

Culture concept and sex in the Abu Ghraib scandal

*Penelope Papailias**

Summary

In staging the torture of Iraqi prisoners, U.S. military forces at Abu Ghraib prison drew on a series of cultural truisms regarding the sexual practices of «Arabs»: the purported source for these ideas was The Arab Mind, a 1973 book by Raphael Patai, which recycles generations of Orientalist stereotypes. In this paper, I consider how the reiteration of this ahistorical knowledge of «Arab sex» in media coverage of the scandal deflected attention from the particular historical conjuncture in which the boundaries between the American occupier and the Iraqi subject were being staked out through a politics and performance of sex. The emphasis on «their» premodern sexual practices and cultural backwardness screened the specificity of contemporary American sexual culture, particularly the mainstreaming of pornographic and sadomasochistic practices, as well as the homophobia, sexism, and racism of U.S. society. At the same time, the focus on timeless Arab sexual repression obscured the newness of the techniques and technologies (i.e. digitized voyeurism, mass dissemination of images with JPEGs, the Internet, and digital photography) through which discourses on sex and embodied forms of pleasure and pain were being produced.

In a May 24, 2004 article in *The New Yorker*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh identified Raphael Patai's 1973 *The Arab Mind* as the book American neoconservatives had been drawing on to understand «Arab culture»¹. According to Hersh, the book's description of «Arabs» as particularly susceptible

* Penelope Papailias is Lecturer in the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Thessaly.

to sexual humiliation had provided the logic behind the torture practices at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison, which were documented so memorably in soldiers' digital snapshots. Indeed, one of Hersh's sources suggested that the prolific photographing itself was motivated, at least initially, by the belief that the prisoners would be so embarrassed by visual records depicting their sexual abuse that they would do anything to keep them from being made public – including becoming willing informants for American forces about the growing and increasingly successful insurgency.

Following Hersh's revelations about *The Arab Mind*, Patai's book was sought out and then roundly denounced by academics and journalists as a shoddy piece of scholarship full of racist stereotypes and sweeping, unfounded generalizations: the most blatant of which being the attribution of a common «mind» and «character» to a tremendously large and diverse group of peoples – the so-called Arabs. Indeed, it turned out that Patai had been taken to task long ago by Said himself for perpetuating crude, age-old Orientalist tropes (1978, pp. 308-309).

Nonetheless, even though Patai's book proved exceedingly easy to critique – it did not take longer than a newspaper article to demonstrate its faulty premises² – «cultural» explanations of «Arab» and «Muslim» sexual beliefs (usually without particular reference to Patai) began to crop up regularly in commentaries on the Abu Ghraib affair. Thus, a series of handy truisms – about patriarchal and sex-segregated Iraqi society, the Muslim honor-and-shame complex, the Arab masturbation taboo and sexual repression, the perversion and moral laxness lurking behind that repression, and homosexuality's offensiveness to Islamic law – circulated widely. These formulas were invoked to explain the semiotics of the staged photographs but, even more importantly, to generate empathy for the Iraqi victims on the grounds that they had indeed endured the ultimate violation (which is to say, a *cultural* violation).

This pop anthropology, furthermore, was appealed to even in writings that sharply condemned the acts of torture perpetrated at Abu Ghraib and categorically defined them as emblems of, not aberrations from, the (im)moral agenda of the «war on terror». Hersh himself, for instance, just before introducing the subject of Patai and *The Arab Mind*, writes with assurance that prisoners at Abu Ghraib had been «tormented... in a manner that was especially humiliating for Iraqi men»³.

From the perspective of anthropology, the Abu Ghraib scandal, both commentaries on it and the torture practices themselves, de-

world opinion. However, for scholars of colonialism, the centrality of discourses on sex and of spectacularly brutal violence against colonized bodies was hardly surprising. In making this remark, I do not mean to imply that colonial history constitutes a neat continuity. Indeed, many scholars have questioned the appropriateness of using terms such as «neocolonial» or «postcolonial» to describe contemporary forms of political domination; they have also warned against homogenizing and collapsing diverse colonial histories and cultures into a general theory of colonialism. However, the studious *disavowal* of terms such as colonialism («liberation»), U.S. occupation («Coalition Provisional Authority»), torture («abuse»), and even prisoners and prison («detainees», «detention centers») in American public discourse on the Iraq war, I believe, warrants, if not demands, a consideration of the colonial problematic. Specifically, I argue that looking at the Abu Ghraib scandal through the prism of the colonial encounter enables us to recognize the discourse on «Arab» sexual repression as a classic example of the production of sexuality as a technology of power. Secondly, contemporary scholarship on the conduit between metropole and colony provides a framework for «repatriating» the scandal in order to examine how anxieties over gender, sexual, racial, cultural, and class identities in U.S. society were being played out in an imperial outpost such as Iraq.

