

Sex, Reproduction, and Foreign Policy: From Abu Ghraib to Transnational Adoption

Last April, CBS's 60 Minutes broke a story of prisoner abuse by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, including explosive photos of prisoners with electrodes on their genitals, forced to masturbate, piled naked on top of each, with male prisoners forced to perform oral sex on each other, or leashed and derided by a female soldier. Part of what made these photos shocking, as Ron Reagan has pointed out, was that they were such an affront to what most people in the U.S. thought we were doing in Iraq, or at least could lull ourselves into believing when we didn't want to think about it too hard—something about liberation from dictatorship and torture chambers, achieving stability in the face of civil unrest and terrorism, and building a democratic state. These goals, along with the WMDs, were at the core of the administration's claims for what it was doing, and I suspect that all but the most ardent opponents of the war preferred to believe at least parts of them part of the time. I know I did. It helped me sleep at night.

I think, though, that we need to look at this conjunction of the moral high road in American foreign policy and torture, between violence and benevolence, violation and sentimentality, and doing unspeakably foul things in the name of doing good. I have long been fascinated by the ways protecting women and making life better for children has been at the heart of justifications for U.S. power and domination. Now, I want to be very clear that when I say "justification," I really do NOT mean hypocrisy. Far more disturbing to me is the idea that at least some of the time, we mean it. When the Bush administration offered up the status of women under the Taliban as a justification for

war in Afghanistan, or the massacre of Kurds and political repression as the reason for war in Iraq, it may be true that they didn't exactly believe that these were the important reasons to go to war. We've seen this kind of disconnect between military goals and the "selling" of the war in the Bush administration, as for example when Donald Rumsfeld got irritated about all the fuss about not finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and he made a distinction between the "official" reasons for the war and the "real" ones. But as any number of commentators have pointed out, there's also the serious possibility that there were many true believers among the neo-cons, who really intended to bring democracy to the Middle East.

More significantly, though, these calls to conscience about repression in Afghanistan and Iraq were important to a great many people and sectors whose support was significant to the administration, including the U.S. non-governmental organizations who originally brought them to international attention, Feminist Majority Foundation and Human Rights Watch, as well as the liberal internationalist and feminist sectors that they mobilized, both in and outside the U.S. In their important book, *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call these kinds of human rights organizations the missionaries of empire,¹ suggesting that they sort of lull people in the U.S. into backing the violent and imperialist exercise of power through a kind of sleight [slite] of hand, in which "bad" goals of militarism and domination are sort of sneaked in under the cover of "good" goals. I disagree with them about this; the implication here is that they're separable, and I don't think they are. Nor am I saying, as Niall Ferguson suggests in his *Colossus* that U.S. Americans ought to be more frank and consistent about their imperial ambitions, and get over the need to justify these things, in a way that makes us weak-kneed and

lack resolve. We should be more like the old British imperialists, he says, and just get the job done without all this soft, girlish rhetoric about doing good. (Ok, he didn't really say girlish--he really said 'girlie men', no, no, that's wrong--that's just my gloss on it). But in truth, I don't think the British were any less likely than the U.S. to confuse the exercise of imperial power with "doing good," any more than the Spanish before them were capable of untangling the missionary, evangelical work of bringing the New World Indians to God with conquering lands for the crown and taking their gold and silver. It bears remembering that it's from the imperial British (and perhaps a bit from France) that we learned most of the important global feminist issues of the twentieth century: the veil, polygamy, foot-binding, female genital mutilation, and sati. This, I think, should give us pause.

I'm much more sympathetic--although I think diametrically opposed--to Michael Ignatieff, who in that third major book that's asking us rethink empire this year, *The Lesser Evil*, argues that the United States should be an empire because there's so much good we can do. I would argue it the other way--that the United States should not be an empire, because there's so much harm we can do, but if we want to understand how we wind up doing so much harm, we'd be wise to look not to some intrinsic cruel streak in American foreign policy or in American people, but rather at it's opposite: the overwhelming, terrifying desire to do good.

