troops into the escalating war in Afghanistan. Obama evoked 9/11, he spoke about al Qaeda members who infiltrated our borders, and he described al Qaeda as a cancerous growth that would inevitably spread throughout Afghanistan, if not eventually to American if not eradicated.³⁷ Through his language and his references, it is clear that his anxieties were not about the Afghani people, the Iraqi people, or perhaps even the American people as such (the soldiers he was deploying out into the world). Rather, his concern seemed to be the permeation of American borders, the occupation of American land – the destabilization of who is allowed to be in the U.S., and what they are allowed to be doing. Furthermore, he pointed out that it is America that is fit to lift the world's people from the “dark cloud of tyranny” because of our *innate morality*, “That is who we are. That is the source, *the moral source*, of America's authority.” (My emphasis.) Our morality is what separates *us* (the light, modern, moral people of the world) from *them* (the dark, backwards races of the earth who are in dire need of a moral compass). But who are the gatekeepers of this morality?

Gayle Rubin explores moral panic in her 1984 essay, “Thinking Sex”. She explores America's troubled relationship with sexual “deviants” and the moral uprisings that target them socially and legally. What makes some sex inherently good and others inherently bad? And why is this good/bad dichotomy then transposed onto the person performing the sexual act? Is our sexuality something inherent and unchanging? Rubin would argue otherwise, however it does not seem to have changed the views that many people hold about sexuality – the person attached to certain acts is forever implicated. One interesting point that Rubin

³⁷ Obama, Barack, “Obama's Address on the New Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” *The New York Times*, 10/12/2009, Middle East Section.

makes, one that is especially salient today, is the connection between foreign threats and the proliferation of violence and persecution against sexual “deviants” at home. Rubin points out that sex outside of the family and communism were intrinsically tied in the national imaginary. She even explains,

“New Right and neo-conservative ideology has updated these themes, and leans heavily on linking ‘immoral’ sexual behavior to putative declines in American power. In 1977, Norman Podhoretz wrote an essay blaming homosexuals for the alleged inability of the United States to stand up to the Russians. He thus neatly linked ‘the anti-gay fight in the domestic arena and the anti-communist battles in foreign policy.’”³⁸

The inability for Americans to control their own sexuality directly translated to failure in the arena of foreign policy, thus there was a need to enforce restrictions on who could engage in sexual acts with whom, where they could do it and who could know about it. The United States military currently upholds “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, a policy instated by President Bill Clinton premised on the idea that as long as you don’t come out, you are free to serve in the military. As Rosemary Hennessy explains, “In this context, Bill Clinton’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on gays in the military was only one very prominent articulation of a new backhanded change in the public face of gay tolerance and its link to national identity and state control.”³⁹ But once you “tell”, which several prominent (and valuable) translators have done in recent months, you have no choice but to be discharged. The United States clearly wants a physically and sexually impermeable military, one that does not allow for the sexual fluidity that Rubin is calling for.

Despite Rubin’s resonance with the political and social situation today, our relationship with sexuality and progress has become quite complicated. Obama called for America’s morality to save those “under the dark cloud of tyranny”. But what makes us morally elevated from the rest of the world? As Jasbir K. Puar details in *Terrorist*

³⁸ Abelow, H.; Barale, M. A.; Halperin, D. M.(eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Rubin, Gayle, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 273.

³⁹ Hennessy, Rosemary, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

Assemblages, the notion of progress is one of the things that makes the U.S. morally superior. This means invading Iraq under the banner of women's liberation, or targeting the Iranian justice system for being homophobic⁴⁰, while supposedly American's at home are the picture of acceptance. What Puar makes clear is the imperialist and racist processes that are used to mark certain populations as backward, to queer them in an unacceptable way, while simultaneously engaging in homophobic legislation and behavior within the borders of the U.S., and through foreign policy abroad. In this formulation, Whiteness becomes the queer norm, and (backwards) straightness becomes the racial norm⁴¹. Queer subjecthood is only made available to the white American bodies that fight for reproductive rights or that produce literature in the academy, while racialized populations are constructed as heterosexist in a backwards way. It is important to note here that racialization happens in tandem with class and gender; I would argue that the Westboro Baptist Church which figures significantly into my thesis is a racialized type of whiteness; low-class, backwards, and ultimately, uneducated. This would explain their backward views. But, more than this, certain racialized populations that are not allowed a queer liberal subjecthood are simultaneously queered (sexually backward, low-class, uneducated, racialized, non-reproductive (or at times *too* reproductive)). Hence there is a confusing double-move; one that renders these racialized bodies as simultaneously backwardly straight, but queered in ways that ultimate strip them of their subjecthood. We begin to see that processes of sexualizing and racializing cannot happen without informing each other, and that within the context of invasion the joint racialization and sexualization of certain populations is necessary in order to render them killable, this is something that Puar stresses throughout when she outlines the queering of the racialized terrorist. However, what about those populations within the U.S. that must simultaneously protect the U.S.'s moral authority, and their presence as a progressive nation touting its

⁴⁰ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, x.

