THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF

SPENCER CUNNINGHAM

In considering our life philosophies, it is hard to distinguish between what we accept through mere faith and what we arrive at through thought and mental discipline. And further, what happens when these two modes of our understanding collide? It would seem that belief and reason are mutually exclusive, that whenever they come into contact there must be a victor and a loser—that a choice must be made about which way of understanding we choose to embrace. We struggle daily to reconcile the beliefs we choose to accept with the empirical knowledge we cannot ignore.

E.M. Forster's essay "What I Believe" addresses this pervasive mental struggle. Forster's ultimate humanist goal in the essay is to find a life philosophy independent from the dogma of religion, evidenced by his opening sentences: "I do not believe in Belief. But this is an age of faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defence, one has to formulate a creed of one's own" (67). He suggests his era embraces the notion of religious faith too wholeheartedly, and he wants to develop a functional alternative. To achieve this, Forster affirms that life should be lived to create, ultimately, "tolerance, good temper, and sympathy" (67). In his attempt to reach this philosophical ideal, he highlights the inevitability of turning to belief, even in his fiercely non-religious worldview.

Forster's essay raises, and may implicitly answer, the enduring question: *Can reason coexist with belief?* In the essay, it becomes apparent that reason *can*, in fact, coexist with belief, provided that belief is founded upon and cooperative with empirical and philosophical derivations. That is, provided it is not *blind* faith.

From the outset of his essay, Forster criticizes religion and the tenets it seeks to uphold. The very first sentence of the essay, "I do not believe in Belief," suggests that Forster withholds his commitment to anything requiring blind-faith acceptance of a rule (67). He feels assaulted by the "militant creeds" of the Age of Faith, or religious reactionism, and writes in part to defend his humanistic principles against this threat (67). One of the more pointed rejections of religious faith is expressed in his discussion of the principles of Christianity: "[The orthodox say] man always has failed and always will fail to organise his own goodness, and it is presumptuous of him to try. This claim—solemn as it is—leaves me cold. I cannot believe that Christianity will ever cope with the present worldwide mess" (75). He is arguing that it is man's *duty* to clarify for himself his own values. This argument for intellectual independence characterizes Forster's stance on the issue of belief, leaving no doubt that he is opposed to religious faith.

A consequence of Forster's wholehearted rejection of blind faith, religion, and maybe even God is that it seems he must develop his own philosophy based

exclusively on reason. But paradoxically peppered throughout the essay are passages that both triumphantly accept reason and implicitly praise faith. This is not a logical pitfall of Forster's essay but a manifestation of the subtle distinction between religious faith and humanistic faith that Forster seeks to establish. Regarding personal relationships he claims, "For the purpose of living one has to assume that the personality is solid and the 'self' is an entity, and to ignore all contrary evidence. And since to ignore evidence is one of the characteristics of faith, I certainly can proclaim that I believe in personal relationships" (68). Furthermore, he explains, "The people I respect most behave as if they were immortal and as if society was eternal" (71).

Both these quotations contain an explicit abandonment of reason and an acceptance of faith. But even so, Forster carves a distinction between the religious belief he feels is reckless and the principled belief he feels is both constructive and unavoidable. Subscribing to religious dogma does not satisfy Forster's skeptical stance on faith, but holding to considered, principled beliefs like the ones above does. Ultimately, he understands that reason and belief are hopelessly intertwined, and that there is a correct and constructive way to arrive at belief and an incorrect, destructive way. Given the historical context of the essay, this principle is particularly poignant.

Published in 1938, "What I Believe" was written in the throes of the political and social instability that led to World War II. A number of remarks within the essay point to Forster's acute awareness of the unrest of the time. He discusses a "gathering political storm," mentions the merits of democracy allowing "public criticism" and avoiding "hushed up scandals," describes "labour camps" as a consequence of extreme governmental control, and notably ambiguously asserts "Some people idealise force and pull it into the foreground and worship it" (68-70). Clearly, Forster was well aware of the brewing political issues of World War II, and his essay is in part a reaction to the philosophical confusion and gravity of the coming war.

When viewed in this light, the dissonance between belief and reason takes on new meaning. The war itself highlighted the fact that two logically derived diverging philosophies can exist and that each side may still vehemently oppose the other. In the struggle of democracy versus totalitarianism, at which Forster hints heavily, both sides had justifications for their stances and, of course, the rhetoric for each would have been particularly pervasive in 1938. The Axis powers asserted that totalitarianism provided order, cohesion, obedience, and efficiency, and the Allied powers argued democracy promoted free speech, individual liberties, creativity, and social justice (Palmieri; Griggs). Both sides had their intellectual stances, but both possessed something further: faith that their respective cause was correct. Just as Forster sought to define a humanistic philosophy that satisfied his ideals, the two sides developed their philosophies to satisfy their preconceived faith. Forster captures this quiet parallel in his extensive discussion of democracy and maybe most revealingly demonstrates his fears in the conclusion of his essay when he notes that "one likes to say what one

thinks while speech is comparatively free: it may not be free much longer" (76). Clearly, Forster understands that the war and its ideological struggle may come at a heavy cost.

But what is the importance of the philosophical dichotomy between the Allied and Axis powers and its phantom presence within the context of Forster's essay? It illustrates how belief is inexorably intertwined with reason. That is, we use reason to accommodate belief and belief to accommodate reason. Forster, in his essay, was using the irony of rejecting one belief and asserting another to capture the futility of arguing a point based largely, or entirely, on blind faith. This parallels the political struggle of the time. At the same time, he understands faith is inevitable and is wrestling with the implications of this reality. Faced with war and the potential losses of lives and freedom, a satisfying solution to the issue of belief versus reason seems particularly urgent. Ultimately, he knows he cannot argue his worldview against another if it is buoyed by dogma, so he seeks to change faith's "big 'F'" to a little "f" by transforming the monolithic faith necessary for religion into one that coincides with our innate sense of common humanity. Forster explains that the religious, those whose faith he does not support, "have Faith with a large F," whereas his faith "has a very small one," and he "only intrude[s] it because these are strenuous and serious days" (76).

To Forster, faith is inevitable; blind faith is not. He illustrates that at some level we must accept certain central axioms on faith to live our intellectual lives at all (belief in personal relationships, the permanence of human civilization, democracy, an aristocracy of intelligentsia, etc.). We do not and cannot know if these are true, but our choice of what and what not to have faith in is not necessarily blind. It reflects our understanding of how the world is and how we feel it should be, an empirically idealistic guess. Forster and those who subscribe to his distinction between beliefs attempt to capture how the world appears, and further, how it *should* work. Forster embraces relationships, aristocracy of intelligentsia, living life as if it had no end, and acting as if civilization was eternal not because he knows these things are true but because these satisfy his understanding of how the world must exist for a philosophically, humanistically, and personally satisfying life.

Forster does not reject faith—only faith stemming from religion. The chief difference between faith in religion and faith in principles, and the reason Forster makes this seemingly "splitting hairs" distinction, is that the former must necessarily be blind, while the latter is informed to the extent it reflects some ideal about the human condition reached through consideration, not dogmatic acceptance. Belief and reason are not in fact mutually exclusive. In fact, they are unavoidable and can even complement each other handsomely, provided that faith is not employed as a simplistic and convenient replacement for thought, but as a mechanism for developing informed principles.

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LOSING THE ACCIDENTAL: HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE IN THE THIRD GENERATION

ABIGAIL GOLDEN

There are certain images that nearly anyone in the Western world would recognize as representations of the Holocaust: a small boy with a yellow star on his coat raising his hands above his head as he crosses the street; a skeletal, nearly naked man staring at the camera as other men lying in cubby-like bunks crane their heads to look at the photographer; stick-thin bodies tumbled like broken dolls into mass graves. These are just a few of the many images that have become iconic, images that crop up again and again in a weary montage, part of what the critic Susan Sontag calls the "vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice" (20-21).

Marianne Hirsch, in her essay "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," raises this concern: that the excessive repetition of such photographs from the Holocaust will desensitize us, making us less and less emotionally affected by its horrifying images. But she soon dismisses this idea, asserting that for her generation, the repetition of images does not desensitize; and that, in fact, the appearance of a few iconic pictures of the atrocity, which become ubiquitous through repetition, provides a means for members of the second generation to incorporate it into their own memory and their own sense of identity. These images, she says, are a "*mostly* helpful vehicle for working through a traumatic past," a process she calls "postmemory" (9, Hirsch's emphasis).

Hirsch notes that postmemory has its basis in the second generation's vicarious reliving of events it could not actually experience, and that the second generation's connection to the past is "mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation" (9). Photographs, as well as documents like survivors' testimonies and transcripts of the Nuremberg trials, are so important to the second generation's understanding of the Holocaust because that generation was born too late to witness it for itself; it must rely on the stories of others. Postmemory involves the absorption of these stories into the second generation's sense of itself, to such an extent that the stories become "so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (9).

As a Modern Orthodox Jew who has attended Jewish yeshivas from kindergarten through high school, I have had nearly lifelong exposure to the images and narratives from the Holocaust that became essential components of postmemory for Hirsch's generation. If anything, my exposure to Holocaust memorial material has been more extensive and more sustained than the norm. I have attended school-wide Holocaust Memorial Day assemblies since elementary school, written book reports on Holocaust novels or memoirs each year in junior high school, and made four or five trips to New

York's Museum of Jewish Heritage, which advertises itself as "a living memorial to the Holocaust."

According to Hirsch, my repeated exposure should enable me to work through my people's traumatic past by providing a basis for the work of postmemory, which is a matter of "adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story" (10). But the effect of my exposure has been almost exactly the opposite. By the end of high school, I was sick of hearing about the Holocaust and had perfected stratagems for skipping my school's Holocaust Memorial Day assembly, whose invariable program—a moment of silence, the names of the deceased scrolling down a screen, memorial candles lit one by one in a darkened auditorium—I found simply clichéd.

An entire catalogue of such clichés has come into being in the sixty-five years since the end of World War II, solely as a way for the second generation to capture an event that, by its nature, defies easy capture. The black-and-yellow motif, the six-pointed star emblazoned with the word "Jude" in Gothic lettering, six memorial candles for the six million dead—none of these symbolic tools assisted me in any real way in understanding mass murder (if mass murder can ever be truly understood). Yet each of these symbols has become an instant mental marker for the Holocaust. Such symbols serve no other purpose than as memory triggers for those who have already assimilated the Holocaust into their own memories, who have accomplished the work of postmemory. Yet an entire generation has now grown up experiencing the Holocaust as much through such established symbols as through its own attempts to understand what is, perhaps, incomprehensible.

Do these relentless symbols trigger memory or clog it? At the beginning of her essay, Hirsch quotes extensively from Susan Sontag's account of her first encounter with images from the Holocaust, an experience that Sontag describes as formative and deeply traumatizing:

> One's first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is . . . a negative epiphany. For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau that I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. . . . When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying. (qtd. in Hirsch 5)

I find Sontag's experience startling, because it is so different from my own first exposure to the Holocaust. I only vaguely remember seeing Holocaust photographs for the first time, I do not remember the images themselves, and I have no recollection of my own response. All I retain is an impression of a darkened classroom, slides

projected onto the blackboard, and a low murmuring reaction from the class. I cannot even remember how old I was at the time. Upon reading Sontag's so vividly rendered account of her experience, my primary reaction was to wonder why I could not give a similar account. What made my first exposure to the reality of the Holocaust so different from Sontag's?

Part of the explanation is that I was simply much younger at the time of my first encounter than Sontag was, and so I just did not remember it. But I propose that there are other factors at work as well. Sontag herself helps to explain when she remarks that "photographs, which package the world, seem to invite packaging" (4). Almost as important as the photographic image is the context, physical and emotional and even temporal, in which it appears. In his essay "The Loss of the Creature," Walker Percy expands on this idea with his thesis that any object encountered in the classroom ends up being overwhelmed by the educational packaging in which it is presented. For instance, a student's experience of a Shakespeare sonnet becomes "obscured by the symbolic package which is formulated not by the sonnet itself but by the *media* through which the sonnet is transmitted" (57, emphasis Percy's). Like a sonnet, any photograph comes with a "symbolic package"; this could be more or less neutral, like a picture frame, or freighted with meaning, like the speech with which my teacher prepared us to look at Holocaust images.

