ABU GHRAIB, WAR MEDIA AND THE GRAY ZONES OF IMPERIAL CITIZENSHIP

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Prologue

Excerpt from the press conference at the NATO headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, held by the former U.S. secretary of state, Donald Rumsfeld:

> QUESTION: Regarding terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, you said something to the effect that the real situation is worse than the facts show. I wonder if you could tell us what is worse than is generally understood.
> RUMSFELD: Sure. All of us in this business read intelligence information. And we read it daily and we think about it and it becomes, in our minds, essentially what exists. And that's wrong. It is not what exists.
> I say that because I have had experiences where I have gone back and done a great deal of work and analysis on intelligence information and looked at important countries, target countries, looked at important subject matters with respect to those target countries and asked, probed deeper and deeper and kept probing until I found out what it is we knew, and when we learned it, and when it actually had existed. And I found that, not to my surprise, but I think anytime you look at it that way what you find is that there are very important pieces of intelligence information that countries, that spend a lot of money, and a lot of time with a lot of wonderful people trying to learn more about what's going in the world, did not know some significant event for two years after it happened, for four years after it happened, for six years after it happened, in some cases 11 and 12 and 13 years after it happened.
> **Now what is the message there? The message is that there are no "knowns." There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.** So when we do the best we can and we pull all this information together, and we then say well that's basically what we see as the situation, that is really only the known knowns and the known unknowns. And each year, we discover a few more of those unknown unknowns.
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> —Secretary Rumsfeld press (2002)

The unknown known

The theme of this chapter is inspired by a comment made by philosopher Slavoj Žižek at the Rethinking Marxism 2003 conference plenary session (Žižek 2003; 2004). Adding to Rumsfeld's categories of "known knowns" – that which the U.S. administration knows and admits that they know; the "known unknown" – that which the U.S. administration knows that they do not know; and the "unknown unknown" – that which the U.S. administration does not know that they do not know; Žižek suggested a fourth category. This category, Žižek said, would reveal the ideology of the other three: the category of the "unknown known" – that which the U.S. administration knows but does not admit that they know. This chapter carries forward Žižek's insight to argue that this play between knowing and not knowing is central to imperial citizenship and sovereign power as it is deployed in administration rhetoric. I use the specific instance of media coverage of Abu Ghraib to illustrate how uncomfortable public knowledge is dealt with by evoking a "state of exception" as well as the civilizational superiority of U.S. democracy. Scholarly work on war media and rhetoric since 9/11, I argue, also inadvertently reproduces the nationalist citizen-subject who can potentially correct U.S. democracy from within, even as they are pliant to media messages and war rhetoric. The knowledge the administration produces and the critique of that knowledge still remain within strongly nationalistic boundaries which, consequently, promote the sovereign power of the security state by leaving little room for transnational dialogue or intervention even in the case of torture as international political practice.

The realm of pure truth

I begin by revisiting Rumsfeld's remarks on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, which won a 2003 Foot in the Mouth award from Britain's Plain English Campaign for the most baffling statement made by a public figure (Rummy rant wins 2003). Diverging from Žižek's focus on the known/unknown, the statement can be read for its covert logic of imperial supremacism and racial suspicion. The object of the known/unknown, as Rumsfeld makes clear, are "important countries, target countries". These "target countries" alone can occupy the space of the "unknown" in Rumsfeld's three-term game. In this sense, the known/unknown – what we know and what we do not know, are both about those target countries, while the "we" that knows or knows that it does not know, remains outside the target area. The known knowns, the known unknown, and the unknown unknown are all known by a central sovereign Knower. The Knower who knows what it does not know occupies a position of omniscience,

where the Other is always the target of its knowledge. Within this epistemological frame there is room to question the known and the unknown, but no room to question the Knower who mediates both. Rumsfeld's deployment of the idea of absolute knowledge – or of the all-Knowing Knower – lays the ground for the legitimization of sovereign power. In Foucault's words, "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1972, 93).

Once we reduce the Knower and its target, Known, to the United States and its "target country", Iraq, we can now re-read the statement for its racial logic, where the Other is always suspect, since it is never fully knowable, and it can never claim utter transparency, since it has no space within the Sovereign Knower that can actually know the known and the unknown. The dark, opaque unknown and its constant evasion of the knower's gaze are metaphors that melt into centuries-old epistemological tropes about the Orient as unfathomable mystery. The unknowability in turn creates the desire to master, to know, to render transparent – legitimating the will for power. As Said's (1979) work demonstrates, the Occident's production of knowledge about the Orient is part of the Occident's will to govern the Orient. Still, it is important to note that the latest discourse of sovereignty by virtue of civilizational superiority transcends the older binaries of colonial epistemology of white knower and dark unknown; and this epistemological trope's justification of the relationship between the knower and unknown as a relationship of power and governance. Instead of the colonial production of knowledge allied to the will to power, this new form of imperial sovereignty explicitly uses the absence of knowledge to stage a military occupation. The clue to this vital ideological shift in post 9/11 imperial power lies in the unknown unknown: the things we did not know in the past, may not know now, and may not know later (since we did not know in the past). The rhetorically posited knowledge of the unknown unknown legitimizes military action not on the ground of a present threat, an impending threat, or a past threat, but just from the atemporal, Omniscient position of being able to Know the Other as always-already threatening. As Rumsfeld went on to explain in the press conference, "the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence." Here we double back to the all-knowing Self as ground for the evidence, this time made not on the logocentric assumption of self-presence alone, but the metaphysical claim of omniscience, since the Self not only knows itself but absorbs all other forms of knowledge through its logic of absence. The whole discourse of known/unknown is built on the stated premise that one is always already looking at "important countries, target countries"; in short, one is always already within the realm of already revealed Truth. The "unknown unknown" also rhetorically creates a "state of exception" that perennially justifies sovereign power. The play between "knowing" and "not knowing" as a means

of justifying civilizational supremacy, and thus sovereign power, continues into the discourse around Abu Ghraib, as I will attempt to show.