⁴¹ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xxiv.

history of civil rights? What about the warrior caste, which is disproportionately composed of men and women of color and men and women who come from low income neighborhoods - how do they fall within this hierarchy of progress? These same men and women who are put in the impossible position of protecting “American values” are some of the people who benefit from these values the least; through policies like DADT and the construction of the military as incapable of individual subjecthood, these men and women are not a part of the narrative of progress that they risk their lives to protect, and they are not allowed the academic subjecthood to critique this position. When pointing out that DADT actively closets populations in a racialized way, Puar notes, “This proviso is implicitly racially inflected, demarcating the least welcome entrants into this national revelation of pride to be queer people of color.”⁴² DADT effectively closets men and women of color disproportionately. This race-based critique can easily extend to a class-based critique; the division between queer subjects of life and queered populations marked for death is informed by mechanisms of regulation that produce classed populations, racialized populations, and gendered populations.

So, there is a move, one that marks certain “darker nations” as morally backwards for their intolerance, as I have outlined through Obama’s rhetoric and Puar’s analysis of a changing register of life that delineates between queer subjects who are now within the scope of life, and queer populations. But this move has an underside within the context of the U.S.; one that incorporates certain queer bodies into the moral fabric of what constitutes the American social body and one that marks certain Americans who must defend this moral superiority as targeted for death. A number of queer populations are being swept into the reproductive cycle of the American family, that which centers itself around marriage and alternative reproductive technologies and marriage, what happens to those “figures of death”,

⁴² Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*. 2.

both literal and figurative? There is no doubt that even though queer populations in the U.S. who are either afforded or are fighting for homonormative rights still face legal and cultural discrimination on a daily basis, however it is clear that there is a strategic move within the media and political discourse to incorporate these visible queer bodies into the larger moral narrative that holds America, and our families together. This narrative is part of the construction of queerness as regulatory. Within the framework of a biopolitical war waged on behalf of the liberal subjects of life we have a two-sided move; military men and women are fighting for the progressive rights of neo-liberal America *and* they are stripped of their individual subjecthood as a requisite for rendering them marked for death. They cannot be the liberal subject that they defend; their lives are far too important to risk. Instead queerness as a regulatory mechanism produces two types of queer bodies; the queer liberal subject of life and the queered populations targeted for death.

Returning back to Obama, and his vision for the United States, I think we can see where the vision of an American identity is moving, which directly ties to which bodies make for grievable bodies,

“If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer...

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled. Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states.

We are, and always will be, the United States of America.”⁴³

These words were spoken by Barack Obama after winning the 2008 presidential election. He describes a culturally diverse America, one that includes disabled and able bodied, one that includes rich and poor, gay and straight. Obama's speech reeks of the multiculturalist rhetoric that celebrates certain differences, while actively marking other

⁴³ A speech given by President Barack Obama after winning the 2008 presidential election. “Transcript: ‘This is Your Victory’ Says Obama”, *CNN Online*, December, November 4th, 2008
<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/04/obama.transcript/>

differences as unacceptable. Certain differences are allowed within the construction of an *us*. More important than what we are individually is what we stand for together, “*We are, and always will be, the United States of America*”. But who is the *we* that he so emphatically refers to? Clearly it is not the men and women who are fighting abroad. Obama reserves a different type of speech for them; one that valorizes them as fighters, commemorates them as warriors. Because what Obama doesn’t say is that being American, being one of an *us* worth defending requires a population of people to defend *us*; to fight for *us*; and to ultimately die for *us*. As he has demonstrated through his speeches detailing his plans for Afghanistan, when there is an *us* there must always be a *them*, and despite increased visibility for some queer populations, there must always be plenty of *them* (even within our own borders) who are queered in a way that makes the *us* worth saving.

Sites of (Un)grieving; Unseeable Coffins, Ungrievable Graves

"When you have someone who has given the ultimate sacrifice for their country, with a community and the family grieving, I just don't feel it's the appropriate time to be protesting." State Representative Curtis Johnson, in support of a bill criminalizing protests at funerals.⁴⁴

"There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein [Germany] airbase or Dover [Del.] base, to include interim stops."

A statement issued by the U.S. Department of Defense in March of 2003 at the beginning of the invasion of Iraq.⁴⁵

"Open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential. It is, after all, one of the reasons Plato wanted to ban the poets from the Republic. He thought that if the citizens went too often to watch tragedy, they would weep over the losses they saw, and that such an open and public mourning, in disrupting the order and hierarchy of the soul, would disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority as well."
-Judith Butler, *Frames of War*⁴⁶

In April of 2004 the pentagon temporarily released photographs of the bodies of soldiers arriving from Iraq into Dover base in Delaware. 361 images that were taken by Defense Department photographers were released to news outlets.⁴⁷ The decision to grant media access by the Pentagon to news outlets was declared a mistake within 24 hours of their release, and the ban on the release of photographs of the coffins of dead soldiers that had been in place since the first Gulf War was reinstated. Scot McClellan justified the reinstatement of the ban by explaining, "The president believes that we should always honor and show respect for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice defending our freedoms," speaking on behalf of George W. Bush.⁴⁸ In the view of the current administration, not

⁴⁴ Alvarez, Lizette. "Outrage at Funeral Protests Pushes Lawmakers to Act," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2006, U.S. Section.