Although colonial domination has often been *likened* to sexual domination (through metaphors of penetration, submission, release, etc.), sexuality, as anthropologist Ann Stoler (1989) has argued, was never merely a trope of imperial rule but always integral to its pragmatics. Although Foucault, as many scholars have noted, does not address the importance of colonialism to the rise of the European biopolitical state of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his analysis of the modern «intensification of the body» and «deployment of sexuality» has been central to research on the discursive management of both colonizer's and colonized's sexuality as well as on the classification of colonial subjects⁵. As Foucault pointed out, once sex became not just a matter of pleasure and sensation or a practice to be regulated by law or taboo, but a «problem of truth» (56), expert knowledge of sexuality proliferated in fields such as psychology, medicine, and pedagogy, thus, proving instrumental to the exercise of power over specific, subordinated bodies. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault identified four bodies that became central objects of nineteenth-century discourses

on sexuality: those of the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult (1978, pp. 103-105). While Foucault does not include the colonized subject in this list, under European colonialism a dense knowledge/power nexus undeniably took shape around «native» sexuality, both its pathologies and its eroticism⁶.

If, according to Foucault, sex not only became a matter of truth, but became the great secret at the heart of «our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness» (69), then, it is understandable how sex could come to be posited as the truth of «culture» in essentialist modes of anthropological discourse. This is certainly true in the case of *The Arab Mind*. First published in 1973, Patai's book represents a belated «contribution» to the tradition of American anthropology commonly known as the «culture and personality» school, which was prominent in the United States during World War II, but quickly became discredited because of its cultural determinism as well as its cooptation by the American military establishment⁷.

Indeed, the reductive formulas of cultural identity proposed by the psychocultural research paradigm lent themselves to political uses and during World War II many anthropologists would come to work for the U.S. government⁸. Often produced in order to describe the «national character» of American enemies in World War II and the Cold War, studies in «culture and personality» tended to diagnose cultural «weaknesses», sometimes explicitly in the service of furthering the war effort or postwar reconstruction. Given the psychological underpinnings of «culture and personality», this research typically focused on childrearing as the central mechanism by which individuals learn culture. Perhaps, the best-known study in this tradition is Ruth Benedict's 1946 *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which she wrote in the context of her employment as special adviser (1943-1945) to the Office of War Information on the «peoples of occupied territories and enemy lands». In this book, she attributes the central contradiction in (male) Japanese behavior – namely, their discipline, treachery, loyalty and readiness to die by the sword, on the one hand, and their aesthetic sensitivity and innocent pleasure taken in gazing on objects such as cherry blossoms and chrysanthemums, on the other – to an indulgent childhood that ill prepares taken Japanese youth for the strict restraints on adults in their society⁹.

Similarly, in *The Arab Mind*, Patai discovers the key to «Arab

culture» – or rather to Arab complexes and backwardness – in child-rearing practices and adult sexuality. According to Patai, the pathologies are many: Arab mothers suckle boy children twice as long as girl children, frequently picking up and pampering boys, even to the point of fondling their genitals, while they let their girl babies cry; Arab social life is dominated by an honor/shame complex centered on sexual purity; Arab men consider masturbation more shameful than visiting prostitutes because masturbation denotes an inability to engage in sexual intercourse; homosexuality is repressed and unpublicized; Arab clothing, both male and female, is indicative of a culture of sexual concealment and restraint; and, finally, alongside sexual repression there is a marked moral «laxity» in the tradition of sexual hospitality offered toward guests.

In short, Patai recycles generations of Orientalist writings on the supposedly contradictory sexuality of the «Arabs», encapsulated in the figure of the harem: namely, strict sex segregation and patriarchy combined with perversion and licentiousness. While Patai, like Benedict, uses the «American» [i.e., the (male) American student who supposedly is more prone to masturbate than go to a prostitute] as the point of comparison for the «Arab», his writing is also filtered through an *Israeli* Orientalism, which constructs a Palestinian Arab Other to legitimate Israeli hegemony and discredit the Palestinian national movement. In this respect, it is notable that although Patai appears to have extrapolated his views on «Arabs» from limited field research with Palestinians, and in particular with Palestinians of Jerusalem, he does not identify them as «Palestinians» but only as «Arabs»¹⁰.

