



Sex, Gender, and War in an Age of Multicultural Imperialism

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the case of Chelsea Manning in the larger context of both U.S. imperial war and the ways in which gender and sexuality are deployed in service of colonialism, racism, and militarism. Situating the Manning case alongside two contemporaneous events, the attempted prosecution of Julian Assange on rape charges and Hillary Clinton's much-lauded "gay rights are human rights" speech, we argue that Manning's trans identity has challenged both right and left commentators to absorb her into projects of pinkwashing and homonationalism. We conclude with a consideration about what anti-war, anti-imperial, anti-carceral LGBT politics and organizing around this case might look like.

))) Introduction

On August 21, 2013, a U.S. military court sentenced Chelsea Manning to 35 years in prison for leaking confidential U.S. military documents to WikiLeaks. The following day, Manning released a statement coming out as a transgender woman. Manning's revelation emerged during a summer that saw the rise of a national discourse about trans military inclusion. In June, Kristen Beck made headlines when her memoir, *Warrior Princess: A U.S. Navy Seal's Journey to Coming Out Transgender*, hit store shelves. In July, the Palm Center, a leading organization in the efforts to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) announced a new multiyear project focused on trans military service.¹ On August 23, headlines announced that Col. Jennifer Pritzker had come out as transgender.² Pritzker is the billionaire heir to the Hyatt

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Hotel fortune whose philanthropic venture, the Tawani Foundation, exists “to enhance the awareness and understanding of the importance of the Citizen Soldier; to preserve unique sites of significance to American and military history; to foster health and wellness projects for improved quality of life; and to honor the service of military personnel, past, present and future.” The Tawani Foundation gave \$1.35 million to the Palm Center for its trans military inclusion work, possibly the largest financial contribution to trans advocacy ever made.

Manning’s August 22 statement created a conundrum for the LGBT rights organizations that had remained mostly silent on her case until that time.³ Organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) said nothing about her during the years between her initial arrest and her 2013 sentencing. Some trans advocates, like Dru Levasser of Lambda Legal Defense and Mara Keisling of the National Center for Transgender Equality, briefly commented on why they were not advocating about her case in response to media questions about Manning’s gender identity that preceded her official coming out.⁴ But after Manning officially came out as trans and controversy emerged over transphobic media responses,⁵ the Human Rights Campaign, NGLTF, and others released strategic statements that disavowed the transphobia while remaining uncritical of Manning’s prosecution and sentence.⁶ Meanwhile, Kristin Beck released a public statement calling Manning a “liar and a thief and a traitor . . . and a tarnish on Dr. [Martin Luther] King’s dream.” Beck also suggested that Manning was not really trans but rather was pretending to be trans in order to get special treatment in prison.⁷

Manning presents significant dilemmas for the LGBT organizations leading the charge for trans military inclusion in the context of a post-DADT U.S. military. Military inclusion campaigns, including the one for trans military service, centrally rely on pro-military and pro-war arguments, lauding the bravery of service members, the wonderful opportunities of military careers, and the importance of protecting our country.⁸ Manning is a hero to those who oppose U.S. militarism. Since Manning’s arrest, those people and organizations have worked to present her in a sympathetic light, often relying on the tropes developed by the pro-military, anti-DADT advocacy of brave, proud, gay soldiers. Now, in the exact moment when the trans military inclusion campaign is formulating and introducing the figure of the proud, brave, palatable trans soldier, Manning is a potential liability—a trans military figure who cannot be ignored, but who utterly fails to line up with the uncritically patriotic, pro-military talking points that military inclusion campaigns require.

In this article, we reflect on the historical context of the prosecution of Chelsea Manning.⁹ We consider the Manning case alongside Julian Assange’s rape case in

Sweden and Hillary Clinton's 2011 speech regarding the status of gay rights in the world. We do so to reflect on the relationships between discourses of human rights and victimization and apparatuses of racialized-gendered state violence. Imperialism and militarism are always, among other things, sexual and gender projects that use sexual, gender, and family norms as technologies of intervention and violence. In taking the cases of Manning, Assange, and Clinton together, we examine the mobilization of a version of feminist and anti-homophobic politics that aligns with U.S. military imperialism. This militarized sexual/gender politics requires a portrayal of particular sympathetic victims of homophobia and gender/sexual violence and proposes apparatuses of racialized-gendered violence as the solution to violence in order to justify their expansion.

This article draws from critiques of carceral feminism, homonationalism, and pinkwashing to situate the Manning case alongside the Assange and Clinton examples, exposing how the production of feminist and gay politics aligned with militarism serves the projects of U.S. neoliberal war and imperialism—how women's rights and LGBT rights fit into the tool box of war-on-terror proponents. The sympathetic victims of violence and discrimination that these political projects have produced—the rape victim, the persecuted homosexual, the gay soldier, and most recently, the trans soldier—are mobilized in ways that do not relieve the actual enduring realities of heteropatriarchal violence, but instead shore up the apparatuses that produce that violence. Here we track how some forms of violence become nameable and some are silenced through the production of these figures. We suggest that, although carceral feminist and homonationalist politics are particularly visible and vibrant right now, significant and complex challenges to those formations endure in queer and feminist resistance formations.