⁴⁵ Milbank, Dana, "Curtains Ordered for Media Coverage of Returning Coffins," *Information Clearing House*, October 21, 2003, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6078.htm>.

⁴⁶ Butler, Judith, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010), 39.

⁴⁷ Carter, Bill, "Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops is Broken," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2004, National Section.

⁴⁸ Carter, Bill, "Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops is Broken," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2004, National Section.

showing the photographs of dead soldiers was ultimately for the protection of their families. In February of 2009, under the new Obama administration, after 18 years of instatement, the ban that had been temporarily lifted in April of 2004 was officially reversed. The news media now has permission from the pentagon to photograph the bodies of dead soldiers arriving into Dover.⁴⁹ However, despite the administration's reversal of the policy there are still limitations on how we publicly mourn fallen soldiers. The number of photographers allowed is restricted and they still need to acquire permission from the Pentagon in order to photograph the coffins. Most importantly, and most similarly to the Bush administration's rhetoric on the subject, permission from the family of fallen soldiers is required in order to publish photographs.

It is clear that *who* we choose to mourn and *how* we choose to mourn has political repercussions. Within the framework of a nation at war, these decisions are especially important. We choose which lives matter and which bodies count. Within the framework of a necropolitics, where death is as necessary to the functioning of the state as life itself, the bodies of the men and women serving in the military simply *cannot* matter. The ability to handle their loss is informed by the mechanisms of racism, classism and sexism that have become institutionalized within the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. Judith Butler, while trying to understand the violence following 9/11 grappled with this, "The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life*?"⁵⁰ In the above quote, Republican state representative Curtis Johnson argues against the Westboro Baptist Church group's protests at the funerals of men and women who died in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was in favor of the criminalization of protests at funerals. For him, like many other politicians in the U.S., having a ban on media access to the photographs of dead soldiers did not violate the

⁴⁹ Bumiller, Elisabeth, "U.S. Lifts Photo Ban on Military Coffins," *The New York Times*. December 7, 2009, National Section.

⁵⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20.

community and the family's process of grieving, but protesting outside of the only site of mourning that was legally available did.

Within what Judith Butler recognizes as a “frame of war” grief serves a particularly poignant role in determining the precariousness of life, in determining which life is recognized as grievable, “So, one way of posing the question of who “we” are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not.”⁵¹ Although in her study she suggests that an ungrievable life is one that never really lived, it is clear that in the case of military men and women there is a transformation that they must undergo in order to become soldiers; in order to be killed but not completely sacrificed. Giorgio Agamben recognized this liminal space as being occupied by homo sacer; “An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed).”⁵² Within his conception homo sacer constituted bare life; life that is both excluded from the polis (what Judith Butler would consider grievable life) and *within* it. Hence, if we consider both Agamben and Butler side by side, it becomes apparent that each of us is capable of occupying that space of ungrievability. When Judith Butler writes about ungrievable life during the public mourning of 9/11 she sites “non-U.S. nationals” and “illegal immigrants” as missing from that process.⁵³ But what about U.S. nationals who are constructed as ungrievable? How do we account for the restrictions on public grieving that occur within these frames of war, and how is the family figured as a part of these restrictions?

Jenny Edkins also writes about the political significance of mourning. Although she does not explicitly speak about soldiers, she sets her sight on one of the largest components

⁵¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 38.

⁵² Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12.

⁵³ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 38.

of the war on terror: grieving the victims of September 11th. She describes the use of missing persons fliers after September 11th. Years after the collapse of the World Trade Towers the fliers featuring photographs and physical descriptions remained on display for the public. Unlike other forms of mourning, these fliers insisted on the physicality of the people in question. Edkins argues that due to the lack of bodies, due to the status of *missing*; she argues that this category troubles the distinction between dead and alive. How can people, especially within the context of New York City, just go *missing*? More than that, these fliers served as a reminder of the trauma experienced on that day. Although Edkins explains that there was an attempt to resolve the question of missing persons, to change their status from missing to dead, the continued public display of these fliers served as a “collective scream”, a refusal to remember the event in a certain way.⁵⁴ She writes, “The state can only survive with its legitimacy in tact if the trauma of violence is concealed. The persistence of the missing posters on the streets of New York was testimony to the trauma, to the ineffectiveness of the state in safeguarding those it claimed to protect, and to the lies of heroism and sacrifice. These were ordinary people who went to work and were overtaken by disaster, not heroes who sacrificed their lives for America. Just look at the pictures.”⁵⁵ This public mourning reveals the fissures in memory and grief. Although Edkins see a delineation between the office workers killed in the World Trade Center and the “heroes who sacrificed their lives for America,” I see instead, a parallel. Imagine the significance of a collective mourning of the soldiers whose bodies are flown home in coffins, killed by anything from explosions, to gun shot wounds, to heart attacks. How would this mourning, this testimony to the trauma enacted abroad affect the way war is thought of within the context of the United States? How would unrestricted grieving expose Americans to the banality of wartime violence? I am not arguing that there is a truth to be exposed or discovered, however I do see grief and mourning as

