LET ME REST A LITTLE, HUMANKIND

IDA NOEL GIRMA

He must be a feather, the way his naked body rests so lightly, facedown, on the dirt. The portion of his face not obscured by his thin arm looks almost peaceful—eyes closed, blemish-free. He is not a victim of physical violence or torture; instead, his body is slowly, meticulously, shutting itself down. He is starving to death. One could mistake his big toe for a pebble. Dust clings to his skin. I fear that he might soon dissolve into the ground. But he is resting. The caption of Australian photographer Daniel Berehulak's photograph taken during the 2005 famine in Niger, titled "Let Me Rest A Little, Brother," informs the viewer that the young boy is resting, not dead, and that the even smaller boy standing above him, gazing into the camera with desperate, piercing eyes imploring help, is his brother. Legs dangling from a broken-down wagon with just one wheel is all we see of a third figure in the photo. I saw this image in an online photo essay and felt shock, sadness, anger. The onlookers in the photograph somehow, perhaps counterintuitively, augment the helplessness of the prostrate child, asking "What can we do?" The immobility of the wagon asks, "Where can we go?" The child's small, dusty, naked body implies, "It is too late."

The anger I felt at the injustice shown—at the inability of the boy's family to help him, to feed him—followed by my longing to help him myself corresponds to sociomedical scientist Robert Sember's idea that "the power of images lies in their capacity both to convey information and to evoke reaction, often in the form of a feeling or an impulse" (1626). Most would agree that photographs, especially those of suffering, almost necessarily evoke reaction. They are intrinsically shocking and saddening due to the nature of what they depict. A person's reaction to a photo, however, can be many things—shallow, misinformed, under-informed, personal, biased. Sometimes there is knowing recognition. Sometimes the image is totally alien, unfamiliar. Either way, the viewer's understanding of the photo directly influences his or her reaction.

Writer and activist Susan Sontag offers one perspective on the way people view images of suffering. She contends that "harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock, but they do not help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us" (94-5). The viewer feels shock and sadness but does not "get it." This produces what can be called a "shallow" reaction, wherein the photograph simply does not reveal enough for the viewer to have a contextual understanding of the events portrayed. The image requires a narrative; perhaps a textual explanation of the economic, political, social, and environmental factors surrounding the food crisis in Niger must be examined before the full impact of Berehulak's photo can set in.

Sontag's view contrasts with Sember's understanding of images as "a way of knowing, not in the narrow sense of containing information but in the more profound sense of making information meaningful" (1627). In his article, "Images in Public Health," Sember supports the addition of pictures to the pages of the *American Journal of Public Health*. He asserts that the photographs themselves underscore and strengthen the content of public health scholarship because they provide added depth to the issues. According to this argument, a photograph provides the context that a narrative lacks. These views are paradoxical when considered together, but neither one is necessarily wrong. Whether the viewer derives context and a greater understanding from a photograph or from a narrative is irrelevant. Highly relevant and important, however, is that the viewer does obtain a deep (i.e., "non-shallow") understanding of what he views, as contextual understanding may be considered an essential prerequisite for effective action, which is the next logical "feeling or impulse" (1626).

Berehulak's "Let Me Rest A Little, Brother" likely arouses in many viewers a desire to take action and alleviate the children's suffering. Those who saw the photograph immediately after publication were confronted with an image of urgent famine—the awareness that two hundred, two thousand, or ten thousand miles away, at any given moment, a child was starving to death. Those who see the photograph today know that the effects of a four-year-old famine have not vanished. Sontag acknowledges that the desire to take action against an atrocity is strongest when something can be readily done about the situation at hand. In discussing the photos of the My Lai massacre released in March 1968, she writes, "we could feel an obligation to look at these pictures, gruesome as they were, because there was something to be done, right now, about what they depicted" (95). This logic is compelling. After all, what of the adage "Don't cry over spilled milk"—things that can be helped are the things worth acting on. Surely this expression is far too caustic and insensitive—dismissing the importance of memorialization—but it does not fit for another reason as well.

Before discussing this reason, though, the concept of memorialization requires further explanation. In her piece "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," Marianne Hirsch uses the term "postmemory" to describe "the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (9). She develops her concept of "postmemory" specifically with respect to the Holocaust. Hirsch espouses a different kind of photography-induced action—one as important to the discussion of humanely and productively viewing images as intervention-oriented action. The action of the postmemorial generation is to cope. In Hirsch's words, "the postmemorial generation—in displacing and recontextualizing these well known images—has been able to make the repetition [of the same Holocaust images] a mostly helpful vehicle of working through a traumatic past" (8). The two forms of action—let us say,

"interventionist" and "memorialist"—seem radically dissimilar, but really only differ in the sentiment with which the actor in each situation views a given image. In Sontag's interventionism, action is taken to change a current atrocity from the outside. In Hirsch's memorialism, action is taken to reconcile oneself with a past atrocity from the inside.

But these two forms of action can be reconciled. Images of suffering, whether of wars past, of current famines, or of violence, represent and depict events that are happening now or will most likely happen again. Truly singular events may seem like exceptions—the bombing of Nagasaki, the firebombing of Dresden, the effects of apartheid in South Africa. The systematic mass slaughter of European Jews in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War put an indefinite moratorium on the use of the word "holocaust" in almost all discourse for a reason. But all of these atrocities had similar human effects. The Holocaust is unparalleled for many different reasons while, say, famine in Ethiopia has occurred at least four times in the past century and may very well happen another four times in the next, but their effects are alike (Kiros 16-19). Those affected by any aforementioned event dealt with heart-wrenching injustice, intense pain, and disabling sorrow. They all faced death. Berehulak's subject felt the same hunger in Douloukou in 2005 that a boy his age in a 1941 Warsaw ghetto felt. Because of this, the date of a given photo becomes tangential to our processing of its meaning.

Our reaction to Berehulak's photo ought not be necessarily more profound than our reaction to images of famine in India in the 1960s, for example, though the latter happened "in the past." Our intervention will be more conventionally fruitful in Niger, affecting change in an ongoing situation, but the mere fact that images of famine exist, past and present, makes the matter continually pressing. This is not to say that all atrocities depicted by images of suffering are the same; it is enormously important to recognize the different contexts of suffering, to obtain understanding. But distinguishing events only to establish temporality of suffering is harmful. Events are temporal, but suffering is tragically mired in perpetuity. As such, images should not be looked upon solely to work through trauma of the past, or to understand why events happened, but instead should always be regarded with the consciousness that events that produce the same or similar images are recurring or could recur. This explains why the aforementioned adage fails to apply—the milk is never spilled, *it is always spilling*, so long as there is war, violence, hunger, hatred.