))) Gay Rights as Human Rights

On December 6, 2011, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered a speech declaring that “gay rights are human rights.”¹⁰ This speech crystallizes the relationships of contemporary gay rights claims to neoliberal militarism and imperialism. It represents in a distilled form—and also distills—those relationships, concatenates and brings together on a global stage the U.S. war on terror as a war on culture and values. Clinton's speech operates on three distinct but linked registers: global configurations of human rights discourses and apparatuses, U.S. domestic politics and policy, and U.S. imperial military intervention.

Global Human Rights Apparatus

Clinton's speech contributes to the universalizing arc of human rights discourse, which, against its own claims, has always served specific geopolitical interests and power structures. In fact, human rights discourse has served those interests in part by obscuring them under the mantle of "the universal." Clinton's speech accomplishes this through the rubric of "gay rights as human rights." Delivered in the days leading up to the United Nations-sponsored Human Rights Day, the speech took on special weight and significance. In positioning this speech in the context of that internationally recognized event, Clinton moves gay rights from the realm of the particular to the realm of the universal: the overarching message being, gay rights do not concern only gay people, but all of us—or at least, as we will see, all of us who compose global human society.

Clinton opens the speech by naming the universal ground of human rights and the legacy of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

It proclaims a simple, powerful idea: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. And with the declaration, it was made clear that rights are not conferred by government; they are the birthright of all people. It does not matter what country we live in, who our leaders are, or even who we are. Because we are human, we therefore have rights. And because we have rights, governments are bound to protect them.¹¹

This of course obscures the actual geopolitical context of the reconfiguration of global power in the aftermath of World War II, the weakening of traditional European empire, the consolidation of the U.S. empire as a dominant world power, and the divvying up of spheres of military influence and control along what would become Cold War battle lines. This history is evacuated, and the classic social contract myth of representative democracy—that people come first, and governments serve them—is cast once again.¹²

Clinton then shifts from this universal staging to the particulars of gay rights. She does so in a clever enactment of "coming out": rather than name gay rights explicitly, she obliquely references gayness through intimation.

Today, I want to talk about the work we have left to do to protect one group of people whose human rights are still denied in too many parts of the world today. In many ways, they are an invisible minority. They are arrested, beaten, terrorized, even executed. Many are treated with contempt and violence by their fellow citizens while authorities empowered to protect them look the other way or, too often, even join in the abuse. They are denied opportunities to work and learn, driven from their homes and countries, and forced to suppress or deny who they are to protect themselves from harm.

Finally, Clinton names this new object of human rights: “I am talking about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. . . .” This move does not only partake in the production of queerness and transness as secrecy (despite the hypervisibility of the nonnormative queers), which Eve Sedgwick told us about a while ago.¹³ It produces this secret in order to reveal it: to cast upon it what Pheng Cheah has termed the violent light of humanity.¹⁴

To make her argument that “gay rights are human rights”—or, as we are saying, to bring gayness from the particular to the universal—Clinton enacts a chain of equivalences drawing from the U.S. context: women, African Americans, and now gays. A lot is accomplished in this deft move. It reinstates the obviousness of human rights as universal, an abstraction from history and geopolitical struggle that the efficacy of human rights as a technology for capital and empire depends upon (a point to which we will return). It isolates gayness as separate and distinct from gender and race. This echoes the *Advocate’s* infamous cover declaring, “Gay is the New Black” in response to the passage of Proposition 8 at the time of Barack Obama’s historic election to office.¹⁵ This move both codes gay as white, and also suggests that anti-black racism is in the past, something that has been resolved by U.S. law, cleaving the “bad old days” of slavery and Jim Crow. Thus the United States can declare equality achieved at home and operate as global leader on human rights. In this move, Clinton reaffirms the possibility of progress narratives (the universal march of time forward and better) and makes a “the time is now” call for gay rights. Rather than disrupt the universality of human rights discourse, this new gay moment brings gayness into the universal and affirms the universal. It affirms as well the role of the United States as arbiter of the universal, which comes across in the scolding Clinton offers other nations who are falling behind this universal, gay march forward.

Domestic Agendas: Gayness and “Progressive” Neoliberalism

The speech not only served to reuniversalize human rights and resecure the role of the United States as arbiter of the universal. It also operated in a domestic context as part of a repositioning of the Obama administration as pro-gay in the lead-up to Obama’s run for a second term. Obama’s turn from an earlier, more ambiguous position was meant to distinguish him from the Republicans (often hard to do) and to keep up with some changing tides at the level of subnational state law. In so doing, it also contributed to a Democratic Party tradition firmly established by Bill Clinton’s administration: branding imperial, racist state violence as somehow progressive. If DADT was seen as pro-gay baby steps, the

repeal of it got Obama labeled the first gay president (a nod back to the fact that his neoliberal predecessor had already been anointed the first black president).¹⁶ In her speech, Clinton acknowledges the ways that the United States has lagged behind other countries regarding the legal statuses of gays, and so this global and universalizing speech is also meant to produce some humility and appeal to gay voters. This domestic repositioning agenda became more explicit in Obama's Democratic National Convention speech in summer 2012, and then of course in his listing of Stonewall among U.S. legacies and his mention of "gay Americans" in his January 2013 inauguration speech. In so doing, Obama hitched gay rights to the hope that his second term might see a realization of more progressive promises.