⁵⁴ Dauphinee, Elizabeth and Cristina Masters, Eds. *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 36.

playing a potentially significant role in the delegitimization of state violence. I see the construction of soldiers as ungrievable as a necessary step in engaging in a war abroad. Imagine the repercussions of sending grievable bodies abroad to fight and die; how would that put the notion of war into question?

At the beginning of this chapter I quote Judith Butler as connecting public grief and outrage. She points to the political potential that public mourning would stimulate in terms of collective outrage; something that queer theorists have recognized since the grief experienced during the genocidal AIDS outbreak. In his groundbreaking essay on AIDS and its social and political significance, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”, Leo Bersani suggests that this public rage is the “only necessary response,” to the AIDS crisis and the inadequate and homophobic response of the government and society writ large.⁵⁶ Rage is something that was promoted by Queer Nation and by the Black Panthers; it was a political tool that defied the legacy of peaceful protesting made famous during the Civil Rights era. The politics of rage was a new way of organizing through and around emotions. In fact, there are similarities between the way that AIDS victims were mourned during the early years of the outbreak, and the way that soldiers are mourned in the current political climate of the U.S. Bersani recognized the death that gay men symbolized in the U.S.; both literally and figuratively. In “Is the Rectum a Grave?” he writes about how AIDS effectively biologically actualized the death that the rectum, that gay men, and that certain types of non-reproductive sex symbolized for the nation. Although perhaps not immediately recognizable, the soldier, a state agent of death, one who enters the world of war to commit unthinkable acts, one who must be made ungrievable in order for the nation to cope with the effects of war; this figure is in some senses non-reproductive as well. Although both the AIDS victim (or perpetrator) and the U.S. soldier abroad come from fully functioning American family units, the families that

⁵⁶ Bersani, Leo. “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October*, Vol. 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, Winter, 1987, 201.

unknowingly reproduce these figures must ultimately be protected from them. In both the Bush administration, and in the Obama administration, the restrictions and policies on grieving dead soldiers is always for the good of their families. Much like the discourse surrounding the deaths of victims of AIDS, to publicly mourn them, to proclaim their death as one that is caused by the “gay disease” would be to out them, and by extension, to out the American family. If we allowed these soldiers to be grieved without restrictions, we would not only be allowing for a space of public outrage, but we would reveal the bare life present in *any* American family. It would be an affirmation that yes, any son can die of AIDS, and by extension, be gay. An affirmation that yes, any daughter can become a soldier, and by extension, be killed abroad. Managing grief and how it is related to the American family, is a key component to the biopolitical state; because managing the discourses surrounding death shield us from the underside of our obsession with reproduction and life.

In September of 2009 a photograph of Lance Cpl. Joshua M. Bernard was released by the Associated Press. The photograph, taken by Julie Jacobson was taken after Bernard was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade; a wound that proved to be fatal as he died later that day during surgery in an attempt to save his life. Alongside this photograph, the AP released several other photographs that were taken before the grenade hit, depicting seemingly mundane scenes of life in Afghanistan. The photographs taken prior most likely would have caused no uproar; photographs of dead soldiers taken before their deaths is nothing spectacular within a context where your life can be taken at any moment. But coupled with a photograph taken during that liminal stage between life and death, a photograph that literally shows the precariousness of life at war, these seemingly innocuous photographs take on a sinister meaning. As Santiago Lyon, the director of photography at the AP pointed out he was aware of the repercussions of publishing the photograph, “And that becomes very personal and very direct in some way, because we have a name, we have a home town, we have a

shared nationality and we have, to a certain extent, a shared culture and some common values.”⁵⁷ Although this may be to some extent true, the home towns, nationality, and shared culture of soldiers is shared in most obituaries of fallen soldiers. What is not shared quite as often is the liminal stages of death, we see Bernard earlier the day before, earlier in the day of the grenade blast, and directly after. Most people who see any of the photographs know Bernard’s fate; it evokes the feeling of looking at the pictures of victims of the Holocaust, images that conjure similar feelings of impending death. But this impending death is one that the viewer is not completely innocent in; most Americans are complicit in or even benefiting from the lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although within the minds of the AP some sort of a truth is being shared, in my understanding truth is irrelevant. In looking at these photographs, much the same in imagining the dead sons and daughters who fall victim to AIDS and the War Against Terror, we begin to see the presence of bare life within everyone; the potential for anyone to be killed but not sacrificed. It is through processes of grieving that we determine those who are grievable and those who are not; those who are qualified life and those who are bare life; those who are queer subject of life and those who are queer populations marked for death.