The citizen's civilizational journey

In this context, critiques of wartime media since 9/11 face the fundamental challenge of rearticulating assumptions about the models of citizenship that undergrid them. Although the concept of citizenship remains marginal to media studies, recent work has done much to dislodge the idea of citizenship as an unchanging political essence and instead foregrounded the semiotic, performative, rhetorical and discursive dimensions of citizenship (Asen 2004, Barnhurst 1998, Miller 1983, Murphy 2003, Zaeske 2002). These studies, however, still retain the nation-state as the imagined boundary of the citizen-subject. In contrast, other media scholars have displaced the set of naturalistic ties that firmly bind citizenship (real or rhetorical) to territoriality, nationality, and sovereignty (Shah 1999, Tapia 2005, Cammaerts and Van Audenhove 2005, Neilson 2002). Such a rethinking is persuaded by the work of scholars such as Balibar (2003), Ong (1999), and Sassen (2003) who have dealt with the question of citizenship in transnational contexts as well as the context of globalization, where nation-states no longer seem to enjoy the political and economic sovereignty that once made boundaries powerful. Yet in war media studies, the citizen-subject evoked is an invariably nationalist subject. Cutting across war media studies paradigms is the silent presence of the free-willed yet economically, culturally, or linguistically drugged first world citizen. The U.S. citizen, who is the subject of these writings, appears to be burdened by pre-existing stereotypes of Arabs/Muslims that are part of collective consciousness (Merskin 2003) or weighed down by the rhetoric of presidential binary discourse that produces moral certitude (Coe et al. 2004) or carried away by the mythical resonance of dominant media editorials (Lule 2002). The citizen-subject is also swayed by religious rhetoric, whether it is that of the community of the covenant (Bostdorff 2003) or of the exorcism(Gunn 2004), neither of which naturally enters into the state-citizen political or legal pact. The citizen is unable to assert agency in the theoretical paradigm of political economy, for here, the propaganda model affirms the supremacy of the manipulative media (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Nor can the citizen be trusted to act against a media climate of war hysteria or a society of the spectacle (Kellner 2002, McChesney 2002). Within the cultural studies paradigm, there is a startling contrast between the willingness of the citizen to produce resistant and negotiated readings of fictional media texts, such as romances and soap operas, and their "cultural dope" mode when they are confronted with war news. The studies cited above, then, retain a model of liberal citizenship, with a citizen

who withdraws from the realm to which it rightly belongs, that of constituting power in the citizen-state compact, but who may or may not awaken to action at a time of crisis.

Propaganda analysis of the media that rely on political economy epistemologically reproduces this essentially decent citizen whose almost perennial ignorance of U.S. foreign policy has to be corrected by the media, which invariably fails to communicate in the public interest, if one may so hyperbolically put it. Take, for example, the influential critique of Herman and Chomsky: "The U.S. media do not function in the manner of a propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Rather they permit – indeed, encourage spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalized largely without awareness" (1988). The five filters of the propaganda model: concentration of ownership, primacy of advertising income, strategic news sources, disciplining flak, and anti-communism enable elite consensus and prevent the citizen from effective intervention in the political process. Thus, for instance, in the case of Cambodia and East Timor, the media did not provide "facts" or "analyses that would have enabled the public to understand the issues or the bases of government policies…" and "they thereby assured that the public could not exert any meaningful influence on the decisions that were made." This, they state, is "quite typical of the actual 'societal purpose' of the media on matters that are of significance for established power; not enabling the public to assert meaningful control over the political process." Recently, Chomsky re-asserted the significance of the propaganda model for Iraq, stating that "government-media" propaganda was able to convince the people that Iraq is an imminent threat and that Iraq was responsible for September 11" (Chomsky 2003).

The propaganda model is based on the model of the sleeping decent citizen who could potentially awaken through "organization and self-education" from ignorance to take steps for "democratization of social life and for meaningful social change." The history of international intervention happens in the diurnal rhythm of the waking and the sleeping life of this political citizen. The interplay between politics and economy is played out through the figure of this citizen-subject: if the citizens do not know their nation's international politics, it is because of the monopolistic media economy and its lop-sided filers. The political lack is transferred to the sphere of the economy, where the helplessness of the political citizen is obvious and natural in face of the disempowerment in economic citizenship.

It is also perfectly explicable, it appears, that the citizen goes back to political sleep after the horrors of each post-atrocity revelation that tells the story of adventures abroad. This model appears to hold true even for critical

media analysis of propaganda, which Kellner defines as "a particular mode of persuasive discourse that mobilizes ideas, images, arguments, rhetoric, and sometimes disinformation and lies to induce people to agree with specific policies and actions." Kellner states: "propaganda attempts to overcome divisions of opinion and to persuade people that policies they might have opposed, such as war, are right, good, and just" (1992, 235). The figure of the manipulated citizen, as we saw with Chomsky, returns: this time it is neither Indonesia nor East Timor but Iraq 1991. Thus Kellner (1992, 7) argues, from the paradigm of critical theory, that the "media helped to create an environment, that in conjunction with other social factors, helped mobilize consent to the Bush administration's war policies". The "tribal drum of television," he writes, "turned the population into often frenzied supporters of the U.S. military intervention in the Middle East" (1992, 7). This argument is repeated in when, in post 9/11 U.S., it is seen that television "whipped up war hysteria" (Kellner 2002) or when the mainstream media's control of the public sphere end up producing patterns of "thought and behavior congruent with corporate capitalism" (Kellner 2004). The unquestionably firm relationship between political citizenship and economic citizenship creates a democratic crisis that leaves the subject of the nation-state voiceless actor.

