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Retracing the Untold: Sexual Violence in the American Gulf War Captivity Narratives and Their Counter-Narratives

Though the genre of the American captivity narrative is very well researched, one of its newer forms has received not much – if any – scholarly attention. Despite the fact that American Prisoners of War in Iraq have also produced captivity narratives, the most widely-known of which is probably Rick Bragg's *I am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (2003), they have gone unnoticed compared to the attention granted to generic texts from other periods. In agreement with the genre's traditions, the American Gulf War captive is usually represented as belonging to the American nation's """representative heroes, embodying and exalting the character of the people" (Slotkin 2001, 471). Titles such as *Edgar Hernandez, POW: An American Hero* (Martínez and Rellahan 2008) make these aspirations perfectly clear. With this propagandizing stylization of Gulf War captives as national heroes comes a connection between their captivity narratives and an inner U.S. nationalist discourse. This facilitates the creation of not only individual but also of collective American identities in the texts and furthers the transformation of individual captives into symbolic figures. In this paper, I argue that the representation of the captive's (violated) body is essential in these processes of identity formation. I will therefore analyze the representation of bodies in the Gulf War captivity narratives and their surrounding discourses. My suggestion is to determine the dominant literary practice of representing male and female captive bodies in a first step and then to conduct a dissident re-reading of the material along the inherent 'faultlines.'

My observations set out from Michel Foucault's theories on discourse and power, more precisely, his observation that
discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (1980, 100-101)

For the theoretical framework of my analysis, the key word in this quotation is "fragile." In this article, I treat the imbalanced representation of captive bodies in the American Gulf War captivity narratives as fragile stories that contain "the faultlines and breaking points through which they enable dissident reading" (Sinfield 2001, 9). According to Sinfield, "dissidence operates, necessarily, with reference to dominant structures" (9), which is why I analyze the 'dominant' way of representing male and female bodies in captivity before turning towards the "unspoken stories" (Ricoeur 2014, 30) that enclose sites of dissidence.

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1 The term is taken from Sinfield (2001).
The notion of 'untold stories' stems from Paul Ricoeur's "Life in Quest of Narrative," in which he describes the individual's subconscious struggle for coherence in his/her life story as follows: "the story of a life grows out of stories that have not been recounted and that have been repressed in the direction of actual stories which the subject could take charge of and consider to be constitutive of his personal identity" (2014, 30; original emphasis).

Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity construction entails the idea that some possible stories are not selected by the individual and suppressed in favor of other narratives. In my analysis, I also bear in mind Ricoeur's conceptualization of "the story as the synthesis of the heterogenous," as well as the three principal features of emplotment in narrative that he identifies as: "the mediation performed by the plot between the multiple incidents and unified story; the primacy of concordance over discordance; and, finally, the competition between succession and configuration" (2014, 22). Narrative identity constructs, as well as the actual textual narratives, bear the marks of these processes in the forms of silences and inner tensions that lie beneath the surface but remain as potential sites of dissidence. This is where I read Ricoeur together with Sinfield, who states that: "[n]o story can contain all the possibilities it brings into play; coherence is always selection" (2001, 51).

In the context of narrative identity theory, one very interesting aspect of the captivity narratives is how the potentially traumatic event of captivity is mediated into the plot of the individual's life story. The importance that is placed on the event of captivity by others is immense, which is discussed in the captives' narratives and becomes manifest in obituaries written for ex-captives. When Robert 'Bob' Simon, one of the First Gulf War captives, passed away in February 2015, the obituaries held by friends and colleagues on CBS' Sixty Minutes (1968-) consistently mentioned Simon's captivity as a remarkable event in his extraordinary life:

His capture by Iraqis gave him unique status with the Marines and sailors. In their eyes, Bob had been a POW, and that earned him their respect. There was a special reverence in the way they approached him and talked to him about it, thanking him for what he had endured. [...] Although he was a civilian and a reporter, the troops seemed to feel he had suffered at the hands of the enemy and they told him how much they admired the way he carried himself through that ordeal. (Walsh qtd. in "Our Stories About Bob Simon" 2015)

As expressed in Simon's obituary, physical suffering in captivity is thought to deserve reverence and respect from others, for example the Marines and the sailors who recognize and perpetuate the ex-captive's cultural importance. In Simon's life story, which can be viewed in its 'entirety' by the writers of his obituaries, captivity is evaluated as an event which is important enough to be highlighted and, thus, endowed with significance.

The eulogies delivered in honor of ex-captive John McCain, who passed away in August 2018, are similar in this respect. Barack Obama emphatically recalls the time

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2 All Gulf War captives, except for Bob Simon, are still alive in 2019. John McCain was held captive for several years during the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Though he is not a Gulf War captive, looking at the eulogies delivered in his name provides relevant insights into the significance placed by others on the event of captivity in an individual's life story.
in McCain's life that was spent "in the cells of Hanoi" (Obama 2018) and George W. Bush states:

The thing about John's life was the amazing sweep of it. From a tiny prison cell in Vietnam to the floor of the United States Senate. From troublemaking plebe to presidential candidate. [...] In one epic life was written the courage and greatness of our country. (Bush 2018)