I would argue that the difference between my experience of iconic Holocaust images and Sontag's experience of the same images is comparable to the gap between Percy's English student and the individual who experiences his environment without any obscuring symbolic package. While the student sees himself as a "consumer receiving an experience-package," someone who comes across the same sonnet by chance, free of the classroom, approaches it as though exploring virgin territory (Percy 57). Sontag came across photographs from Bergen-Belsen and Dachau on her own, by chance and at a young age, without any context for what she was seeing. I, too, first learned about the Holocaust at a young age, but my experience of it was as much context as content. My teacher (I can neither remember her name nor the class subject) certainly taught us that the Nazis used to be in control of Germany and that they were evil and barbaric, that they hated the Jewish people because of our religion and tried to wipe us out forever. I can be sure of this much because, though I do not recall the actual words she used, I remember thinking such thoughts about Nazis and Germany later on in childhood in exactly that framework of "us versus them." After having "packaged" these remarks, she then turned on the projector for us to see the images for ourselves.

As we sat in the classroom that day, we were shocked, but it was shock that had been engineered for us to experience; we did not discover it for ourselves, as Sontag did when she came upon "the photographic inventory of ultimate evil . . . by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica" (20). Sontag's first experience of the Holocaust parallels that of the explorer who first stumbled upon the Grand Canyon, whose case

Percy cites as an example of true, unmediated experience (46). Mine, on the other hand, corresponds to that of Percy's English student whose approach to a Shakespeare sonnet is so structured and so obscured by context that, when he is required to remember what he studied years later, he recalls not the poem but "the smell of the page, the classroom, the aluminum windows and the winter sky, the personality of Miss Hawkins—these media which are supposed to transmit the sonnet . . . [but which] only succeed in transmitting themselves" (57). Just so, I remember neither my own shock nor the images that shocked me, but only the classroom in which I first saw them.

From my teacher's perspective, it might not have mattered whether a child who first learns about the Holocaust at a young age remembers her first experience with it or not—the imperative is to expose children to it early on in their development. It is a sign that educators are doing something right: after all, any child exposed to such horror at such a young age will grow up knowing in her very bones the atrocity that is possible when the world is silent and will become a positive voice in the struggle against forgetfulness. And this is indeed what happened, at least for a while. Throughout elementary school I felt all the things it is proper to feel about the Holocaust—horror, pity, the urgency of remembrance—and in junior high school I even went through a period where I sought out Holocaust books like *Night* and *The Cage* and movies like *The Devil's Arithmetic*, so much so that I began to identify with their persecuted, terrified protagonists. My engagement with the Holocaust in junior high school was, in fact, a form of postmemory; the stories I read became so real to me that they became what Hirsch would call "memories in their own right" (9).

However, the postmemory I engaged in was not exactly the "vehicle of working through a traumatic past" that Hirsch describes; or, rather, it was a superficial and truncated version of the phenomenon that Hirsch conceives of as a lifelong process (9). Though for a time I became preoccupied with the Holocaust, this effect did not last. I entered high school and began to question the now-too-simple moral parables I had been taught: of good against evil, of us versus them, of faith before reason. The narrative of the Holocaust that I'd been taught—that the Nazis were evil, inhuman reincarnations of Amalek, the historical enemy of the Jews, bent single-mindedly on the destruction of our lives and culture—began to seem too dogmatic, and our continued mourning for the six million dead too all-consuming. All my life I had been fed a narrative formed by the second generation's understanding of the Holocaust, a narrative formulated and packaged for children's consumption. All my life I had been told the same sort of things the narrator of *The Cage*, by Holocaust survivor Ruth Minsky Sender, tells her daughter Nancy when the girl asks why the Nazis killed her grandparents: "The Nazis were evil. They wanted the world only for themselves. They killed your grandparents, my family, Daddy's family, six million of our people only because we were Jews" (4). But, unlike Nancy, I was no longer a child, and simple sentences about monstrous, inhuman Nazis were no longer enough. Beyond a certain

age, words like "evil" no longer make sense when applied to an entire country; a story that boils down to "us versus them" loses meaning when "they" have been demonized for too long.

I do not know what would replace such a story in teaching the Holocaust. After all, an event of the Holocaust's magnitude must be addressed, especially in a community such as mine, in which many children grew up with grandparents who were curiously silent about the past and hid tattooed numbers on their arms. Such children cannot be told nothing, yet neither will they understand a treatise on the banality of evil or the origins of totalitarianism. All I know is that the way I was taught about the Holocaust was fundamentally flawed; simple stories made a difficult subject easier to understand when I was in elementary school, but that very simplicity rendered them less compelling as I grew older.

So, then, I abandoned my pursuit of postmemory, turning instead towards cynicism. The emotions I'd been made to feel about the Holocaust felt cheap and manipulative, like a sentimental movie that pulls at the heartstrings effectively but in predictable, unimaginative ways. To protect myself I built up a shell against all art and experience related to the Holocaust—because nothing I had already seen could tell me anything new, I told myself there was nothing out there that would make me think or feel about it in a novel way, and so there was no reason for me to re-expose myself to the Holocaust at all. This reaction, I believe, was a direct result of the way I'd first encountered the Holocaust as a child. Because I had always approached the Holocaust in a structured, sanctioned way, and had always been told what to feel about what I saw, I began to question those feelings when I reached adolescence. For the first time I became aware of how I had been emotionally manipulated all along, from that first day watching my teacher work the projector in a dark classroom, up to the Holocaust Day assemblies I still had to attend.

My retreat into cynicism was severe, but it is not the end of the road. The ongoing intellectual process that led me to question the simple narrative I'd been taught then is now causing me to reexamine the conclusions I came to in high school about that narrative. In the process of writing this essay I have come to realize that Holocaust photographs, shorn of their educational packaging, still have the power to shock and to wound; and if I am still shocked, what grounds do I have for indifference? But if I am to accept my own emotion, and to act on it—if I am to engage in postmemory—I must feel that I have arrived at that emotion honestly. I must develop a narrative of the Holocaust that I can trust, one that does not reduce hell on earth to a simple matter of six million martyrs and memorial candles and "never forget." It won't be an easy process, any more than my original loss of faith was easy; but it is necessary work, and I have already begun it.

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PATENTING CULTURE: THE CULTURAL CONFLICT OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

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The debate over intellectual property rights often fails to address fundamental conflicts of culture that are inherent within them. In 1997, the American corporation RiceTec patented basmati rice, arguably appropriating a cultural staple and turning it into a generic brand. Through the lens of the patenting of basmati rice, and by employing the work of Jonathan Lethem, Siva Vaidhyanathan, and Marilyn Randall, I will attempt to bring into focus the cultural context, conflict, and significance that is manifest in not only this appropriation controversy, but in international patent law in general. I will show that when we turn our focus away from the economic and legal aspects of this debate, and focus on the cultural implications, what we will find is a cultural power struggle.

A close examination of this controversy reveals conflicts between different ideologies of ownership, elements of theft, and colonialism within a particular cultural context. RiceTec's patenting of basmati rice is based upon European ideas and traditions of ownership that are foreign to the culture that cultivated and nurtured basmati. If we understand basmati to be a cultural resource, then its appropriation is a blatant theft of one of India's most prized goods. This attempt at appropriation, which was committed by a Western entity and founded on Western legal concepts, can then be seen as an example of twenty-first-century cultural colonialism.

Farming, and the food it produces, is a source of culture, history, and pride for people around the world. Just as farmers are inevitably bound to their land, so too is their culture bound to their crops. The corn, wheat, and rice we eat today are both the products and reflections of the growers' cultural contexts, each occupying an important place in cultural traditions. Basmati rice is one such artifact. For thousands of years, basmati rice has been grown in the foothills of the Himalayas, each generation of Indians passing down this traditional food to the next in line. But this crop represents far more than the region's main source of daily calories and grain exports. Basmati is used in religious ceremonies, weddings, and has even been the subject of poetry for hundreds of years (Arora 3). It is an inextricable component of Indian culture.

So when RiceTec obtained U.S. patent number 5,663,484 in 1997, claiming basmati as its own, the region erupted. What followed was an intense, international legal battle that spawned several movements and began a continuing discussion about intellectual property rights and the economic repercussions of what was soon termed "bio-piracy" (Shiva).

RiceTec claimed it had created an original kind of rice by crossbreeding a basmati strain with a semi-dwarf strain (Arora 4). This "new" strain of rice had one major

advantage beyond simply being patentable: it was more durable and suitable to other climates than traditional basmati. This meant that the natural monopoly over basmati rice that India and Indian farmers had enjoyed for millennia was about to be lost. In response, the Indian government, accompanied by Indian scientists and activists, mounted a strong campaign and challenged the ruling in the courts. In 2001, RiceTec's patent claims were struck down (Arora 5), and in some ways the crisis was averted. Despite this outcome, however, the event is significant and deserves additional consideration.

The RiceTec patent can be understood as an attempt at cultural de-contextualization and as a very real clash of cultures and their norms. In order to analyze this conflict we must first outline the different cultural norms that inform different conceptions of intellectual property. Siva Vaidhyanathan, a writer, cultural historian, and media scholar at the University of Virginia, claims in "Hep Cats and Copy Cats" that the cultural value systems that inform non-European-derived traditions of ownership often differ from the more linear or "progressive" value system that "emanates from the European artistic tradition and informs European and American copyright law" (125). The European tradition emphasizes individual ownership and creativity, whereas non-European-derived traditions tend toward a more communal conception.

This difference in conceptions of ownership helps to explain how the RiceTec patent resulted in a clash of cultures. The cultural context from which basmati was appropriated was inherently different from the world that conceived patent and property law. Jonathan Lethem examines the culture surrounding the ideas of intellectual property in his essay "The Ecstasy of Influence," where he debates the merits of a "public commons," a metaphorical place where ideas are passed down like any other cultural tradition (66). While Lethem discusses the concept in a purely intellectual realm, the idea is entirely applicable to the cultural context in which basmati rice originated. Basmati rice was not the property of any one farmer, or any one group of farmers. It was never owned in the way that the Western world conceives of private property. Basmati rice has always been a symbol of cultural heritage, not just another crop or export item. It has inherent cultural value to the entire community to which it belongs that surpasses its quantifiable value on the international grain market.

A parallel to this cultural understanding of ownership is outlined in Vaidhyanathan's work as well. While Vaidhyanathan refers exclusively to music, we can see the same cultural norms at work. Before basmati rice was patented, it existed—like the elements of Blues music—available "for any skilled and practiced performer to borrow and put to use" (121). Both Lethem and Vaidhyanathan refer to cultural realms and resources that were never governed by theories of individual property rights or conceptions of individual ownership. Basmati's cultural context was a shared existence; the only restraints on its use were the soil and climate to which it was adapted. It belonged to the entire Himalayan region equally; not to any one group.

Significantly, while both Lethem and Vaidhyanathan stress the importance of a "commons," they have different approaches to explaining where it resides. Lethem's description is conceptual and expansive, and he concludes that it belongs to "everyone and no one" (66). Vaidhyanathan is far more specific, perhaps because his reasoning is based on Blues music, where the resources of "the commons" come from a very specific and earthly place: "the cotton fields" (121). He makes an explicit and deeply meaningful cultural and historical reference to the African American community and the cultural context that invented and cultivated Blues music in America. Just as Blues music comes from the cotton fields, basmati, in even more tangible ways, comes from the Himalayan rice fields and Indian culture. In other words, "the commons" in Vaidhyanathan's conception is intended for use by those who have other, even more tangible things in common: culture, identity, and experiences.