The "primacy of the media economy" argument was reiterated in an editorial for the timely special issue of *Television & New Media*. The editorial writers identified six "casualties of war" in the media sphere from 9/11 to the fall of Kabul. "Independent inquiry was the first under threat, already rendered vulnerable by a century of interlocked interests of government, news, media corporations, and Hollywood," they write. This in turn, damaged "public knowledge of war conditions in Afghanistan, the threat of anti-terrorist laws to harm civil liberties, the invitation to war profiteering in U.S. economic stimulus laws, the use of polls in the propaganda effort, and the mangling of history" (Lewis et al.2002). Once again, we are presented with a historically contextualized, but largely similar set of reasons for the lack of information in the public interest. This ideologically arranged marriage of politics and economy generates a circular reasoning where the economy remains the unknown before which politics must surrender its possibility of knowledge. To be fully politically informed and to function as a political actor, it appears, one must first have full economic citizenship. The political citizenship of this social actor remains in abeyance since it is constantly colonized by the U.S. military/corporate sector. Economy shortcircuits the political; the explanation is ready before politics can be articulated, a phenomenon Žižek calls "postpolitical" (Žižek 1997, 999).

The kind of civilizational transformation imagined – from deficient economic citizenship to full political citizenship – also undercuts the political

system that this hypothetical citizen, as subject of a capitalist democracy, is meant to support. Biesecker's (1998) point that democracy cannot be treated as an ahistorical given is particularly relevant here, as are studies of citizenship cited earlier that refuse to treat it as an unchanging political essence. However, what is more pertinent to this chapter are the implications of this particular model of political citizenship, or rather, the rhetorical reinvention of such a citizen-subject, to international issues. What ought the world that is constituted in and through imperial policy do while this fictional citizen-subject is shielded by its rhetorically produced "unknowing" condition? Does this decent imperial citizen that persistently recurs as a rhetorical figure in state, media, and academic discourses really belong to the sphere of political ontology, as it appears to do? Or is this unknowing citizen – who does not know what the government is up to because the media does not function in the public interest – a necessary fiction in our militaristic politics (and its counterpart, the knowledge produced about U.S. militaristic politics) since Vietnam? Is not the passive assumption of this idea of citizenship, or the rhetorical reinvention of such a citizen, itself arguably a fallacy?

Italian philosopher Agamben's (1995) work is significant in this context for its theorization of sovereign power and the state of exception. Prior to the state-citizen contract organized on the ground of birth and nationality, he argues, is the phenomenon of sovereign power. He uncovers a novel dimension of state power that is primarily self-constituting; one that does not require a democratic mandate from the "constituting power" of the people that a concept like citizenship may imply. Sovereign power – the power to govern over bare life and the power to eliminate bare life – constitutes itself, not through a juridical domain, but through a logic that puts sovereignty in a position to decide what shall be deemed rule and exception. Sovereign power "creates and defines a space in which the juridical order has validity" just as it creates a state of exception, or a suspension of order in which the juridical relationship can be replaced by the direct power of violence. Sovereign power constitutes itself in and through the state of exception because it has the power to define rule and exception. Thus Agamben states there is a "hidden point of intersection" between the juridical institutional model of power, and the biopolitical model of power. In doing so, Agamben develops and moves beyond Foucault's concept of biopower, in which the state has the power to include in its technologies of governance the "biological life" – or death – of populations as a whole (Foucault 1978). Agamben shows how the biopolitical model of power – the power to govern the life and death of populations – can be enabled only through sovereign power, a form of power that is both inside and outside the juridical order, and which constitutes itself through a state of exception. The state of

exception, which is not chaos, but the "suspension of order", the exception to the juridical realm, is integral to constitution of sovereign power.

In a state of exception, the "citizen", who is the fictional subject of our understanding of the media, is a dangerous ontological assumption not simply because this figure sanctions political passivity and thus endangers democracy in the U.S. alone, but because it epitomizes a civilizing narrative that effectively conceals its silent rhetorical deployment in the legitimization of sovereign imperial power. It also obscures the ambiguities of citizenship at a time when nation/colony, home/empire distinctions are relegated to the gray zones necessitated by a global war on terror. As Žižek points out, since 9/11, the U.S. is operating under the logic of a state of emergency, since it is in a state of war. However, for the majority of people, daily life goes on since war is the "business of state agencies". In other words, he states, "we are entering a time in which a state of peace itself can be a state of emergency" (2004, 107). To paraphrase Arendt: Eichmann is normal according to the "normal" of Nazi-Germany (1963, 26). The fictional citizen-subject, in other words, appears to be all the more fictional when a democracy begins to operate from a state of exception.