Interventionist action, addressed by Sontag, works because it provides concrete results. But a certain limitation almost always comes with interventionism. People are compelled to act on what they see from the "outside." The sympathetic viewer of an image of suffering wants to do something, but approaches his intervention the first way he can think of, as an outsider. "He" will help "them." This incurs certain dangers. Arthur and Joan Kleinman write in their essay, "The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," that famine

(and for our purposes we can add other sufferings—violence, war, etc.) is culturally presented in a way that misrepresents the affected populations (7). They find that the portrayal of famine as "the experience of a lone individual" leads to labeling localities as "irrational" or "self-destructive," which finally results in the local world being "deemed incompetent, or worse" (7-8). Their solution is to "humanize intervention," but crafting the humane responses Kleinman and Kleinman seek requires a different approach to images.

Hirsch, through her discussion of the postmemorial generation, provides this new approach. Members of the postmemorial generation, because they are the children of victims, find more significance in photos of their parents' suffering than do others. The bond between the two generations bears enough strength that members of the second generation do not view images with an outsider's eye, but in fact work through trauma themselves. In essence, postmemorial viewers look at images of suffering with empathy. They feel a real, visceral sorrow for the victims they are seeing, a sorrow with which they *identify*. They are on the "inside"—not because they suffered themselves, but because their empathy with their parents' suffering is so profound. This is different from the feelings of other viewers, of Sontag's interventionists, who feel a profound sympathy for those suffering before the lens, but who can truly only feel for them. As Sontag puts it, "'We'—this 'we' is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through—don't understand. We don't get it" (98).

Therefore, the danger in "outsider" intervention can be eliminated if people conscientiously place themselves in the role of a member of the postmemorial generation without actually having family members who have experienced the situations they are viewing, and yet still maintain their gut reaction to intervene. A person attempting to view images of suffering in the most humane and productive way possible, in the "right" way (as in rectitude), must go much further than simply to react sympathetically to photographs of victims. He must make the decision to intervene according to his means—through contributions or even on-site humanitarian work, of course, but as importantly, through advocacy and support, education, political participation, basic discourse. And most of all, he must make the effort to intervene as if he has a personal stake in the results—because he understands that he actually does have a personal stake in the results. He puts himself as close as possible to the people he is trying to help: in sentiment, in thought. He has no prideful sense of philanthropy because he feels that he is on the inside. He is generationally connected—not by blood, but by the bond of humanity.

Achieving this perspective is not necessarily easy, though Susan Sontag provides one method of accomplishing this by an example from her own life. In 1993, Sontag lived in Sarajevo during the siege, where she directed Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. After the opening performance, Sarajevo's mayor declared her an honorary citizen, conceivably for taking such a profound interest in the people of the city when much of the world remained indifferent. In a 2004 interview, Sontag said that "it's

hard to make that effort to think how the other person feels. But that's really what a moral life is, and ethical life is" (qtd. in Moyers). With these ideas of "honorary citizenship" and "ethical life," Sontag shows a method by which one can achieve a postmemorialist perspective on the suffering of peoples everywhere. Empathy can be achieved by acknowledging the necessity of "putting yourself in someone else's shoes."

The most productive and humane result will come of viewing images of suffering when we attain this position, either how Sontag did it or in some other way. Better yet, Kleinman and Kleinman's idea, cited by Sember—that "images will be used for sentimental effect, a form of privileged catharsis in which a swell of sympathy for those who are less fortunate than ourselves is an end in itself" (1628)—becomes very unlikely if people place themselves in a hybrid interventionist-memorialist position. Combining elements of both, the viewer can intervene in atrocities while respecting "the interpersonal space of suffering, the local, ethnographic context of action," effectively from the "inside," because the atrocities are so shocking to him that they eradicate any haughty, or even modest, conceptions of "us" and "them" (Kleinman and Kleinman 18). Shock translates to sharply perceptive empathy, not tidy sympathy, because the viewer of photography of war, famine, or violence feels more than an obligation to help the people suffering. He feels that, in a way, he too is suffering. This hybrid position, albeit idealistic to expect of all, can provide a greater sense of humanity to the conscientious viewer—one that ties him or her to every other individual in the world in memorial sentiment and in obligation—so that Sontag's notion, of the "breathtaking provinciality" of speaking of reality as spectacle, becomes unthinkable (97).

Daniel Berehulak photographed a starving child in Niger and titled his piece "Let Me Rest a Little, Brother." It almost makes me cry. I feel a little ill. I want to help him because I can, and because I must. Because that "Brother" is me.

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EMILY JACIR: A MODEL TO EFFECT POSITIVE CHANGE THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

SUSAN THOMAS

Walking into the exhibit "Material for a Film" by Emily Jacir, the first thing that meets the viewer's eye is a repetitive panoply of bullet holes in the pages of a book. This larger-than-life book has nothing threatening about it; at first it leaves the viewer confused as to its purpose. One wanders further into the exhibit and notices more pictures of books, filling the wall. Some titles are in English and are recognizable: great classics, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Odyssey*. These were the books on Wael Zuaiter's bookshelf the night he died. There are more pictures: a photograph of a coin Zuaiter used for the lift, a snapshot from a trip to Venice, pictures from dinner outings with his friends. There is even a film clip from his tiny role in *The Pink Panther*. There are photos of the city he lived in, notes he wrote, and shots of his apartment. We see the exact rooms in which a man once lived. Accompanying the photographs are descriptions and anecdotes from Zuaiter's life. Proceeding through the exhibit, one feels as if he or she is walking through someone's life. The collection of photographs provides details that inspire curiosity. Exiting the exhibit, one notices a photograph so unobtrusive that it could have been overlooked upon entrance. It is a small black and white snapshot, inconspicuous next to the larger depictions of Zuaiter's life. Entitled simply "Roma 16 ottobre 1972," the photograph shows Zuaiter gunned down and bleeding in a building in Rome.

The exhibit, which won the Hugo Boss Prize for contemporary art, addresses the murder of Palestinian intellectual Wael Zuatier by Israeli secret service agents after the 1972 Munich Olympic attacks. In retaliation for the Munich massacre, the Israeli government carried out assassinations of many Palestinians suspected in planning the attacks. One of the first Palestinians killed was translator Wael Zuatier, although he was never proven to have any ties with terrorists. Through "Material for a Film," which can be seen as a mix of biography, politics, and art, Jacir makes a more effective political point through narration than through the exploitation of violent images.

The appropriate presentation of violence in media and art is a topic that has been investigated thoroughly by many writers. One of the foremost scholars on the subject is Susan Sontag. In her essay, "Looking at War," Sontag casts doubts on the effectiveness of war photography in creating any kind of political change. She claims that basing assumptions on violent images "is to dismiss politics" (83). Sontag believes that the context of any photograph is very important for its interpretation. Without context, a violent image becomes nothing more than a "spectacle" for people to enjoy (94). She notes that "the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is almost as keen as the desire for ones that show bodies naked," (82) and calls those of us who view images of suffering but cannot alleviate that suffering "voyeurs" (83). In her

conclusion, Sontag writes: "Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they don't help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand" (94).