That it worked to also rebrand Clinton in advance of her 2016 presidential bid is evidenced well in the "Texts from Hillary" meme of 2012.¹⁷ The formerly frumpy first lady is seen through this meme with an updated ponytail in celebrity sunglasses, being cool. That it is the brainchild of two gay media publicists is not to suggest a conspiracy, but a convergence of white/gay/neoliberal interests.¹⁸

Militarizing Pro-Gayness

To understand the third function of the speech, in relation to U.S. military interventions for empire, we return to the universal and particular. The speech makes nods to the cultural relativism debates of the 1980s and 90s, although ultimately rejecting them:

The third, and perhaps most challenging, issue arises when people cite religious or cultural values as a reason to violate or not to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens. This is not unlike the justification offered for violent practices towards women like honor killings, widow burning, or female genital mutilation. Some people still defend those practices as part of a cultural tradition. But violence toward women isn't cultural; it's criminal. Likewise with slavery, what was once justified as sanctioned by God is now properly reviled as an unconscionable violation of human rights.

Here Clinton extends the progress trope, projecting a clean break with slavery that becomes located in the past, effectively erasing slavery's contemporary afterlife, hypervisible in the targeted mass imprisonment of black people in the United States and the perpetual racial wealth divide.¹⁹ Then Clinton shifts to the real function of universal discourse: to determine who and what cannot be absorbed into the universal.

To understand how this operates, we turn to Naomi Klein's examination of human rights discourses in *The Shock Doctrine*.²⁰ In her analysis of the role of

military occupation and war in imposing economic restructuring, Klein considers the emergence of “human rights abuse” as a concept and a field of intervention. Klein notes that in 1976, author of neoliberal policy Milton Friedman won the Nobel Prize for economics. This happened in the midst of Pinochet’s brutal regime for imposing Friedman’s plans and the obvious proving wrong of the invisible hand thesis. The next year, Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize, largely for its work on human rights abuses in Chile and Argentina. Klein argues that the newly emergent “international human rights movement,” by focusing on narrow specific abuses, and not the political economic agendas behind them, winds up leaving behind the economic as realm of activist intervention. “But by focusing purely on the crimes and not on the reasons behind them, the human rights movement also helped the Chicago School ideology to escape from its first bloody laboratory virtually unscathed.”²¹

How did this happen? Because of the ways the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was used as a political tool in the Cold War, Amnesty developed a policy of “impartiality”—it would be member funded and independent of a state or faction ideology. “Amnesty’s position, emblematic of the human rights movement as a whole at that time, was that because human rights violations were a universal evil, wrong in and of themselves, it was not necessary to determine why abuses were taking place but to document them as meticulously and credibly as possible.”²²

Today, human rights have been taken back up by those military complexes that have most abused them and can now assert them as justification for military intervention. As Clinton’s speech progresses, its militaristic logics become more apparent, as does the fact that not all people or places count as part of humanity. Of course, domestically, racially subordinated and indigenous populations are left behind by this agenda, despite the U.S. progress narrative Clinton proposes. This narrative flies in the face of the evidence of the growing racial wealth gap and the persistence of gendered inequalities in employment, wages, and wealth across all racial categories. But here we see the universal category of the human posed as a weapon against external threats. Clinton shifts to language of mobilization and threat:

This morning, back in Washington, President Obama put into place the first U.S. Government strategy dedicated to combating human rights abuses against LGBT persons abroad. Building on efforts already underway at the State Department and across the government, the President has directed all U.S. Government agencies engaged overseas to combat the criminalization of LGBT status and conduct, to enhance efforts to protect vulnerable LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, to ensure that our foreign assistance promotes the protection of

LGBT rights, to enlist international organizations in the fight against discrimination, and to respond swiftly to abuses against LGBT persons.

Note the language here: “strategy,” “combat,” “engaged,” “fight,” “respond swiftly.” We have moved from the realm of feelings and culture to the realm of war. And where will this engaged, swift combat on behalf of LGBT people take place? What Clinton designates “hostile places.”

And so, in the end, to be pro-gay is not only to be pro-military, but gay affirmation is militarized and anti-gayness is posed as not just culturally backwards, but a security threat. This has been the work of the long war on terror, to make cultural difference (or ethnic/racial/geopolitical difference, depending on the valence demanded by context) a security threat. As Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai have pointed out, this is a renewed strategy from a long historical Orientalism.²³ And as Andrea Smith has pointed out, Orientalism is an anchor for war in white supremacist society.²⁴ And so the speech Occidentalizes pro-gayness, and Orientalizes homophobia, in the context of perpetual, undeclared war.

To close this section, we should note that Klein argues that within “human rights regimes” that normalize war and economic exploitation, torture always plays a role:

The widespread abuse of prisoners is a virtually foolproof indication that politicians are trying to impose a system—whether political, religious or economic—that is rejected by large numbers of the people they are ruling. Just as ecologists define ecosystems by the presence of certain “indicator species” of plants and birds, torture is an indicator species of a regime that is engaged in a deeply anti-democratic project, even if that regime happens to have come to power through elections.²⁵

The torture of Chelsea Manning is just one instance of a normalization of torture, in both military prisons abroad and in cages within U.S. borders.