Let's start by looking at what we know about torture and war crimes committed in the last three years in relation to the US in Afghanistan and Iraq. I have no independent knowledge here, no high-level sources of my own in the Pentagon or the White House,

¹ Hardt and Negri, p. 36.

I'm just working off of what's been published in the United States and Europe by investigative journalists or leaked and available on the internet. It turns out that this is rather a lot, much of it independently corroborated through multiple sources, but unless you've been paying close attention, it's been easy to miss in the US, though not in the rest of the world. Except for a few weeks in April, when the Abu Ghraib photos were everywhere, the mainstream press in the US hasn't exactly been eager to point out what we know, choosing instead to focus on an election between two presidential candidates whose positions on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are virtually indistinguishable, except that one claims he can get us out in four years, and the other one, if we believe John McCain, is working with a 10-20 year times frame. To the extent that we've had a debate on war crimes, the Nuremberg principles, and the Geneva Convention, it's been about Vietnam—and the bottomless anger of some Swift Boat veterans who will never forgive the young John Kerry for coming home from that war and accusing himself, and them, of war crimes. And I can't say that anybody has exactly covered themselves in glory in that debate—the press seems tacitly to have agreed to focus on what seem to be entirely false claims that Kerry wasn't really wounded, or really being shot at; the Bush people seem to have organized an attack on someone who actually served in the war rather than using Dad's connections to let other people, mostly poor people, fight in his stead in a very unpopular war; the Kerry people seem unwilling or unable to insist on the truth of this debate, what the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" have admitted publicly, that this is in fact a fight about whether the U.S. military's conduct of the war in Vietnam violated the Geneva Conventions by killing civilians, destroying homes and crops, and using horrible chemical weapons that burned, killed, and scarred civilians, including

children, caused epidemics of cancer and birth defects to this day, and systematically defoliated forests.ⁱ

But back to Abu Ghraib. We all remember the pictures that I mentioned at the beginning. But then there was the series, published in the U.S. but much less discussed, of a dog attacking a sobbing Iraqi man sitting in a pool of blood. Other photos and stories circulated in Europe, but much less so in the U.S.—men being sodomized with a broomstick and a phosphorescent light stick, women being gang raped by U.S. soldiers, Iraqi boys being anally raped by U.S. soldiers. Members of Congress reportedly saw a videotape of this last. The U.S. military is conducting investigations of at least 14 murders of prisoners of war in Iraq. According to articles published in medical journals, Army physicians knew about the torture of prisoners, and when for example called in to treat someone apparently suffering from a heart attack during a beating, the attending physician apparently ascertained that the prisoner was not dying and sent him back.ⁱⁱ And while all that is bad enough, no one in the military or the White House is claiming that this kind of torture—and it is torture, despite a preference in the press for the legally neutral term "abuse"—no one is saying that it was limited to Iraq. Three partially published reports—the initial investigation by Gen. Antonio Taguba, the Department of Defense Report by James Schlesinger, and the investigation by Major General George Fay—have all been quite forthright that sleep deprivation, hoodings, the use of dogs on prisoners, and sexual humiliation have been part of the treatment of prisoners in Bagram Air Base and other camps in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, as well as Camp Cropper in Baghdad and other

detention centers whose location is secret. We've heard less about these probably in part because we don't have graphic photographic evidence—although some have alleged that there are videotapes of prisoners being beaten in Guantanamo--but largely because of a distinction that has only made sense within the U.S., not even the British have found it worth treating seriously: that only prisoners in Iraq are protected by the Geneva Convention, because only they are prisoners of war; those who fought in defense of the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan, are "enemy combatants," a legal status made up by the Bush administration to mean that they have no rights,ⁱⁱⁱ that they could be tortured, because the Taliban was not a "legitimate" government.