In the case of studies in «culture and personality», the power/knowledge nexus is often so blatant as not to require the subtleties of a Foucauldian analysis. The implication of Patai's research in U.S. military intelligence is literally written all over *The Arab Mind*, free copies of which the State Dept apparently used to give to officials posted to U.S. embassies in the Middle East¹¹. In the preface to the first edition of the book, Patai tells us about his employment by the Department of Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, for which he prepared a report on the conditions of the Middle East, as well as about his subsequent authorship of country handbooks on Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan for the Human Relations Area Files. The posthumous 2002 re-edition of *The Arab Mind* carries the «endorsement» of Norvell B. De Atkine, a retired army colonel who was formally head of Middle East Studies at the

J.F.K. Special Warfare Center in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In his introduction, De Atkine praises this thirty-year old study, which he regularly assigned in his classes, for being unburdened by post-modern jargon and a «fixation on race, class and gender». Furthermore, he explains that *The Arab Mind* has acquired a new value in light of the events of September 11th, 2001 because it can be used to understand the «social and cultural environments» and «modal personality traits» that made the World Trade Center and Pentagon attackers «susceptible» to becoming terrorists.

Patai's book bears no resemblance to contemporary anthropological scholarship on the Middle East and does not appear on anthropological reading lists, except occasionally as a counter-example: as a case book in Orientalism and in how *not* to do anthropology¹². Yet, Hersh's description of Patai as «a cultural anthropologist who taught at, among other universities, Columbia and Princeton», an epithet that was repeated again and again in articles that cite Hersh, clearly endowed him with a much more impressive disciplinary presence than he, in fact, ever had¹³. Despite the ease with which *The Arab Mind* can be (and was) relegated to disciplinary prehistory, this text, nonetheless, raised the spectre of past applications of anthropological research by military intelligence as well as the relation of scholars to the state at times of «national emergency». Perhaps more than anything, the invocation of culturalist arguments during the Abu Ghraib scandal demonstrated the continuing (growing?) allure of cultural substantialist discourses produced in the name of anthropology, if not *by* professional anthropologists¹⁴.

Although references to Patai's book in the press simultaneously constructed and debunked anthropological expertise, and certainly have not had a salutary effect on anthropology's public image, his work actually provides a convenient foil against which to juxtapose contemporary anthropological scholarship on colonialism¹⁵. Rather than catalyzing the demise of anthropology, as was heralded by some, the critique of anthropology's colonial legacy actually invigorated the discipline, leading to the emergence of an important strand of research, often historical in nature, *on* colonialism. This research no longer takes the colonized to be the sole subject of anthropological study, an «Other» and an «elsewhere» bracketed off from the colonizing «Self». Instead, colonizer and colonized are located within a common analytical horizon and nation formation and empire building are viewed as mutually constitutive processes. Rather than entailing the imposition of an already formed Euro-

pean modernity, the colonial experience has been shown to have contributed decisively to *fashioning* European racial, class, and gender hierarchies and distinctions (Stoler and Cooper, 1997).

From this perspective, the Abu Ghraib scandal exposed to the public eye, ever so briefly, the circuit of personnel and expertise currently linking geographically dispersed sites of incarceration, both in the U.S. and abroad, and the way in which lines of exclusion from «American democracy» were being etched in blood¹⁶. A short biography of Specialist Charles A. Graner, the thirty-six year old white army reservist from the 372nd Military Police Company of Maryland who was singled out as the ring leader in the Abu Ghraib abuse, demonstrates quite clearly this dialectic between home front and war front. A marine veteran from the first Iraq war, Graner, who was sentenced to ten years in military prison on January 15, 2005, had been a prison guard in civilian life, like Staff Sergeant Ivan L. Frederick II, another of the soldiers charged in the scandal.

In an Article 32 hearing against Frederick, Special Agent Scott Bobeck, a member of the Army's Criminal Investigation Division, reported that in the absence of formal training these two former prison guards became *de facto* leaders when the 372nd was ordered to prison-guard duty at Abu Ghraib in October 2003. From his conversations with other soldiers, Bobeck testified: «What I got is that SSG Frederick and CPL Graner were road M.P.s and were put in charge because they were civilian prison guards and had knowledge of how things were supposed to be run»¹⁷. Significantly, the lives of these low-level footsoldiers of the imperial project reveal that the trenches in the «war on terror» not only cut across metropolitan and colonial sites of incarceration but also run through the American bedroom: it turns out that Graner had been arrested previously for beating his former wife in an altercation and had pleaded guilty to charges of harassment.

As the suspects in the Abu Ghraib scandal have come to trial, the common defense being put forth by their lawyers is that they were the «little guys», scapegoats for a criminal policy with lines of responsibility running right up to the White House. Based on an instrumentalist model of power as wielded by those at the top of the «chain of command» rather than a notion of power as a relationship of forces in which «poor kids from West Virginia» could be centrally involved, this argument supports the expansion of the criminal investigation to higher rank officers and politicians, some-

thing to which few would object. However, this line of argumentation grossly understates the role of the «little guys» in the colonial project. By contrast, study of the colonial record has underscored the importance of taking account of the experience of low-ranking colonial agents, soldiers, guards, clerks, officials, and spouses. Colonial enforcers but often class and gender subordinates, these figures illuminate the uneven ground on which colonial authority was made and remade (Stoler and Cooper, 1997). In the case of Abu Ghraib, it is worth noting that American violence coincided with the growing success of the insurgency: rather than monolithic American power, the Abu Ghraib scandal exposed a threatened imperial project. In the corridors of that miserable prison, then, in a burlesque parody of an Anthropology 101 class on cultural relativism, the borders between colonizer and colonized – but also between the white heteronormative American male and any number of deviant bodies and marginalized members of U.S. society – were being drawn ever more vigilantly, ever more violently.