))) Carceral Feminism and Homonationalism in the WikiLeaks Scandal

Although Clinton’s speech works to mobilize a new image of LGBT victims of human rights abuses who can be used to justify security operations, the rape charges against Julian Assange proceed down the well-worn path described by scholars as “carceral feminism.” There is nothing new about colonization, military occupation, and empire-building requiring and producing systems of gendered racialization and racialized sexualization and gendering. The imposi-

tion of gender norms and family formation norms and the use of sexual violence as a tool of war have been central to processes of warfare, imperialism, and colonization.²⁶ The depiction of cultures and peoples targeted for invasion as “backward” in terms of sexuality and family formation has been a rationalization for colonization, and has often included portraying indigenous women as needing to be saved by the colonizers from their own families and cultures.²⁷ These methods and rationalizations are visible in the colonization of North America and the Pacific by the United States and have been deployed to justify the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the proposed war with Iran, and in rationales for the Israeli colonization of Palestine.²⁸

Feminists committed to decolonial and anti-racist politics have consistently challenged “women-saving” justifications for military intervention and imperialism. In recent decades, a related debate has emerged regarding “women-saving” rationales for expanding criminalization regimes. In the wake of a variety of anti-racist and feminist challenges to normalized gender violence in the 1960s and 1970s, a carceral feminism emerged that bolstered and extended criminalization and imprisonment regimes under the auspices of responding to gender violence. Domestic violence, rape, and child sexual abuse were targeted with enhanced criminal punishment and surveillance technologies. These enhancements were convenient to the broader mass prison-building project in the United States that occurred during this period and to the expansion of criminalization and imprisonment in many other countries that took up aspects of this American model, including, in some cases, a push towards prison privatization or imprisonment-for-profit. Anti-racist feminists have challenged and continue to challenge these developments, arguing that criminalization responses not only fail to reduce gender violence, but actually expand gender violence.²⁹ These critics have argued that prisons and police are not solutions to sexual violence and abuse, but instead that police and prisons *are* the harassers and rapists, and that the violence of criminalization and imprisonment exacerbates harm in communities and families. These critics have questioned the cooptation of the feminist concern with sexual and family violence to support regimes of criminalization, exposing the misleading nature of “women-saving” rationales for expanding apparatuses of racialized violence.

Scholars and activists have further observed how, in recent decades, the emergence of a neoliberal gay and lesbian rights politics has produced a distorted version of anti-homophobia as a newly circulating rationale for expanding apparatuses of racialized violence—both in the realm of military intervention overseas and in domestic criminalization. Although at one time evidence of homosexual practices operated as a rationale for intervention in countries tar-

geted for colonization, and colonizers introduced laws criminalizing sodomy and enforced binary gender norms in order to “civilize” indigenous populations, now those seeking to intervene for purposes of plunder and profit come under the banner of “gay rights as human rights.” The figure of the gay hate crime victim operates domestically to pass laws expanding prison sentences and police budgets, and the figure of the hanged homosexual operates to justify military intervention overseas.³⁰

In several ways, the Manning case illustrates the production and dimensions of the sympathetic victims whom state violence must be galvanized to protect. The sexual assault charges against Julian Assange and the public discourse about Chelsea Manning’s gender identity before and after her August coming out statement illustrate the deployment of sympathetic victim narratives developed by carceral feminism and homonationalism. In these cases, figures such as the gay soldier and the rape victim seeking justice are mobilized to align feminism and anti-homophobia with militarism and criminalization.

Protecting Women, Extraditing Assange

Since June 19, 2012, Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has been taking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to escape extradition to Sweden. Assange is avoiding extradition to Sweden because he believes, as do many others, that Sweden will turn him over to the United States to be prosecuted for his work making secret government documents public through WikiLeaks. Assange faces rape charges in Sweden, specifically the charge of “minor rape” under Swedish criminal law (which has three levels of rape charges: “gross rape,” “ordinary rape,” and “minor rape”). Sweden’s sexual assault criminalization regime is notoriously broad, having been reformed to create a more rigorous definition of consent and a lower bar for finding evidence of coercion than many other countries. The result has been a sharply rising conviction rate in Sweden. Sweden now has the third highest per capita rape conviction rates in the Council of Europe, and the second highest in the European Union after Lithuania.³¹ But critics of Sweden’s expanded definition of rape suggest that intensifying criminalization does not effectively address gender and sexual violence. The rise of reported rapes still far exceeds the rise in convictions, suggesting that increased criminalization has not actually reduced sexual violence in Sweden.³²