Jacir's exhibit deftly avoids the "spectacle" aspect of photography. Almost all of the photographs that Jacir puts on display are not shocking. A photograph of a book does not grab your attention the same way the Abu Ghraib torture photographs compel you to look. Jacir does not demand that her viewer look at the images. Moreover, she offers adequate context so that the violent situations can be understood. Her one image that could be described as "shocking"—the small black and white photograph—is deemphasized in the exhibition. Rather than shocking viewers, Jacir requests their attention. This gives viewers the luxury to peruse the exhibit as they please—without the feeling of horror associated with traumatic images.

Unfortunately, news companies often rely on the "shock-value" of their images in order to garner viewers' attention. This negative phenomenon of exploitation is outlined by Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman in their essay "The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times." Like Sontag, the authors analyze the moral dilemmas faced by professional photojournalists. Sontag observes that in order to make images more "shocking" and therefore commercial, photojournalists are often tempted to compromise the "moral authority" of their pictures (92). She supports this idea with examples of many famous war photographs that were "posed." In one Civil War photograph of Gettysburg, Sontag explains that the recently dead were moved "to a more photogenic site" to make the picture more dramatic (92). Kleinman and Kleinman observe this same phenomenon of moral exploitation as recently as 1994. In a famous Pulitzer Prize-winning photo by Kevin Carter, a starving girl is huddled on the ground in front of a vulture. While the photograph is very powerful in evoking a viewer response, Kleinman and Kleinman explain that the creation of the photograph raises ethical questions. Carter later revealed that he had waited "20 minutes, hoping the vulture would spread its wings," before taking the photograph (Kleinman and Kleinman 5). This kind of inaction caused other journalists and Kleinman and Kleinman to question Carter's morals. In their article, Kleinman and Kleinman wonder if he was "complicit" in the starvation when he took the time, "minutes that may have been critical at this point when she is near death, to compose an effective picture rather than save the child" (5). However, the article acknowledges that the role of a professional photojournalist is to create images that "[provide] political testimony and [drive] people to act" (6). This gets at the crux of the dilemma faced by professional photojournalists. Commercially, photographs must exploit—ethically, they cannot. Kleinman and Kleinman note that the images that receive the most fame in the media are often those that depict the greatest horror.

Given the intense demand for images of suffering, it is interesting that Jacir has succeeded professionally without relying on photographs of violence. In contrast to

Carter, Jacir did not need to involve herself in any sort of complicity when creating her images. Her approach to photography avoids the negative connotation of "exploitation" that results from violent imagery and her treatment of the material does not inspire the need for posing. Her photographs—of books, apartments, and letters—come across as honest representations of a man's life. Instead of exploiting, Jacir uses the truthful material at hand to create her work.

Nonetheless, Jacir does not fail to make her political purpose clear. Kleinman and Kleinman define inspiring political change as the intended purpose of violent images. Sontag also believes that images are political, but violent images should only be observed by those with the power to create change. With the images in "Material for a Film," Jacir wishes to create sympathy for a murder victim in a topical war. Her exhibit lends support to the Palestinian plight in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More than this, it outlines a problem that this and all wars create: the death of innocent intellectuals. However, her art is more moving than reading an article about Zuaiter's life or watching a film. Her format inspires interaction and connection with the narrative. One can walk through the exhibit without being overwhelmed with horror. It does not cause sensory overload and the violence is contextualized. Instead of a nameless victim, bloodied on the streets—you can barely see Zuaiter's face in the picture—we know who this man is and his role in world politics. The viewer fully understands the tragic loss of an intellectual mind because of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

In addition to the voyeuristic and exploitative problems associated with violent photographs, Sontag proposes that too much exposure to violent imagery can be "desensitizing" (Sontag 97). Flooded with shocking images, Sontag argues that "we are losing our capacity to react" (Sontag 97). Kleinman and Kleinman further note the highly disturbing problem of how the media often unintentionally perpetuates the horrors they are trying to prevent. They cite the example of a news article using a picture of a child prostitute that "appeals…to a prurient sensibility" (Kleinman and Kleinman 11). In making this photograph marketable, the media is appealing to the same love of violence and sexuality that caused the photograph to be made.

Jacir goes out of her way to contextualize the violence she presents. With only one violent image, Jacir does not desensitize her viewer, nor does she perpetuate the violence she is condemning. By not relying on shock value and by accompanying her violent image with others that offer insight into the situation, Jacir inspires sympathy and understanding—until one does condemn the violence that is presented. Though Sontag might cite all the problems associated with violent imagery as reasons to discredit the use of violent photography, Kleinman and Kleinman are quick to point out that this does not imply that the documentation of violence should be avoided. They write that "the possibility of moral appeal through images of human misery," means that their absence causes "existential dismay" (16). To them, there is a fine line between documentation and exploitation. There should be no doubt that violent

images are necessary in our society. These images show the ugly truth of things we might not wish to contemplate. The fact that violence exists should not be suppressed, but such imagery should not be used as pornography for the masses. Citizens should neither be encouraged nor forced to look at images that are nothing more than a series of horrors with little context. Jacir's model walks this line admirably.

While not relying on the seduction of violent imagery, Jacir's exhibit is nevertheless very successful in conveying its political message. The effectiveness of Jacir's exhibit can be seen as a result of its narrative form. Just as Sontag predicts that "a narrative seems more likely to be effective than an image" (98), Jacir's narrative is more effective than any multitude of violent images. In contemporary representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, viewers are often presented with scenes of soldiers marching through towns, or the aftermath of a suicide bombing. Instead of brief, shocking images, Jacir gives us deeper understanding of the results of such conflict. What is inspiring is that the exhibit contradicts Sontag's argument that "No photograph, or portfolio of photographs" (98) can go further than a moving film about the horrors of war. Though Sontag believes that photographs cannot create understanding, the main medium of Jacir's exhibit is photography. And her photographs do create empathy.