Whose sexism?

The new mores accepted in the large urban centers of the West have by their very libertarianism reduced the problematic aspect of sex and turned sexual activities into something strangely reminiscent of athletics in which all young people participate as a matter of course.

Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*

The Abu Ghraib scandal demonstrated that despite its potential for alterability in the «photoshop» of amateur photographs, the digital photograph retains the evidentiary power attributed to analogical photography since the second half of the nineteenth century¹⁸. While earlier reports filed by humanitarian organizations on the abusive practices at Abu Ghraib (and other «detention centers» in the global U.S. prison network, most notably Guantánamo Bay) had fallen on deaf ears, these lurid images galvanized public outrage to a degree that demanded a response, however perfunctory, from the Bush administration. In their new function as *proof* of the violence directed against Iraqi bodies, rather than as «news from the front», war souvenirs, and titillating aesthetic compositions, the photographs ended up being treated as so many transparent win-

dows onto the «interrogation procedures» at Abu Ghraib. This semblance of total vision predictably obscured the ways these images had been constructed and framed both at the time of their initial production and dissemination to friends and family and later in the course of their recirculation in the global media circuit. Perhaps this oversight explains why the sexual practices and ideologies of American society, particularly the mainstreaming of pornography and sadomasochistic sex, remained the unmarked category against which the difference of «Arab» culture was foregrounded.

The description of Iraqis as sexually repressed and «especially» vulnerable to sexual shame implies, preposterously of course, that «Westerners» have overcome the «problem» of sex and graduated into a tolerant, gender-integrated, inequality-less society in which sex is a «matter of course». The selective re-presentation and contextualization of the photographs, however, contradicts this utopian vision, leading one to ask exactly *whose* misogyny, *whose* homophobia was being put on display during the scandal.

For instance, one might ask, as many feminists did, why Pfc. Lynndie England emerged as the icon of the Abu Ghraib scandal. (England, a 21-year-old white army reservist from a poor West Virginian town, was Specialist Graner's girlfriend in Iraq and in October 2004 became the mother of his child). Why, out of so many photographs, were two images of England shown again and again: one depicting her leading a naked male Iraqi prisoner around on a dog leash and another showing her, with cigarette dangling cockily from her lips, mock shooting at the genitals of a hooded Iraqi prisoner? Even though women, albeit in smaller numbers, were held and tortured at Abu Ghraib – and many American women soldiers have filed claims to having been sexually assaulted by male counterparts – in an army notoriously lax in punishing such violations – the American media spotlight honed in on these images of men being abused by a woman¹⁹. From this, we might conclude, as has been pointed out by feminists, that male violence against female bodies does not shock: it is all too familiar. Meanwhile, this fixation on the female rapist who appropriates the phallic symbols of gun and gaze to objectify and castrate her male victim, enabled sympathy for the imperiled masculinity of the (heterosexual) Iraqi male prisoner to be built along gender lines, thus obscuring other axes of difference, such as race, culture, and religion (D'Cruze and Rao, 2004, p. 497).

The prominence of these images of England in media coverage

to men, less prone to violence, and more respectful of other cultures: «a uterus», she (remarkably) discovers, «is not a substitute for a conscience». After Abu Ghraib, she argues, feminists can no longer argue that women's «assimilation» into traditionally male institutions will catalyze reform and social change. There is ambivalence, though, in her talk of women's peaceful nature: even though she sees women as «innately gentler and less aggressive than men», she says that she supported women's full incorporation into the military «because I knew women could fight». Gender equality, for Ehrenreich, is posited on a belief in «woman's right to do and achieve whatever men can do and achieve, even the bad things».

From this perspective, England actually should represent a success for liberal feminism, but one that exposes its racism and implication in (neo)colonial ideologies, practices, and institutions. In her unexpected barbarism, England, the embodiment of the American dream of «equal opportunity», simultaneously foiled and brought into relief liberal feminism's modernizing agenda and patronizing discourse on the liberation of the oppressed «Muslim» woman (see Athanasiou, this volume). Ehrenreich, for instance, notes that she had been delighted that the presence of U.S. servicewomen «irked their Saudi hosts» in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. After Abu Ghraib, however, she fears that photographs of Iraqi male prisoners being abused by American women soldiers will provide ideal material for Al Qaeda to revile the excesses of the (supposed) «gender equality» of American society and «galvanize misogynist Islamic fundamentalists around the world».