This is a horrifying litany, shaming to those of us who believe in or long for an ability to believe in the fundamental decency of U.S. Americans and our institutions. But there are two sides to this. I'm not going to say to you, as I've heard so many say in recent months, that this is an aberration. This dark, ugly side of U.S. warfare and intelligence operations in violation of any international law or sense of decency stretches back at least through the Henry Kissinger years, through the free-fire zones and My Lai and hundreds of similar massacres in Vietnam, through the bombing of Cambodian civilians whom we were not at war with, through CIA-sponsored or tacitly approved coups in Iraq, Iran, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Grenada, and Guatemala, the murder of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, the Reagan administration looking the other way during the torture, murder, and disappearances in Argentina and Guatemala, and proxy-wars in El Salvador, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua, and now Colombia, the genocide in East Timor. And, we could point out, there were countless atrocities that we know about in the U.S. war in the Philippines at the turn of

the century and the Indian Wars of the 19th century. But there's another tradition that matters here, too, one that I don't want to lose sight of. We know about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and Baghram for the same reason that we know about so many of these other events: because people in the U.S. military and intelligence community put their jobs and livelihood on the line to bring them to light, in hopes that government and civilians would respond, and because some journalists decided that we needed an honest debate about what was really going on, that functioning as a mouthpiece for what the government said was neither patriotic nor the role of the media. Many in the U.S. military hate the torture and murder of Iraqi, Afghani, and other prisoners from all over the world housed at Guantanamo or shipped off to Thailand and Pakistan to be tortured, because they know that in the future, the only protection for U.S. POWs against torture and murder will be the Geneva Convention, the Convention Against Torture, or other instruments of international law, and if we ourselves gut them, then US soldiers will have to live with the consequences. The other school of thought is more pragmatic and less principled: torture is stupid because it doesn't work. If the goal of questioning prisoners at Bagram and Guantanamo was to get information about the Taliban or Al Qaeda, and in Iraq to gather information about the growing insurgency there, they argue, then they have failed utterly. If we accept the testimony of "unnamed sources"—always an iffy proposition, I admit—then from the anonymous author of *Imperial Hubris* to "high ranking intelligence officials" who speak to the *New York Times*, to Generals Janis Karpinsky and Antonio Taguba in Iraq and all the people who spoke to *New Yorker* correspondent Seymour Hersh, author of *Chain of Command*, there are a lot of people in the regular military and in intelligence who hate Donald Rumsfeld, who

regard him as an amoral bully, along with Dick Cheney, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle. Brutality and humiliation, these intelligence officials say, does not produce good information, and only a small minority of these prisoners have any information to give. According to the Red Cross, 70 to 90 percent of prisoners at Abu Ghraib had done nothing wrong, and more than 100 prisoners were children; at the camps at Baghram and Guantanamo, a number of CIA officials claim that some significant but undetermined percentage were innocent of anything except being in the wrong place during "sweeps" by Afghan warlords. But this is precisely the problem with holding people without charging them or giving them access to the courts—it's not just wrong, it's not just illegal, but you have no ability to sort out who is innocent and who might really have information.

So what does all this have to do with sexuality, gender, and reproduction? What do we know or should we be thinking about all this in our role as students and scholars of Women's Studies or Queer Studies? More than you might think. Seymour Hersh made the argument in a column in the *New Yorker* and more recently in his new book that one of the important sources of the sexualization of the torture of Iraqi prisoners was what he called the "Bible of neocons" about Iraqis, cultural anthropologist Rafael Patai's *The Arab Mind*, first published in 1973 and recently re-released with a new introduction by Colonel Norvell DeAtkine, director of Middle East Studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, who said that it formed the basis of his cultural instruction for military teams being deployed to the Middle East over the past 12 years.^{iv} Here's what Hersh wrote about it.