The conductors of the experiment "Chinese Village Women as Visual Anthropologists: A Participatory Approach to Reaching Policymakers" would not be surprised at the ability of photographs to convey narrative meaning. Caroline Wang, Mary Ann Burris, and Xiang Yue Ping demonstrates the power of the photo "novella" form within politics. Their anthropological experiment gave rural Chinese women cameras in order to document the women's health issues and spur change in a male-dominated society. The format of the "photo novella" in this experiment was chosen because "The essence of photo novella is to avoid the voyeuristic quality that often characterizes professional photojournalists' work" (Wang 1393). When the photos went on public display, the experimenters noticed that common people, officials, and the media were all interested in viewing the work. They wrote: "The 'human interest' strength of photo novella fires the attention of the media, too, as demonstrated by the attendance of national and local press at the Chengjiang County opening" (1394). Their novella format aroused interest and curiosity within the larger population, especially because it dealt with daily life. As a result of the photographs, policy changes were enacted in the village to provide more health care for women and better daycare services. Like the experiment, Jacir uses a type of novella to "put a human face on the data" (1395). Her photographs become narratives as they take us through Zuaiter's day-to-day life. Their human qualities draw the viewer in and allow him or her to better connect to the information being presented.

The mainstream media, so often plagued with the problems inherent in violent imagery, could perhaps benefit from looking at Jacir's model of presentation. To sell, the media does not always need to shock us. It does not need to perpetuate the brief

looks at violence that result in voyeurism instead of effecting change. Instead, the media needs to do as thorough a job as Jacir has done with her work. Finding personal stories and presenting the spectrum of lives of others is a more lasting means of communication. While the creation of violent imagery should not be suppressed and nothing should prevent documentation, we must remember the reason for this imagery in the first place. To prevent violence, and to make political change, violent imagery should give us a profound and comprehensive understanding of world events.

In the caption to photographs of the pages of the bullet-ridden book, we learn that this was Zuaiter's copy of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Zuaiter, who was fluent in English, Arabic, Italian and French, wished to translate this book from Arabic to Italian. He was working on the project when he was assassinated. One of the bullets lodged into the spine of the book that he was carrying that night. To this day, a direct translation from Arabic to Italian of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* does not exist. No violent photograph could depict intelligence gunned down as effectively as a simple picture of a bullet in a book.

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OVERLOOKING THE RITE IN THE NAME OF WHAT'S "RIGHT": THE WEST AND ITS PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

CATHERINE L. CROOKE

> "A name commonly applied, including by the [World Health Organization] itself, is 'female genital mutilation' but this description may be ethically inappropriate. . . . Evaluatively, the name is not a neutral description but a severely hostile judgment, since it condemns those who seek, authorize and perform such cutting as mutilators of human beings."
>
> —Rebecca J. Cook, *African Journal of Reproductive Health*

On November 1, 2006, in Duluth, Georgia, Khalid Adem was sentenced to ten years in prison and five years' probation for allegedly circumcising his young daughter with scissors. The court determined that he committed the act in 2001, when his daughter was two years old—though his wife did not report the crime until 2003 (Poole and Feagans). Adem denied responsibility, but his daughter ultimately testified that "my dad cut me on my private part" (Mungin, "'Dad Cut Me,' 7-Year-Old Testifies"). An Ethiopian immigrant to the United States, Adem is native to a culture that traditionally practices what is often referred to as "female genital mutilation." In contrast, his wife's country of origin, South Africa, does not partake in the tradition (Hansen). This particular difference between the cultural backgrounds of Adem and his wife seems to support the verdict that was eventually reached; it is illogical to think that someone such as Adem's wife would perform a *foreign* ritual that is quite so distinct and irrevocable.

Nevertheless, when one considers the Adem trial within the larger context of the debate about female genital cutting (FGC), an element of the case rings false. Even if Adem was justly accused, his daughter's experience was atypical of those who undergo female circumcision. In Miss Adem's case, it was her father who enforced and performed the ritual, while in the vast majority of FGC cases, the practice is perpetuated and performed by women. To better understand the larger debate, then, we need to explore the rhetoric of this particular case. Rather than reflecting the reality of the rite, the trial reflected a misinformed model of the tradition in which men are the perpetuators of an institutionalized act of aggression. This discrepancy is significant because it is indicative of a larger issue at play in the United States.

The conversation about female circumcision that is unfolding in the West is unfortunately characterized by an almost willful ignorance of the social and cultural structures and beliefs that encourage FGC within the communities that practice it. Genital cutting is undeniably a violent ritual; consequently, it raises questions about the place that certain belief systems have in the globalized world, as well as about the

extent to which certain cultural traditions can be reconciled with modern society. Yet in attempting to answer these questions, one is inevitably led to pass judgment on foreign cultures and values. This cannot be reasonably attempted without first establishing a firm sense of the culture surrounding the rite in question. If the United States has in fact chosen to enter the debate on female circumcision (and indeed, because the U.S. outlawed it in 1996, this seems to be the country's intention), the nation should avoid treating the practice as a gratuitous act of cruelty. It is vital that the United States regard FGC as a product of a nuanced and deeply rooted belief system that merits just as much consideration as the ritual itself.

Female genital mutilation is a topic of interest and controversy not only because of what it entails but also because of its prevalence. It is practiced in fourteen African countries, including some in which the tradition has officially been banned. Within these nations, the estimated percentages of women that will be subjected to genital cutting are, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), as high as ninety percent in Ethiopia, ninety-seven percent in Egypt, and ninety-eight percent in Somalia. Between 100 and 140 million women in Africa have been circumcised, and two million women are estimated to be at risk each year (Hansen). Furthermore, FGC has been practiced in Asia, Australia and South America—and, indeed, in the United States (Williams and Sobieszczyk 966).

It is crucial to point out, however, that the population of women who undergo FGC is diverse not only in terms of geography, but also in the sense that the women experience a wide range of circumcision practices, all of which are classified by the WHO as "female genital mutilation," or "FGM." The most severe and dangerous form of the practice, known as infibulation or Pharaonic circumcision and categorized by the WHO as "FGM Type III," is probably the one most often imagined when female genital cutting is discussed. Infibulation requires the complete removal of the clitoris, as well as the removal of the inner lips and most of the outer lips of the vagina. What remains of the outer lips is then stitched together, leaving only a tiny hole through which urination, menstruation and intercourse occur—often with great difficulty. Pharaonic circumcision inevitably leads to health problems later in life; infibulated women suffer from chronic urinary tract infections, hemorrhaging, pain during intercourse, and complications during pregnancy (Dreifus). Yet other forms of FGC are prevalent, especially since infibulation has been widely outlawed. The least damaging practice entails a nicking of the clitoris, the only goal being to draw a small amount of blood. The WHO category "FGM Type I" refers to the removal of part or all of the clitoris; this is commonly referred to as sunna, which translates to "tradition" or "duty." Finally, between the two extremes of Type I and Type III falls a vast range of "intermediate" practices, all of which are categorized as "FGM Type II," and many of which are associated with some of the same health risks as Pharaonic circumcision (Williams and Sobieszczyk 967).