Bush's synopsis of McCain's life epitomizes the importance placed on captivity by others. It is a catalyzing event in this "epic life" of John McCain because through it he has had a "firsthand experience of cruelty, which left physical reminders that lasted his whole life" (Bush 2018). I suggest that it is the captive's body that is central to the construction of (captive) identity in these narratives – both metaphysically, as in the oral and literary representation and retelling of the violations it endured in its captive state, and physically, as present in the flag-draped coffin.3

As the eulogies for McCain and Simon demonstrate, captivity can be mediated into the individual's life story as an event that is part of a larger plot, even though it is ultimately an arbitrary occurrence. Traces of this mediation can also be detected in the Gulf War captivity narratives. David Eberly, who is one of the First Gulf War captives, assures himself as much as the readers of his autobiography, Faith Beyond Belief: A Journey to Freedom (2002), that "[f]or now I am here [in captivity in Iraq]. Only God knows why … there must be a reason" (2002, 15; ellipsis in original). The captive suspects that the reason for his captivity lies within Providence; he trusts that a divine being has a higher plan for his life. Another captive, Bob Simon, states from a secular point of view that establishing reason and coherence in a captivity setting is the result of mythmaking:

The weeks following our release, when there was little in my world beyond memories of Iraq, I felt I was beginning to understand the process of mythmaking. I could see how, when the need was great enough, a series of random events becomes infused with meaning; how in retrospect, days which were ruled by coincidence and chaos become coherent stages in a voyage of discovery. (1992, 53)

In my reading, the statements by Eberly and Simon show traces of emplotment at work and the individual's struggle for coherence in his or her life story. I would describe this as the (subconscious) selection of a life narrative that promises concordance and that is therefore preferred over other possible narratives. As a result of establishing coherence, the captives apparently feel that they can explain a traumatic event in their lives that otherwise poses a threat of discordance.

The obituaries for John McCain and Bob Simon indicate that the captive's body is at the center of immense public attention. This focus on bodies, and especially on the violation of bodies, is also central for the captivity genre. Consider the following

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3 In the videos of John McCain's funeral ceremony, the camera repeatedly captures the coffin, thus drawing attention towards McCain's physical presence. The captive's body and his injuries are also a central motif in McCain's captivity narrative, Faith of My Fathers (McCain and Salter 1999).
passage from one of the genre's founding texts, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" by Mary Rowlandson:

[the Indians] gathered a great company together about her [a captive white woman], and stripped her naked, and set her in the midst of them; and when they had sung and danced about her (in their hellish manner) as long as they pleased, they knocked her on head [sic!], and the child in her arms with her: when they had done that, they made a fire and put them both into it […]. (Rowlandson 2000, 145; parentheses in original)

Repeatedly, over the course of the centuries, the captivity narratives revert to the description of captive bodies as in the Rowlandson example. Here, the captive's body is described in contrast to the captors' bodies: the former vulnerable, exposed, and harmed, the latter energetic and brutalizing. This narrative strategy aims at a variety of effects which support the propagandistic function of the texts: it creates compassion for the captive whose violated body is described, evokes enmity towards the demonized captors, and, moreover, it satisfies the audience's desire for the sensational.4

Returning to the Gulf War context, it must be observed that both in inner U.S. news discourses and in printed narratives, there is a focus on the captives' faces and bodies – especially their violated bodies. This emphasis can also be found in contemporary news discourse and in political rhetoric. For instance, in 1990, when Iraq invades Kuwait, presidential rhetoric and Newsweek refer to the military operation as the "Rape of a Nation" ("Kuwait: Rape of a Nation" 1991), and portray Iraq's invasion as if the metaphorical bodies of both states were engaged in a metaphysical captivity scenario. Likewise, the inner U.S. media landscape focuses chiefly on the foreign hostages held as human shields by Saddam Hussein and his administration during the Gulf Crisis that preceded the First Gulf War.5 Short captivity stories, such as "Against Their Will" (Belkin and Hevesi 1990), establish a captivity scenario and prepare their inner U.S. audience to connect Iraq under Saddam Hussein with an American captivity experience.

The focus on bodies and violence in captivity then proceeds from the pre-war media discourse into the Gulf War captivity narratives. Rhonda Cornum, protagonist and narrator of She Went to War: The Inspiring True Story of a Mother Who Went to War (1992), was deployed to serve in the First Gulf War. In her captivity narrative, she states:

[The American pilots] weren't afraid of death; they were afraid of landing behind enemy lines or having engine trouble that led to being captured. All the pilots had heard stories about what the Iraqis would do to the 'infidels' if they caught us, stories of torture and abuse. […]. We'd also heard about the special abuse reserved for the women of Kuwait.

4 There are probably countless examples of the description of bodies in the long tradition of the genre but, given the limits of this paper, one instance must suffice. This is not to say that the description of bodies has remained absolutely static over the centuries. Rather, my point is that bodies were in the center of attention right from the beginning without wanting to historicize today's Gulf War captivity narratives.

Some Iraqi soldiers had behaved like animals, raping and sexually torturing Arab and foreign women living there. (Cornum and Copeland 1992, 13)

In this passage, Rhonda Cornum typifies a culturally pre-determined way of imagining and representing male and female bodies in captivity: male captives are likely to experience "torture and abuse," whereas the female captive must fear the "special abuse reserved for the women" (1992, 13), namely rape and sexual torture.