Just as misogyny and patriarchy were displaced onto the «Muslim» during the media scandal, so too was homophobia. While the decision to do things like make male prisoners wear women's underwear and sanitary products was ascribed to *their* misogyny, not that of American soldiers, so too practices such as the simulation of oral sex between male prisoners were attributed to *their* sexual repression and homosexuality «taboo»²³. Yet, public consent during media coverage that these «homosexual»-marked practices represented the ultimate form of torture, in and of itself, put the lie to the idea that U.S. society is open and embracing of homosexuality. Furthermore, the categorization of certain practices, such as oral and anal sex or bondage, as «homosexual» simply evaded a recognition of the «perverse» dimensions of heterosexual sex, not to mention the normativity of certain forms of homosexual sex (Puar, 2004, p. 530). This framing had the effect of marking off

certain members of the domestic body politic as pathological and «saturated with sexuality» (Foucault, 1978, p. 104), while the broadcasting of the photographs provided an opportunity to elaborate in painstaking detail before the American television audience the exact «nature» of their perversion.

As the scandal unfolded, voices in the gay press spoke out against the homophobia of the U.S. army; however, in uncritically accepting the «knowledge of Arab sex» propounded in media coverage as well as the description of the torture practices as «homosexual», these commentators overlooked the connected processes of racism, ethnocentrism, and misogyny at play in the torture practices as well as in their re-presentation (Puar, 2004). In «Weapons of Mass Homophobia», for instance, Patrick Moore, author of *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*, notes that the «humiliations of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib suggest that the U.S. military has finally taken the time to understand some element of Islamic culture»²⁴. With this «abuse of homosexual sex as a military tactic», he laments, «our sexuality is being further stigmatized».

Accepting a timeless discourse on Arab sexuality, based on «Islam's rejection of homosexuality» (as if Catholicism accepts homosexuality?), however, not only denies the existence of Muslims in Arab societies who identify with a global discourse on gay identity but also implicitly accepts an evolutionary model of sexual liberation. Specifically, an acts-centered model of masculinity (in which active/passive positions in sexual intercourse are correlated with gender identity, thus meaning men can have sex with other men and remain «men») is assumed to be the norm for «Muslims» and treated as a «premodern» forerunner to an out-of-the-closet gay identification in terms of sexual orientation. Needless to say, this understanding of the «Muslim difference» is based on an entirely ahistorical notion of homosexuality that treats any male-male sexual intercourse as by definition «homosexual». According to this line of argument, then, Iraqis would appear to be deluding themselves, participating in homosexual acts without owning up to them («Sex between men does occur in Islamic society, but the shame is in gay identity rather than the actual homosexual acts», explains Moore).

Furthermore, to the extent that the Iraqi prisoners indeed feel they have been shamed by what happened at Abu Ghraib, they appear to signal acceptance of their society's negative views of

homosexuality, thus indirectly «insulting» openly gay men in the United States. If the media focus on images of the female rapist enabled the heterosexual American male to come out of the Abu Ghraib scandal as a victim, so too did the discourse on «homosexual» torture, often inflicted by straight women – once gay men's «natural» ally – locate the (white) male homosexual in the position of victim, in the process revealing, not incidentally, the misogyny of some forms of gay male politics (Puar, 2004).

Exposure and dissemination

Up to this point, I have focused on the selective re-viewing of the Abu Ghraib photographs in the media coverage of the scandal. The production of these photographs, however, was not just a means to record the torture but also an inextricable part of the torture itself. In this respect, the photograph of England mock shooting an Iraqi prisoner in the genitals can be seen as a commentary on the violence of vision, underscored by the well-known homology of camera and gun. While the mainstream press did allude to the «shame» induced in Iraqi prisoners by the fact that their misery was so extensively photographed, what was not taken into account was what the staging, circulation, and viewing of these images might tell us about contemporary *American* sexual culture and the popularization of pornographic and sadomasochistic practices.

Yet, as critics such as Susan Sontag have pointed out, decoding these images of bondage, simulated fellatio, and hooding relied on a familiarity with the semiotics of sadomasochistic sexual practice: for instance, in the infamous photograph with the leashed prisoner, England strikes a classic dominatrix pose²⁵. Furthermore, the torture photographs of the Iraqi prisoners were one category in a larger archive, which included images of soldiers having, or simulating, sex among themselves: these include photographs of England and Graner having sex together as well as of England having sex with multiple other partners and performing sex acts on herself²⁶.

While the media coverage focused on the pain of the Iraqi victim, the photographs testify to the proliferation of sexual practices and the emergence of new kinds of pleasures. As Foucault reminds

us: «Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement» (1978, p. 48). We also cannot discount the participation of media viewers in these new forms of stimulation as they gazed through the peepholes opened by these photographs (and the television screen itself, of course). As historian Joanna Bourke wrote shortly after the scandal broke: «In the past few days, we have all participated in the pornographic gaze»²⁷.