It is the physical damage associated with female genital cutting that, since the West began to take interest in the tradition in the 1970s, has led outsiders to passionately speak out against the practice. The WHO's position is that "female genital mutilation is universally unacceptable because it is an infringement on the physical and psychosexual integrity of women and girls and is a form of violence against them" (Bell 130). Yet while an acknowledgment of the violence required by female genital cutting is important to discussion of and opposition to the practice, it is critical that the West come to understand FGC within the context of the culture that perpetuates the custom. As it stands, the West discusses female circumcision in terms of pain, horror, and subjugation. As evident in American commentaries and news articles as well as in the case of Khalid Adem, this representation of the issue amounts to a manipulation of what is at stake.

The trial of Khalid Adem is significant in part because it literally brought the issue home to the United States. The case attracted so much attention that a conference on FGC that was originally scheduled to take place in Nairobi, Kenya was moved to Atlanta, the reason being—according to an article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*—that the executive director of the host organization believed the trial created "an incredible opportunity to break the silence about the issue." She went on to clarify that this silence was an affliction unique to the U.S., calling it "disturbing to see progress in Africa while in this country we're not prepared to address the issue" (Shoichet). Indeed, many Americans will be surprised to discover that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 168,000 African women living in the United States have undergone genital cutting (Hansen).

A consideration of the West's relationship with female circumcision from a historical perspective reveals the equally unexpected fact of the West's own employment of the practice. Kirsten Bell, a professor at Macquarie University, says in her article "Genital Cutting and Western Discourses on Sexuality" that "the conceptual separation underlying Western treatments of male and female circumcision is alien to many Africans" (128). Most of the West has gradually made a prominent distinction between male and female circumcision (thus, the term "female circumcision" is often deemed a euphemism). This is not to suggest, however, that the West has not historically revered the latter. According to Bell, masturbation was perceived to be the cause of a number of ailments in the mid- to late-nineteenth century—asthma, epilepsy and rheumatism, to name a few. In turn, clitoridectomies (as well as male circumcision) were considered a successful cure for excessive masturbation. This belief persisted in America and Australia until the late 1960s (132). Bell asserts that "the history of female circumcision in the West sheds light on the way that changing cultural attitudes . . . may lead to the continuation or cessation of medical practices" (132). She refers here to the way that changes in Western perceptions of the differences between female and male genitalia have been reflected in the Western medical field, but her observation is also relevant to the potential transformation of practices in contemporary African

cultures. A shift in cultural attitudes would likely precede any change in the genital cutting tradition.

Unfortunately, the West tends to avoid becoming familiar with the cultural attitudes that are at the heart of FGC. Instead, it focuses on the horror of the physical manifestation of foreign understandings of femininity, purity, and honor. The conversation about FGC is too often reliant upon an oversimplified and superficial packaging of the issue as simply a gender-specific form of abuse. This rendering of it also happens to be the most visually communicable (if not with the use of actual images, then with the use of vivid descriptions), and the most appealing to passion. In her article "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," Karen Halttunen asserts that "eighteenth-century moral philosophers treated sympathy as a sentiment stirred primarily through sight" (305). Ultimately, however, the act of seeing can be replaced by the act of imagining, fueled by stirring accounts of someone else's suffering. In her article, Halttunen describes a custom that developed in America in the late 1700s and early 1800s in regard to journalistic publications whose purpose was to record and report on murders. She writes,

> the popular account of murder became increasingly visual in its treatment of the violence of the crime, offering detailed verbal descriptions. . . . Readers were expressly invited to envision the murder in question, to reconstruct it imaginatively in their mind's eye, to watch the violence unfold. (312)

While it may seem that there was an element of entertainment inherent in these historical accounts that cannot reasonably be pointed to in modern literature on female circumcision, Halttunen's underlying argument is that all accounts of violence, though on some level necessary to generate sympathy, have the potential to leave people more mesmerized than sympathetic.

The first sentence of a published personal account of FGC written by a sixteen-year-old Somali girl living in Atlanta launches into a description of her own circumcision. She describes being pinned down and screaming, the "deep, cold look" on her mother's face, her own bulging eyes, and the "surge of pain through [her] spine [that] sends [her] head back to the floor" (Hussein). Graphic personal accounts are arguably fundamental to raising awareness about FGC, yet in light of the potential that violent narratives have to appeal to readers' lurid appetites, an effort should be made to place these accounts within a more objective frame.

It is apparent that the West's awareness of this contextual frame is lacking. Tragically, this is evident even in the medical field. The need for doctors with an understanding of the beliefs and traditions that facilitate and perpetuate FCG was so dire in 1999 that a Harvard-trained Sudanese doctor founded a clinic at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Massachusetts specifically devoted to the care of African women. Said one of Dr. Nawal Nour's patients in a *Boston Globe* feature about the

clinic: "I've been trying to get a doctor that will understand the culture and the circumcision problems that I've had. I never came across any" (Sege). In an interview conducted for *The New York Times*, Dr. Nour herself was asked about her patients' experiences with other American doctors. She responded:

> I understand that female circumcision is a horrible act and I empathize with the horror of the doctor, but what I ask is that a physician not reveal their emotions and thoughts to the patient. For people who haven't ever dealt with this, the whole thing may be difficult to understand. One can say, "it's a horrible practice and it needs to be stopped." But the practice is very different from the patient. The patient may or may not have wanted it herself, or she may be happy with the way her body looks. (Dreifus)

The last line of Nour's statement is especially enlightening in that it reveals a complexity often ignored when discussing female genital cutting. There is a focus in the West on the horror of FGC (evident in Nour's allusion to the doctor's perspective); furthermore, the West's understanding of female circumcision is often based on the assumption that genital cutting is always imposed on women against their will. Yet, in the interview, Nour describes her childhood memories of recently circumcised peers basking in the satisfaction of having blossomed into mature women. In a similar vein, Rebecca J. Cook writes in the *African Journal of Medical Health* that "in a society where there is little economic viability for women outside marriage, ensuring that a daughter undergoes genital mutilation as a child or teenager is a loving act to make certain of her marriageability" (7). Perhaps because it is easier to imagine the issue as the oppression of one group (women and girls) at the hands of another (men), the West generally disregards both the female desire to be circumcised, and the reality that the ritual is organized and performed almost exclusively by women, effectively precluding any practical understanding of the procedure within the male population (Gruenbaum 131-2, 134-6).