The emergence of rape charges in the case against Assange has produced vigorous debate exposing concerns about carceral feminism and the multiple sites of “women-saving” rationales in the U.S. imperialism toolbox. Regardless of the veracity of the charges against Assange, the analysis of carceral feminism pro-

duced by anti-racist and anti-criminalization feminists is helpful for understanding how the criminalization of sexual and gender violence may fail as a solution to sexual and gender violence but succeed as a method for the control and neutralization of people deemed threatening to the U.S. government and its clients. Crime, of course, is always a social construction, and the content of criminality is constantly changing. In the United States, especially since the formal emancipation of slaves and the passage of the 13th Amendment, criminalization has been a central method of racialized control and exploitation. Criminal laws focused on sexual behaviors, gender and family formation have been mobilized to target people of color in various ways. The portrayal of black people as oversexualized has been key to lynching regimes focused on the mythological figure of the black rapist of white women, and the criminalization of adultery was one of the methods of recapturing black people into the convict lease system after emancipation. The criminalization of indigenous gender and sexual expressions has been central to processes of displacement and land theft. The production of categories of criminalized sexual behavior, gender expression and family formation has been co-constitutive with processes of racialization and colonization in the United States. These categories have targeted racialized populations in particular ways, including by making people of color hyperexposed to criminalization related to sexuality and gender and carving out a zone of “privacy” around white men that disproportionately, though not absolutely, protects their sexual violence from criminal consequences. What appears consistent is that although the introduction of criminal regimes to outlaw various sexual, gender, and family practices has been used to shape racialized distribution of wealth and violence, criminalization has never been designed to eliminate or even meaningfully intervene on the daily pervasive gender and sexual violence that is central to life in the United States and concentrated in apparatuses of state control such as policing, the military, prisons, and the heteropatriarchal family. Anti-prison feminists argue that regimes of criminalization could never reduce or eliminate gender violence because they are invented to be racialized gender violence—criminalization systems are institutions and practices that emerge from slavery and colonization and settlement, codifying and sustaining racialized gender violence. For this reason, it is not surprising that the increased criminal penalties for rape, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse that emerged as a response to the feminist naming of these problems, have both failed to get to the root causes of these problems and enhanced the criminalization of people of color and others deemed “threatening” to the U.S. status quo. The criminalization of sexual and gender violence becomes available, under these regimes, to be used as a tool for targeting and neutralizing threats, not as an exercise of

practices genuinely aimed at reducing violence, but as an instrument available for achieving aims convenient to U.S. militarism. The figure of the rape victim in need of governmental protection and redress is mobilized conveniently by apparatuses that are actually significant perpetrators of racialized gender violence. In the Assange case, carceral feminism in both Sweden and the United States provides the framework of state protection of women from sexual violence as a tool for the United States's criminalization of a person whose actions have threatened U.S. military interests.

Chelsea Manning, the Sympathetic Gay Soldier

Just as the Assange extradition story exposes the deployment of carceral feminism to advance U.S. military interests and the expansion of racialized-gendered state violence more broadly, the portrayal of Chelsea Manning's gender and sexual orientation puts the articulation of an anti-homophobic politics aligned with U.S. militarism on display. Prior to her public announcement following her sentencing, Manning was consistently portrayed by people sympathetic to her case as a young gay man. The photos shown again and again by media outlets like *Democracy Now* portrayed Manning in uniform or in a shirt and tie, sometimes holding a sign advocating for equal rights on the battlefield. This depiction and the discussion of Manning as "gay" were a source of discussion and concern due to the significant evidence that Manning had a trans identity before her August coming out statement. Manning sought gender counseling, told her superiors that she had gender identity disorder, and created YouTube and Twitter accounts under the name "Breanna Manning." At the beginning of Manning's confinement in Quantico, she listed "Breanna Manning" as an alias. Published chat logs between Manning and the snitch Adrian Lamo not only explicitly discuss Manning's female identity and pursuit of health-care support to transition, but also her fear of being portrayed as male in the controversy surrounding her alleged whistleblowing activities. In one excerpt, often quoted in discussions of Manning's gender identity before her August coming out statement, Manning wrote, "I wouldn't mind going to prison for the rest of my life, or being executed so much, if it wasn't for the possibility of having pictures of me . . . plastered all over the world press . . . as boy. . . ."

Critics of the portrayal of Manning as a young gay man voiced concerns about the erasure of Manning's trans identity, charging both that the consistent reference to Manning as "he" and by the name "Bradley" rather than the name "Breanna" was incorrect and transphobic, as is the media's consistent conflation of gay and trans identities when discussing Manning. The Bradley Manning

Support Network responded to these concerns, asserting that they continued to call Manning “he” and “Bradley” because Manning had not instructed them otherwise and they intended to respect Manning’s wishes and did not have enough information to conclude that a change in name and/or pronoun is desired.³³ The simultaneous depiction of Manning as a young gay male soldier by those sympathetic with her cause, and the silence about her case from large, national gay and lesbian rights organizations evince the presence of a relatively new U.S. anti-homophobic militarism. The mainstream gay groups that invented the sympathetic gay soldier figure did not come out to support Manning because that invention had as its sole goal inclusion in military service for lesbians and gay men. It did not include support for those people when they face the realities of being in the military; in fact, it required ignoring the actual conditions of being a soldier and participating in the pro-war patriotic fantasy of U.S. military service, which hides its dangerous and gruesome realities. At the same time, the mobilization of the sympathetic gay soldier image by Manning’s supporters, which required them to ignore the copious evidence of her trans identity in order to depict her within a friendly white gay pro-military masculinity developed in the gay military inclusion advocacy, failed to generate support from the advocates who developed that image but mobilized liberal pro-whistleblower tropes on her behalf. The circulation of the range of images of state-protection-seeking sympathetic victims—the rape victim, the gay soldier fighting discrimination, the LGBT people seeking U.S. intervention against their governments, the patriotic whistleblower who should be protected from retaliation—speak to the languages of advocacy that can be iterated in the context of global neoliberal warfare.