"The notion that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation became a talking point among pro-war Washington conservatives in the months before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq...One book that was frequently cited was 'The Arab Mind'...The book includes a 25-page chapter on Arabs and sex, depicting sex as a taboo vested with shame and repression" In his discussion with conservative pro-war intellectuals, he said, two things predominated: "One, that Arabs only understand force, and two, that the biggest weakness of Arabs is shame and humiliation." The goal of sexualized torture, and the photographs of it, according to Hersh, was to create a group of Iraqis who would be released under the threat of blackmail with these photographs, and gather information about the anti-American insurgency as spies for the U.S. military.^v

Patai describes a singular "Arab culture," and even an "Arab mind" full of bizarre sexualized and violent features. He characterizes a strange world, in which children are intensely shamed about sexuality, but endlessly exposed to it, creating a repression/sex/sin complex that means they think about sex all the time at the same time that they are required not to act on it. Mothers, he says, offer their breast to male infants to quiet their slightest cry, and handle their genitals to comfort them. Despite a public culture of modesty and embarrassment, he insists, Arabs—all Arabs, apparently--nevertheless in private talk endlessly about sex, are incredibly sensual, engage in all sorts of homosexual acts. Women are acutely inferior. For children as for adults, apparently, masturbation is an excruciating shame, indicating for men that they are not "man enough" to have sex with a woman. For a women, he says, adultery or rape is a humiliation of her father and all her paternal relatives, requiring that her husband or father kill the man that raped her, and Patai suggests, under most circumstances kill the

woman who was raped, as well. According to this logic, apparently, a woman raped by US soldiers would want to protect her male relatives from that knowledge less they be obliged to engage in suicidal attacks on the US military and possibly murder their wife or daughter. Male prisoners, if Hersh is right, were believed to be willing to betray everything and everyone they care about in order to avoid someone finding out about their being forced to masturbate, being humiliated by a woman, or engaged in homosexual contact.

One of the more incredible features of the U.S. press's reporting on the torture at Abu Ghraib was the reiteration of the *Arab Mind*-style suggestion that there was something about Arab culture that made it particularly obsessed by sexual humiliation and homosexuality. While I don't want to repeat Patai's move of positing a national or racial personality, I have to notice that the evidence in this case seems to point the other way—that it is a segment of the U.S. military, intelligence, and government that appears to be obsessed with sexual humiliation and homosexuality. The prosecution of suspected homosexuals in the U.S. military has intensified since the institution of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in 1992. The heterosexualized culture of the U.S. military seems to breed sexual abuse and rape, even of US women soldiers. Conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh indirectly made this point himself, that something about this behavior is deeply rooted in U.S. communities, when he observed that nothing had happened at Abu Ghraib that didn't regularly happen in fraternity houses. At the risk of stating the obvious, what's horrible and shaming for us as US citizens and residents is not that this reveals something dark and violent about Arab culture, but within American culture, rooted in homophobia and sexism.

In the academic circles I run in, Patai's work has long since been roundly condemned. In *Orientalism*, mostly concerned with 19th century British and French works, Edward Said nevertheless took a detour to cite Patai's *Arab Mind* as an Orientalist text, one characterized, in other words, by the production of a kind of academic knowledge uniquely useful to imperialism, one that creates a feminized, sexualized "orient" that is the opposite of the masculine, intellectual, modern "occident." But lest Patai's work seem like some kind of oddly still powerful but nevertheless past moment in academe, it bears noticing the reception of the equally orientalist historian Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong?* in 2002. This lightly footnoted account of a backward Arab world that oppresses women, that in fact became backward because it was so unlike the West, where women have been respected and accorded equality, merited the author a generous review in the *New York Times Book Review* and an extensive interview on NPR. But, for all those of us concerned about the rights of women in a "modern" Iraq or discouraged by the failure to win an equal rights amendment to the U.S. constitution, or the paltry 14% of House and Senate seats currently held by women in the U.S., you will be relieved to know that the transitional government of Iraq has promised that the new Iraqi constitution will contain promises of equal rights for women and 25% representation. Meanwhile, Congress has threatened Title VI funding for any area studies program that endorses the ideas of Edward Said—which is to say, quite forthrightly, in Said's terms, any university area studies program that fails to make itself useful to the neoconservative cabal that wants to insist on this particular, orientalist way of making sense of the Arab world, as run by ideologies of sex and gender. And lest that sounds too much like a women's studies way of making sense