⁵⁷ Dunlap, David W. “Behind the Scenes: To Publish or Not?” *The New York Times*, Lens Blog, September 4, 2009, <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/behind-13/>

Conclusion: Gagaism and Queer Transport

“The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”

-José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*⁵⁸

“Call all you want, but there’s no one home/ And you’re not gonna reach my telephone/
‘Cause I’m out in the club and I’m sippin’ that bubb/ And you’re not gonna reach my
telephone.”

-Lady Gaga, “Telephone”⁵⁹

In my thesis I attempted to outline some contradictions that we face within the current biopolitical frame of war. I engaged in a critique of queer theory as an institution and the current discourse of LGBTIQ rights and how they work in collusion with racist, xenophobic and sexist structures to produce two types of queer citizens; queer liberal subjects of life and queer populations marked for death. I argued that within this context soldiers serving in the U.S. military are *necessarily* queered as a population marked for death. I also attempted to use queerness in a way that seriously engages with anti-racist critical theory and feminist critical theory; it was my intention that my usage of queerness (both my critique and my engagement in the theory) would posit race, gender, and nationality as central to sexuality and reproduction.

As I finish my thesis the debates regarding the legislation of DADT and the role of men and women serving in the military are in flux. On May 27, 2010 the U.S. House of Representatives voted to allow the repeal of DADT, leaving the final step in the hands of military commanders to fully dismantle the ban.⁶⁰ Additionally, on the same day, the U.S. Senate voted against the ban of privately funded abortions at military hospitals and medical

⁵⁸ Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia; the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

⁵⁹ Germanotta, Stefani. “Telephone,” *Fame Monster* (New York: Interscope, 2009).

⁶⁰ Herszenhorn, David M. and Carl Hulse, “House Votes to Allow “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Repeal,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2010, National Section.

facilities effectively granting women serving abroad access to abortions, but not funding.⁶¹ In April of this year the Navy announced its intentions to allow women to serve on submarine crews, something that was previously not allowed.⁶² As a nation at war in the midst of a financial crisis, and now facing one of the most devastating environmental disasters in known history, it is necessary to open up the ranks of soldierhood to people who were previously unable to serve. As time passes who is queered as a population, and which mechanisms are used in order to render these bodies ungrievable will no doubt change. As we have seen, the LGBTIQ population in the U.S. that was vehemently targeted for death decades ago now embodies one of the most vigorous pushes for life in contemporary politics. Equally so, formations of race and class are in constant flux; as we can see with the example of the Westboro Baptist Church, certain types of whiteness are transmuted through class and educational background and are effectively racialized. But however these structures may change and transform, which they will most certainly do, imagining them through a queer lens allows for an understanding of race, class, gender, sexuality and reproductivity that makes isolation of one structure from another impossible. Although this type of critique makes easy solutions unfeasible, and most definitely complicates issues, I see it as a necessary part of any type of critical engagement in this world.

Now I want to end my research with some possible ways of envisioning a futurity; one that imagines queerness as *both* regulatory and potentially liberatory. In April of 2010 a video that was created by troops in the 82nd Airborne Division currently located in Southwestern Afghanistan went viral.⁶³ The video featured an all male cast paying homage to one of the most visibly queer pop-stars of our current generation; Lady Gaga. They reenacted

⁶¹ Laveille, Vania, "The Senate Acts to Ensure that Service Women Can Use Private Funds to Access Abortion Care," Feministing.com, May 28, 2010, <http://community.feministing.com/2010/05/the-senate-acts-to-ensure-that.html>

⁶² Lorber, Janie, "Quiet Resistance to Women on Subs," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2010, National Section.

⁶³ "Afghanistan Goes Gaga," *The Smoking Gun*, April 30, 2010
<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/years/2010/0430101afghan1.html>