When RiceTec patented basmati rice in 1997, it did not remove the rice varieties native to India from "the commons," since the patent only covered a "new" hybridization of the rice. Thus, the various strains that existed previously in India were not affected. While this might appear to honor the concept of "the commons," if one uses Vaidhyanathan's analysis, it does the exact opposite. The issue at stake here is not simply whether Indian farmers can still grow and cultivate their cultural heritage; it is the fact that their cultural heritage was being appropriated and essentially exported by a foreign entity. This appropriation then becomes an attempt at cultural de-contextualization. In other words, although RiceTec's patent would not have removed basmati from its place of origin, by attempting to grow it in other places and contexts, it would have become just another globalized product, and not the rare cultural resource that it is today.

That is why it so disconcerting that when one examines the media coverage surrounding this controversy, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find the voice and opinion of the Indian basmati farmer. Indeed, while the coverage has allowed Indian intellectuals and cultural authorities like Vandana Shiva to speak out, and as much as one might like to provide a platform for the airing of grievances and allow experts to attest to the cultural significance of basmati, the news coverage of this controversy has focused almost solely on the economic and trade impact of the patent. The absence of the basmati farmers' voices in the debate is yet another example of how basmati has been culturally de-contextualized. The importance of the very individuals who have cultivated basmati and stand to suffer the greatest harm from its appropriation have been ignored and ultimately lost in the legal and economic debate.

RiceTec, in attempting to make basmati a globalized good, was effectively devaluing the cultural uniqueness of basmati. Culture is a finite resource which must be protected. Ironically, there is a Western economic concept called the "tragedy of the commons" that states that a resource left to the public—unowned by any one party—is fated to be abused and depleted by its inevitable overuse. There is no reason we should view the basmati situation any differently. The appropriation of an essential

cultural resource like basmati represents the opening salvo in a potentially dangerous trend. If a cultural resource is removed from its context and distributed around the world, it too could become a tragically depleted cultural commons, sapped of its strength.

It is important to understand that this type of cultural de-contextualization and appropriation does not represent a new paradigm, but rather a historically recurring theme. In her essay "Imperial Plagiarism," Marilyn Randall shows the interconnected relationship between the metaphors of conquest, colonialism, and plagiarism and examines the shifting rationales upon which they are based. Randall refers to the "the colonial metaphor of legitimate possession through the civilizing work of improvement" (134). Randall's "colonial metaphor" highlights how the historically Western sense of entitlement to conquest—built upon the notion that foreign lands and people can, and indeed must be, "improved"—has survived to this day. To use Randall's terminology, the logic and legitimization of RiceTec's basmati patent is based on a "colonial logic of possession by improvement, which is itself underwritten by the Lockean principles of production and work as sources of legitimate ownership" (134). This Lockean principle that X can be taken, improved upon, and thus newly owned is not only an entirely Eurocentric dynamic of ownership, but is the reasoning behind every European conquest into "savage lands" since Columbus pillaged the Bahamas on his way to America. When looked at through the Randall's "colonial metaphor," we can understand the patenting of basmati to embody not only a conflict of ideologies of ownership and a cultural theft, but a form of cultural colonialism.

Terms like "colonialism" can produce strong reactions and carry ethnic overtones, so let us be clear: I am not calling RiceTec or the current system of international patent law inherently racist; what is at play here is one culture exercising its power and influence over another. Indeed, Vaidhyanathan argues that the battle lines drawn during intellectual property disputes are not etched along racial divides, but are in fact a struggle between established and non-established entities (133). In the case of the basmati patent, the established entity is a Eurocentric system of ownership manifested as international patent law regulating and appropriating a foreign culture. When explaining his concept of "imperial plagiarism," Lethem draws a similar idea, saying that it is the appropriation of a "commonwealth culture for the benefit of a sole or corporate owner" where "cultural debts flow in, but they don't flow out" (66). This analysis shows that the patenting of basmati is not only a commodification of culture for the economic benefit of an established corporate interest, but is a cultural power grab. Randall says that if we "imagine a context where the 'right to copy' construes no economic benefits either on author or plagiarist," what we will be left with is a "discourse of power" (131-32). This is the most fundamental dynamic at work in the controversy surrounding the basmati patent. Intellectual property rights and copyright law are inherently a "discourse of power." So when the subject is the patenting of a cultural resource in the way that basmati rice is to the entire sub-continent of India, it

becomes a discourse in cultural power, a discourse that the Western world has dominated for centuries.

This discourse of power not only assigns importance to one culture at the expense of another, but is a modern day manifestation of European ideals and values imposing themselves on foreign peoples in foreign lands. It is a clash of cultures and a revisiting of the "the colonial logic" that justified hundreds of years of economic and cultural appropriation.

While the cultural effects of such an appropriation are harder to measure than the economic consequences, they are nonetheless real. When RiceTec patented a plant that both literally and figuratively constituted the basis of a vast portion of Indian society and culture, they did more than just bite into India's yearly export numbers. They stole from their cultural tradition. As stated before, basmati rice is a gift from generations of farmers to their children and to their children's children. Its unique aroma, taste, and texture was created and honed over millennia by Indians—and for Indians. To commodify, rebrand, and decontextualize a gift as sacred as this constitutes more than economic warfare. It is cultural theft.

Basmati rice, like so many cultural artifacts, is more than just a product for sale. It is simultaneously a reflection and an embodiment of a very specific culture and place in history. It has inherent value and meaning beyond its market price. The risk of depleting distinct cultural resources amidst the tides of globalization or in an attempt to make everything common is very real. Certain things belong to certain places, people, and cultures. Basmati rice is special because it is Indian—and because it is grown in the foothills of the Himalayas. The use of another culture's conception of property and ownership to remove it from that context is a direct threat to India's cultural heritage. If Basmati became less Indian, then India itself would become less Indian.

Cultural appropriations like the basmati patent continue to this day. As conscientious observers of this era of globalization we should not let economic rationales or our own Westernized conceptions of property explain away a new era of colonialism. The appropriation of traditional knowledge and resources of native peoples without consent or compensation is indeed colonialism, even if it is conducted under a more stylized banner. When we hear of corporations using patent law to reach into foreign cultures to appropriate a new product, we must remind ourselves that this is not just business as usual, or even simple corporate greed. It is the ugly specter of colonial right and justification reborn in the twenty-first century.

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CRAZY, SEXY, SALTY

BLAIR PFANDER

This billboard advertising Pretzel Crisps outside of San Francisco is the four-year-old brainchild of Snack Factory LLC and a younger sibling of New York Style Bagel Chips (Kelleher). The campaign is pushing a redesigned, pale blue package and new cursive logo. The text in the ad—"We're thin and stacked . . . so lose the old bag"—plays on a description of the pretzels, which are "thin" and "stacked" in a pile, and the idea of men leaving their wives ("old bags") for skinny women with big breasts. The ad was released after the original campaign slogan, "You can never be too thin," became the subject of a passionate media outcry, with one New York City citizen memorably defacing a bus-stop ad to point out that "Actually, you can" (Mastrangelo).

After the first campaign, Pretzel Crisps' Vice President of Marketing, Perry Abbenante, issued this tenuous apology:

> We hope people noticed what isn't in the ads: No extra thin, scantily clad female models; No mention of dieting programs, points, etc. . . . We in no way advocate unhealthy weight loss or want to promote a bad body image. We appreciate your feedback and apologize if the ad offended people. We are listening to feedback and making some adjustments to the campaign. (Mastrangelo)

In defending his company's ad strategy, Abbenante pointed to an important absence in both the original and redesigned advertisements: people. There are no "scantily clad

models"—or even a haggard "old bag"—in the image, yet their presence is evoked by the text. Through the miracle of ad copy, Pretzel Crisps' customers were asked to regard two aluminum foil packages as human beings.

Surely the marketers weren't trying to bait their critics, but at the very least they hugely misunderstood (or maybe willfully ignored) the complaint. Pretzel Crisps' method of addressing the media crisis was to swap an irresponsibly pro-anorexic slogan for an ad that was blatantly misogynistic—perhaps whoever designed the ads didn't think so, and that's what's so bewildering. In both campaigns, consumers were asked to accept a distorted version of gender in which thinness and sexiness were presented as successful versions of femaleness, implying that anything else was undesirable, and worse, in the case of the "thin and stacked" campaign, disposable. We can assume that the company thought this campaign would sell chips to the largest number of potential consumers, which indicates a belief on the part of Snack Factory LLC that both men and women are amused by the ad. But why would anyone find it funny?

To laugh at the billboard is, I think, to acknowledge an understanding of, and implicit participation in, the dichotomy between two widely accepted female stereotypes: the sex kitten and the frigid hag. Neither is an accurate representation of true female identity, whatever that is. Yet, many women hold a deep desire to be the former and an intense fear of becoming the latter. In her book *Gender Trouble*, feminist philosopher Judith Butler articulates the problem of socially imposed gender norms (like the sex kitten and the hag) as "ideal morphological constraints [placed] upon the human such that those who fail to approximate the norm are . . . condemned to a death within life" (xxi). For Butler, "death within life" refers not only to physical violence and death, but a life limited by social expectations. The sex kitten and the old bag summoned (though not bodily present) in the Pretzel Crisps billboard can be treated as examples of Butler's "ideal morphological constraints": both are culturally crafted images, or "morphologies," of extreme femaleness that manipulate how real women evaluate their worth. The assumption contained in both Pretzel Crisps advertisements is that consumers operate in the cultural space contained within the borders of the sex kitten and the old bag.

In the preface of her book, Butler coins the term "mundane violence" to describe cultural norms that place limits not only on how we live, but also on how we perceive ourselves (Butler xxi). The "mundane violence" that the billboard commits is the public reinforcement of two absurd versions of female identity, and by extension, the notion that one identity is preferable to the other. Between the lines of the ad copy, customers are asked to buy into a worldview that elevates men, who are presented as the arbiters of the transaction (egged-on by the prompt "lose the old bag," i.e., "leave your wife—unless, of course, she's 'thin and stacked'"), and degrades women to the status of mere options—choose version "a" or "b." For the woman, neither version of the female offers satisfaction, but inevitably leads to failure: the sex kitten presents

an unrealistic feminine ideal, and the old bag is dehumanization made manifest, both the package and the woman it represents portrayed as throwaways.

According to Butler, consumers' participation in this socially constructed framework of gender necessitates an element of "performance":

> [A]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle or identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (185)

Butler develops her central argument—that people perform gender—around the idea that actions and gestures endlessly mimic notions of sexual identity that are themselves "fabrications," or social constructs. Thus, there is no original gender, only artificial reproductions of what culture teaches us is properly "woman" and "man." The three distinct performances of gender acted out in the moment of a consumer viewing Pretzel Crisps' "thin and stacked" billboard are: first, the personal performance of a female consumer invited to become more exaggeratedly feminine by purchasing a snack food, and second, the performance of a male consumer encouraged to see himself as more virile by choosing to "lose the old bag."

The third act is the concerted performance of Pretzel Crisps as a corporate personality attempting to create a brand identity based on skinniness and sexiness, thereby performing gender on a public, rather than personal, scale. Even the specifics of its more feminine logo and packaging—the softer pastel colors, the swooping cursive font—prompt the idea that a corporation, like an individual, might craft a particular gender identity. Each creates a more desirable identity through what Butler calls "acts and gestures": a woman is expected to want to be thin and stacked, so the company assumes she will buy chips advertised to have those qualities. Her gender act is the purchase of slender, sexy chips. Likewise, Pretzel Crisps tries to merge its brand identity with ideas about health and attractiveness, so its act is creating a logo (and complementary campaign) that connect ideal feminine qualities to its product.