These cultural presets shaping captivity narratives have been described by Elliott Gruner as a demand for "properly endorsed male heroes and raped women" (1994a, 51) in the captivity genre. This translates into a literary practice that emphasizes the threat of rape for female captives even in cases where the actual occurrence of rape is contested. For instance, Jessica Lynch's biographer informs the readers of *I am a Soldier, Too* (2003) that:

> The [medical] records also show that she [Jessica Lynch] was a victim of anal sexual assault. The records do not tell whether her captors assaulted her almost lifeless, broken body after she was lifted from the wreckage, or if they assaulted her and then broke her bones into splinters until she was almost dead. [...] Jessi remembers none of this. [...] When she came to, the cruelties were over. (Bragg 2003, 96)

In this passage, as well as in many others, the female captive's body is represented with an emphasis on physical abuse and sexual violation. Moreover, it is over the physical condition of the captive's body that epistemic authority is contested in Bragg's/Lynch's narrative. The biographer, Rick Bragg, claims to have access to the captive's medical records and discloses information that his protagonist is apparently missing or unwilling to discuss. This gives rise to several questions: if taken at face value, must Bragg's narrative be read as an attempt to counter the silencing of sexual violence in Jessica Lynch's captivity? If so, is this disclosure happening against the captive's will and does it therefore constitute a re-victimization of the female captive by the male author?

So far, I have been unsuccessful in validating Bragg's sources because Jessica Lynch's medical records remain confidential. Thus, there is a possibility that Bragg consciously misrepresents Jessica Lynch's story based on obscure information. If this is the case, Lynch is actually victimized by her male biographer, who sexualizes her life story in accordance with the captivity genre's preference for "properly [...] raped women" (Gruner 1994a, 51). In this case, the version of events that remains untold is the one in which the Iraqi captors actually behave humanely and do not comply with

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6 In a second article, Gruner states that "[i]n the popular imagination captivity for a woman remains a problem of body, not of mind" (1994b, 51).

7 In "The Woman in Peril and the Ruined Woman," Jennifer Lobasz refers to this dilemma in passing when she mentions that "the US Army would not release Lynch's medical records, which would state whether she had been raped" (2008, 316). Newspaper articles that discuss the possibility of Jessica Lynch having been raped in captivity typically cite the authorized biography by Rick Bragg as their source. Some articles quote Lynch's Iraqi doctors who deny the possibility of her having been raped (cf. "Doctors in Iraq Dismiss Jessica Lynch Rape Claim" 2003).
Western stereotypes of the Oriental Others being notorious rapists. Within *I am a Soldier, Too*, the discord between the captive protagonist and her biographer is resolved by Bragg's emphasis on Jessica Lynch's alleged loss of memory. In Bragg's narrative, the captive's memory loss is interpreted as a (subconscious) selection of events by a traumatized individual in favor of a more coherent and less stigmatizing life story. Seeing that this interpretation is imposed upon the captive's life story, its validity is highly questionable.

In *I am a Soldier, Too*, the (non-)occurrence of rape and its tellability become a crucial site of dissidence. Jessica Lynch's body is a breaking point that encapsulates a dissident version of events – the untold story – which the author of her biography tries to eradicate. Hence, Rick Bragg does not tire to remind his readers that he is a superior source of information:

> Jessi lost three hours. She lost them in the snapping of bones, in the crash of the Humvee, in the torment her enemies inflicted on her after she was pulled from it. It all left marks on her, and it is those marks that fill the blanks in the torment her enemies inflicted on her after she was pulled from it. It all left marks. (2003, 79)

For the biographer, the female captive's body becomes a 'text' that can be read. In this interpretation, the "marks" (2003, 79) of violence are a semiotic system inscribed onto the female body that Rick Bragg can decipher, even if the captive herself cannot. As readers, the semiotics of the female captive's body are explained to us by the male epistemic authority within the text. Through the narrative representation of the captive's body, we are led to imagine what happened to Jessica Lynch in "those three hours of cruelty" (2003, 98). This is meant to influence the identity we construct for Jessica Lynch's Iraqi captors as much as the image that we have of the captive herself.

Another female Gulf War captive, Rhonda Cornum, was also involved in a public debate on the extent of sexual violence that she was subjected to while in captivity. Writing for the *New York Times*, Elaine Sciolino informs her readers that Rhonda Cornum had testified before a presidential commission on women in the military in June 1992 that she "was violated manually – vaginally and rectally" (1992, n.p.). In contrast to this statement, Sciolino notices, the event is described quite differently in *She Went to War*, which was published later in the same year (Cornum and Copeland 1992, 49-50). When Sciolino asks Cornum about the discrepancy between her biography and her statement in front of the commission, Rhonda Cornum answers that she "didn't think a clinical description of what happened was essential to the book" (qtd. in Sciolino 1992, n.p.). This can be read as an attempt to divert public attention from the issue of sexual violence against captive women. Without wanting to make assumptions, there are several possible motives for this decision. First, the ex-captive might want to evade further victimization that accompanies the telling of stories by and

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8 I would like to thank the peer reviewer who pointed out that the Western tradition of stereotyping Muslim men as their uncivilized Others facilitates the acceptance of Bragg's version of events, whereas Jessica Lynch's claim of not having been raped is discredited in this setting.