the music video “Telephone” complete with lip-synching, complicated dance moves, and prop replicas. I am not only interested in unpacking their performance and embodiment of Lady Gaga and Beyoncé and the sexual/gender enigma that they have become. Additionally the choice of “Telephone” as a song both lyrically and in terms of the music video they attempt to replicate conveys a specific message of transcendence that fits into what José Esteban Muñoz has termed as *queer futurity*. For Muñoz queer futurity is deeply tied to Ernst Bloch’s notion of utopia. In Muñoz’s work hope and potentiality figure into a critical vision for futurity; a utopia. He locates himself between the “hamstrung pragmatic gay agenda” and the anti-futurism of much of queer theories most prominent scholars.⁶⁴ He moves beyond antirelationality and antiutopianism and sees critical utopianism as *central* to queerness. He explains, “Queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon. My argument is therefore interested in critiquing the ontological certitude that I understand to be partnered with the politics of presentist and pragmatic contemporary gay identity.”⁶⁵ For Muñoz, utopianism (and more generally futurity) allows for a critical engagement in the present. He argues that this is central to queerness and central to anti-assimilationist politics. He makes the connection between antiutopianism in the academy, and the pragmatic LGBTIQ rhetoric that pervades political discourse. Like Puar, his engagement with queer theory is dependent on other structures of power and identity; racism figures as pivotal to his arguments. Although perhaps his insistence on analyzing queerness (mostly) through men’s experiences leads one to question his commitment to queerness as a space for women *and* men, his critique is useful when imagining the queer space and time that is created by the soldiers in the 82nd Airborne Division.

⁶⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 10.

⁶⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.

No matter how fantastic the dance moves, nor how elaborate the costumes in the video created by the 82nd Airborne, it never escapes the viewers mind that these men are *soldiers*, and their performance of Gaga's "Telephone" serves to complicate our notion of what that entails. They are *both* soldiers and Gaga, and more than this their performance in no way detracts from their status as non-civilians. In fact some of the most complicated dance moves that they perform are done so while garbed in the most visible marker of the soldier; their uniform. They are in their uniform when they dance emphatically to Gaga singing, "Stop callin', stop callin', I don' want to think anymore/ I left my head and my heart on the dance floor."⁶⁶ They are both spatially located in a war zone and on Gaga's fantastical dance floor; a place that Muñoz recognizes as belonging to queer space and time.

The original video opens with Lady Gaga violently taken to a cell by two butch security guards while fellow (female) inmates yell sexual epithets her way. After being thrown into a cell, stripped almost completely naked, and chained down, one of the guards says haughtily "I told you she didn't have a dick," in reference to speculation on Gaga's gender. Gaga's excessive sexual performances and her surreal choice in fashion and hairstyles leads to the type of media speculation that surrounded Grace Jones during her heyday. However being a miniature blonde white woman, Gaga is safe from any sort of racially inflected remarks about her gender or sexual performance. With references to lesbian S&M culture and artistic surrealism; Lady Gaga walks out of her cell draped in chains with smoking cigarettes serving as sunglasses. She walks through a crowd of fellow inmates, mostly made up of women of color who are no where near as fantastically outfitted as Gaga herself. She proceeds to make out with a white butch woman clad in leather while being fondled by a black woman with bleached hair; both are fellow inmates. This is all before the music starts. It is significant that these military men chose to mimic and emulate an artist like

⁶⁶ "Telephone". <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocrAwBRYNcc&feature=related>.

Lady Gaga, and a song like “Telephone”. Lady Gaga has been transformed into an icon in the gay male club scene; her performance of femininity is more like drag than any Ru Paul performance could ever achieve. She began her career on the queer burlesque scene in New York City where she first acquired the stage name Lady Gaga. This is part of the reason that the troops’ performance interests me; they are performing a certain type of hyper-femininity (one could speculate a purposefully failed femininity on the part of Gaga). Thus, they are not simply mimicking gender norms; rather their embodiment of Gaga through her dance and her voice allows for a much more complicated critique of gender and the specific type of (heterosexual) masculinity that is expected of them as soldiers.

The opening of the soldier’s video features two of the men, lip-synching Gaga’s words intended for the person on the other end of the line. Is it her lover? Her friend? Her husband? Her lyrics allow this space to remain open for interpretation; however one is led to believe that the caller is a person that is romantically tied to Gaga - someone she clearly has not interest in speaking to. They emulate the homoeroticism that Gaga evokes in her own video; on the other end of the line in her video is Beyoncé, her partner in crime and Gaga’s love interest. It is during Beyoncé’s part of the song that they introduce the first (and only) visibly non-white soldier in the video; a black man dressed in loose fitting camouflage clothes who mouths Beyoncé’s words. Surrounding him are six other soldiers outfitted in the type of extravagant surrealist outfits that suggest the exaggerated clothing of certain S&M subcultures. Aaron Melcher, who thought up the concept for the video, is most visibly outfitted in yellow tape, a clear reference to a scene from the video where Gaga is covered in yellow crime scene tape while she is trapped in her cell.⁶⁷ In many of Gaga’s videos she controversially evokes violent images and concepts surrounding women in the media. In other videos she graphically portrays women who have been violently murdered and she

⁶⁷ “Afghanistan Goes Gaga,” *The Smoking Gun*, April 30, 2010
<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/years/2010/0430101afghan1.html>

herself is thrown from a balcony at the hands of a man. When transported to the realm of the military, Melcher's usurpation of this critique of violence against women resonates loudly in a space where gendered violence is institutionalized to the point of normalcy.