Butler's claim that gender performance is an infinitely mimicked and culturally reproduced act lacking a true original closely resembles Wendy Doniger's argument that individuals have no single "self," but rather an abiding sense of identity that arises from a collection of "masks" that we alternate putting on and taking off (Butler 188; Doniger 69). In her essay "Many Masks, Many Selves," Doniger argues that we are "driven to self-impersonation through the pressure of public expectations" (60). "Self-impersonation"—like gender imitation in Butler's *Gender Trouble*— is a vehicle through which we construct "masks," or affected identities constructed to address specific

cultural assumptions and expectations. A logo is analogous to Doniger's concept of a mask: it is a crafted, produced identity. Pretzel Crisps might be seen as the corporate embodiment of Doniger's fluid concept of identity, an ever-changing, self-promoting new campaign, the way an individual adopts a new mask for a particular situation. As such, the billboard can be perceived as an enormous declaration of the cultural expectations upon which individuals base their crafted gender identities, or masks.

Branding and advertising are synonymous with mask-making: they are methods through which corporations appropriate cultural norms, the way individuals acquire them via masks. Of course, truly talented advertisers do not just reflect these norms—they manipulate them. Gifted marketing executives understand not just the statistical details of their target consumers, but also something of their psychology. They know how to manipulate desires, fears, and insecurities to elicit a specific response—that is, how to motivate a customer to buy their product. Because ads are designed to appeal to the largest number of potential customers, they are a convenient way to examine what culture—here embodied by advertising executives acting the role of cultural experts—defines as normal and good. The ad copy reveals a set of assumptions not just about sexuality and gender, but also of goodness: "thin" and "stacked" are not just desirable traits, they are human virtues. Thin and beautiful are normal and good, and unattractive and disposable are abnormal and bad. By developing a campaign that pits these two contrasting versions of female identity against each other, Pretzel Crisps' advertisers are appealing both to women's desire to be sexually attractive (the "good" manifested in "thinness" and "stacked-ness"), and inversely, to their fear of abandonment should they fail to live up to the skinny, sexy standard. The purchase of Pretzel Crisps becomes a kind of gender insurance: we are made to believe that by eating sexy chips, we guarantee our most successfully female selves.

The very same ideas of good and normal that Pretzel Crisps promotes in its campaign influence the re-creation of its corporate identity. The decision to use a cursive, pastel-colored logo is likely motivated by the same ideas of genderized "goodness" that the company imposes on the customer with its "thin and stacked" campaign. The new logo is designed to address the perceived desires of its customer—specifically, that the brand appear to be healthy and attractive. The relationship, then, between consumer and corporation may be seen as one of mimesis, each recreating in itself the traits (what Butler would call the "acts" and "gestures") that the other determines are desirable. Pretzel Crisps' feminized logo and accompanying campaign are meant to render the brand softer and more appealing to customers in the precisely the same manner that its billboard suggests customers become more appealing by eating their chips. To convey the imitative nature of the relationship in Doniger's terms, Pretzel Crisps is the ever-changing self, its logo and ad campaigns composing a multiplicity of masks that affect not only customers' brand perception, but Pretzel Crisps' perception of itself. Pretzel Crisps reinvented itself as a lighter, more feminine

brand, and, in turn, its customers were asked to see themselves as lighter, more feminine versions of themselves.

A massive billboard over the highway is like an enchanted cultural mirror: in it, we see ourselves at our best—our teeth whiter, our cars bigger, our waists smaller. One might even say that the entire business of advertising is based on this urgent need to mimic, or reproduce in ourselves whatever qualities or products are deemed "best"—an urge Doniger might identify as our need for infinite "self-imitation" (62). Because we have been trained through the viewing of millions and billions of advertisements and logos in the course of a lifetime and to like or dislike who we see in the mirror, we assume others also prefer this more flattering version. And so we buy things. At this most basic level of consumer psychology, we buy something in an effort to be liked: "we simply choose the mask that matches the mask of the person we're trying to please," writes Doniger. "[W]e project what we regard as our best self to the world" (67). In the case of the Pretzel Crisps ad, the assumption being made is that a woman's "best self" is "thin and stacked," and her worst is old and forgettable. The billboard asks us to believe that by eating Pretzel Crisps, we ingest these flattering traits and assimilate them into our selves.

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DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL—DON'T LIVE

BEN ILANY

> "At our best and most fortunate we make pictures because of what stands in front of the camera, to honour what is greater and more interesting than we are."
>
> —Robert Adams

The American photographer Jeff Sheng has created a collection of images that fill in some of the gaps in the pictorial history of the lives of gay men and women in the military. In his book *Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Volume 1*, Sheng photographed Airmen, Soldiers, Marines and Sailors[1] posed in everything from utility and combat uniforms to Honor Guard regalia. Sheng is attempting to honor the service of these men and women and simultaneously highlight the tragedy of their hidden lives. The photographs are not meant to simply be a pat on the back for unfortunate servicemembers caught in the teeth of an unjust policy, but are intended to stress the moral dilemma that has plagued the United States military for decades. Jeff Sheng's photographs are a response to the absurdity of the controversy over gays serving in the military and reveal the powerful negative effect that capricious and thinly veiled moral sermonizing can have on targeted minorities.

To this day, even in light of the profound social progress and wider acceptability of homosexuality, gay servicemembers, like me, are barred from leading normal lives in the military. We can be gay, but we cannot act gay in either our speech or physical expression. This issue came to a boiling point in 1993 with the passage of the law "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue," better known as simply "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." The law codified and standardized the restriction against openly gay behavior across the various military services, and was hailed by many as both a resounding success and a momentous failure.

In his first year in office, President Obama signaled to the military that he would pursue an end to the ban on gays serving openly (Simmons). Once again Congress descended into a debate over what constitutes acceptable bedroom practices for our men and women in uniform. Following that announcement, many socially conservative senators and congressional representatives urged that, in respect for the privacy and decency of all of our servicemembers, the policy should remain in place. Senator John McCain stated on the Senate floor that the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" would cause more "gold stars [to be] put up in the rural towns and communities all over America," implying that more members of the military would die as a result of a misbegotten political crusade (United States Cong. Rec. 18 Dec 2010).

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, retired Marine Corps General John Sheehan asserted that the Genocide of Srebrenica, where more than

8,000 Muslims were massacred in the Bosnian War, was a direct result of the Dutch military's allowance of homosexuals within its ranks. When later pressed on his experience and background, the retired General cited his credentials commanding a diverse force of "blacks, Hispanics, and Orientals, just to name a few" (United States Cong. Senate). But despite the testimony in Congress it has become increasingly clear that the divisions between homosexual and heterosexual members of society are arbitrary. They mask the true makeup of our military community by forcing an estimated 65,000 gay and lesbian servicemembers to hide their identities and deprive themselves of leading fulfilling lives (Gates iii). The attempt to propagate these sex-based divisions through official government channels compromises our ability as a military and civilian community to have a productive dialogue about our collective morals and ethics, and unjustly subjects our volunteer military to capricious political talking points.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" mandates that we avoid any actions or statements, public or private, that might be considered by our commanders to expose ourselves as homosexual in nature. While those who may have deep-seated prejudices are protected from exposure to homosexuals by our government, gay servicemembers are simultaneously made into victims. The men and women in Jeff Sheng's photographs balk at these proscriptions. They pose in uniform, but with their faces hidden, their displacement is still revealed. Sheng's work is so effective precisely because the subjects are who they are.

The photograph titled Craig, Baltimore, Maryland, 2009, is a powerful example of the effect that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has on individuals. By collaborating with the artist, Craig, an Airman in the US Air Force, risks his career. His devotion to his career is so strong that he is willing to suppress his sexuality, but at the same time the feeling of injustice is so powerful that he jeopardizes his position to perform this act of protest. Craig risks more than the average Airman: he faces potential harm not just from the violent enemies of his country, but on a second front he faces harm from his own countrymen and his superior officers to whom he swore an oath to obey. Craig offers us a vision of life under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as both dramatic and dispiriting. He is an Airman, and his flight suit and bomber jacket tell us that he is aircrew—a traditionally masculine and fraternity-like community. Much like men's athletic teams, this community thrives on its sense of hyper-masculinity, and heterosexual conquest plays a significant part in that identity.[2] It can't be an easy thing for Craig to socialize with his peers and have to steel himself from participating honestly.

Figure 1. Jeff Sheng, Craig, Baltimore, Maryland, 2009. Print.

The photographs in Jeff Sheng's series are distressing, to say the least. They show us people, but no faces. They claim to display heroes, but it's as if the viewer is glimpsing them in a moment of vulnerability and even shame. There is a rebellious element to them as well, and we can see that Craig is not just a forlorn subject. He may hide his face from the camera out of fear, but he is also frozen in an act of defiance, a proud statement affirming that yes, he does indeed exist. The only source of light in the bedroom is coming from behind him where he appears to have walked out of the closet. He is paused mid-stride, looking over his shoulder as if some pressure drives him back. He appears to be literally coming out of the closet but staying within arm's reach—an obvious nod toward the life he must lead on a day-to-day basis. The scene is barren and gloomy, and there is definitely something wrong in the photograph, as if the subject occupies a world in which he doesn't quite belong. Like all the subjects in Sheng's photographs, Craig is caught in limbo, posing in his uniform not at work, not in front of a base or an aircraft or a squadron or a group of friends, but alone in his bedroom, outside of any military context. The power that the military has been given to control the lives of its members is immense; in the interests of common defense and fighting wars, the Department of Defense has a great deal of latitude to restrict the rights of servicemembers (Parker v. Levy). The military has hidden its gay servicemembers behind this legal wall for decades.

The language of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is a thinly veiled attempt at impartiality and is, at its heart, a judgment of morality: one of right or wrong. The law does not directly invoke morality but simply states as fact, based on lengthy testimony from high-ranking Department of Defense officials, that homosexuals "create an

unacceptable risk to the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability" (US Cong.).[3] The law passed so easily and has continued to enjoy wide support among conservatives and some liberals, because it made no explicit accusation that being gay is immoral. Rather, it provides the needed political cover for policy makers to pursue homophobic agendas while claiming that their stance has nothing to do with personal moral objections.

Morality may be an important tool societies use to establish common values, but there is a risk that blind faith in one's sense of morality may narrow one's vision in certain circumstances. Steven Pinker, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, believes that our sense of morality is a crucial aspect of who we are and how we perceive each other, but that the conclusions we draw from those moral frameworks can be highly flawed. In his essay "The Moral Instinct," Pinker argues that our sense of morality can be fleeting and quick to change, that "our heads can be turned by an aura of sanctity" (34). If we apply religious or righteous traits to an idea, it becomes very easy to rationalize it as part of our moral code. This phenomenon helps to explain how "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" can pretend to be neutral even as it makes judgments based on a particular sense of morality—the morality is inherent not in the policy itself, but within the individuals who express it. When this policy is invoked, people immediately refer to their own conviction that a homosexual lifestyle is not a moral way to live, and they assume that most people share their view.

Emblematic of this principle are the words of former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace, who betrayed his own moral dichotomy in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in 2007 when he stated that homosexuality is immoral and the military should not condone immoral behavior, likening it to adultery (Madhani). He quickly backpedaled the next day, stating that he was giving his own personal opinion and that his support of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" had nothing to do with his own bias. Similarly, in December 2010, House Representative Louie Gohmert argued on the House floor that homosexuality threatens unit cohesion from a neutral point of view, and that homosexuality overall is, historically, a harbinger of the downfall of every significant civilization (United States Cong. Rec. 15 Dec 2010).

The policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," therefore, implies that because American servicemembers are so predominantly averse to homosexuals, we as a society must codify a set of rules in order to defend the prejudices of those servicemembers so that they will continue to fight and die for our country. The paradoxical moral argument is clear, and the Department of Defense can claim innocence against any accusations of prejudice because it makes no moral judgments; however because individuals within the Department of Defense will make moral judgments, suppressing gay servicemembers is for the greater good. In other words, the Pentagon is enforcing a morality not for its own sake, but for the sake of the prejudiced (Frank "Marching Orders"). This is bureaucratic doublespeak at its finest.