9 I am referring to the conflicted relationship between trauma and narrative, which cannot be covered here.
about surviving female victims of sexual violence. Second, the emphasis on her role as a victim of sexual violence could be perceived as detrimental to the cause that Rhonda Cornum is most concerned with: advocating gender equality in the military. Third, it might be the case that the sexual assault simply did not matter that much to the ex-captive, which is why she refuses a sensational stylization of this particular event in her captivity narrative and dismisses it as 'inessential.'

In spite of the temporal distance between Cornum and Lynch – or maybe rather because of this distance – texts by and about them show how the female captives' bodies are showcased with an emphasis on sexual violence. This results in a narrative identity construct that is marked by victimization regardless of the individual female captive's efforts to contest this image. Moreover, my analysis of Gulf War captivity narratives shows that female captives are primed to expect rape in captivity. Hence, Rhonda Cornum recounts her thought processes upon being taken captive as follows: "[w]e had heard the stories of what the Iraqi soldiers had done to women in Kuwait, so I had thought about the probability that I would be sexually abused if I were captured" (Cornum and Copeland 1992, 50). Similarly, Shoshana Johnson, who was held captive during the Second Gulf War, recalls her internal struggle just before giving herself over to the Iraqis who attacked her convoy in Nasiriyyah in 2003: "The thought of surrendering petrified me. Interrogations, beatings, torture, rape – all of that flashed through my head" (Johnson and Doyle 2010, 5). As these excerpts show, fearing rape and abuse at the hands of the (Iraqi) Other is a culturally pre-conditioned response that is traceable in all of the Gulf War captivity narratives published by female captives.

I now turn to the representation of male bodies in the narratives published by male Gulf War captives. Whereas all kinds of physical torture techniques are readily recalled, the prospect of sexual violence in captivity is mentioned only sparsely and only in connection with their fear of castration, which carries different implications than the fear of rape that is evident in the women's narratives. My analysis suggests that rape

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10 See Thomas (2003), Hemerly-Brown (2011), and Cornum (2012). In these articles, Cornum explicitly opposes the use of her story as a cautionary tale against women in the military. According to Lobasz, the same argument was also made in Lynch's case. Lobasz quotes Rush Limbaugh, a conservative commentator of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, who queried Lynch's medical records because proof of her rape in captivity "might shut up those feminists who are always griping about letting women serve alongside men in the military" (qtd. in Lobasz 2008, 316). Limbaugh was originally quoted in Bookman (2004).

11 The threat of sexual violence in captivity is discussed in all of the four women's accounts of captivity in Iraq. Melissa Coleman, the second female captive from the First Gulf War, at first stated that she was sexually abused in captivity. However, Coleman rescinded her statement and has since claimed that she was not maltreated (Sciolino 1992). The second female captive from the Second Gulf War, Shoshana Johnson, recounts an episode of sexual abuse in I'm Still Standing: From Captive U.S. Soldier to Free Citizen (Johnson and Doyle 2010, 17).

12 In a similar vein, Bragg describes Lynch's feelings and premonitions upon being deployed to Iraq in 2003: "She was afraid of being left behind. [...] Everyone knew what Saddam's soldiers did to women captives. In her worst nightmares, [...] she could see the Iraqis rise up out of the sand to come and get her" (2003, 10).
marks a kind of physical victimization that is primarily associated with the female body and, hence, all but excluded from the representation of violence done to male American captives. The following example is taken from *The Gulf between Us: A Story of Love and Survival in Desert Storm* (2003), which was published more than a decade after the actual events in the First Gulf War:

"UN investigations of Iraq's treatment of POWs during the Iran/Iraq war had covered instances of sexual assaults, Iranian POWs becoming impotent as a result of torture, and alleged castrations. [...] Tales abounded of heinous Iraqi torture techniques. Those tales were shrieking through my [Cliff Acree's] mind as I lay there exposed to my audience and whatever sharp instruments they might wield. (Acree and Acree 2003, 86)"

Cliff Acree, one of the narrating protagonists of this captivity narrative, experiences what turns out to be a health screening for sexually transmitted diseases but his immediate fear is related to "sharp instruments" that could be used for the "alleged castrations" (2003, 86). Neither he nor the other male captives recount that they were sexually abused while in captivity or actually castrated. Nonetheless, the scene is narrated with an emphasis on the threatening possibility of mutilation, an arc of suspension that is also reflected in the layout.

A similar episode can be found in David Eberly's *Faith Beyond Belief* (2002):

"Still blindfolded, I was told they were checking for sexually transmitted diseases and that I was to drop my trousers. Absolute terror filled my body, as lightning seemed to strike my nerves. I had read how the Iraqis had mutilated the Iranians. (2002, 125)"

Similar to Cliff Acree, who had heard about the above-mentioned tales of "heinous torture techniques" (Acree and Acree 2003, 86), David Eberly fears castration because he has prior knowledge of Iraq's treatment of Iranian POWs. Male and female captives alike are informed by the same discourse, which contains stories, or 'tales' of Iraqi cruelty against their Iranian or Kuwaiti captives. A close-reading of the Gulf War captivity narratives suggests that this information plays out differently in the narratives by male and female captives: the former mainly voice fears of castration, whereas the latter mostly talk about fearing rape.

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13 *The Gulf Between Us* (2001) was written by a married couple and contains two autobiographies in one. The double plot-line, respectively narrated by Cynthia and Cliff Acree, is rather unusual for a captivity narrative and employed to mirror the wife's metaphysical captivity during her husband's physical captivity in Iraq.

