

Dr Jessica Wolfendale. CAPPE University of Melbourne

Torture Lite and the Normalisation of Torture.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001, the phrase ‘torture lite’ has appeared in the public discourse about torture, used by journalists, military intelligence personnel, and academics to distinguish between two kinds of torture: torture, which is violent , physically mutilating, cruel and brutal, and torture lite, which refers to interrogation methods (such as extended sleep deprivation, noise bombardment, and forced standing) that are, it is claimed, more restrained and less severe than real torture. In this paper I argue that the distinction between torture and torture lite is attractive to liberal democracies because it bolsters what David Luban has called the “liberal ideology of torture” – the myth that torture can be compatible with the basic commitments of liberal states. However, as I shall demonstrate, torture lite techniques are torture and these techniques can be just as cruel and severe as more violent methods. Furthermore, the language of torture lite and the nature of torture lite techniques encourage a moral psychology in which violence and cruelty of torture are denied, the victim’s suffering hidden, minimized and doubted; and the torturer’s sense of responsibility diminished. Far from referring to a milder form of torture, torture lite refers to techniques that are likely to encourage the normalization of torture and the perpetuation of the myth of the liberal ideology of torture.

Web sites

<http://www.cappe.edu.au/staff/jessica-wolfendale.htm>

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