The Abu Ghraib scandal makes startlingly clear the instrumental role that new technologies have played in the mainstreaming of «perverse» pleasures. Internet porn sites, X-rated programs on cable television, and the webcasting of private life provide countless outlets to see and be seen, to be a voyeur and to expose oneself. Perhaps this explains why the soldiers created, preserved, and publicized materials that could be used as evidence to convict them. It is not just that they did not see themselves as committing crimes, but that they were not treating photography primarily as a technology of documentation, but as a mode of transmission. As Sontag has observed: «The pictures taken by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib reflect a shift in the use made of pictures – less objects to be saved than messages to be disseminated, circulated». JPEGs, the Internet, digital photography, and e-mail provided the infrastructure to extend and intensify the spectacle of violence, to relive and re-expose oneself and others, and to engage ever more spectators, including ultimately the global media audience.

The power of transmission appears to have been a source of tremendous thrill and exhilaration. «Clicking the "send" button», as Puag notes, «is the ultimate release of productivity and consumption, and dissemination, the ultimate form of territorial coverage and conquest, becomes yet another layering of the sexual matrix» (2004, p. 532). The creation of these images, the multiple levels of spectatorship they encode and enact, and their selective representation, thus, hardly constitute processes secondary and external to the sexual acts «in and of themselves» but, to the contrary, testify to the proliferation of discourses and the incitement of pleasures that, according to Foucault, compose sexuality as a «great surface network».

A final observation about the photographs, which returns us to the relationship between colonizer and colonized, has to do with the appearance of the American soldiers in them. A point that has

early-twentieth-century small town America: these photographs, which were often turned into postcards, depict white people smiling and laughing below the corpses of black men and women dangling from trees or light fixtures²⁹. In the publicized Abu Ghraib photographs, we similarly witnessed the degradation of brown bodies by cheering whites, as the Iraqi was rendered above all a body vulnerable to violation, a body that could be ridden «like an animal» by fully dressed, fully «human» American soldiers.

Nonetheless, the legacy of racialized violence *but also of racialized vision* that the Abu Ghraib photographs draw on has been scantily discussed. While issues surrounding gender and sexual orientation, and to a lesser extent class³⁰, were prominent in the re-viewing of the Abu Ghraib photographs, racism was glaringly absent as a topic in both mainstream and critical discourse³¹.

The Anthropology slot

They're not being abused. They're being kept in control.

Guy Womack, defense lawyer for Specialist Charles A. Graner, Jr.³²

Given the prominence of culture discourse in the Abu Ghraib scandal, it should come as no surprise that defense lawyers for the soldiers charged in the abuse have invoked «American culture» to contextualize and explain (away) their clients' actions. Thus, during the court martial of Specialist Graner, his lawyer Guy Womack reminded the jury that the leashing of the prisoners was simply a method of control, analogous to the harnessing of toddlers by their mothers in airports to «control» them, while the «human pyramids» into which the naked, bound, and beaten prisoners were arranged resembled the formations of cheerleaders «all over America» at football games. In an extension of this metaphor of college fun, a caller to Rush Limbaugh's ultra right-wing talk show described «stacking naked men» as analogous to a fraternity prank³³. In some over 2,000 e-mail messages that he sent home, many with photographs of prisoners attached, Graner himself described the abuse in terms of athletics: in reference to the disciplining of a prisoner depicted in one of the photographs, he wrote that it had been a «real upper body workout»³⁴.

Rather than the neutral norm, a universal modernity to which

the oddities of «other» cultures are compared, this defense of the «kids» actually pictured the United States as having a «culture» that needed to be explained to the world at large. This culture, needless to say, was that of «apple pie America», of football and white frat boy fun, and of outdoor, fresh-air sports, not of cyber-pornography and the like. But even so, the innocence with which these practices and the docile bodies they produced – whether the leashed children, the «supportive» cheerleaders, or the various victims of college hazing – were alluded to gives pause. How can adult Iraqi prisoners be compared to infants? What are the implications of comparing degraded (and always potentially degradable) Iraqi prisoners to cheerleaders? How is it possible to overlook the racism and sexism of American sports culture itself? In short, how could there be so much reference to culture and so little cultural analysis?

In a 1991 essay, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot coined the term «savage slot» to speak of the site in the Western cultural imaginary to which anthropology, as successor to earlier genres such as travel writing, traditionally had been assigned. The Abu Ghraib scandal suggests that in the age of globalization and multiculturalism, Trouillot's term needs slight modification. Rather than a «savage slot», one might speak instead of an «anthropology slot» to denote this self-consciousness about culture: in other words, in place of «knowledge of the Other», «knowledge of the culture of the Other». In the Abu Ghraib scandal, this «anthropology slot» was drawn on in prison corridors, and later on television screens and in newspaper columns, to secure control over Iraqi bodies and, by extension, other unruly and sex-saturated bodies in the metropole (women, homosexuals, the poor, people of color, etc.). Indeed, the empathy for the Iraqi (presumably heterosexual) male victim and outrage at the female American rapist – the two figures on which the media coverage focused – both drew on and extended the supposedly exorcised (but now displaced) sexism and homophobia of American society as well as its (notably unmentioned) racism.