14 David Eberly was held captive in Iraq during the First Gulf War but, like Cliff Acree, published his captivity narrative in temporal proximity to the Second Gulf War. Considered together with the republishing of Cornum's account of captivity – *She Went to War* was republished in 2003 with Ballantine Books – this suggests a renewed interest in the First Gulf War captives which coincided with the recurring warfare between America and Iraq.

15 One of the most controversially discussed captives from the war in Afghanistan, Bowe Bergdahl, has published a short testimony called "Bowe Bergdahl, in Sparse Prose, Details His Captivity for the First Time," in which the captive recounts severe physical torture and threats to cut off his ears, nose, "as well as other parts of [his] body" (Bergdahl and Lamothe 2015, 2). Though it is not made explicit, this might be alluding to threats of castration as well.
If these 'tales' and the results of the UN investigations are taken at face-value by the captives, the thought that no male American POW was subjected to any kind of sexualized torture appears unlikely. Yet, the non-occurrence of sexual torture against American men in the Gulf War is confirmed by the Pentagon:

The Pentagon has officially said that none of the 19 male American P.O.W.s in the [First] Gulf War were sexually abused. But former captives said that had they been sexually abused, they would never have admitted it. […] 'If it would have happened to me, rape I mean, I probably wouldn't be here today; I probably would have done something to get myself killed,' said Specialist Troy Dunlap of the Army, who was captured along with Major Cornum and who was in the truck with her during her sexual mistreatment. 'But if for some strange reason I survived, I would never tell anyone, no one, never.' (Sciolino 1992)\(^\text{16}\)

In my reading, Troy Dunlap's assertion that he would rather commit suicide than admit to have been raped is emblematic of the lack of representation of male rape as more than an abstract possibility in the captivity narratives. The print captivity narratives I found only ever discuss rape in connection with the stories that the captives have heard about the Iranian POWs of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), with reference to the women of Kuwait, or with regard to the female American Gulf War captives. Sciolino's article explicitly tells its readers that the possibility of male rape exists and that we might not be hearing about it because the male captives do not talk about it. This is contrary to the dominant way of representing female bodies in these narratives. The result of this disparity is a lack of representation of the topic of sexual violence committed against male captives, which reinforces the images of female victimhood that govern the imagination and the representation of their bodies in captivity.

According to Elliott Gruner, the dominant way of representing male bodies in the captivity narrative is to depict them as "properly endorsed male heroes" (1994a, 51). One narrative strategy to achieve this is to contrast a physically strong male body with a violated and fragile female body. Consider this example from Rick Bragg's I am a Soldier, Too (2003) in which he introduces one of Jessica Lynch's rescuers as follows:

Seth Bunke, a six-foot-six, blond, recruiting poster of a U.S. Marine, fought a war he could not have imagined. […] He is the opposite of Jessi, except for the color of his hair. His arms are thick with muscle and his legs look like pulpwood logs. He entered the service to fight, to go to war, and he killed when he got there. […] The story [about Jessica Lynch] [he] would hear made Seth Bunke want to kill, and made him proud to. […] 'I took it personally,' said Bunke. 'I took it right to heart. I have a sister. She's nineteen. I thought of Jessi, and I thought of her. I thought of the people who would do that. I wanted to kill them. I killed thirty-four of them.' (2003, 121-124)

Throughout this passage, Seth Bunke is presented as the antithesis to Jessica Lynch. Whereas she is immobile and passive because she is injured and held captive in an Iraqi

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\(^{16}\) To be clear, Dunlap was not asked whether he himself had been raped but comments as a witness of the sexual assault against Cornum. Troy Dunlap has not published a print captivity narrative. He appears in Sciolino, "Female P.O.W. Is Abused, Kindling Debate" (1992), and as a protagonist in Cornum's She Went to War (1992), which was written by Peter Copeland.

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hospital, Bunke embodies activity and physical domination. Confronted with the
damsel in distress story of Jessica’s captivity, Bunke is motivated to kill the enemy to
avenge and rescue her. He immediately draws a connection between Lynch and his
sister, even though the two may have nothing in common but their age and their
biological sex. This is possible because the female captive is an empty signifier that can
be filled by any white American woman. Bunke kills in order to avenge the captive
white woman, who, following Richard Slotkin, symbolizes the “civilization that is to
be saved from savagery” (2001, 474). In my reading, it is Jessica’s female body that is
of essential importance for this symbolism to work and that renders her interchangeable
with Bunke’s sister but not necessarily with women of other ethnicities.

Whiteness appears to be the key term in Slotkin’s theory and, indeed, the Gulf War
captivity narratives are remarkably consistent with regard to the ethnic background of
their protagonists up until Johnson’s I’m Still Standing (2010). Even though she was
held captive at precisely the same time as Lynch, the inner U.S. media had focused
almost entirely on the white American captive. Johnson comments on this discrepancy
in representation as follows:

> there began to be speculation that I was angry and jealous of [Jessica Lynch] for the way
> that she had become the Army’s poster child because she was white and that I felt
discriminated against. […] Whatever the Army’s reasons, I don’t think their choice of
Jessica for hero status had anything to do with color. (Johnson and Doyle 2010, 251-252)

Even though Johnson claims that race has nothing to do with the heroization of Lynch,
she cannot explain away the fact that Lynch received much more public attention and,
allegedly, a more appropriate disability rating. Similarly, Edgar Hernandez, POW: An American Hero (2008), the narrative of a Mexican American Second Gulf War
captive, remains largely unknown in comparison to Lynch’s biography, which has even
been adapted as a television movie. This leads me to suspect that race is still a factor
in the representation of captive bodies in the Gulf War context. Apparently, the captive
can be interpreted as a symbol more easily if he or she fulfills certain notions of what
it means to be American. Otherwise, s/he will have to fight for recognition and
representation.