Within the communities in which female genital cutting is practiced, the tradition is seen as a necessary step in the protection and rearing of one's daughters. Female circumcision is considered a rite of passage into womanhood; it is what assures the cleanliness and purity of the woman, and it is what defines and signifies her intact and virginal state. Whether or not one finds fault with the belief that a woman is virginal and pure only if her vaginal opening has been made artificially tight and impenetrable, this notion of purity is powerfully ingrained in the collective mind of the male and female communities of the practicing cultures. Anthropologist Ellen Gruenbaum, who has conducted extensive research on FGC in Sudan, writes in her article on the topic that the "altering of less visible parts like the genital area is . . . reinforced by body aesthetics, even if no one but the person herself usually sees or feels it." She goes on to describe the "way in which Sudanese women praise the smooth, clean character of

the idealized infibulated vulva," and the fact that "women also express revulsion at the imagined dirty, smelly or wet folds of the open, uninfibulated vulva" (125). Gruenbaum also asserts that certain aspects of FGC, particularly the removal of the clitoris—often considered the female equivalent of the penis—are what "define the child's sex socially" (126). In practicing communities, many young girls desire to be circumcised for some of the same reasons that American girls seek to acquire Barbie-like proportions—although in the case of circumcision, the perception that the procedure is a prerequisite to marriage and social acceptability is mired in reality (125).

Generally speaking, it is the women who perpetuate and enforce the tradition of female circumcision. In 1997, Cornell professors Lindy Williams and Teresa Sobieszczyk conducted and published a study on the continuation of FGC in Sudan. Although approximately half of the women they asked said they did not know why genital cutting continued to thrive, eighty percent of them attributed their personal decision to circumcise their own daughters to "custom and tradition," "the practice [being] a 'good tradition'" and "cleanliness" (974). Given that the ritual is promoted and performed almost exclusively by female members of society, it is not helpful to the American understanding of FGC that the most well-known U.S. case of female genital cutting involved a clitoridectomy carried out by a man.

An article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* written by Lateef Mungin before Khalid Adem was found guilty quoted Adem's outraged wife: "[My daughter's] whole life has been changed. . . . She is going to be traumatized psychologically. Parts of her body have been taken away from her without her consent. They need to look at this child the same way they would if she had been raped" ("Rite of Outrage"). In the individual case of her daughter's experience, Mrs. Adem's words ring powerfully true—particularly since they come from a woman whose native country does not practice FGC. Indeed, the press represented the story quite accurately. The story itself, however, portrays the larger issue in a way that augments the West's simplified perception of FGC as a gruesome manifestation of male dominance. For Adem's trial to have contributed to the West's superficial understanding of female circumcision is especially dangerous since the well-publicized trial represented mainstream America's first intimate encounter with the practice.

An examination of the tactics taken on by the prosecution and defense at Adem's trial seems to support the hypothesis that the West lacks knowledge about the culture surrounding FGC. Mungin covered the trial quite thoroughly in his articles. Ultimately, it was the seven-year-old girl who ensured the conviction of her father. The prosecutor's argument hung on her brief testimony, and on a series of nightmares in which she had allegedly screamed "No, Daddy. No." The prosecutor claimed, "She was basically saying her dad was a monster in her dreams. But it is not a dream. He did it in real life" (Mungin, "Mutilation Case Goes to the Jury"). The defense, meanwhile, argued that there was no way Adem would have been able to hide the damage of the procedure from his wife, thus concluding that the mother must have

been responsible. Guilt and responsibility aside, it is worth noting that the jury was ultimately unmoved by the defense's suggestion of maternal neglect, despite the defense's directed questioning: "Now moms, how in the world would you not know that your daughter had been circumcised—for a year and four months?" (Mungin, "Mutilation Case Goes to the Jury"). Might this reflect the common assumption that genital cutting always victimizes women?

Given that Adem's wife was South African and therefore less likely than he was to adhere to the custom of female circumcision, Adem's conviction was probably just. Still, as far as the United States is concerned, the trial introduced a new element to the issue of FGC. The debate is no longer academic and abstract; it is undeniably an issue in our own communities. On some level, this new dimension of the issue gives one the impression that the United States can now divorce the physical act of violence from its cultural context. One might argue that because neither the ritual nor the values associated with it are traditionally American, the United States has no obligation to consider the significance of the belief system that supports the tradition. This, however, is a flawed judgment of the situation. Criminalizing parents who circumcise their daughters, for instance, has—according to an article by Catherine E. Shoichet in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*—merely driven the practice underground, while the cultural values that feed it continue to flourish. The outlawing of FCG in the U.S. has done little to facilitate a dialogue about the cultures that see beauty and necessity in the tradition. This dialogue must take place. If the United States intends to approach the issue in a productive manner, it must cease to distort and trivialize the cultural significance of the practice.

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TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS: UPPER WEST SIDE STYLE

KIMBERLY RUBIN

Saturday Night Live is infamous for its humor, which walks the line between social commentary and pure amusement. While its performers and characters have been able to use the show as a platform for future successes in comedy, few have had as great success and notoriety as the Lonely Island. Perhaps better known for their front man, Andy Samberg, the Lonely Island is a group of three friends: Samberg, Akiva Schaffer, and Jorma Taccone. The three produce, direct, and star in a series of digital shorts, or music videos, that appear on the show. In 2009 they released their first album of songs, which has been labeled by providers as comedy.

Their success is likely due to the forward nature of their work. Their songs, delivered as parodies of hip-hop, R&B, and rap, range from love poems to Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to tales of premature ejaculation. "Lazy Sunday," the group's breakout video from 2005 featuring Samberg and SNL cast member Chris Parnell, is surprising. The loud, threatening backbeat brings to mind rattling chains. Their words are shouted at the camera, which hides the message at first. No, the two are not rapping about the ills of the South Bronx or Brooklyn, but the leisures of Manhattan life delivered as "gangsta rap." The song has been heralded as "poking fun" or parodying rap music. Parody is more than a humorous rendering of a subject. Seymour Chatman, an American film and literary critic, has defined parody as a form of word play that "imitates an original by substituting as little as possible" (28). He identifies the importance of parody by its ability to imitate the original work's style while using it as a "vehicle for baser, more vulgar, or other inappropriate content" (30).

Applying the term "inappropriate" to "Lazy Sunday" seems unsuitable. "Inappropriate" degrades the new content in comparison to the original. While it is possible to view humorous shorts by the Lonely Island such as "Lazy Sunday" as parodies, the idea that their content is "inappropriate," or of lesser value, than traditional rap songs is problematic. Instead, the shorts should be viewed as using rap for its traditional purpose to expose and critique the creator's environment.

Rap is more than just a musical genre of spoken rhyme over a beat. In order to understand the musical and cultural importance of rap music, it is necessary to visualize its history. William Eric Perkins, editor of *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, describes the evolution of rap in his essay, "The Rap Attack." Some trace its development back to Africa, where oral communication and ritual chanting, such as call-and-response, were important and revered traditions. Others compare it to slave work songs, improvisational jazz and blues from the early twentieth century, and poetry of the Black Arts Movement. All agree that the creation of rap is

inextricably linked to African American culture. It wasn't until the late 1970s, as the technology for deejaying and mixing records developed, that rap exploded as a new genre with artists like Afrika Bambaataa and the Sugar Hill Gang. The constant beat created by those new technologies has remained one of the most important parts of the music.