It is interesting that prominent and self-declared gay hero soldier Dan Choi is one of the few anti-DADT advocates to publicly support Manning. That this pro-military patriot has sided with Manning does not complicate Choi’s position. It is a mere extension of it, which, far from disturbing neoliberal militarism, absorbs Manning into it. Choi and others mobilize for a more pure, ethical, transparent “just” war, not to abolish war and the capital-imperial relations that make it. Even anti-war journalist Amy Goodman, in her support for Choi and the repeal of DADT, has been caught up in the myth of gay patriotism as progressive. Rather, we must oppose all forms of U.S. military imperialism while also rejecting the rebranding of those imperialisms as multicultural and progressive.

Manning’s story ultimately was too anti-military for the homonationalist organizations to take up, even while her advocates sought to portray her as the sympathetic gay soldier produced by anti-DADT organizations. The support

team leaned on this gay heroism story as one of the only available scripts in the absence of broad public opposition to imperialism and war. The limits of that strategy will be considered in our concluding section.

))) Anti-War, Anti-Colonial Politics

In Chelsea Manning's story, two forms of normalization coalesce in reinforcing waves: a normalization of gayness and a normalization of imperial war. This is not accidental. The normalization of gayness was drawn from the latter, in the sense that in its normalizing drive, gayness has aligned itself with patriotism and the imperial nation. The nation's desire for homogenization, as Roderick Ferguson reminds us, does not only eject difference but does what it can to tame and incorporate it.³⁴ The forces of patriotic nationalism are strong and no doubt they are coming for trans bodies next.³⁵

Manning and Manning's support team have been in impossible circumstances, and although we want to reflect on that, and learn about ourselves and the limits of our political moment from it, we do not want to be casual about those circumstances. The entire apparatus of the world's largest imperial war machine have mobilized against her. "Gay hero," whether true or not for Manning, was a trope strategically deployed by advocates focused on building support for a vulnerable person.

Activists and journalists have argued that Manning's case illustrates the Obama administration's aggressive campaign to silence whistleblowers and other opponents of U.S. imperial war. This is certainly true, and there can be no doubt that the Obama administration sought to make an example of Manning as a generalized threat to would-be whistleblowers. The chilling of dissent in the context of the war on terror, in which "security" becomes a cover story for a further hemming in of protest politics, is furthered here. But the trajectory of the Manning case is also connected to the failure of a broad left anti-war movement in the United States to provide context for her actions.³⁶ Such a movement would need not only to oppose all forms of U.S. military occupation (including within U.S. domestic borders, in its territories and "possessions," and at its military bases), but also must recognize how the figures of gay soldiers, rape victims, and persecuted homosexuals are mobilized in support of imperial war. The inability of anti-war organizers and activists to sustain active, broad, public opposition in the face of unending war left Manning to act alone. The evacuation of left politics, including and especially anti-war politics, from neoliberalized social movement formations, the consolidation of corporate media, and the

criminalization and dismantling of transformative movements by the U.S. government created a context in which Manning's actions could be isolated and targeted by the federal government. In the early days after Manning's arrest, cynics called Manning naïve for her statements in chat logs that releasing the documents and exposing the U.S. population to the truths of wars committed in our names would inspire resistance and uprising. What are the conditions that produce that cynicism and abandon Manning to the brutal conditions she has faced?

Manning's post-sentencing statement clearly articulates the anti-war terms of her struggle:

In our zeal to kill the enemy, we internally debated the definition of torture. We held individuals at Guantanamo for years without due process. We inexplicably turned a blind eye to torture and executions by the Iraqi government. And we stomachted countless other acts in the name of our war on terror. . . . Patriotism is often the cry extolled when morally questionable acts are advocated by those in power. When these cries of patriotism drown out any logically-based dissension, it is usually an American soldier that is given the order to carry out some ill-conceived mission.³⁷

In this statement, Manning rejects a normalization of war in the post-9/11 context. She also points to the ways in which vulnerable soldiers are tasked with the dirty work of empire. Manning positions her refusal to continue to participate in that role, but also that her current role of prosecuted enemy is an extension of that. In the wake of Manning's sentence and her request for a pardon and for trans supportive health care while imprisoned, the task becomes how to articulate opposition to war in ways that both refuse the terms of multicultural imperialism and that move forward with trans liberation struggles.

After Manning's sentencing and public statement, grassroots groups already working on prison support work through a prison abolition framework immediately began to articulate what such a movement might look like. Black and Pink prisoner support network argued:

As we fight for Chelsea Manning's health care, let us not forget the fight for her freedom. As we fight for the freedom for Chelsea Manning, let us not forget the fight to free all prisoners. The United States prison industrial complex functions as a tool of domination and control that steals the lives of poor people, people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and those who resist the violence of the government. The fight for Chelsea Manning is part of the fight for abolition, the fight for a day where we live free from police, militaries, judges, and the cages that steal millions from our communities.³⁸

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) released a statement rejecting the individualization of the case, and the voyeuristic fascination of media and publics with trans bodies in prisons. SRLP reframes the Manning case in terms of the systemic violence in prisons enacted against trans and gender nonconforming people:

Not only do transgender people in prison have problems accessing healthcare, but they experience a heightened level of gender policing. The clothing they wear, their hairstyles and grooming practices, their bodies, mannerisms and identities are scrutinized and controlled by the state. Any deviance from norms can lead to violence at the hands of corrections officers or other people who are incarcerated. Legal “protections” are hard to access as there is little accountability on the inside.³⁹

Here SRLP suggests that a broad movement for trans justice, which seeks to end prisons and seeks to support the survival of people in prison in the meantime, is the platform from which to deexceptionalize Manning and understand her experience in the context of racialized-gendered state violence.