Up until this point, the representation and the construction of narrative identity
within the Gulf War captivity narratives still appears to produce fairly stable and
coherent results. The reason for this is that these narrative identity constructs are
governed by deeply engrained, normative cultural narratives about bodies, gender, and
nation. I will now broaden the scope of the analysis to go deeper into the "potential or

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17 The limitations of this article prevent me from going into detail on gender, masculinity, and
the military. I do, however, understand that there is an extensive discussion on gender and
the military, also with regard to inter-military sexual trauma. See Hynes (2004), Browne

18 See Johnson and Doyle: "There was speculation that I was jealous of Jessica Lynch and her
70 percent disability rating. […] While my board said my [mental] issues were unratable
[sic!], her rating board said hers were automatic. Automatic. That, I felt, was totally unfair"
(2010, 259, original emphasis).

19 See Saving Jessica Lynch (2003), directed by Peter Markle.
virtual story" (Ricoeur 2014, 30) that remains untold in print captivity narratives from
the Gulf Wars. Reverse or counter captivity narratives of the Gulf Wars are very
scarce.20 Thus, I employ a broader definition of the term 'counter-narrative' which
centers on the narrative's potential to tell the other side of the dominant story. Therefore,
I will now incorporate into my analysis narratives about the Tailhook Scandal of 1991
and about the Abu Ghraib Scandal of 2003. In the remainder of this article, I will
examine the implications for the representation of captive bodies and incorporate my
findings into a dissident reading of the Gulf War captivity narratives.

The Tailhook Scandal, which has casually been called the "granddaddy' of all
military sex scandals" (Browne 2007, 749), occurred at the annual Tailhook Convention
of Naval and Marine aviators in Las Vegas in September 1991. According to official
records, it involved about 140 officers, 83 female victims, and seven male victims.21 Its
close temporal proximity to the First Gulf War turns it into a source of dissident stories
about military life that were left untold in the Gulf War captivity narratives written by
members of the military. In contrast to these texts, narratives about Tailhook tell of
misogynist and sexually abusive behavior conducted by Americans against fellow
Americans. The scope of the scandal draws attention to fact that women run the risk of
being raped not only in the company of the Iraqi Other but also in the company of
American men. Tailhook thus destabilizes the image of masculinity that the Gulf War
captivity narratives try to establish as natural by telling stories of men like Dunlap,
Eberly, Acree, and Bunke while simultaneously bursting the illusion that American
women are safer in the company of American men.

Instead of appearing as heroic role-models, American men now appear as
perpetrators within an institutionalized system of abusive behavior that has been called
a "military rape sub-culture" (Zaleski 2015, 17). Even more significantly, American
men also appear as victims of sexual assault because, allegedly, seven of the Tailhook
victims were male. In Tailhook's wake, their cases were silenced and, according to
Kingsley Browne, "the male 'victims' – even ones who claimed to have been subjected
to sexual groping by women – were never mentioned again" (2007, 753).22 Whereas

20 1001 Nights in Iraq: The Shocking Story of an American Forced to Fight for Saddam Against
the Country He Loves (2005) by Shant Kenderian, an Iraqi emigrant to the U.S. who handed
himself over to the American forces during the First Gulf War, cannot be read as a counter-
narrative in the strict sense. Although the captive/captor constellation is technically reversed,
the protagonist identifies as American and remains highly affirmative of the American views
on the war in Iraq. Instead of having a destabilizing effect, his narrative is rather assertive.

21 The numbers stated above are taken from Browne (2007). However, the numbers on Tailhook
vary. The Encylopædia Britannica, for example, only mentions "a seven-month investigation
by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and Inspector General [that] uncovered 140 cases
of misconduct against 80 to 90 female victims" (s.v. "Tailhook Scandal," my emphasis).
Likewise, there is no mention of male victims in Titunik: "twenty-six women were groped and
molested when forced to pass through a gauntlet of male aviators" (2008, 142).

22 Browne's use of single quotation marks suggests doubts about the victimization of men by
female offenders. Though they are technically mentioned, this could be read as a silencing
strategy that restricts the voices of male victims in addition to the missing legal proceedings
against their offenders. Concerning male victims of sexual violence in the American military,
Tailhook's female victims were showcased as cautionary examples against or for gender equality in the American military – always depending on the point of view of those who instrumentalized the victim's story – the male victims disappear. This suggests that their stories contain too much dissident potential and/or that men have even more difficulties talking about sexual abuse than women. This difficulty has been attributed to the idea that male victims of sexual violence suffer "an even bigger social stigma" (Broadbent 2011, n.p.). Reflecting upon this potential stigmatization, a male survivor of sexual violence in the military, Rick Tringale, states in an interview:

‘Our [American] society treats men differently when they have been raped,’ he [Rick Tringale] says. ‘In society’s eyes I am somehow less of a man because I have been raped, or I must be a latent homosexual. Rape is a very emasculating thing.’ (qtd. in Broadbent 2011, n.p.)