To complicate matters, many proponents of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" point out that the policy is not a ban on homosexuals serving in the military, but as the language of the law clearly states, only a prohibition on homosexual acts. It does not mandate that commanders seek out or initiate tests for homosexual nature. So theoretically, homosexuals are as free to serve in the armed forces as heterosexuals (Shawver 8). Will there be restrictions? Of course—the military places restrictions upon all kinds of people: alcoholics, the overweight, those suffering from certain chronic illness, and even people who are afraid of fire. Indeed, claustrophobic people are not permitted to serve as aircrew, and if it is discovered that you are claustrophobic (either through statements or acts) you may lose your job or suffer other negative career consequences. Is it not fair to say, according to opponents of repealing the policy, that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" does not prevent anyone from serving their country in uniform, but in fact, it only seeks to protect the privacy and moral compasses of other heterosexual servicemembers?

This logical fallacy has carried a great deal of weight throughout numerous Congressional hearings on the issue. But unlike almost any of the aforementioned reasons for exclusion or subjection in the military, homosexuality is not a disease or psychological condition (Munsey). And certainly the law does not make the claim that it is, though the implication is that many within military ranks may believe so. Given the overwhelming opinion of the psychological community that homosexuality is not a disorder and the lack of claims from the military to the contrary, this particular position (that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" isn't a ban on gays at all) is indefensible.

Circular logic plays a big part in the continued arguments against gays serving openly. It is simple for fans of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" to begin from a position of emotion or perceived sanctity, and rationalize that position into a moral stance (Pinker 35). Nathaniel Frank provides further arguments in his book, *Unfriendly Fire*. Saying homosexuals can serve as long as they don't do gay things, say gay things, or "display a propensity" to do either would be like saying Christians are welcome to serve in the military so long as they do not pray to Jesus. "Is a restaurant that bars creatures that bark," asks Frank, "not a restaurant that bars dogs?" (xviii). According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation is "an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others" (APA). These attributes make up a significant portion of how we, as human beings, identify ourselves. To deny individuals an essential portion of themselves is to do them, and all of the people around them, an injustice. Gay people can't be reasonably asked to suppress such important parts of their personalities any more than other human beings can. It simply does not work.

The evidence that it does not work is borne out of the statistics: since "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was formally written into law in 1993, more than 14,000 servicemembers have been discharged—a number that averages out to almost three per day (SLDN). More than 320 servicemembers with critical language skills such as Arabic, Korean and Persian, and more than 750 who had skills that the military considers to be

"mission-critical" have been discharged for being gay (US GAO "Financial Costs"). This statistic hits particularly close to home for me. As a Persian Airborne Cryptologic Linguist in the Air Force, I saw firsthand how short the Air Force was when it came to qualified operators. I have friends who were deployed upwards of nine months out of every year due to a dearth of experienced operators. If asked whether they would be all right if a gay person took one or two of their rotations, I have a hard time believing that they would have any answer other than an emphatic "yes." I can say this with confidence because the evidence shows that when the military was at its busiest during times of conflict, rates of discharges under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" fell dramatically (Frank, *Unfriendly Fire* 12).

There have been a number of studies on both the effects of the policy on homosexuals and the effects of homosexuals on the military, and they give us some helpful insights. In 1993, when "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was being hotly debated among the media and politicians, the military and Senate commissioned a number of studies to evaluate whether or not a ban on homosexuality could be justified. One such study took a close look at a selection of our NATO allies and Israel (not a member of NATO, but nonetheless considered to have a modern military) and found that not only does every member nation except two (the United States and Turkey) allow homosexuals to serve openly, but that it "is not an issue and has not created problems in the functioning of military units" (US GAO "Policies and Practices" 3).[4] Several countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom, reversed existing anti-homosexual policies in the late twentieth century and have reported no ill effects as a result. After lifting its ban in January 2000, Vice Admiral Adrian Johns[5] of the British Royal Navy said:

> [W]e very soon came to realize that sexual orientation was not something that could just be put to one side . . . when people can't give 100% to their job because they are being intimidated, or are scared or they are preoccupied with hiding their true identities rather than playing a full part in the team, operational efficiency is degraded. (Johns)

The Royal Navy then began to actively recruit gay Britons through advertising and information campaigns (Lyall). Despite the ban, gay sailors had been exceeding expectations for years in the Royal Navy in essential ways, proof that the presence of gays does not harm unit cohesion or military readiness.

While our closest allies have either no history of banning gay servicemembers or have been reversing bans for decades, nations such as Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, Cameroon, Egypt, Iran, Sierra Leone, North Korea, Syria, Yemen, Zimbabwe, and of course, the United States, either have explicit bans on gays serving in the military, or laws against homosexuality in their societies as a whole. The United States is not in good company here; this is not the crowd that we should be sharing

our moral values with. The assertion that allowing gays to serve openly would reduce overall combat effectiveness is even more absurd in light of the fact that the United States insisted strongly that both Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM be joint NATO efforts ("Bush and Blair").[6] If the Global War on Terror is so important to our freedom and security, why would we risk inviting countries that we know harbor homosexuals in their military ranks into the fight? Would that not jeopardize our ability to succeed in the wars? Since 1949, when the United States military began participating in NATO, its members have served with openly gay servicemembers from those of other member nations ("What is NATO?"). There have been no specific reports of conflict or breakdown in unit cohesion as a result.

It bears repeating that discharges on the grounds of homosexuality in our armed forces (before and after the passage of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell") have traditionally fallen during times of conflict, and risen during peacetime. During the first Gulf War, discharges for homosexual conduct fell to an all-time low. It is well known in the military that many servicemembers came out by telling their peers and superiors that they were gay, but commanders felt pressure to ignore intelligence regarding the sexual orientation of their troops because they could not afford to lose the manpower. Clearly this hypocrisy highlights the ability of gay servicemembers to serve normally. Unfortunately, in what can only be seen as a betrayal of trust and a two-faced application of the military's own policy, it discharged over a thousand people in the six months following the conclusion of the Gulf War when the pressure to ignore homosexual conduct evaporated (Frank, *Unfriendly Fire* 12). Indeed, Frank provides an almost endless collection of statistics and numbers that describe the colossal impact that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has had on both the military budget and its chronic personnel shortage—not to mention the 14,000 experiences of individual men and women who were called before review boards to have their personal sex lives exposed, documented, and then used against them. Since September 11, 2001, the number of discharges for homosexual conduct has once again dropped dramatically. A close analysis of the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan reveals a pattern: Periods categorized by lulls in violence correspond with higher rates of discharges. In other words, when commanders and war fighters are busy prosecuting the Global War on Terror, they ignore the policy (Frank, *Unfriendly Fire* 169). The current efforts to repeal the policy through judicial and legislative means, as well as artistic protests like Jeff Sheng's, are spurred on by the continued pattern of using and discarding gay military members whenever the military's need for them wanes.

Jeff Sheng has photographed approximately sixty gay servicemembers in just a few years, but it is only recently that his work has received national attention. Reactions to the photos have been overwhelmingly positive, with one Senator using the collection as an exhibit in the ongoing Senate debate over "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ("DADT Stalls"). But what if such a project had started back in 1993? What would the political

landscape look like today if all current and former gay servicemembers (a number that, if the Urban Institute's numbers can be believed, must be in the hundreds of thousands) participated in this photo project? Could any of the supporters of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" maintain their position in light of such overwhelming numbers? Stephen Pinker writes that "we are all vulnerable to moral illusions" and so it is easy to make morality-based choices on issues that may seem inconsequential to us (34). In light of this, perhaps Sheng's most important contribution is the annihilation of the illusion that there is an archetypal "Gay Soldier" who does "Gay Things." Instead, he presents the truth that there are countless gay people who wish to serve their nation in uniform, to fight its battles, and to protect its families and its Constitution from enemies, foreign and domestic—and that even if we refuse to let them show their faces, they are still a part of our community and an essential element of our legacy. Gay servicemembers have a long and unbroken history in the United States Military—that fact is borne out by the persistence of the controversy. That history should not be characterized only by negative statistics, sad stories, and broken careers. It deserves to be remembered and even documented in a way that treats them for who they are: volunteers who choose to fight so that the rest of Americans don't have to.

In April 2009, I was preparing to deploy to Iraq with several members of my unit. We were set to fly to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, before continuing to the Middle East. My boyfriend and I had been seeing each other for more than a year and, despite the difficulty of two men dating in the military, we had a very positive relationship. While we didn't go out to restaurants together for fear of being seen by our colleagues, we were not consumed with what we couldn't do; our version of dating quickly became normal for us. And so, when the question arose as to how I was going to get to the airport the morning I was supposed to leave, we decided it would be best if we said our goodbyes the night before, and I would get a ride from a friend.

As our unit gathered at the airport and prepared to head up the escalator to our gate, one of the wives suggested that we pose for a photograph. Each wife or girlfriend stood with her respective man, and the photograph that resulted is an excellent one. It shows the men in uniform and the women who stay behind and try to keep them sane. It is old-fashioned and sweet, in a way. The only thing missing from the photograph is me. Since I had no spouse and no girl to hang from my arm, it fell to me to hold the camera. This is a piece of my own history from which I am conspicuously absent. I couldn't be a part of it because it would betray a piece of my true nature to my employer—the only government organization in the United States that is permitted to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

This paper will be the final document bearing my rank and title in the United States Air Force: Senior Airman, Tactical Support Operator, 97th Intelligence Squadron, 55 WG. As of December 2010, I will simply be a veteran counting on the goodwill of my fellow citizens to continue defending me and those I hold dear. I have been privileged to experience a variety of training and operational activities, and my own life is richer

for it. I often wonder, though, that if I had been given the chance to pursue a family life like so many of my peers, would I have made different choices? Would I be over the skies of Iraq or Afghanistan right now? My time in the Air Force has changed me in a fundamental and positive way. There are corners of our military where the concerned, the skilled, the capable, and the eager serve; where sexual orientation is genuinely ignored, and the content of your character and your dedication to the mission is what determines the quality of your treatment by others. And for a short while, at least, it was my honor to serve with them. It is my sincere hope that even a year from now, sexual orientation will be entirely inconsequential, and that all Airmen, Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors will be able to wear their wedding rings, introduce their spouses at group functions, have candid conversations with colleagues, receive equal financial support for their families, and even be seen in public—and have it be entirely normal.

Afterword, March 2012

The week after I completed this paper, everything changed. My timing, it seems, could not have been better.

During his 2008 presidential campaign, Senator Barack Obama indicated that he would support the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." For many this was a momentous promise that seemed to truly resonate with his message of hope and change, but after a year in office the President was still mum on the issue. The growing cynicism in the nation surrounding the healthcare debate crept into the minds of many, and I began to doubt whether or not he had the political capital to make good on his promise to the military. But in his State of the Union Address in 2010, he reiterated his commitment to ending the policy and set loose a litany of senior military commanders into the Congress and media to debunk the age-old arguments in favor of the ban. Despite accusations of social experimentation and excessive political correctness, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act passed in December 2010 and went into effect on September 20, 2011. Though the debate consumed the Congress and the national discourse, the repeal landed in the military ranks with little fanfare. None of the predicted apocalyptic breakdowns transpired, there were no massive drops in recruitment or spikes in attrition, nor has there been a need for any large scale corrective action. It turns out that servicemembers are tremendously good at following orders from their Commander in Chief. This comes as little surprise to me, despite the warnings from the supporters of the old policy.

During a panel discussion with the team that drafted the plan to implement the new policy for the Air Force, Colonel Gary Packard responded to a question about the impact of the policy by saying "well, some people's Facebook status changed, but that was about it" (Branum). Gay servicemembers throughout the military have come out to their colleagues, they have gotten married in ceremonies attended by their peers

and commanders, and even produced an "It Gets Better" video at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan (OutServe).