The political frames put forth by SRLP and Black and Pink are for trans justice in the context of broad social, economic, and racial justice, especially in the forms of prison and military abolition. This contrasts with both the vision and work of the most visible well-resourced LGBT organizations working in the United States. In the past few years, these organizations, as advocates of a narrow gay rights platform, have had many reasons to declare victory and progress. The end of DADT, the *Perry v. Brown* marriage decision about Proposition 8 in California, the prominence of Clinton’s “gay rights are human rights” speech, the announcement that women can serve in combat roles in the U.S. military, the Supreme Court’s striking down of the Defense of Marriage Act, and the statements by Obama about gay marriage and Stonewall at the Democratic National Convention and his inauguration have caused much celebration. Critics, meanwhile, have spilled much ink examining how a prominent gay rights agenda has emerged that essentially demands only the “freedom” to marry, the “right” to serve in the military, more criminal laws and policing, and the promises of equal opportunity (to compete for wage-stagnated temp jobs) delivered by the toothless U.S. anti-discrimination law regime. Critics contend that these “advances,” even when won, do not address the harms facing gender and sexual outsiders—they do not provide material relief from the worst conditions and violences produced by homophobia and transphobia. The development of anti-homophobic politics that aligns with and complements U.S. militarism, criminalization, and austerity, and the national and global prominence of this politics as the *defining* anti-homophobic politics of our time, accomplishes a number of

things. It provides an opportunity for public officials like Obama and Clinton to make a stand on a purportedly progressive issue while staying aligned with the imperial and racist imperatives (e.g., austerity, mass imprisonment, enhanced immigration enforcement, war) that are the center of their work. It disciplines and contains queer, trans, and feminist subjects by channeling desires for the alleviation of heteropatriarchal violence and harm into the desire for recognition by—and nominal inclusion in the apparatuses responsible for—the worst heteropatriarchal violence and harm. Finally, it recuperates institutions like marriage, the military, and the criminal punishment system, making them sites for freedom, inclusion, and equality and silencing the long-term feminist, antiracist, and anti-colonial analysis of them as apparatuses of violence and control.⁴⁰

Of course, as the statements released by SRLP and Black and Pink attest, this homonationalist and carceral feminist politics is not and has never been the only anti-homophobic or feminist politics in the United States, even though carceral feminism and homonationalist gay rights politics are the most prominent versions today. Critical scholars and activists working on a number of fronts are not only producing anti-military, decolonial, anti-racist feminist, and anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic analysis, but are also directly challenging homonationalist and carceral feminist strategies and logics. Two visible sites of this work are the debates inside the U.S. anti-violence movement raised by anti-criminalization feminists, and the emergence of anti-pinkwashing activism that challenges U.S. and Israeli depictions of Israel as a human rights-protector based on its same-sex marriage and LGBT military service policies. These interventions, although often complex and contradictory, provide resources for thinking about sexual and gender technologies of white supremacy, militarism, and imperialism.

Debates within U.S. feminist anti-violence activism about criminalization continue to heat up as anti-racist critiques of mass incarceration gain wider exposure. Two anthologies produced by the organization INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Color of Violence* (2006) and *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (2007), have provided important fuel for these conversations.⁴¹ Both books analyze the failings of law enforcement-centered approaches to sexual and gender violence and examine how feminist anti-violence work became dominated by criminalization approaches despite the long-term opposition to such approaches by women of color and immigrant women. Although these conversations about how feminist anti-violence work was coopted by carceral feminism and how grassroots activism transformed into state-sponsored, police-partnered depoliticized service provision work are not new, and have been ongoing throughout these developments, these two anthologies raised the visi-