For Tringale, rape and emasculation correlate, which constitutes a parallel to the fear of castration that is displayed in the Gulf War captivity narratives. The silence on male rape can thus be explained with a fear of social stigmatization that is connected to being a sexually 'deviant' male and/or an emasculated man compared to the template of male heteronormativity. If it were incorporated into the texts, male victimhood would produce a striking incongruence with the male identity constructs of the Gulf War captivity narratives. This might provide an explanation as to why sexual violence against American men remains a taboo, whereas it is conceivable for men of other nationalities (i.e. the Iranians who were allegedly tortured by Iraqis during the Iran-Iraq War).

While Tailhook occurred within the American community, the second scandal that I focus on, namely the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, took place in Iraq during the Second Gulf War. Abu Ghraib is especially interesting because it was used as a prison facility by the Hussein administration prior to the American occupation. During the First Gulf War, several American captives were held at Abu Ghraib and complained of inhumane treatment which is why narratives about Iraqi imprisonment at Abu Ghraib offer an intriguing double perspective. The Abu Ghraib pictures, the leaked "Taguba Report" (2004),23 and the news coverage of the scandal are significant because in them, the captive/captor constellation of the American Gulf War captivity narratives is reversed. For my purposes, even the Abu Ghraib pictures imply an untold narrative of Iraqi captivity, which provides a balance to the Americentric representations that can be found in the Gulf War captivity narratives.24

23 The "Taguba Report" is officially referred to as "Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade," a classified document that was leaked to the press and made available online. Along with the publication of the pictures, the report fueled the scandal around the torture proceedings at the Abu Ghraib prison facility.

24 Though the events take place at a prison facility, the narrative that is implied in the Abu Ghraib material is not a prison narrative as such but remains a captivity narrative. The events...
According to a report by Gen. Antonio M. Taguba that was leaked to and subsequently published by CBS News,
between October and December 2003, at the Abu Ghraib Confinement Facility (BCCF),
numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on
several detainees. This systemic and illegal abuse of detainees was intentionally
perpetrated by several members of the military police guard force […] (2004, 16)
The catalogue of abuses Taguba lists is extensive and includes several instances of
sexual abuse committed by American guards against their Iraqi captives (2004, 16-17).
CBS News coverage states that there were:
charges that Iraqi inmates were sodomized by soldiers […] [and] an allegation from one
detainee that a male juvenile had been raped by a translator: 'They covered all the doors
with sheets. I heard the screaming ... and the female soldier was taking pictures.' (Leung
2004; 2nd ellipsis in original)
In an article that was published in the New Yorker, Taguba states that he "described a
naked detainee lying on the wet floor, handcuffed, with an interrogator shoving things
up his rectum" (qtd. in Hersh 2007, n.p.) to the people attending a meeting with Donald
Rumsfeld at the Pentagon in 2004. He evaluates the proceedings at Abu Ghraib as
follows: "That's not abuse. That's torture" (ibid.). In my reading, the Abu Ghraib report
and its media documentation counter the American self-descriptions in the Gulf war
captivity narratives by offering access to an untold story, a narrative that contests
"stories about the barbarity of those who are constituted as [the state's] demonized
others" (Sinfield 2001, 34) and replaces them with a possible story that unveils the
'demonic' self.
The Abu Ghraib scandal is so important as a breaking point in American narrative
identity construction because the pictures and reports explicitly show the exact opposite
of what the Gulf War captivity narratives and the surrounding discourses establish as
the 'general rule.' The photographic evidence of American misconduct against Iraqi
prisoners remains available in the form of online databases. Those parts of the Abu
Ghraib files that are accessible contain pictures of American soldiers posing with naked
and blindfolded Iraqi prisoners. There are furthermore scenes of sexual abuse and
pictures of soldiers posing with the corpse of an Iraqi prisoner, who died as a result of
the torture interrogations (see Thompason 2011). As opposed to the male Tailhook
victims, who were allegedly never mentioned again, the Abu Ghraib images are
powerful visual reminders that have been incorporated into popular culture and art.25 In

happened during the Second Gulf War and, technically speaking, the prisoners who were
taken by the Americans and held at Abu Ghraib would have fallen under the protection of
"the applicable rules of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of
War, FM 27-10, AR 190-8, or FM 3-19.40" (Taguba 2004, 19) which equates them to the
American captives of the same military conflict.
25 There are, for example, the Abu Ghraib paintings by Fernando Botero, several Abu Ghraib
murals by different street artists, various pieces of protest art (see Apel 2005, 99), and the
exhibition "Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs From Abu Ghraib" (2004),
curated by Brian Wallis, Jessica Gogan, and Thomas Sokolowski for the International Center
the subsequent sections, I analyze two of the best-known pictures. Though the number of photographs available would allow for an extensive study, the two pictures that I discuss are emblematic of the kind of abuse that occurred at Abu Ghraib.