But it is more than just the soldier's performance of Gaga and Beyoncé's video; it is the choice of the song that evokes this concept of queer futurity most strongly. In the song Gaga fails at communicating over the phone, she exclaims, "Not that I don't like you, I'm just at a party/ And I'm sick and tired of my phone r-ringing". Within the context of serving in the military abroad the telephone can serve as the soldier's connection to their previous world as a civilian. As the soldier's in the video ardently mouth Gaga's lyrics that insist that her lover/friend/husband should stop trying to call, they resist the pressure to return to the straight time⁶⁸ of their families and lovers at home. Existing outside of the linear, pragmatic, and presentist time of straight time, Gaga exists for a moment on the periphery; in ecstatic time. As Muñoz describes it ecstatic time is much more than the pleasures of the present moment, "Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future. Opening oneself up to such a perception of queerness as manifestation in and of ecstatic time offers queers much more than the meager offerings of pragmatic gay and lesbian politics."⁶⁹ Existing in ecstatic time is not to uncritically disengage from the perils of the present moment; it is an insistence on ecstasy, and insistence on the possibility that ecstasy can and in fact *does* exist. In the song Gaga is at a club, a space closely associated with notions of ecstasy; however performing the song in war torn Afghanistan complicates this statement. The comparison between Afghanistan and a club may seem grisly or inappropriate, but the club is a space of transcendence, a space that is not easily understood within the heteronormative structures that dictate acceptable ways of

⁶⁸ A term used by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*.

⁶⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32.

performing subjecthood. Afghanistan as envisioned as a club allows for both a rejection of straight time and an insistence on ecstatic time. Through their performance the soldiers are forcing us to recognize that even within a space that is largely symbolic of the violence that the U.S. is enacting abroad that ecstasy can and will exist. Afghanistan, in effect, loses the one-dimensionality of a space of war and death, and instead is re-envisioned as a space of life, and a space of potential ecstasy. Their position within the warrior caste typically disallows any queer or academic reading of the critique that they perform; as soldiers they are not granted the type of liberal queer subjecthood that is awarded to figures like Andy Warhol, participants in Queer Nation, and, at times, to Gaga herself. It should be noted that within this specific context it is Gaga (a white pop star) who is always touted at the liberal feminist queer subject and somehow Beyoncé (a black hip hop singer/rapper) always falls to the academic wayside despite her insistence on critiquing gender norms and heterosexuality as an institution.

In her study of soldiers and the rituals of military masculinity, Carol Burke examines the minute spaces of resistance that figure into the daily lives of soldiers. Existing in a place where their time and space is completely controlled by superiors, and, even more, a place where they are expected to sacrifice their individuality and surrender their well-being into the hands of superiors when they are stationed abroad, every action and inaction in a soldier's life is of utmost importance. Burke reveals many of the fissures and spaces of transgression that exist within this highly regulated space, and how homoeroticism can be complicit in the construction of certain types of patriarchal masculinities. In her reading of hazing activities that initiate recruits into soldiers, she highlights the moments and the spaces where masculinity and homoeroticism become intertwined. These hazing activities, "facilitate the assertion of a collective masculinity and at once celebrate and restrain homoerotic

enthusiasm.”⁷⁰ As she understands, homoeroticism plays a role in the development of military masculinities, a role that complicates the inclusion of women as a part of these structures of manhood. Although it is clear that homoeroticism is a necessary component of many different forms of military masculinity, I would like to argue that the soldier’s performance of Lady Gaga moves beyond the type of homoeroticism that helps to form masculinity. Instead, it moves into a queer homoeroticism that pushes the boundaries of masculinity and femininity and the space that exists in between. Although there are clearly many references to homoeroticism throughout the soldiers video, their performance of two women, one whose femininity and womanhood is put into question, and the other who embodies a black femininity that itself disallows for a queer critique, opens up the space for the viewer to question precisely what these structures of gender and sexuality really mean. The boundaries are blurred when we hear Gaga’s voice and see Beyoncé’s dance moves mimicked by men in uniform. These men performing complicated femininities do not only make the viewer question their identities as soldiers, but the identities and performances of Gaga and Beyoncé, and by extension, ourselves. More than this, Burke explains the subtleties in military transgression. She explains the performances enacted at formal parades and marches; marches that take place on military bases and spaces outside of war zones. These marches help to reveal the performative nature of the military in general; from the uniforms to the choreographed dance-like steps that soldiers must memorize. In formal parades soldiers often time perform breaches of conduct; through deviance in uniforms or marching the wrong way, soldiers enact minute protests that are not evident to the outsider’s eyes.⁷¹ However the spaces of transgression are always outside of the battlefield. What makes the video from the 82nd Airborne so powerful is their insistence on defiantly transgressing *within* the battlefield. This not only forces the viewer to question role of soldiers, but the space of war. Afghanistan

⁷⁰ Burke, *Camp All-American*, 68.