of what's at stake here, we have neo-conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer writing that "This war is about--deeply about--sex. For the jihadists, at stake in the war against the infidels is the control of women. Western freedom means the end of women's mastery by men, and the end of dictatorial clerical control over all aspects of sexuality -- in dress, behavior, education, the arts."^{vi} For us, he suggests, without irony, it is about granting sexual liberation and gender equality to Iraq. Or pro-war liberal Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* writing last week that "I firmly believe that the central moral challenge of this century, equivalent to the struggles against slavery in the 19th century...will be to address sex inequality in the third world."^{vii} They all love women's rights, as long as they're somewhere else.

But I do want to insist that there is no "American mind" at work here, running a war in Iraq counter to any principles of human rights or international law, but rather a fight over ideas and policies, ways of conducting the military and intelligence operations, in which a relatively small group of old cons and neocons has taken racialized ideas about sex and gender, in which Arab notions are fundamentally opposite to our own, and exploited them to appalling ends. Two decades of feminist critique of this kind of conservatizing "global feminism" comes, essentially, to this: there is no singular culture of sex and gender "over there" from which we are essentially different and from which we must rescue "them." Such notions, feminists from Gayatri Spivak to Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal to Chandra Mohanty have argued, are dangerous, imperialist, and can be endlessly deployed in the service of militarism. How prescient that now sounds. And despite the objections of students in my transnational feminist theory class that

Spivak and Said are too theoretical in a world that needs activism, these are ideas worth fighting for.

But I don't want to leave us with the sense that there is a "hard" foreign policy rooted in militarism, and a soft, liberal internationalism that is essentially benevolent. I want to turn from the harsh brutality of the treatment of prisoners of war and violations of the Geneva conventions to what is at first glance seems a much cuddlier subject: transnational adoption. But I want to suggest that saving women and children is not just a pretext for war, it's also actualized through war. And just as there are human rights discourses about prisoners and war at work in American politics, there are imperialist discourses of adoption—and vice versa.

The first thing we need to ask is, through what historical processes do children become available for adoption, or, in the language of sentiment, in need of being "saved"? And the answer to this is fairly straightforward: through economic and military events that result in massive social disruption. In the last fifty years, we have seen infants and children being "saved" after the U.S. wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia; after the end of the Cold War in Romania; in relationship to the current dislocations of the creation of a hyper-exploited factory workforce in China and Korea. While they share these roots in common processes, though, I want to stress that adoption "markets" are also incredibly different from each other, with their own national and regional dynamics, and so I want to be clear that I am not going to talk about the conditions of adoption "in general." Instead, I am going to focus on Latin America,

particularly Guatemala, which seems to me the worst example of a process that seems to be occurring, albeit quite unevenly, across Latin America.

The tiny country of Guatemala is currently the largest source of adopted children per capita (the third largest by nation).^{viii} Ninety percent of these children are going to the United States. The legal process of adoption from Guatemala is unregulated (at best; the cynical version would have it that a web of judges, lawyers, social workers, and corrupt government officials "regulate" the process quite well, to their personal enrichment and without regard for parental or children's rights). Adoption is also one of the largest economic sectors in Guatemala, at \$50 million in 2001. Adoption there takes place directly, with the heads of "orphanages" placing children with overseas families with no legal regulatory process intervening, except the U.S. embassy, which grants visas to these infantile immigrants.^{ix} While U.S. adopters imagine themselves as benefactors--one Internet-based organization for U.S. would-be adopters from Guatemala, Precious.org, titles its ad on Google.com, "Save a Child—Adopt"—Guatemalans, like Mexicans, believe the fundamental issue to be violence and theft. In 1994, two U.S. visitors to Guatemala were beaten nearly to death by mobs following accusations that they were trafficking in children.^x