Most importantly, the degradation and brutalization of prisoners' bodies and the enunciation of expert «knowledge of the Arab» [as knowledge of (his) sex] colluded in defining the culture of the «Arab» or the «Muslim» in terms of an embodied difference (interestingly focused not on the «veiled woman» or the «harem», the standard tropes of Orientalist discourse, but on male gendered

theory of the incest taboo, anthropology has proved worthy of the whole modern deployment of sexuality and the theoretical discourses it generates» (1978, p. 110).

7. Spearheaded by students of Boas, the culture and personality school drew on Gestalt psychology to define culture not as an aggregation of traits, but as a whole irreducible to its parts. Culture, which was often described in terms of a «pattern», as in Ruth Benedict's, *Patterns of Culture* (1934) or Edward Sapir's «Sound Patterns in Language» (1925), in turn was thought to shape individual personality.

8. During World War II, many American anthropologists were employed by the U.S. government to produce «cultural intelligence». In some cases, anthropologists blatantly compromised professional ethics by, for instance, using fieldwork as a cover for espionage. Yet, ironically, as Price (2002) notes, for some anthropologists this full-fledged commitment to the «war effort» was motivated by the fact that Nazism so fundamentally contradicted the Boasian critique of «race» and the anthropological axiom of cultural relativism.

9. «The contradictions in Japanese male behavior which are so conspicuous to Westerners are made possible by the discontinuity of their upbringing, which leaves in their consciousness, even after all the "lacquering" they undergo, the deep imprint of a time when they were like little gods in their little world, when they were free to gratify even their aggressions, and when all satisfactions seemed possible» (Benedict, 1989, p. 290).

10. Born and educated in Hungary, Patai also studied in Jerusalem where he lived for fifteen years before moving to the United States in 1948. Among dozens of books, he penned *The Jewish Mind* as well as many studies of Jewish culture and folklore; he also edited the collected works of Theodore Herzl, the nineteenth-century founder of the Zionist movement. Although Rabinowitz (2002) does not include Patai in his cohort of early Israeli anthropologists because of his emigration to the United States, Patai's preoccupation with the Palestinian Other and the Arab East would seem to bring his research into line with this literature, even if his work was not incorporated into the canon of Israeli anthropology.

11. Whitaker, «Its Best Use is as a Doorstop».

12. Ibid.

13. From the original preface to the 1976 edition of *The Arab Mind*, it comes out that Patai taught at these Ivy League institutions for a semester or two in the late 1940s. During the brief period when he even had a permanent university affiliation, it was at the decidedly less prestigious, if not entirely unknown, Dropsie College (1948-1957). Even «cultural anthropologist» seems a stretch given that, according to his own account, he was trained as an Orientalist and his expertise centered on the philology of various Middle Eastern languages. Furthermore, even though *The Arab Mind* is described, unlikely enough, as «one of the great classics of cultural studies», it has been reissued by a publishing house, the Hatherleigh Press,

18. Rejecting Barthes's «ontological» approach to the photograph, John Tagg has argued that the «evidential force» of photography identified by Barthes «rests not on a natural or existential fact, but on a social, semiotic process». The photograph's evidentiary force is a «historical outcome and exercised by photographs only within certain institutional practices and within particular historical relations» (1988, p. 4).

19. In Specialist Charles A. Graner's court martial, for instance, new photographs were brought forth that showed Graner standing beside a 19-year-old Iraqi woman who had been made to expose her breasts (Kate Zernike, «Central Figure in Iraq Abuse Goes on Trial», *The New York Times*, 11 January 2005.) On the rising rates of sexual assault of American women soldiers by their male colleagues and women's fear to report such incidents because of a «blame the victim» climate, see Suzanne Goldenberg, «I Reported the Rape Within 30 minutes – Then Watched My Career Implode», *The Guardian*, 25 October 2004. Julian Borger, «US Soldiers Accused of Raping 100 Colleagues», *The Guardian*, 27 February 2004.

20. «We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality (men, adults, parents, doctors) and who is deprived of it (women, adolescents, children, patients); nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process» (Foucault, 1978, p. 99).

21. Specialist Chee Yee Liang, for instance, has testified to being told to watch a prisoner shower because it would offend his Muslim faith. Kate Zernike, «Soldiers Testify on Orders to Soften Prisoners in Iraq», *The New York Times*, 13 January 2005.