⁷¹ Burke, *Camp All-American*, 42.

becomes a complicated real space that is filled with desires and pleasures as much as it is violence and atrocities of war.

The soldier's insistence on queering a space that is so closely tied to the heart of the nation is something that recalls past actions of Queer Nation. Queer Nation worked to demand attention, exposing the inert heterosexuality of public spaces that supposedly exist outside of "sexuality". QN subverted the imaginary nation, using the erotic in a political and powerful way. The use of American corporate logos, the use of national public space, and the name itself, *Queer Nation*, indicates that this movement does not want to move away from the connection to the nation. As Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman explain,

"However, it must be emphasized that disidentification with U.S. nationality is not, at this moment, even a theoretical option for Queer citizens: as long as PWAs (Persons with AIDS) require state support, as long as the official nation invests its identity in the pseudoright to police nonnormative sexual representations and sexual practices, the lesbian, gay, feminist, and queer communities in the United States do not have the privilege to disregard national identity."⁷²

This lack of privilege extends beyond PWA and includes many of the men and women serving in the military, people who belong to low-income households, and people of color who live in daily fear of the racist and xenophobic police forces that daily threaten their well being. It is clear that there are intersecting processes of discrimination at play, but Queer Nation attempted to tackle and dismantle them. Queer Nation effectively created a space for those queer bodies that are legally and culturally rendered invisible and worked to subvert the very mechanisms that attempted to render them invisible. This subversion, and the embrace of queer erotics in such a nationally charged space help to transport the men in this video to a queer time and space. Theirs is a proclamation that extends beyond the "We're here and were queer," that is chanted on streets during pride marches and actions. These men occupy the line that divides the morally superior America from the dark others from around the world; to

⁷² Berlant Lauren and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality", *boundary 2*, Vol. 19, No.1, Spring 1992, 197.

argue that this is a site of queerness is to explode the division that the war on terror necessitates. They are there *and* they are queer. Despite their location as the defenders of a Christian morality, despite their class location, despite their racialization, despite the gender policing they endure; their queerness survives.

It is through Gaga and Beyoncé's voices, through their homoerotic performance, and through their insistence of defying straight time that these soldiers proclaim their subjecthood. This subjecthood directly challenges the queer liberal subject theorized in the academy, or the LGBTIQ subject of life. Yes, they have wives and girlfriends at home. Yes, they are participating in an institution that legally enforces the closet. Yes, they are participating in a war that has been heavily criticized by academics on the Left. But they are also performing a type of queerness that destabilizes the (heteronormative, white) masculinity that is expected of them. These men who are assumed to be straight, conservative, racist, homophobic, and backwards defenders of a Christian morality – these men are performing a deconstructive queering that complicates notions of citizenship, race, gender and sexuality. Perhaps the Westboro Baptist Church had it right all along, perhaps the military *is* filled with fags, dykes, and misfits of every kind and we just haven't paid enough attention to this queer warrior caste that is targeted for death to give them any credit for it.

At the end of the original video Lady Gaga turns to Beyoncé as they drive away from the straight world. She promises her an out from a straight time and place, an escape based on a collective feeling of frustration and displacement. I like to read this promise as a critical statement on the state of identity based politics rampant in the United States; Gaga and Beyoncé are not only escaping heteronormativity, gender roles and racial boundaries, but they are defiantly challenging them through their flirty wordplay, outrageous dance moves and kitschy outfits. The video for "Telephone" is a type of neo-camp, new version of the

camp that queer theorists lauded in the 90's.⁷³ However, this time around the camp aesthetic is embodied by two women who do not fit tidily into the realm of queer subjecthood. In fact one, Beyoncé, is married to a black hip hop mogul and rapper. And yet. Both of these women defy the prototypical queer liberal subject. They demand to be recognized as existing outside of straight time and place. When transported to a war torn Afghanistan, this defiant proclamation of queerness resonates more loudly than ever. These men stationed abroad perform this queer love song, singing emphatically to each other. They embody the neo-camp aesthetics of Gaga and Beyoncé. In doing so they do not only disrupt a straight time and place, but they demand a reordering of what is recognized as queer time and place. This type of queer transport not only challenges the heteronormative structures surrounding the military, but it challenges the identity based LBGTIQ movement that pervades the U.S. and the institutionalized queer academy. As they drive away, Lady Gaga takes Beyoncé's hand in hers and promises her queer transport. She insists on the queer potentiality that is in the horizon they drive toward, a potentiality that does not quite exist. *Yet.*

“We did it Honey B. Now let's go far, far away from here.”
 “You promise we'll never come back?”
 “I promise.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Although Susan Sontag wrote about camp in the 1960's in *Notes on Camp*, Judith Butler most notably wrote about camp in *Gender Trouble*.

⁷⁴ Germanotta, Stefani. “Telephone,” *Fame Monster* (New York: Interscope, 2009).

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