The first picture shows Charles Graner and Sabrina Harman who are posing behind naked and blindfolded Iraqi prisoners who have been arranged in a perverted human pyramid on the concrete floor. Harman and Graner are smiling and giving the thumbs up for the camera. At their feet, their anonymized prisoners are piled upon each other in a very uncomfortable and humiliating position. The second picture that I want to discuss shows Lynndie England, who poses for the camera while a group of blindfolded and naked male Iraqis is forced to masturbate next to her. In the larger context, the Abu Ghraib picture showing England and the masturbating captives constitutes a double reversal of the role of captive/captor and of perpetrator/victim. In my interpretation, this contests the 'natural' allotment of these roles in the Gulf War captivity narrative. Read as a 'counter-narrative', the pictures bear several implications for the representation of male and female bodies in captivity because they contest every conviction that the Gulf War captivity narratives display about sexual violence in captivity. In the (implicit) narrative about Abu Ghraib, Lynndie England and Sabrina Harman are female offenders and their victims, in these scenes, are exclusively men. The photographic evidence stops the women from assuming one of the roles that white American women conventionally play in the captivity narrative. Instead of being represented as either the victim of sexual violence and/or as the passively virtuous damsels in distress, England and Harman occupy an active part in the picture's composition. They smile, engage with the camera, give the thumbs-up, and England even points at the prisoners' genitals with her other hand. The women's position as captor conflicts with the passivity and victimization conventionally associated with women in the captivity genre.

After the scandal, England has attempted to script herself into a more conventional role. Though she served a prison sentence for her part in the events at Abu Ghraib, she refuses to take responsibility for her actions and actually tries to establish herself as a victim: "All I did was stand in the pictures. Saying sorry is admitting I was guilty and I'm not. I was just doing my duty" (qtd. in Jones 2009, 5).

of Photography in New York and the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, which was accompanied by texts written by Seymour Hersh.

26 Entering "Abu Ghraib human pyramid" in an online search engine produces the picture in question. The "Taguba Report" refers to this kind of mistreatment as: "Part 1,6.g. Arranging naked male detainees in a pile" (Taguba 2004, 16).

27 The "Taguba Report" refers to this as "Part 1, 6.f. Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped" (Taguba 2004, 16). England's pose is now known as the 'Lynndie Salute.' If you enter the terms "Lynndie England, Abu Ghraib, masturbation" into a search engine, the image is likely to be produced.

28 Her biography, Tortured: Lynndie England, Abu Ghraib, and the Photographs that Shocked the World (Winkler 2009) presumably tries to construct England as a victim, too. It is currently unavailable due to a legal dispute between England and her biographer, Gary Winkler. Online sources suggest that only a few dozen copies of the book were sold in all before the legal dispute put a hold to its further publication (Tagle 2009).
effort to publicly assume another role than that of perpetrator. England's excuses are a strategic narrative in which she sees herself in a metaphoric/metaphysical captivity of bad circumstances and abusive relationships. In England's version of events, she "was blinded by a fool's love [for Charles Graner] […] and would have done anything he told [her]" (qtd. in Jones 2009), which suggests passivity rather than active participation. However, her interviewer, David Jones, refuses to accept this explanation and attributes her part in the pictures to England's pathology as a "gullible backwoods girl," whose "unsympathetic character" (Jones 2009) renders empathy impossible. What this example shows is that the story behind the infamous picture can be narrated and re-narrated in very different and often conflicting versions.

In conclusion, I suggest that when considered together with those stories that unveil their breaking points, the Gulf War captivity narratives cease to be effective pro-American propaganda material and, instead, begin to tell stories that have hitherto remained untold. In line with Ricoeur and Sinfield once more, the joint analysis begins to point to "unspoken stories" (Ricoeur 2014, 30) that have remained hidden behind the "chimera" (Sinfield 2001, 51) of coherence. With Sinfield, I explain the dissident potential of the largely conformist, propagandistic print narratives of Gulf War captivity as "dissidence being incorporated […] with reference to dominant structures" (2001, 47). This reference takes the form of displaying captive bodies with regard to explicitly sexualized violence. True to the cultural conventions, female captives are showcased as victims of sexual violence, whereas men apparently suffer everything but rape. For the male captive, this catalyzes a heroization process that depends on the display of resistance to physical violence and of physical power. The white female captive is transformed into a culturally encoded signifier, who is marked by passivity, victimhood, and dependability on men.

However credibly the Gulf War captivity narratives in print invoke the dominant structure, the untold version of events (that may or may not have fallen victim to selective processes in favor of coherence) remains detectable. First, the silences within the print narratives and the adjoining media discourse, for example on male rape, point towards the possibility of a dissident version of events underneath the coherent surface. Additional 'cracks' in the surface can be found by looking closely at the Gulf War captivity narratives' vicinity. As I have shown, the representation and description of bodies and of sexualized violence in the coverage of the Tailhook scandal, the Abu Ghraib pictures, and their adjoining discourses provide enough subversive material to destabilize a) individual narrative identity constructs and b) 'larger' American narratives as exemplified in the Gulf War captivity narratives. Whereas the print Gulf War captivity narratives produce rather coherent stories and identities, Abu Ghraib and Tailhook point towards the untold stories. That is, they offer a means to unveil the "faultlines" (Sinfield 2001) in Gulf War captivity narratives and in an inner U.S. nationalist narrative. As the roles allotted in the Gulf War captivity narratives are reversed, the breaking points become apparent in spite of, or because of, the struggle to maintain coherence.
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