22. Barbara Ehrenreich, «Prison Abuse: Feminism's Assumptions Upended», *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 2004.

23. In perhaps the most graphic instance of this sort of displacement, Specialist Sabrina Harman, one of other female guards charged in the scandal, wrote the word «rapist» (spelling it as «repist») with a black marker on the thigh of one of the prisoners in the well-known «pyramid» photographs. Luke Harding, «I'm Sorry. It Just Isn't Me. Soldiers Face Court Martial», *The Guardian*, 20 May 2004.

24. Patrick Moore, «Weapons of Mass Homophobia», *The Advocate*, 8 June 2004.

25. Susan Sontag, «What Have We Done?», *Guardian Unlimited*, 24 May 2004. See also Joanna Bourke, «Torture as Pornography», *Guardian Unlimited*, 7 May 2004. Interestingly, the notorious leash photograph appears to have occupied a canonical role in the corpus of Abu Ghraib photographs. Of this photograph, England herself noted in a May 5, 2004 sworn statement, «I'm pretty sure this is one of the first photographs we took of the detainees». Michael A. Fuoco, «England Gives Her Side: In Sworn Statement, Soldier Charged in Iraq Abuse Provides Details But Says No Crimes Were Committed», *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 May 2004.

26. Lynn Duke, «A Woman Apart: For Fellow Soldiers, Lynndie England's Role at Abu Ghraib is Best Viewed at a Distance», *The Washington Post*, 19 September 2004.

27. Bourke, «Torture as Pornography».

28. Luc Sante, «Tourists and Torturers», *The New York Times*, 11 May 2004.

29. Sontag, «What Have We Done?», Sante, «Tourists and Torturers».

30. Discourse on class was centrally focused, once again, on Lynndie England. England, who grew up in a West Virginia trailer park, was repeatedly compared negatively to the «heroic» Jessica Lynch, her class alter ego. Also hailing from a poor West Virginia family, Lynch, a 19-year old member of the US Army's 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company, was captured by Iraqi forces and later rescued, in April 2003, by U.S. special forces.

31. Perhaps it took the devastation of New Orleans, particularly poor, black New Orleans, by Hurricane Katrina in September 2005 to make visible the structural racism of American society and its role in linking home front and battlefield. The black «looters» of post-hurricane New Orleans were shot at by «fellow Americans» as mercilessly as if they were the enemy on the streets of Baghdad, while «the day after», the same private contractors used in Iraq, companies run by cronies of the Bush administration, were brought in to police and «reconstruct» the city.

32. Cited in Kate Zernike, «Central Figure in Iraq Abuse Goes on Trail», *The New York Times*, 11 January 2005.

33. Sontag, «What Have We Done?». To this comment, Limbaugh enthusiastically responded: «Exactly! Exactly my point. This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation and we're going to ruin people's lives over it and we're going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time».

34. Zernike, «Central Figure in Iraq Abuse Goes on Trail».

35. For a discussion of the «othering» of colonial bodies and the exclusionary tactics of liberalism that makes explicit reference to the violence at Abu Ghraib, see D'Cruze and Rao 2004. For an overview of the tensions between the universalizing discourses of liberalism and practices of discrimination and estrangement enacted in their name, as manifested in the French controversy over the «veil», the European colonial imaginary's quintessential sign of embodied difference and gendered vulnerability, see Athanasiou (this volume).

References

Athanasiou Athena, *The Discourses on the «Veil»: Gender, Sexuality, Nation and the Metaphor of the «Other Woman»* (this volume, in Greek).

- Benedict Ruth, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1989.
- D'Cruze Shani and Anupama Rao, «Violence and the Vulnerabilities of Gender», *Gender and History* 16 (3), 2004, pp. 495-512.
- Foucault Michel, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, New York, 1978.
- Mazzarella William, «Culture, Globalization, Mediation», *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, 2004, pp. 345-67.
- Patai Raphael, *The Arab Mind*, Rev. ed., Hatherleigh Press, New York, 2002.
- Price David, «Lessons from Second World War Anthropology», *Anthropology Today* 18 (3), 2002, pp. 14-20.
- Puar Jasbir K., «Abu Ghraib: Arguing Against Essentialism», *Feminist Studies* 30 (2), 2004, pp. 522-34.
- Rabinowitz Dan, «Oriental Othering and National Identity: A Review of Early Israeli Anthropological Studies of Palestinians», *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9, 2002, pp. 305-25.
- Said Edward, *Orientalism*, Vintage, New York, 1978.
- Stoler Ann, «Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures», *American Ethnologist* 16 (4), 1989, pp. 634-60.
- Stoler Ann, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1995.
- Stoler Ann and Frederick Cooper, «Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda», in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997.
- Tagg John, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1988.
- Trouillot Michel-Rolph, «Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness», in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox, School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, N.M., 1991.