The lyrics sung over the beat, like the lyrics of many other genres, have overcome the music to represent the work. Rap's lyrics have a strong narrative element that lends itself to storytelling and oratory. Combined with its connection to African tradition and heritage, rap has emerged as the genre used by marginalized African Americans to call attention to their status in society. There has always been a critical aspect of rap, whether in competitions between deejays who use their songs to highlight their accomplishments and their opponents' shortcomings or simple boasting and displays of masculinity. Yet when combined with growing dissatisfaction with second-class citizenship and poor living standards, rap became a form of socio-economic expression. As the raps produced by these circumstances became successful, they were embraced by youth of all races, which caused a mainstream backlash. Today, it is hard to separate the cultural importance of rap from the musical one.

Tricia Rose, author of *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, broadly defines the genre as "a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America" (2). Furthermore, she identifies rap's primary thematic concerns as identity and location. Different varieties of rap address these concerns in different ways. "Gangsta" rap, based on experiences with gang violence, police run-ins, and general discontent in urban areas, especially Los Angeles, uses location to determine identity. The tone of these songs is aggressive, and the words are charged. The songs attempt to bring critical attention to the inequality experienced by blacks in urban areas.

According to Chatman, the tension between the original style (what is being copied) and new content (how it appears) determines the sense of inappropriateness necessary for a parody. Such a tension exists in "Lazy Sunday." "Lazy Sunday" is the story of two white men, young and middle class, wasting their Sunday with a quest to see the newly released *Chronicles of Narnia*. The Lonely Island is describing a stereotypical American experience; however, they do so in an atypical style: gangsta rap. This contrast between the content and its description is the most striking part of the song and evident within the portrayal, themes, and word choice of the song.

The video is immediately misleading. It hides its content behind a stereotypical opening for a gangsta rap video: images of city streets, old buildings, and cars, typical views of the neighborhood. It isn't until the camera cuts to Andy Samberg in a clean studio apartment that the video, and the audience's perception of it, veers from a traditional path and becomes a farce. Yet the song continues to keep its focus on the neighborhood with references to notable destinations, such as Magnolia Bakery, and

scenes walking down the street and in an abandoned park. This matches one of the primary themes of gangsta rap previously defined: location. Tricia Rose explains:

> Nothing is more central to rap's music video narrative than situating the rapper in his or her milieu and among one's crew or posse. Unlike heavy metal music videos, for example, which often use dramatic live concert footage and the concert stage as the core location, rap music videos are set on buses, subways, in abandoned buildings, and almost always in black urban inner-city locations (10).

This focus on location in turn emphasizes rap's other thematic concern, identity, as the songs are often ways to validate the home of the rapper: "Rappers' emphasis on posses and neighborhoods has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness. It satisfies poor young black people's profound need to have their territories acknowledged, recognized, and celebrated" (11). The Lonely Island is doing the same thing; they are situating themselves in their neighborhood in order to acknowledge and celebrate it. Why, then, is "Lazy Sunday" considered a parody and not a rap song?

The nuances of parody should be considered. Chatman refines his definition of parody to explain that stylistic parody depends on the audience's familiarity with both the original author's style and new subject matter's inappropriateness. "The audience must not only recognize the original, but sense that the style is being used to express a content which the targeted author could or would not contemplate," Chatman explains (36-7). A comparison between the notable gangsta rap group N.W.A. and the Lonely Island illuminates this tension. N.W.A., comprised of MCs Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, MC Ren, and Ice-T, was one of the most controversial gangsta rap groups as well as one of the groups that gave the genre its direction. Drawing from their experiences in Compton, a city in South Los Angeles County, N.W.A. brutally described the injustices of their community, especially those caused by the police. Ahmir "?uestlove" Thompson writes for *Rolling Stone's* series "The Immortals: The 100 Greatest Artists of all Time": "Even if you've never lived through all the gangbanging and police harassment they were talking about, you could tell there was truth there."

While N.W.A. clearly draws upon their neighborhood for inspiration and setting, their work transcends the specific location to rage out against the system at large. In their song, "F*** the Police," they imitate a court trial of "N.W.A. versus the police department." With guns going off in the background, Ice Cube sings, "Just cuz I'm from the CPT, punk police are afraid of me." CPT, an abbreviation for Compton, becomes a charged word; it assumes that the listener will be familiar with its place and its story. In another song, "Straight Outta Compton," the rappers pass the narrative of the song with a call-and-response: the call "Tell 'em where you from!" is answered with the line, "Straight outta Compton!" The video is more explicit in its commentary with its images of cops strapping on guns while looking at maps of Compton paired

with the rappers sitting around burning trashcans and running from the police. Their work created the infamous image of Compton, which is now synonymous with gang-related crime and police violence.

The Upper West Side is the polar opposite of Compton. Yet the Lonely Island uses its reputation in the same way rappers now use Compton: to acknowledge a neighborhood, to establish identity, and to evoke an image. They exhibit their own street knowledge by knowing where to purchase the best cupcakes, "No doubt that bakery's got all da bomb frostins," and sneaking their own food into the movie theater, "The theater's over-priced./You've got the backpack?/Gonna pack it up nice." They recall aspects of New York City that are universally known, such as Magnolia Bakery and *Friends*. The images their "streets" invoke and the way they portray themselves are trivial in comparison to Compton and the attitudes of N.W.A.'s members. Samberg and Parnell need a search engine to find their way to the movie theater, and then end up in the back seat of a taxicab. While they may act tough by having a "snack attack" and sneaking food into a theater, they also consider the risks: "don't want security to get suspicious." Eazy-E, on the other hand, flaunts his actual toughness in "Straight Outta Compton": "I see a motherf***** cop, I don't dodge him." Finally, the gun shots heard in the background as the duo eats their cupcakes adds the coup de grâce. The probability of hearing guns shots on the Upper West Side is next to none. The Lonely Island is trying to transform their neighborhood into a '"hood," but is only making themselves seem like "posers."

While the Lonely Island convincingly copies the musical style of gangsta rap, their word choice and figures of speech accentuate the inappropriateness of their new content. Describing frosting as "da bomb" or the directions to the theater as the "dopest route" may be appropriate speech in rap, but when applied to locations in the stereotypical "intellectual" neighborhood of the Upper West Side, it comes out ridiculous. Even more ridiculous are the references the pair makes. They constantly refer to classic chick-flicks, "I love those cupcakes more than McAdams loves Gosling," and they use the line "Girl actin' like she never see a $10 before/ It's all about the Hamiltons, baby." This is a clear reference to the slang term for hundred-dollar bills, "Benjamins." Songs like Puff Daddy's "It's All About the Benjamins" focus solely on spending money, with lines like "I'm only here/For that green paper with the eagle." Parnell and Samberg take these references to money even further though, with an easy-to-miss historical reference: "You can call us Aaron Burr/From the way we're droppin' Hamiltons." "Gangstas" quoting American history hardly seems appropriate and yet for once the duo does something that isn't out of place for their neighborhood.