What is problematic about deploying the politically sleep prone citizen as an epistemological tool in wartime, is its silent legitimization of sovereign power. This citizen-subject, mostly asleep, yet claiming a dormant political life that can be awakened through media revelations, operates within the curious ironies of the known unknown, once again, with a racial-military coding. Communication in the public interest balances against its opposite, communication that is not necessarily in the public interest, through a logic of foreclosure and disclosure. The foreclosure/disclosure hypothetically produces the essentially good, normal, humanist citizen-subject, who, armed with alarming, true knowledge, will awaken to public interest, and protest against the militaristic citizen-subject who has journeyed out to police the world. In either case, the saving of public interest remains with us, the "American" (read nationalist) citizen-subject, shortcutting the possibility that an anti-imperialist politics is not a nationalist project. Such is the frightening lesson of Abu Ghraib, to which I will turn to now.

There was no real dearth of coverage of Abu Ghraib on network news, although it was largely reported as a marginal and extreme fallout of the war on Iraq. As of May 15, 2005, news archive searches for Abu Ghraib yielded 385 results on CNN, 734 news items on ABC, 1038 stories on MSNBC, and 999 stories on CBS[1]. My focus in this chapter is primarily on the reports in May 2004, when the story first made its appearance. A timeline of the unfolding torture trail, as well as key documents, and the inquiry reports (Taguba, Schlesinger, Fay, Church) conducted so far are all available at www.aclu.org,

including details of the case that has been filed against Rumsfeld by the American Civil Liberties Union. As I describe below, the figurative references to the "state of exception" and the normalizing of the state of exception can be seen throughout in the discourses of power deployed to handle the crisis of Abu Ghraib.

Imperial citizenship: us and them

The problems of assuming "civilized citizenship" as an epistemological premise can be traced in the way Abu Ghraib was both normalized and/or justified as a state of exception even in the initial context of its media revelation. The rhetoric surrounding torture, I argue here, shows how the citizen who travels from the unknown to knowledge – as an epistemological figure – is appropriated into the technologies of governance. The state, in this context, is able to play upon the ontological assumptions of the model of citizenship described above in order to contain the public images of torture that challenged its projected image as sole defender of freedom and democracy.

The torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib was a classic case of communication (inadvertently or otherwise) in the public interest that was made possible by CBS *60 Minutes* and the *New Yorker* magazine that acted as the airing spaces for the political rifts within U.S. army and intelligence. Presenting the University of Georgia's Peabody Award in broadcasting excellence to CBS for breaking the Abu Ghraib story, Horace Newcomb, director of the award, called it an "important moment" in television of 2004 (CBS wins Peabody 2003). Seymour Hersh, who traced the "chain of command" for torture in painstaking detail in his series of articles in the *New Yorker*, notably won the National Press Foundation Award, 2004, the Ron Ridenhour Courage award 2004 (named after the journalist who broke the story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam), and the fifth George Polk award, 2004. By all criteria, Abu Ghraib was a successful media feat of exposure, an example of investigative journalism and reporting. The citizen-subject of wartime communication certainly began the civilizational journey from the unknown to the known at this moment: few could plead not guilty to witnessing the widely-circulated images of abuse that, as Sontag (2004) noted, was now far more infectious through the digital images linked up to the Internet. The images of Specialist Charles Graner, Pfc. Lynndie England, or Spc. Sabrina Harman posing playfully with naked Iraqi male bodies piled into pyramids, the hooded Iraqi man waiting for electrocution on a box, the Iraqi man crawling on the floor, held on a leash by Lynndie England, and finally, the attack dogs menacing a nude, bound Iraqi male prisoner with their homophobic, pornographic and sadistic resonance were certainly arresting enough to outstrip channel-switching instincts.

What of the citizen-spectator of these images, confronted with this new unknown unknown? To trace the citizen's civilizational journey, let us turn to the way in which these spectacular images of Iraqi prisoner torture by U.S. soldiers and military intelligence units at Abu Ghraib was normalized by the administration through a logic of exception. The leading defence of the administration in terms of media strategy was to treat torture as an unknown unknown and to term the interrogation methods as "abuse". This was done so consistently from a nationalist perspective – that is, without any sense of the responsibility that the U.S. had, to its occupied territory and the citizens of that territory. Abu Ghraib called into the question the problems of imperialism and citizenship: the blurred categories of nation/colony, state of law/ state of exception, free citizen/colonized subject. There could clearly be no discourse of international human rights given the ambiguous status of the U.S. vis-à-vis the Geneva convention and no particular claim of Iraqi citizenship given that Iraq was occupied territory.

Both Bush and Rumsfeld responded to the Abu Ghraib images with covert racial logics of American exceptionalism and of civilizational supremacism that categorized the images as representing deviant, perverse human behavior, and not the everyday realities of war by other means. These disclaimers of May 2004 must be seen in the context of Bush's nomination and the senate judiciary committee's confirmation of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General of the United States in January 2005. Gonzales, by this time, was well known for his recommendation that prisoners in Afghanistan be denied the protection of the Geneva conventions, and also for his role in redefining torture to mean "procedures that would produce pain of an intensity akin to that which accompanies serious physical injury such as death or organ failure" (Danner 2004). Without explicitly denying knowledge of torture, Bush's televisual and rhetorical image appeared ignorant about both sanctioning torture as policy, and regarding the specific interrogation methods at Abu Ghraib. Bush characterized Abu Ghraib as a "stain on the nation's honor", the consequence of "wrongdoing by a few" that should not reflect on the "thousands of U.S. military personnel serving and sacrificing in Iraq" (Bush: Abuse was 2004). Torture, and intelligence gathering, thus appeared to be a "state of exception" to the war in Iraq, rather than integral to it, as we see in later reports that note how more aggressive interrogation methods were deployed after the then-inexplicable rise of the Iraqi armed resistance (Danner 2004).