bility of these debates and offered accounts of work aimed at challenging these dynamics. For this reason, they became useful, on-the-ground tools for many activists doing local anti-violence work and attempting to find approaches that align with anti-criminalization and anti-prison politics. The 2011 publication of the anthology *The Revolution Starts at Home*⁴² further supports activists working to build responses to gender and intimate-partner violence using strategies that do not rely on police and courts. These anthologies are part of a genealogy of women of color feminist analysis that has challenged the narrow framings white feminism has given to “women’s problems” and the limited interventions white feminism has produced, observing how those solutions not only often fail to reach women of color, but frequently align with the white supremacist politics and policies that most threaten the survival of women of color.⁴³ The past ten years have seen an increasing production of scholarly and activist writing on feminist, queer, and trans anti-criminalization and anti-prison scholarship, with feminist, queer, and trans analysis also proliferating in the growing movement for prison abolition.⁴⁴ At the local level, this work can be seen in many programs and practices being engaged by anti-prison feminist, queer, and trans anti-violence activists around the United States. Some are directly opposing criminalization expansion regimes, including gang injunction laws and gun laws. Some are opposing jail and prison building projects. Others have developed programs to support current queer and trans prisoners and/or people in women’s prisons and to help people make the transition out of prison and find housing and other necessities. Others are working on decriminalization projects, trying to stop the flow of people into prisons by opposing drug laws, three strikes laws and other key mechanisms for the rapid prison expansion of the last four decades.⁴⁵ Many are explicitly opposing criminalization and jail-building projects being proposed in the name of protecting women or LGBT people, such as “gender responsive prison” building projects, increased penalties for domestic violence, human trafficking laws, and hate crime laws.⁴⁶ Many others are working on prevention strategies to address the root causes of sexual and gender violence by addressing poverty, engaging in organizing, and political education work.⁴⁷ Many are also working to develop programs and practices to respond to harm and violence without relying on police or courts, recognizing that those apparatuses increase violence and danger rather than alleviating it.⁴⁸ All of this work is complex and experimental. All of it is being undertaken by activists seeking to meaningfully intervene in the continuing gender and sexual violence that shapes and shortens the lives of its targets, recognizing the failures of law enforcement responses to violence and the devastation that criminalization regimes have wrought on people of color and poor people.

Anti-pinkwashing scholarship and activism provides an example of work explicitly being undertaken to context the terms of a gay right politics mobilized to support militarism. The term “pinkwashing” is most frequently used to describe the strategy the Israeli government has utilized in recent years to cast Israel as a “modern democracy” by highlighting its purportedly progressive gay rights policies—the fact that same-sex marriage is not forbidden in Israel and that LGBT people are permitted to serve in the Israeli military.⁴⁹ The Israeli Consulate has funded tours of Israeli gay rights activists to the United States to spread this image, has promoted Israel in advertising and marketing as a “gay haven” and a gay tourism destination, and has mobilized Islamophobic portrayals that cast Arab and Muslim countries and people as homophobic as part of its pinkwashing work. Anti-pinkwashing activists and scholars have chronicled these developments, exposing them as propaganda aimed at covering up the brutal realities of Israel’s ongoing theft of land and resources from Palestinians, its system of apartheid, its siege on Gaza, the wall it continues to build to annex land and restrict movement throughout Palestine, its ongoing support of settlements, and other daily atrocities. Anti-pinkwashing organizations have emerged around the globe, engaging in public education as well as directly opposing and aiming to disrupt and stop pinkwashing activities such as the screening of Israeli government-supported pinkwashing films at film festivals, and Israeli government-supported pinkwashing panels. Some of this work, particularly in the United States and Canada, has also highlighted those governments’ support of Israel’s violent regime and linked it to those countries’ own basis in ongoing settler colonialism. This anti-pinkwashing work has also challenged the notion that same-sex marriage and LGBT military participation are good measures of anti-homophobia or are felicitous goals of anti-homophobic advocates, questioning how the institutions of marriage and the military operate to further racism and colonialism in Israel and elsewhere.⁵⁰ In this way, this activism is developing critical interventions into the development of pro-military LGBT “equality” politics.

Pinkwashing is also being used to describe other contexts, in addition to Israel, where governments are employing anti-homophobic rhetoric to justify military intervention and/or cover up and distract from their violent misdeeds. In the U.S. context, this term has been employed to highlight Obama’s sudden turn to talking about gay rights (e.g., marriage and military service) during his second campaign for the presidency, described above. With a focus on the purportedly edgy progressive issue of gay marriage, Obama sought to evade criticism of his brutal record of domestic and international violence: his development of drone warfare, his record-breaking levels of deportations, his failures to close Guan-

tanamo, the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, his support for austerity measures and scandalous bail out of banks, and his leadership of the most imprisoning country in the world. Critics have also noted the mobilization of anti-homophobic rationales to support sanctions and war against Iran. The circulation of images purported to depict gay men being hanged in Iran have been used to amp up calls for military intervention. Anti-war feminists have also critiqued the mobilization of “women saving” rationales for the war in Afghanistan, most famously in 2001 when then-First Lady Laura Bush became the first First Lady ever given the opportunity to give the president’s weekly radio address, focusing her remarks on the plight of Afghan women and describing how the war on terror was “a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”⁵¹ These interventions, along with growing scholarly attention to “homonationalism,”⁵² are sites of contestation of the current circulation of feminist and anti-homophobic rationales for militarism and imperialism.

As this article goes to print, a new horizon of pro-military LGBT activism is becoming visible: the fight for trans military inclusion. In the coming years, we will no doubt be flooded with images and stories of brave patriotic terrorist-killing trans people who just want the right to serve their country. Perhaps the next Chelsea Manning will emerge into a discursive environment in which the normative trans soldier narrative developed by the next round of advocacy will be the framework they are squeezed into. This narrative will be used to explain their existence in ways that fail to challenge war making or transphobia, but will use trans “equality” to shore up the image of imperialist justice. And once this fight is won, and the ban on trans military participation is removed, that future Chelsea Manning can also expect to be ignored or maligned by the pro-military apparatus that fought for her “right to serve,” because its politics begin and end at inclusion in apparatuses of state violence and do not encompass the realities of the brutal violence of U.S. militarism for its targets and soldiers.

NOTES

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