Through these dedications to the original form and incongruities consistent with their personal identities and backgrounds, the Lonely Island creates a humorous song that could be considered a parody. However, that interpretation is complicated by Chatman's inclusion of another component of parody: a parody must "utilize the

original writer's diction and style, but follow a train of thought precisely along the lines that he would have pursued from the given premise" (36). It is hard to imagine a group like N.W.A. singing about a lazy Sunday spent in bed followed by neighborhood shenanigans. The comfortable bourgeois lifestyle that allows for a Sunday spent in such a manner is not one that typically can be found in the 'hood or ghetto. In fact, the forced aggressive tone of "Lazy Sunday" violates one of the central attractions of rap for youth, especially middle-class white youth: authenticity. Perkins writes about the appeal of gangsta rap:

> In an age of mass overconsumption and media hype, gangsta rap no doubt represents a religion and ideology of authenticity . . . These abstract slogans of 'bein' and stayin' real' summon up romantic notions of ghetto authenticity . . . Hip hop speaks to youth's desire for identity, for a sense of self-definition and purpose, no matter how lawless or pointless (20).

Perhaps this is what attracted Andy Samberg and his fellow Lonely Island members to rap in the first place. In an interview conducted with Jason Gay from *Rolling Stone* for the release of their album, Samberg speaks to his youth in California where he was surrounded by "standard Bay Area hippie shit" (Gay). As their interest grew, music and musical creation became their dream: "Growing up, we never talked about 'We should all work at Saturday Night Live!' We were like, 'Someday, we should make an album. That would be awesome.'" Jonathan Lethem describes this conversion through imitation as typical in his essay "The Ecstasy of Influence":

> Most artists are brought to their vocation when their own nascent gifts are awakened by the work of a master. That is to say, most artists are converted to art by art itself. Finding one's voice isn't just an emptying and purifying oneself of the words of others but an adopting and embracing of filiations, communities, and discourses (3).

Chatman would have to agree because he sees parody as "at once ridicule and homage" (33). The Lonely Island's respect for the art seems genuine; the *New York Times* hails another Lonely Island song, "Natalie Raps," which is a blatant copy of Eazy-E's song "No More ?'s," by saying, "It isn't parody; it is a love letter" (Caramancia). Yet the group blatantly ignores the authentic aspect of the genre, and in doing so, questions the authenticity of the original songs. When Akiva Shaffer was asked why they created an album, he answered "Suffice it to say, the streets wanted it," referring to the neighborhood fascination and validation of much of gangsta rap. However, Samberg counters with the question, "Are you talking about the British rapper guy The Streets?" (Gay). Clearly, nothing is serious for the trio, which makes their songs funny, but hard to imagine as "authentic" parodies.

Perhaps the answer lies in the idea that the Lonely Island isn't actually making a parody, but a new form of rap. Rap may have begun as a way to bring the marginalization of black society to public attention, but with "Lazy Sunday," the Lonely Island is reversing the flow, bringing public attention to the sterility of what is considered mainstream. They are able to accomplish this through "enframing," philosopher Martin Heidegger's idea, which encourages people to see the objects in their world "only in terms of how they can serve [them] or be used by [them]" (Lethem 4). This is not foreign to traditional rap's creation, as rap is a musical genre based on appropriations of other genres for the purpose of meeting the rapper's needs. Parody does this, but in order to comment on the original form, not the new content. The Lonely Island combines the two to serve their own purpose that could be construed as a way to safely comment on their own culture while remaining safely behind the humor of the surface-level parody.

Enframing does not apply just to art; it is a part of human nature. In many ways the diffusion of rap and hip hop into all facets of mainstream culture can be attributed to this phenomenon. "White youth are not simply consuming pop culture messages wholesale, any more than Black kids are," writes Bakari Kitwana, a former executive editor of *The Source*, one of the first publications devoted to rap music, and author of *Why White Kids Like Hip-Hop*. According to Kitwana, "Most hip-hop kids . . . are taking from popular culture what they find useful, fashioning it to local needs, claiming it as their own and in the process placing their own stamp on it" (3). "Lazy Sunday" may appear to be a parody in its imitation of rap; however, it is the lifestyle, not the method of expressing it, that is the parody. It is the gangsta bravado that is the inappropriate content, not the song describing it. The Lonely Island is not criticizing the embrace of rap by white audiences. Instead, their depiction seems to be more critical of the adoption of a false behavior due to the sterility of mainstream society.

By sticking too closely to the form of parody, is the Lonely Island at risk of completely hiding their message? Not according to rap, where parody can be worked into the genre and remain a valid component of that genre. 2 Live Crew, a group of "booty rappers" (rap focused on sex and eroticism), spawned controversy in the 1990s for both their explicit content and appropriation. They were sued for copyright violation for their parody of Roy Orbison's 1964 hit, "Oh, Pretty Woman." While a lower court found the group guilty, the Supreme Court found the song to be protected as an original parody under the doctrine of "fair use." Justice David Souter explained that the song provided "social benefit . . . as a comment on the naiveté of the original of an earlier day, as a rejection of its sentiment that ignores the ugliness of street life and the debasement that it signifies" (Chatman 27). Even outside of their parody, the "meaning hiding beneath the surface of the obvious meaning of the lyrics" in 2 Live Crew's work has been considered beneficial social commentary. In a lawsuit over obscenity and pornography, witness Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. concluded, "Well they represent the stereotype over and over again, in such a graphic way, namely

to exploit it. You can have no reaction but to bust out laughing. You realize how ridiculous this all is" (Perkins 25). While it is unlikely that 2 Live Crew originally wrote their works to be funny, or even to exploit stereotypes in a critical way, it is clear that their work is able to provide criticism, parody, and authenticity, thus successfully being rap while remaining humorous.

"I think the goal of most comedy, just like most movies or television, is an escape from the mundane stuff in our life, and I've always found it worthwhile to make something completely stupid just to prove that you can," said Andy Samberg in an online interview with *Esquire* about his work. His words highlight the dualism in his comedy—humor and criticism combined. When viewed within that context and not as parody, "Lazy Sunday" can offer the viewer more than a prescription for an amusing weekend agenda. It can offer a way to laugh at yourself, no matter your race, class, or musical tastes. Isn't that the best way to keep it real?

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