Testifying before the senate armed services committee on May 7, 2004, Rumsfeld said he had failed to recognize "how important it was to elevate a matter of such gravity to the highest levels" (Rumsfeld testifies before 2004). The "mistreatment", in his words that carefully avoided the use of the term torture, was "inconsistent with the values of our nation." He added that it was

"inconsistent with the teachings of the military, to the men and women of the armed forces. And it was certainly fundamentally un-American". Rumsfeld, who made a flying trip to Abu Ghraib, also took a further plunge into the Unknown Unknown, when he said to a packed hall of U.S. soldiers, "I stopped reading the newspapers. I'm a survivor," a gesture greeted with thunderous applause in visual clips replayed on May 13, 2004 primetime ABC World News and BBC America World News transmitted by PBS. The apology he had offered to the Iraqi detainees before the senate armed services committee was not heard in Iraq. This public demonstrations of ignorance of the national debate occurred even as ABC World News reported on May 14, 2003, that the International Red Cross had checked fourteen detention facilities across Iraq, and had turned in a secret report to the Bush administration a year ago in May 2003, following which they met with Condoleeza Rice on January 15, 2004, and Paul Wolfowitz on January 16, 2004. (See www.aclu.org for a timeline of the torture policies, The Case against Rumsfeld).

Once torture became Known, then it became a Known Unknown: the administration now knew about Abu Ghraib, but not about torture being a widespread practice from Guantanomo Bay to Afghanistan to Iraq. More important, the prisoner torture was not "knowable" as an "American" act. In his May 10, 2004 weekly radio address, Bush said, "The brave and honorable soldiers, sailors, airmen, Coast Guardsmen and Marines who are serving and sacrificing in Iraq – not the few who have let us down – show the true character of America" (Bush: I have 2004). Torture thus appeared to be a dramatic and singular exception, and not the norm, and certainly not one that belonged to our national character. As the White House got increasingly defensive, Bush restated, "We do not condone torture. I have never ordered torture. I will never order torture. The values of this country are such that torture is not a part of our soul and our being" (Bush: I have 2004). The administration affirmed faith in the majority of the troops who they knew were good kids doing the job; as against the deviant Others, who had served up this "body blow" as Rumsfeld put it during his Baghdad trip (Rumsfeld visits Iraq's 2004).

Since torture was not integral to national character, the real question was how to do a makeover for the "Arab world"; yet another post 9/11 "rebrand America" project. Peter Jennings said on ABC World News May 11, 2004 that the administration was doing its best to overcome the serious setback, and to "tell the world that abusing prisoners was an aberration." Networks consistently portrayed Abu Ghraib as an exception, one that would be overcome by the stable norms of civilized citizenship that were the premises of western democracy. It was no wonder then, that all that was needed was a battle of images. ABC news reported Condoleeza Rice had appeared on three Arab networks, illustrating it with a clip in which she said "people will see" that the

administration was determined to get to the bottom of the matter. CNN's Wolf Blitzer on May 10, 2004, commented that it was now up to Rumsfeld to "ride out the storm and to make it appear to America and the world that he is fixing it." Wesley Clark, then speaking for Democrats, appeared on ABC news on May 11, 2004, to say that the question was "how seriously are we perceived to be taking the issue." *Time* magazine's Washington correspondent Timothy Burger appeared on CNN on May 10 (Mother's day) to say that the images would play right into the hands of extremists in the Arab world who "want to portray us as occupiers and anti-Arab, which is wrong, but that image will be portrayed especially in much of the Arab world, which has a government-controlled press which won't allow the other side of the story: that most Americans are good people, they're trying to do their best."

The rhetorical presentation of Abu Ghraib an "exceptional act" was based on the assumption of the national self as a known known: where there was a bright half of America that could interrogate itself, and a darker half that may be the semi-playful victims of a subterranean popular culture of hazing and sexual pranks. As Rumsfeld told the armed services committee, this incident too could be used to prove the civilizational code:

> However, terrible the setback, this is also an occasion to demonstrate to the world the difference between those who believe in democracy and in human rights, and those who believe in rule by terrorist code.
> We value human life. We believe in individual freedom and in the rule of law. For those beliefs, we send men and women of the armed forces abroad to protect that right for our own people and to give others who aren't Americans the hope of a future of freedom.
> Part of that mission, part of what we believe in, is making sure that when wrongdoings or scandal do occur, that they're not covered up, but they're exposed, they're investigated, and the guilty are brought to justice.
> Mr. Chairman, I know you join me today in saying to the world, judge us by our actions, watch how Americans, watch how a democracy deals with the wrongdoing and with scandal and the pain of acknowledging and correcting our own mistakes and our own weaknesses. (Rumsfeld testifies before 2004).

Once again, we see the epistemological trope of the known/unknown; this time too, it is drawn on the sovereign infallibility of "America" and its self-referential ability to uncover the Truth. The association of U.S. citizenship with human rights, justice, and freedom through the possibility of the corrective mechanisms of its democracy makes torture fundamentally a question of national character and national values; while refusing to acknowledge it as international practice, and a question of processes of transnational justice. The knowing/unknowing American national citizen was the subject of the torture debate even as the torture clearly concerned citizens and international

organizations elsewhere in the world. Underpinning Rumsfeld's testimony is the notion of civilizational supremacy of a nation that is determined "to give others who aren't Americans the hope of a future of freedom." This discourse of the self-correcting, and therefore civilizationally superior form of American humanity was strengthened when U.S. citizen Nicholas Berg was beheaded by an alleged militant group just as Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, who conducted the investigation on Abu Ghraib, was testifying before the Congress in Washington D.C. The video of the beheading stated that this act was in revenge for the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, leading senator John McCain to remark on May 11, 2004, on ABC World News: "It is terrible. It is tragic. It also shows the stark difference between Americans and these barbarians. We have found out about mistreatment of prisoners – we are addressing the issue completely. These people have no regard for humanity or common decency, which is why we have to win in Iraq." Wayne Allard, another senator, said in the same newscast that the incident illustrated the "difference between the way we do business, and so frequently our adversaries do business."