But there remain political challenges ahead. The military is famous for its excellent benefits available to dependents and spouses of servicemembers. But because the Defense of Marriage Act prevents federal agencies from recognizing same-sex marriages, the Department of Defense is prohibited from affording benefits to these families. In a remarkable show of fairness, the DoD attempted to come up with ideas to circumvent the restriction. But given the political environment, it decided that any additional funding requests for gay families were unlikely to make it very far in either the House or the Senate. There are currently several lawsuits on their way to the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of DOMA, and it seems that we will have to await results from the judiciary in lieu of relying on our lawmakers.

Furthermore, many veterans who were discharged under DADT have been refused access to severance money that they would have been available had they been forced out for other honorable reasons. Justice, it seems, is not always retroactive. During his campaign, then Senator Obama also gave a nod to the transgendered community who would still be subject to constrictions even with DADT gone. He conceded that changing this would have to be further down the political line, and that repealing DADT alone was going to be a difficult enough fight.[7] There is still important progress to be made, but we are one significant step closer.

On September 24, 2009 I was deployed to Mosul in northern Iraq. I wrote an entry in my journal that reads,

> As I walked home from the flightline I saw four MH-60s in the distance covered in soap suds parked side by side on the pad with their propellers removed. Huge floodlights were set up around them, and little shirtless soldiers in PT shorts were scrambling all over the helicopters scrubbing them down. From the front they looked like big chubby puppies sitting cooperatively for bath time. The whole scene could have been something out of a calendar—fit, scantily clad soldiers covered in suds washing their choppers. I stood and enjoyed the view for a few minutes before continuing back to the compound.

There have always been and always will be gay people in the military who do and say and think gay things. They may behave a little differently now that they are not officially deviants, or they may not. The point is, we are on track to freely be who we want to be and live the lives we want to live so long as we uphold our oaths of enlistment. And if any current or future serving Americans find this somehow distasteful or offensive, then all I can offer them are the words of Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Micheal P. Barrett: "Get over it. Let's just move on, treat everybody with firmness, fairness, dignity, compassion and respect" (Hodge).—Ben Ilany

NOTES

1. While not commonplace in civilian publications, it is customary in the military to capitalize all titles regardless of the grammatical form they take.
2. In 1998, ESPN published a web series titled "The last closet: sports" (http://espn.go.com/otl/world/day1_part1.html) exploring the difficult world of gay athletes and the challenges that they face, trying to put on a strong masculine front to avoid suspicion or stereotyping. In a paper published in Energy Publisher in December 2010, Robert R. Reilly, a member of the American Foreign Policy Council, said that "the most prized characteristic in the military is masculinity," that in battle is when man "is at his most manly," and that homosexuality produces "girlie men."
3. It is striking that all of the studies commissioned from third parties by Congress and the Department of Defense refuted the claims made by what was clearly becoming the "moral majority." In addition to the two studies already cited in this paper, these are: Defense Force Management: DOD's Policy on Homosexuality GAO/NSIAD-92-98, Consideration of Sexual Orientation in the Clearance Process GAO/NSIAD-95-21, Multinational Military Units and Homosexual Personnel University of Santa Barbara, and Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: Options and Assessment, National Defense Research Institute MR-323-OSD, and two critical PERSEC reports (an internal DoD study group). These documents, along with a more comprehensive collection of studies, official commentary, and video may be found at http://dadtarchive.org.
4. North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a group of North American and European nations who have agreed to mutual military defense. The United States military operates extensively with NATO allies in both peacetime and wartime operations.
5. Admiral Johns' full title is Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command Vice Admiral. I have shortened it for brevity's sake.
6. While not commonplace in civilian publications, it is customary in the military to capitalize the names of certain military operations.
7. The issue of unfair treatment of transgendered people in the military was of distinct concern in the 2011 debate at Columbia University to readmit ROTC programs to campus. For my reaction as well as those of many other students, see http://www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/militaryengagement/index.html.

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WAR DOCUMENTARY BRINGS HOME THE DISTANT AND FORGOTTEN

RENE MORAIDA

Lincoln Center is the cultural mecca of New York City. It's clear just stepping off the 66th Street subway stop, where it's not uncommon to find a musician hauling his or her cello onto the train or to see men finely dressed in tuxedos heading to or returning from a formal evening concert. The fanciful, choreographed water fountain is the heart of Lincoln Center, surrounded by iconic institutions such as the New York City Ballet, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Julliard School, among others. So it seemed to me a little out of the ordinary that my first trip there would be to see not a ballet, but a war documentary: *Restrepo*, part of the Human Rights Watch film festival at the Lincoln Center Film Society. It is a study of an American outpost in Afghanistan named after Juan Restrepo, a fallen medic in the soldiers' battle company. This is a serious documentary—not some ordinary war drama. It does not have the complex cinematic camera movements or the soaring music of *Saving Private Ryan*, or a love story such as the ones portrayed in *Pearl Harbor* and *Forrest Gump*. No, the genre of documentary does not invent such things, for the camera tells the unscripted story of real soldiers and their experiences. *Restrepo* is a powerful portrayal of war that I will never forget.

The setting of the film is the Korengal Valley. The "Korengal," as it is often referred to in the movie, lies in the border region dividing Afghanistan and Pakistan, sandwiched between the Afghan capital city of Kabul on the southwest and the Pakistani capital of Islamabad on the southeast. It is widely believed that many of the insurgents fighting the U.S. and NATO forces take refuge in this border region. As the movie opens, video footage from military helicopters takes the viewer on an aerial tour of Afghanistan's rugged terrain. We see the sharp mountains and desolate landscape. It looks so different from the busy cosmopolitan urban landscape outside the theater, and this contrast creates tension. We know what awaits us and that we cannot turn back. We are there as a roadside bomb explodes under an armored vehicle. We are there as soldiers respond to an incoming attack on their outpost. With barely enough time to throw on their armored vests and wearing only boxers and combat boots, they shoot back as bullets swirl around them. We are there for lighthearted moments of downtime too, and the painful moments when death and loss come to the soldiers.

And so this documentary is far more powerful than a long news report or a composed history lesson. It is a human drama, a human story, about real people who might otherwise be forgotten. In making this film, independent journalist Sebastian Junger visited the battle company five times between 2007 and 2008. In his accompanying book *War*, he recounts a combat scene where two soldiers, Private First

Class Timothy Vimoto and Private Tad Donoho, come under machine gun and grenade attack. Junger recounts that "Both men began returning fire, bullets kicking up dirt all around them, and at one point Donoho saw Vimoto open his mouth as if he were about to yell something. No sound came out, though; instead, his head jerked back and then tipped forward. He didn't move again" (18). The death of Vimoto is tragic and by associating a name to a death, it becomes personal for the reader like the viewer.

We see the aftermath of another U.S. soldier's death in *Restrepo*. In the scene, soldiers quickly cover his body while others come closer to inquire what happened as the chaos continues around them. One soldier lets out a wailing scream and sobs, lamenting the loss of a friend and fellow comrade-in-arms. His grief pierces the theater. I am crying and see that others around me are too. We are gripped, drawn in by this human trauma. Soldiers are typically portrayed as tough and resilient and to see this moment of pain and frailty is overwhelming. There is a moment of collective emotion in the theater; we are mourning the loss along with the soldier, and perhaps too, lamenting the absurdity of war. We are now partly connected to the soldiers from a distance; the war begins to come home.

Yes, we are partly connected, but only partly. We could see glimpses of war and hear what combat is like, but we could not smell the war, or touch it, or make it real and tangible. For as much as I took in what I saw and my emotional reaction to it, it was still not a full sensory experience. At the same time there was a huge disconnect as I sat in the air-conditioned comfort of a New York City theater. Many in the audience were likely being introduced to this war for the first time, even though it was approaching its tenth year. Why was there such a disconnect? What about everyone else who hadn't seen this film and didn't give even this short amount of time to think about what's happening in Afghanistan? I would be remiss not to give credit to the audience in the theater and all those who have seen the movie or have attempted to learn about Afghanistan by reading about the war or having a conversation with a veteran. Indeed, any of this is better than not having any consciousness of what is happening over there.

As an illustration of how disconnected some may be to the war in Afghanistan, it is useful to look at empirical evidence. In 2009, the Pew Research Center found that 38 percent of Americans who do not follow the news from Afghanistan "feel the news can be so depressing they would rather not hear about it," and "27 percent say they feel guilty for not following the news from Afghanistan more closely" ("Most Say"). To tap the pulse of Americans and their views on war, *Christian Science Monitor* reporter Michael Ollove, who labels Afghanistan an "invisible" war, visited York, Pennsylvania, and drew sharp contrasts with how the town views this war compared to World War II. He found that during the 1940s World War II was "inescapably Topic A—and probably every other letter of the alphabet as well—in York as it was in every other small town or big city in America" (Ollove). By contrast, he found that Leada Dietz, a

York resident and activist, described Afghanistan as a "forgotten" war. "It's almost as though there is no war," she said (qtd. in Ollove). Dietz's remarks expose a blind spot in the American psyche.

Ollove offers an explanation as to why Americans are not as engaged as they once were. He cites the lack of a draft, and the Bush Administration's decision to prevent the public from seeing the flag-draped coffins arriving back in the United States (Ollove). Even after the Obama Administration overturned this prohibition, the media still does not show these images on a regular basis, if at all. Ollove also lists the economic downturn and "war fatigue" as other causal factors for American ambivalence, or rather, blunt indifference.

Ollove also cites a Bush-era tax cut as evidence that even during war time Americans are not sharing any sort of financial burden. Andrew Bacevich, a professor of international relations at Boston University, a Vietnam veteran, and the father of a soldier killed in Iraq, agrees. "The policies of holding Americans harmless renders the war remote and unreal for most," he says. "Americans are not asked to participate, and only minimally experience the various effects of one of the longest wars in our history" (qtd. in Ollove). It is useful to look back at our history and remember Vietnam. Though many university students weren't even born during this era, it should be recalled that the draft was in place at this time. The future then for so many Americans was uncertain, not knowing whether they would be called up and sent to fight. Today, with an all-volunteer force, that uncertainty and immediacy has all but disappeared.

While the lack of a draft and the absence of images of the dead seem to be major causes of indifference, they are not the only ones. Some argue it is television and the dominance of pop culture that keeps Americans from paying more attention to the war. Army Reservist Craig Trebilcock says, "I don't think the average person thinks about these wars at all. They're more concerned about what's going on in 'Lost' or who's winning 'American Idol' than what the country is doing overseas" (qtd. in Ollove). It is quite possible that some Americans prefer to be preoccupied with entertainment and reality television than the reality of what's happening in Afghanistan. It is much more cheerful and uplifting to watch a drama or comedy than it is to see war footage or a video of coffins and soldiers dying. David Carr, a flim critic for *The New York Times*, makes a similar point in his review of *Restrepo*. As he says,

> for the most part public interest and understanding of what American soldiers do on our behalf remains remarkably limited in wars that go mostly untelevised and undernoticed. American men and women fight, die and kill a long ways from home, and many want it to stay that way. (Carr).

Columbia University professor Bruce Robbins, who specializes in cultural theory, helps to explain this phenomenon of humans distancing themselves from suffering in

his essay "The Sweatshop Sublime." He describes the average lay person's attitude as: "It's fine if I know it's happening, as long as it's not happening right here" (91). All are arguing essentially the same thing, that we tend to prefer to keep a space between the evils and suffering of the world and our blissful spheres of existence. Physical distance is a factor related to war indifference, as the experience of watching *Restrepo* in Lincoln Center clearly reveals. Viewers are far removed from the terrain and combat environment of Afghanistan. Yet the medium of film and the subsequent reviews of the film, exposes the public to subjects that once may have seemed distant, but now are more accessible.