The ability to enact this difference between "us" and "them" became critical to the way in which the knowledge about Abu Ghraib was absorbed. Conservative talk radio picked up the theme, in Sean Hannity's words: "Do we now understand the difference between atrocity and mistreatment? Where is the outrage now?" (ABC World News, May 11, 2004). The knowing American who can perform the journey away from the unknown, who belongs to the America which can self-reflexively interrogate itself, know itself, and interrogate its own unknown, is held up as the civilizational difference from "their" world. The debate on torture constructed a citizen whose nationalist identity was constructed on the trope of the known/unknown: the citizen whose bright, visible, rational self can interrogate its darker self.

The Christian and the corrections officer

As seen in the reactions to Abu Ghraib, the founding narrative of democracy then rests on the knowing, civilizationally superior citizen who could be the corrective force that straightens out its errant, dark twin. Yet it is this very narrative of democracy that collapsed in the media revelation of Abu Ghraib. In other words, the civilizational narrative – that of citizen who comes to her/his democratic senses when confronted with the failures of democracy – seems to have hit the rock of the transformed world of post 9/11 politics with Abu Ghraib. Thus Danner writes, "At least since Watergate, Americans have come to take for granted a certain story line of scandal, in which revelation is followed by investigation, adjudication, and expiation. Together, Congress and the courts investigate high-level wrongdoing and place it in a carefully constructed

narrative, in which crimes are charted, malfeasance is explicated and punishment is apportioned as the final step in the journey back to justice, order, and propriety. When Alberto Gonzales takes his seat before the Senate Judiciary Committee today for hearings to confirm whether he will become attorney general of the United States, Americans will bid farewell to that comforting storyline" (Danner 2005).

The storyline of exposure, outrage, and correction – the bedrock narrative of a purely political democracy – disappeared, according to Danner, with the Bush nomination of Alberto Gonzales, who rewrote the definition of torture in a now publicized White House memo. Thus Danner added, "The senators are likely to give full legitimacy to a path that the Bush administration set the country on more than three years ago, a path that has transformed the United States from a country that condemned torture and forbade its use to one that practices torture routinely" (Danner 2005). Yet Danner's dramatization of the moment of the confirmation of Gonzalez bypasses the discursive thread that had all along been woven along with the normalizing of the exception, the visibility of Abu Ghraib, as a natural condition of rule. The breaking story of Abu Ghraib was simultaneously normalized as a state of exception to the existing state of war. The state of exception, or the state of war, naturalizes the borderline cases of the exception as an extension of the general state of war. This normalizing of the "exception to the exception" even as one accepts war as a normal, everyday, condition of the empire is evident if we travel the gray zone between torture as paralegal activity that potentially violates conceptions of human rights (the Geneva convention point of view) and torture as integral to war by other means in the larger gameplan of us vs them, civilization vs terrorism, freedom vs oppression, democracy vs dictatorship.

The belief in the comforting storyline of exposure, outrage, and correction ignores the way the terms of debate, and the very language in which it may be conducted, radically shifted after 9/11. As Žižek points out, Jonathan Alter wrote in *Newsweek* as early as 5 November 2001 as follows: "We can't legalize torture; it's contrary to American values. But even as we continue to speak out against human rights abuses around the world, we need to keep an open mind about certain measures to fight terrorism, like court-sanctioned psychological interrogation". And as if to suggest that the practice of "extraordinary rendition", or the transferring detainees to nations outside the U.S. known for their brutal interrogation practices would be new, Alter added, "And we'll have to think about transferring some suspects to our less squeamish allies, even if that's hypocritical. Nobody said this was going to be pretty." Žižek writes that the liberal response, as articulated by Alan Dershowitz, was: "I'm not in favor of torture, but if you're going to have it, it should damn well have court approval." What is more dangerous than an explicit endorsement of torture, Žižek argues,

is to "simply introduce it as a legitimate topic of debate" because such a move "changes the background of ideological presuppositions and options much more radically than outright advocacy" (Žižek 2003, 104).

It is in this context that Rush Limbaugh's much publicized comments make sense. Limbaugh characterized the incident as "no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation, and we're going to ruin people's lives over it, and we're going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I'm talking about people having a good time, these people, you ever heard of emotional release? You [ever] heard of need to blow some steam off?" These were just boys and girls blowing off steam during a stressful situation. Let's not make an international incident out of it, for crying out loud" (Rush: MPs just 2004).

Appearing in two CBS interviews immediately after the Abu Ghraib photographs were released, Lynndie England was quoted in a CBS station interview in *60 Minutes* on May 12, 2004, echoing similar sentiments of "normal" war practices. "I guess it just goes with stuff that happens during war time," England told reporter Brian Maass in an interview with CBS station KCNC-TV. "Going in and interrogating, and doing what you're told. People probably think that, 'No, they thought of this on their own, and they were just doing this of their own free will, and this and that,'" said England. "It's not like we laid in bed one night and thought, 'Oh, I want to do this tomorrow, let's do this.' We didn't think of it" (The Pictures: Lynndie 2004). England's words capture the normalcy of the exception; or rather, the normalcy of torture during a state of exception.

The same argument was being used in the Abu Ghraib trials by Guy Womack, the defendant lawyer for Charles Graner, described as the "ringleader" of the Abu Ghraib torture incidents, who appears in the photographs along with Lynndie England. Arguing that his client was only following orders, and often earning praise from his superiors for his actions, Womack said, "Don't cheerleaders all over America form pyramids six to eight times a year? Is that torture?" (Booth 2005). This resonates with Limbaugh's way of normalizing Abu Ghraib through a cultural argument that juxtaposed the binaries, fun and work: why not have a little fun at the end of the working day? "Doing the job" may reflect the banality of evil in our times, but that is certainly a part of the civilized citizenship that makes it easier to both exceptionalize and normalize Abu Ghraib.

Curiously, it is the metaphor of "the job" that prevailed in the statements of various other actors in Abu Ghraib. Sabrina Harman, in an e-mail interview from Baghdad to the Washington Post, said it was that "her assignment" to break down the prisoners. "They would bring in one to several prisoners at a

time already hooded and cuffed," Harman said. "The job of the MP was to keep them awake, make it hell so they would talk" (She's no stranger 2004). Similarly, in the CBS *60 Minutes II* interview, Lynndie England said she was instructed by persons in higher rank "to stand there, hold the leash" while she was being photographed; presumably, she too was following orders because she said she "didn't want to be in any picture" (The Pictures: Lynndie 2004). The civilian contract staff working for private security firms or for the intelligence and were present in the prison also were apparently doing their job; as it turns out, so well that the two firms involved in the torture story, CACI International and Titan, won million dollar contracts from the Pentagon a day after Charles Graner was sentenced (Beaumont 2005). Defending Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney said: "Don Rumsfeld is the best secretary of defence the U.S. has had. People ought to get off his case and let him do his job." (NBC Nightly News, May 9, 2004). The anonymity of the job extended all the way up. After the senate had finished viewing the videotapes and photographs, Bush too rose to the occasion to give a speech to Republicans, and as Rick Santorium praised strong leaders "who are not afraid to step out and do what's right for America." On May 10, 2004, CBS nightly news reported that Bush also drove across town to the Pentagon to personally convey an endorsement for Rumsfeld: You are doing a superb job. Our nation owes you a debt of gratitude… Who can doubt that Iraq is better for being free?"

Perhaps the most powerful and truthful testimony to "doing the job" has come from Charles Graner, himself, whom Specialist Joseph Darby (the "whistle-blower" who turned in the CD of the photographs to his superior officer at Abu Ghraib) quoted as saying: "The Christian in me says it's wrong, but the corrections officer in me says I love to make a grown man piss himself" (Tanner 2005, Watson 2005). This insightful comment reflects on the two Americas, the moral America that is sentencing Graner, and the military America that trains the corrections officer in him. Graner's remark also draws attention to the "work" of the corrections officer; the job that's not Christian, but must be done. In an E-mail that the *New York Times* obtained, it turned out that Graner had been sending his "work diary" to friends and family in chatty messages that strikingly uses the semiotic code of work to naturalize his actions:

> "The guys give me hell for not getting any pictures while I was fighting this guy," said one message, titled "just another dull night at work," with a photograph attached of a bound and naked detainee howling with pain, his legs bleeding. To an e-mail message about a Take Your Children to Work Day event, he replied, "how about send a bastard to hell day?" attaching a photograph of a detainee's head bloodied beyond recognition (Zernike 2005).

Graner is significant because he is, in Foucauldian terms, the biopolitical

body of the empire. That is, he is indistinguishable from the point where the totalizing state structures of imperial power and the processes of individualization or subjectivation merge into the political body, at once governed and governing. The words of followers are often more important than those of their leaders. Sending a photograph of him stitching a wound on a detainee's eye, Graner once again referred to the banal and absolute nature of his power, "Try doing this at home, and they'll lock you up if you don't have some type of license," adding, "Not only was I the healer, I was the hurter. O well life goes on" (Zernike 2005).

The citizen who can perform the civilizational journey, both "healer and hurter", and in the final analysis, or in the final solution, is simply playing their part in the floating signifier of the "job" in a state of exception; this is the new form of citizenship, especially the power of imperial citizenship, that we cannot afford to ignore. Indeed, it arguably illustrates Žižek's (2003) use of the phrase "liberal totalitarianism", the point where the everyday, innocuous metaphor of "doing the job" forms a continuum with the sovereign violence of the security state.

Abu Ghraib marked a significant difference in the way the revelatory moment of knowledge for the waking citizen is discursively handled, so that the entire effort is, almost as it were, to quickly naturalize any new atrocity. What has been striking about Iraq network coverage is that it marks a real difference from Gulf war 1991 in terms of its daily imagery from the terrain of war. The hyperreality of the media coverage and the packaging of the war as a "spectatorial video-game" that Shohat and Stam (1994) critiqued in Gulf war coverage have vanished in favor of the broad daylight and realtime bodies of the Iraqi armed resistance. However, the images of Abu Ghraib that Colin Powell compared to My Lai was devoured so quickly, so that by the time the third part of the Hersh story appeared, it had ceased to be the lead, and was replaced with the anxiously awaited handover of Iraq to the interim government.