While visual reminders can provoke awareness, our instinct is to shrug off that awareness. In his essay, Robbins recounts a cartoon from the *The New Yorker* in which a person examines the label on a shirt collar, something many of us may have done ourselves. Robbins writes that we may or may not think about which country it came from and consider the potentially horrible conditions under which it was created. Whether we are committed to fighting global inequality or changing our buying habits, Robbins says the outcome is the same: in that instant, "you put on the shirt and forget about it" (85). He continues:

> Yet at the same time this insight is also strangely powerless. Your sudden, heady access to the global scale is not access to a commensurate power of action on the global scale. You have a cup of tea or coffee. You get dressed. Just as suddenly, just as shockingly, you are returned to yourself in all your everyday smallness. (3)

While Robbins is examining this behavior through the lens of sweatshop labor, it can be applied to our awareness about war. While watching *Restrepo*, the viewer may get angered, emotional, vow to take action, vow to care more, but once we leave the theater or turn off the movie, we may forget about it, and, like Robbins says, return to our "everyday smallness."

Why do we stay in our "everyday smallness"? Are we afraid to allow anything uncomfortable to penetrate our bubbles, shake our foundations, erode our veils of safety and security? Stepping outside of the smallness of ourselves can be a good thing. If we fail to shrug off our indifference, we are choosing to be left in the dark. So much is at stake. We may be headed back into complacency and pre-*9/11* thinking. A seemingly foreboding article published in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2000 by James M. Lindsay, an expert on the domestic response to American foreign policy, noted that "Americans ignore much of what happens overseas because they see little at stake" (4).

What were Lindsay's thoughts in 2000 on how to make Americans less apathetic about what happens overseas? "A renewed threat to American security would clearly do the trick," he says. "So might a recession" (Lindsay 7). Obviously, Lindsay's predictions were realized. In his *International Politics* article "Distant Suffering and

Cosmopolitan Obligations," scholar Andrew Linklater notes how interconnected the world is today. "Globalization has made affluent societies more aware of distant suffering than ever before," he writes (24). He drives home his view that we, in developed and advanced societies, have the moral obligation to care about what is happening in other parts of the world. I agree, we do have that obligation. Do we always act on it? Linklater says no: "For many, compassion alone can produce cosmopolitan behavior. But one must ask how far efforts to promote identification with 'distant strangers' can also encourage emotions such as shame and guilt" (27). Like faraway victims of a tsunami, or refugees fleeing a civil war, it is not too far of a stretch to say that U.S. and NATO soldiers in Afghanistan are also considered "distant strangers." I find this uncomfortably perplexing. We so remove ourselves from war by distance and apathy that other Americans, young men and women fighting a war, become distant to us.

In his review of *Restrepo*, Carr implicates us all in making the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines the "distant strangers" that Linklater discusses. Carr, a member of the mainstream media establishment, appears almost shocked and surprised at his profession's limited war coverage. The film, again, seems to make up where the news media has fallen short. The time and effort the film makers invested has paid off. Carr interviewed Sergeant Brendan C. O'Byrne, who completed a tour in Afghanistan, who explained that *Restrepo* has served as a vehicle to help others see what soldiers go through in war. "I've received all sorts of e-mails from families and wives of soldiers who say the book and the movie helps them understand why their fathers or their brothers or husbands don't like to talk about what happened over there" (qtd. in Carr). In much the same way, the film fosters reconciliation between the soldier and the film viewer.

Surely, it would be foolish to think that by watching one film all the problems of indifference will be solved. Bringing back the draft and airing nightly news video of coffins will not solve this problem either. It is hard to raise consciousness about a war without treading into divisive views on war, policy, and ethics. Everyone comes to the subject with a different perspective and set of beliefs. Some reject the idea of war entirely. So how does one account for an appropriate amount of consciousness? Perhaps asking that question is absurd in itself. There is no litmus test; one does not reach a certain level of consciousness where one is no longer indifferent. There is no level, there is no judge, and there is no right or wrong course of action. Sure, it would be great if someone was so moved as to inquire about a local veteran's organization, volunteer with the USO to send care packages to soldiers in Afghanistan, or join a local peace movement. Perhaps watching the film will motivate someone to pay more attention to the news or pick up that free copy of *The New York Times* in Columbia's student center in Lerner Hall or attend a panel discussion on Afghanistan at the School of International and Public Affairs. Even more, as uncomfortably patriotic as it may

sound to some, even walking by the American flagpole can trigger a few seconds of thought, that while you are heading to class, a war is going on and people are dying.

If these suggestions seem like a stretch or are asking too much, I understand. Being close to death and war is very uncomfortable. I maintained my own distance when I was in the military. In 2008, I was an active-duty Sailor in the United States Navy assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), where I worked as a video journalist in media and public affairs. Our ship was a floating airport, a launching pad for fighter jets that dropped bombs on Iraq and Afghanistan. This was my first taste of war after being stationed in Japan and southern California earlier in my military life. I remember our captain and commanding officer telling the entire ship about the first mission. He told us how many insurgents we killed and congratulated everyone—from the sailors who loaded the weapons onto the planes to the pilots who flew the missions—on a "job well done." We were all complicit and it was disgusting to me, but what should I have expected? Perhaps I was too caught up in my "everyday smallness" or was too naïve to believe I could be in the military and escape a deployment to a danger zone. Yet the moment had arrived. I felt a sick feeling in my stomach: war was real now, and I did not like it. It was hard to process and hard to swallow that we had just taken the lives of other human beings. I wondered who they were; did they have families? Why did they hate us? Through all my naïve notions and novice understanding of war, I was glad I was sitting in an office, even if it was miles off the coast on a warship. I was glad I did not have to drop those bombs. Was it cowardice? Did it make me less patriotic? I think not. Did I realize then a future in the military was probably not for me? Yes.

Yet, in order to prosecute a war, someone must step up, someone has to drop those bombs. Like the soldiers in *Restrepo*, someone has to be willing to risk everything, leave his life behind, go off to war, and yes, be confronted with the reality of killing and taking life and be okay with it. In "The Moral Instinct," Harvard professor Steven Pinker explores not merely what is and is not moral in society, but the process of how we determine the difference. According to Pinker, "Moralization is a psychological state that can be turned on and off like a switch, and when it is on, a distinctive mind-set commandeers our thinking. This is the mind-set that makes us deem actions immoral ('killing is wrong'), rather than merely disagreeable" (34). Pinker points out the distinctions we make between "killing is wrong" (a universal norm) and "killing in war is not wrong" (34). We vote for the leaders who send men and women to war and funnel our tax dollars to fund this war. As distanced and distracted from the implications of our actions as we may be, are we not complicit?

Afghanistan may not be entirely forgotten, but the daily deaths of American soldiers has long ceased being front page news. How can we not care to think about others who are doing our killing for us, serving in a war many of us will never see, and picking up the arms many of us refuse to touch? Linklater offers insight into why we, people who believe that killing is wrong, let others do our killing for us in war. As he

explains, "Taboos against harming others can disintegrate rapidly when individuals and communities fear for their survival" (26). The events of *9/11* and the continued threat of terrorism seem to be at the root of this fear. The mechanism that allows us to go about our daily lives without thinking about the war and soldiers dying is the same one that offers us a buffer from daily fear or concern.

I do not wish to cast moral judgment or blindly advise students to consider a career in the military, nor do I advocate an unwavering support of the war in Afghanistan. It is not my place. I am not trying to convince peace activists to change their minds, nor am I affirming that people are more or less patriotic if they have served in the armed forces. I am merely attempting to raise the public's consciousness about a war that fails to pervade our daily lives. I am trying to bring home a war and its soldiers so they won't be forgotten. And I believe that seeing *Restrepo* can be a starting point.

I remember how the movie audience reacted to a soldier's death on screen with audible sobs. They got it; this moment of collective grief was rare and seemed profoundly significant. As philosopher Judith Butler noted in a French documentary on AIDS,

> [p]ublic mourning is not something we do because we have personal needs to grieve. We do have those, I'm sure, but I think public mourning gives value to lives, brings us into a kind of heightened awareness of the precariousness of lives and the necessity to protect them and perhaps to understand that that precariousness is shared across national borders. (Butler)

Butler's implication that this "public mourning" gives validation to those lost, can be extended to give validation to all those who have served, such as those portrayed in *Restrepo*, and to those who will die in this war and in future conflicts. Perhaps we sob because on some level we understand that they fight and die in war so that we don't have to.

The time has come for full awareness of this morbid reality. As Steven Pinker says, "it's hard to imagine any aspect of public life where ignorance or delusion is better than an awareness of the truth, even an unpleasant one. . . maintaining walls of ignorance around some topic, can corrupt all of intellectual life, proliferating error far and wide" ("In Defense of Dangerous Ideas"). Like Pinker, Robbins encourages us to step out of our ignorance. As Robbins says, maybe sometimes we need "a provocation intended to shock us out of lethargy" (6). I believe the film *Restrepo* can be just that shock we require. As Sebastian Junger said during a panel discussion featured on the movie's website, "How society deals with war morally is really, really important . . . I want people to walk out of the cinemas thinking 'my god, I didn't know war was like that" ("Restrepo"). In the same discussion, the late *Restrepo* photographer Tim Hetherington said, "What they go through needs to be seen and needs to be digested by the American public" ("Restrepo"). If anything, my hope is

that you see this film and decide for yourself. Go on the adventure that is *Restrepo*. Let the soldiers into your lives for that hour, hear their stories, experience the war, and bring it home. Perhaps in time they will no longer be the distant and forgotten.

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HIVES, DAMN HIVES, AND THE INTERNET

REBECCA WRIGHT

In late 2010, a loosely knit group of internet denizens who call themselves Anonymous launched cyber attacks against Amazon, MasterCard, PayPal, Visa, and PostFinance using a tactic known as "distributed denial of service," or DDOS, overwhelming the attacked sites' servers and rendering them inaccessible for several hours. The companies became targets because they had, in response to political pressure, either stopped hosting or frozen donations to the whistleblower website WikiLeaks, which was then in the midst of releasing a huge number of classified U.S. diplomatic cables to the public. Anonymous had evolved out of chatrooms on the website 4chan.org, and first gained attention in 2008 staging pranks on the Church of Scientology. Since then, the group has launched attacks on the government websites of countries including Australia and Iran, white supremacist radio host Hal Turner, the Koch brothers, and alleged sexual predator Chris Forcand (it was actually Anonymous, in a *To Catch A Predator*-like trap, that led to the arrest of Forcand in the first place). Since the pro-WikiLeaks operation, Anonymous has also launched attacks in support of the protests in Egypt, Tunisia, and Wisconsin (Grigoriadis). Generally, but not exclusively, Anonymous targets organizations that it perceives as suppressors of free speech and freedom of expression, or who seek to influence others through dishonesty.

Though individual members (or people who claim to be members) have come forward and been interviewed by the press, Anonymous remains largely faceless. An estimated fifty thousand people took part in the WikiLeaks operation, enlisted not only through chatrooms on 4chan and IRC, but also through the group's website and Twitter account (Grigoriadis). Anonymous' slogan ("We do not forgive. We do not forget. We are legion") and their penchant for wearing Guy Fawkes masks in public underlines their desire to remain, well, anonymous. Lacking definitive sources or informative press releases, characterizations by the media and social commentators run the gamut: from activists, civil disobedients, and allies against oppression at one end to vigilantes, vandals, and immature adolescents throwing a collective temper tantrum at the other. These characterizations probably reveal as much about the commenters as they do about Anonymous.

Often, the question of whether a group is aligned with devils or angels must wait for some historical consensus. Civil rights protestors and activists, investigated in the 1960s by the FBI as criminal organizations, have been vindicated as heroes by the passage of time. Inversely, the Ku Klux Klan, self-appointed guardians of the white Christian Southern way of life and accepted by the early twentieth-century power structure, has been condemned as a white supremacy group that used fear and violence to terrorize black citizenry. Groups organize and gain influence over a period of

months or years, and as they evolve, so do our analyses of them (though of course, we interact with these organizations in real-time). But Anonymous exists and acts amid a unique and often brutal Internet culture that is evolving at a speed to which we—as both participants and observers—have yet to adapt. As the Internet and its various subcultures spill out into the real world, they take on a force borne of networking ability that has not been seen before.

Though Anonymous's actions are often illegal and some of its members have been arrested, in a network that is fifty thousand strong and scattered across the globe, individual participants—like a school of fish in which each individual feels safe because it's surrounded by others—can operate with relative impunity or fear of the law, and (collectively speaking) with a disconcerting amount of power. As British author Alan Moore asked, "Who watches the Watchmen?" How we characterize such groups will, in large part, define how we react to them, and as social trends and events develop at ever-increasing speeds, we need to feel assured that groups will use their power in a moral, benevolent way. What do we have to fear from Anonymous? If it makes decisions based on morality, then we can make some predictive assumptions about its behavior. But is morality an appropriate standard to apply to a group like Anonymous?

Morality can be surprisingly slippery. It is generally simplified as "a code of conduct that applies to all who can understand it and can govern their behavior by it," and is assumed to be beneficial (if not downright essential) to individuals and society as a whole (Stanford). Moral codes feel "mandatory and universal" to the point that the thought of violating them often feels impossible (even in hypothetical situations), but despite their universal appearance, which suggests some basis in evolution, moral codes vary widely from culture to culture (Pinker 56). Yet morals are often oddly inexplicable, both to the people who follow them and to outside observers.

Consider, for example, the Trolley Problem, devised by philosophers Philippa Foot and Judith Jarvis Thomson. A runaway trolley is hurtling towards five men, and only you can save them. You can pull a lever that will throw a switch and divert the trolley onto a spur, killing only one man who happens to be there. Or you can hurl a fat man off a bridge, landing on the tracks and stopping the trolley, killing the fat man but saving five people. With either option, the math is the same. So why do people generally find the first option easy to answer (yes, divert the trolley), and feel morally conflicted about the second (don't kill the fat man) (Pinker 35)? Were morality simply logic and rules, there would be no disparity between the two options. Irrational functions like emotions and a sense of justice have somehow become deeply entangled in our moral brains.

Today, as scientists join generations of philosophers and religious thinkers, using twenty-first-century tools like fMRIs and large-scale survey studies to discover why morals have such a hold on our psyches, we are beginning to discover just how complicated our moral reasoning can be. When asked to explain why certain actions are moral or immoral, many people struggle to articulate a reason. Moral reactions can

be among the strongest that we have as a species, and yet we can barely explain the reasons behind them. It turns out that moral decisions—in particular, moral dilemmas—engage several different areas of the brain, including emotional and rational centers, logic as well as instinct (Pinker 35). A challenge for social scientists has been addressing how a moral sense can be "universal and [yet] variable at the same time" (Pinker 37).

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt, though not explaining the evolutionary source of morality, describes some of the underlying patterns and universal themes that underpin our culturally variable morals. He outlines five foundational categories: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (999). One of the reasons morals can seem so different, Haidt argues, is that different cultures prioritize the five themes differently; Asian cultures, for example, value obedience to authority and loyalty to the group more highly than Americans, who tend to emphasize fairness and reciprocity. Haidt describes morals not in terms of moral reasoning, but as moral intuition. People start at the moral conclusion and work backwards, a "post-hoc process in which we search for evidence to support our initial intuitive reaction" (998). Morals also serve a utilitarian social function, bringing groups together. Morality "binds and builds; it constrains individuals and ties them to each other" (1000). A common context helps members of the same culture, even if they don't know each other, to predict each other's behavior and establish a baseline of trustworthiness. For example, on the assumption of trustworthiness, creative writing groups—often comprised of relative strangers—share personal pieces with each other on the assumption that other group members won't steal their creative product. Any member caught doing so would be asked to leave the group. Morality, in this sense, has a coercive effect. The reward of being a moral person is that you are a trusted and included member; people who violate a group's moral codes are untrustworthy and no longer welcome (Haidt 1000).

The standards of morality Haidt offers help us to better understand Anonymous. They value fairness highly, believe that everyone has the right to personal expression, do not respect authority at all, and act mostly (if not exclusively) in support of their moral intuitions. Perhaps they arrive at a moral conclusion to justify their actions, rather than the other way around, but this tactic is common in moral reasoning. It's possible that those who argue that Anonymous is nothing but a bunch of internet vandals do not understand the value system in which their actions make moral sense.

Admittedly, Anonymous' immediate social context complicates and possibly undermines their claim on morality. The website that spawned Anonymous, 4chan.org, is a notorious gathering place of "trolls," or internet users who delight in upsetting unsuspecting people in any number of ways, for no other reason other than "lulz" (a bastardization of LOLs, or LOL, internet speak for "laughing out loud"—they do it because it's funny). 4chan, for example, went after Jessi Slaughter, an 11-year-old girl who attracted their attention after posting a YouTube video (in response

to another Internet dispute unrelated to 4chan) saying, among other things, "This is to all you fucking haters, okay? Guess what—you guys are bitches…I don't give a fuck. I'm happy with my life, okay? If you can't realize that and stop hating, I'll pop a Glock in your mouth and make a brain slushie."[1] 4chan users decided to call her bluff, and taunted and insulted her on her YouTube vlog, MySpace, Facebook, and email. Some 4chan users tracked down her real name, home phone number, and address, and made numerous prank phone calls as well as (according to the family) death threats and accusations of child abuse which ended up being investigated by the local police department. Obnoxious and foul-mouthed Jessi Slaughter may be, but it's hard to imagine any justification to gang up on an 11-year-old in such a coordinated way and expect her to be able to cope with it, and hard to characterize 4chan's users as anything other than bullies in this particular situation.

4chan has a sense of humor, as well. Lolcats (pictures of cats with funny captions, now mostly found on icanhazcheeseburger.com) have their roots in 4chan. They overwhelmed an internet contest in a bid to send Justin Bieber on a concert tour to North Korea and invented the "Rickroll" (in which you click on a link only to discover that it takes you to the YouTube video for Rick Astley's song "Never Gonna Give You Up") (Grigoriadis).

Such antics sometimes spill over into Anonymous. It was Anonymous who overwhelmed YouTube with porn uploads one day, and allegedly wallpapered an epilepsy support discussion forum with loud, strobing advertisements (noise and flashing lights being known to cause seizures) (Courtney; Poulson). Anonymous also flooded and prompted the shutdown of several hip-hop websites and a California teenager's website for his No-Cussing Club (Potter). Anonymous's recent activities may be morally motivated, but the culture in which it exists (and it is hardly a stretch to assume some overlap between the people who defended WikiLeaks and those who attacked Jessi Slaughter) is often frivolous, certainly questionable, and sometimes downright predatory. "Lulz" and internet Darwinism do not exactly foster the requisite environment (mutual support and beneficence, social conformity, establishment of trust) for group morality to function healthily.

Is the Internet a better, safer place because of the Anonymous? The group is trying, in its own selective, capricious way, to take on the role of Internet Cop, Guardians of Freedom. Clearly, Anonymous is not nearly as concerned with its own morals or conduct as it is with making sure other groups act in compliance with behavior it deems to be honorable and humiliating groups which deviate from its standards. This puts Anonymous more comfortably in the company of fictional anti-heroes such as Batman, Rorschach (of *Watchmen*), and Wolverine of *X-Men*. But guardians of morals cannot be automatically assumed to have morals themselves, not in the same way that civil rights groups in the 1960s lobbied for the rights of citizens while also adhering to their own internal moral standards. And groups like Anonymous cannot be assumed to function like groups with a more defined structure, either.

Studies of morality frequently examine an individual, an overall culture, or an organized group of people. But Anonymous prides itself on its leaderlessness and facelessness. The idea that anonymity can breed trusting relationships between its members contradicts Haidt's hypothesis that one of the functions of morals is to have a coercive effect on the behavior of group members, including those who adhere to the standards and ostracizing those who don't. And although the group can effectively punish outsiders, Anonymous has no way of policing its own membership, excluding those who don't adhere to its moral code, or coercing its members into behaving. With no leaders, Anonymous goes where the whims of the hive mind will it to go. If members of a community are bound together by their common individual morals, members of a hive mind are bound by something else altogether. Groups with no authority figure or hierarchy must rely on the authority of each individual member to create something that reflects the collective whole of the group. Anonymous is a different sort of group to which the traditional assessment of group dynamics—to say nothing of morality—is challenging to apply.

The formal study of group dynamics began in the eighteenth century, but has fascinated our ancestors for many millennia (Chant). How do ants make a colony, or bees make a hive, or corals form reefs? What happens to higher reasoning when individuals join a mob? Leonardo da Vinci dissected cadaver brains looking for the place where the human soul resided. Charles Darwin explained the collective weight that random, singular genetic mutations can have. In the modern world, how do videos go viral? How does Google rank its search results? How does order emerge from disorder?

Western philosophy has historically viewed the loss of individuality, the surrender of one's autonomy, as threatening and dystopian. One thinks of the Bacchantes ripping Orpheus to pieces in collective madness; or the many senseless riots that have caused incalculable damage in cities all over the world. Friedrich Nietzsche said, "Madness is rare in individuals—but in groups, parties, nations, and ages it is the rule," (90). There are times when the surrender of individuality is a goal, such as in certain religions; the practice like the Sufi dhikr, and other forms of religious ecstasy, which are believed to bring the practitioner closer to God. But the assumption is that moral individuals tend to become immoral in aggregate, and generally, complicated social action (of the sort that Anonymous engages in) is not what people envision crowds doing. The line between the madness of crowds and the wisdom behind collective action is only beginning to be understood.

As scientists study crowds they discover that crowds have an odd sort of intelligence. For example, when trying to guess how many jellybeans are in a jar, no one person will be right—but when all the guesses are averaged together, it turns out that the group is almost exactly correct, within a jellybean or two. This has been documented over and over again, with a variety of different problems, including economic issues of supply and demand (Surowiecki 4). And the larger the crowd, the

more correct the answer is likely to be, the more likely that the noise of individual stupidity can somehow coalesce into a signal of collective wisdom.

James Surowiecki, in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*, outlines four qualities that a crowd must have before it can be considered "wise": diversity of opinion, independence of individuals, decentralization of authority, and aggregated decision-making. Individuals in Anonymous can trawl the entire internet for information, making their own decision about whether to participate in any given operation. No one individual's opinion holds more weight than anyone else's, and whether or not an operation is a success depends directly on how many people participate. It's hard to imagine a purer distillation of opinion.

So Anonymous may be a "wise crowd." Though it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to predict what organizations will attract Anonymous' ire, there is a deliberative process involved—both when the group is deciding on targets, and when individual members of the group decide whether they are going to participate. It is hard to know how long an idea bounces around in the community—probably not more than a day or so, online attention spans being what they are—but at some point, the "What if…" and "We should…" has to become "We are going to…" with a precise date, time, and plan of deployment. Given the aggregative aspect of Anonymous' decisions and actions, though, how much do individual members allow their assumptions about whether or not others will participate in an action influence their decision?

Professors of philosophy Sara Rachel Chant and Zachary Ernst (University of Missouri) examine the "state of equilibrium" in a group, when individual intentions reach a tipping point and become collective action (Chant 96). When individuals in a group are reasonably certain that other actors will show up and also cooperate in the effort—like moving a large piece of furniture, for example, or cleaning a neighborhood park—they are more likely to commit to a project. Reasonable certainty about the "intentions and behaviors" of other individuals in a group can, at least in part, explain whether an individual member commits to an activity or not.

So though Anonymous cannot breed trust-based morality between individual members, if individuals can make reasonable extrapolations about the intentions of Anonymous as a whole, then they do not have to trust other individuals—they can trust in the collective weight of Anonymous. As politically motivated actions outnumber actions waged against 11-year-olds, Anonymous gains a reputation as a particular sort of organization, and an organization that carries through with its intentions. Thus, as the group ages and evolves, new members will self-select to reinforce the morality they perceive Anonymous to have—and in the process, will make Anonymous a more moral organization, unintentionally shaping it in their own image. In the greater, wider, wiser crowd that is the Internet, everyone has a vote in the ultimate identity of Anonymous, whether they are part of it or not.

NOTE

1. http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/jessi-slaughter

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