Hersh himself commented in an interview to *Democracy Now*, "It's not as if there's any monopoly on critical reporting about the war. Even in *The New York Times* had a marvelous story a month ago about a group of Marines that came back disillusioned with the lack of equipment, the stupidity of their mission. It was an amazing story. It went down, it just went down" (Seymour Hersh: Iraq 2005). As the media reveal more atrocities, it appears that there is a swifter mechanism for absorbing it, within and without the media. In this context, rather than reproduce this perennial epistemological mechanism of the citizen who does not know, perhaps it is time to pay attention to the "everyday life of empire" populated with knowing, yet unknowing citizens. At once Christian and corrections officer, healer and "hurtor", this theological-imperialist citizen occupies a distinctly different position, arguably, from that of the premise of democratic citizenship which rests on a time-space imagination of nations

bound by territoriality instead of a time-space scale in which transnational locations of home and colony, living room and Baghdad, are interwoven in daily life, daily speech, and daily news.

"The sun is shining, the sky is blue, and this is America"

So said Specialist Charles Graner on the first day of his appearance at the Texas court-martial on Abu Ghraib. "Whatever happens is going to happen, but I still feel it's going to be on the positive side" (Opening statements Monday 2005). The shining sun and the blue sky suggest the security of national citizenship, the full certainty of inviolable, inalienable rights within the America of Graner's imagination, where things never really go wrong, where things always happen in the realm of the known known, and one can always travel back from the bizarre world of the colony back to the secure borders of the home-nation. The political rights of the occupied subject must be measured against this secure knowledge that is an integral part of the free ticket of imperial citizenship.

The civilizational citizen, who is a fictional subject of the all-knowing state which can correct itself without reference to the rest of the world even when an international issue is involved, all too often legitimizes a global sovereign governance, which answers its crises either through pure theological racial suspicion, or through a logic of essentially humanitarian rule and exceptional misdemeanor. Such a citizen-subject – one that has dominated models of propaganda analysis and models of communicating in the public interest – is critical to the linking of knowledge, sanctioned ignorance, and imperial-theological power based on an unquestioned logic of nationalism. This citizen, living under the political eternity of the shining sun and blue skies, is dangerous because it denies blue skies and shining sun, or rather, full political subjectivity and citizenship, to the victims of sovereign power. The specter of the knowing U.S. citizen who may save the world from the militaristic U.S. citizen is a deeply nationalistic fiction that misses the logic of sovereign power, and the normalizing of the state of exception; just as the Christian who will edify the corrections officer is a fiction that excludes the rest of the world as critical mediators of our global policies.

Wartime media has made phenomenal advances and wartime media scholarship now has much productive work ahead. In the preceding pages, I have sought to show how the knowing/unknowing citizen, who forms a part of the epistemological underpinning of "communication in the public interest" is a problematic assumption. Inherent in this model of civilized citizenship is the privileging of national consciousness, the subject that can potentially move from ignorant to informed political actor. The ever-deferred moment of political

awakening also buries in its epistemological cover the "everyday" sovereign power of the empire, when "doing the job" in a state of exception can normalize even the borderline cases of the exception. The knowing-yet-unknowing citizen as governmental fiction, or as the yet-to-be-awakened subject of propaganda critique, also poses another danger. How can we challenge the new world order with theoretical orientations that operate exclusively within a nationalist framework; in which all authority of constituting power is vested with the citizen-subject of any nation, in this case, that of the U.S.? The centrality granted to the civilized citizen of the empire-masquerading-as-nation is at the cost of political subjectivity to the citizens of the world (including the U.S.) who challenge the sovereign power to wage wars without accountability. This is evident from the way that Abu Ghraib, as norm and exception, was considered America's problem as nation, not as an international issue. Moreover, media analyses that reproduce the nationalist subject of propaganda run the risk of repeating the same communication model of analyses for the brown populations of Vietnam, Panama, Indonesia, Korea, and Iraq. At this point, the question returns to the original paradox of the unknown unknown: the very (im)possibility of knowing the Other through the framework of civilized citizenship.

In conclusion, one could ask: is not anti-imperial citizenship, even within "America" as territory, fashioned by lives and bodies outside "America" as nation? Is not the political subjectivity of anti-imperial citizenship fashioned by the mutilation of bodies and extinction of lives in the non-American world, as in Iraq, Panama, Korea, and Vietnam? Rather than silently rest on the epistemological assumption of a potential national consciousness, perhaps we could begin to record the speech of the citizen who knows no national boundaries. To quote Margaret Blank, mother of Spc Joseph Darby who passed on the Abu Ghraib photographs to his superior officer: "It was really hard on him," said Margaret Blank, Darby's mother. "He didn't want to go against ... his troops. It cut him in half, but he said he could not stand the atrocities that he had stumbled upon. He said he kept thinking, 'What if that was my mom, my grandmother, my brother or my wife?'" (Spc. Joseph Darby 2004). [2] The citizenship that Darby claimed is not based on the civilizational premise of traveling from neoliberal private to neoliberal public interest. Such a citizenship cannot be located within narrow, state-carved territorial boundaries, or those tied down to nationalist consciousness, but instead, claims fellow-citizens wherever the empire stretches. Perhaps one day, then, we can say, with and against Graner: The sun is shining, the sky is blue…

Notes

[1] In my analysis, I primarily include network news archives accessed from the Internet archives of CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN, over the course of May 2004- May 2005, as well as direct monitoring of ABC World News and CNN during May 2004.
[2] Although Darby's words do not appear to have a religious resonance, his mother clearly saw his actions as part of the battle of good and evil, as seen in her words when Darby was chosen by ABC World News as one of the "People of the Year,": "I said, 'Your picture is on the paper,' and I said, 'Honey, I'm so proud of you because you did the good thing and good always triumphs over evil, and the truth will always set you free.' " http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/PersonOfWeek/story?id=365920&page=1

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