The Guatemalan government provided indirect confirmation of these kinds of suspicions earlier this year when it reversed an earlier commitment to honor the 2000 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. It would have required that the birth family be shown to be unable to care for the child—not just impoverished relative to potential adoptive parents; that consent for relinquishment be freely and irrevocably given, that the relationship of those

claiming to be the relinquishing parents to the child be clearly demonstrated through DNA testing; and that both sending and receiving countries have a central authority that regulates international adoption. The U.S. State Department has maneuvered more carefully than the government of Guatemala, saying that it *intends* to come into compliance sometime in 2004, although as the adoption activist group Bastard Nation has pointed out, the four-year U.S. delay in coming into compliance with these minimal human rights standards is in itself an appalling admission about the state of international adoption.

And there are accounts of human rights abuses in adoption, some more and some less well-documented. One such account made headlines in Mexico in 1997. It involved documentation of the transport of Mexican children to “orphanages” in Guatemala, with no record of how the children were obtained. Journalist Karina Avilés, working for the Mexico City paper, *La Jornada*, wrote a series of articles detailing the traffic in children in Guatemala, including at least twenty cases of Mexican children who had been smuggled across the mountainous border between Mexico and Guatemala. She detailed an extensive network of eighty Guatemalan professionals and government officials—lawyers, social workers, judges—who benefited from these operations. She also told stories of those who kidnapped children, of birth mothers who sold children for as little as \$250 (with adoptive parents paying closer to \$20,000 for their adoption), homes where birthmothers stayed through their pregnancies with the understanding that their newborns would be adopted out, and even prostitutes who “rented their wombs,” in her phrase, becoming repeatedly pregnant and paid for their offspring. She quoted Carmela Curup, of the Procuria General de la Nación of Guatemala, describing the

difficulty of proving the existence of an international traffic in children, but admitting the shady nature of much of what goes on: “everything [about the operation] is legal, all, in inverted commas, is 'legal.’” She added, “We see with concern the number of people who get here, into Guatemala who, for a few quetzales, manage to procure a child.” Avilés also wrote of the other side of the equation, a fantastic account of a hotel full of foreign guests, each one of whom carried an about-to-be-adopted, brown-skinned infant, an image worthy of Borges repeatedly daily in Guatemala.^{xi} Jorge Camil, commenting on Avilés’s investigation, found in the tragedy of the whole affair “the disembodied specter of the U.S. dollar,” a traffic in human beings for sale, not all that different from that other traffic in human lives--slavery. For Camil, it was easy enough to understand U.S. adopters, weaned on images of large-eyed children in magazines asking to be “saved” by Americans, but not that difficult either to understand the corrupting influence of 20,000 U.S. dollars for each infant provided.^{xii}

The origins of current Guatemalan adoption markets, according to human rights activists involved with the Truth Commission movement, lie in the brutal 38-year civil war. During the war, children were abducted by the military and forced to be soldiers or servants, and sometimes, Mayan youngsters were given to the families of the soldiers who were systematically exterminating their people to raise, according to reports by both the Catholic Church’s Project to Recover Historical Memory (REHMI) and by the U.N.-sponsored truth commission, the Commission for Historical Clarification.^{xiii} According to one army officer, “The families of many army officers have grown with the adoption of victims of the violence since, at certain times, it was popular among army soldiers to take responsibility for little three or four year olds found wandering in the

mountains.^{xiv} Rural and Mayan communities have no particular reason to be sympathetic to U.S. tourists, or to see U.S. adoption of Guatemalan children as something other than part of a continuing history of colonialism or exploitation. The Commission for Historical Clarification report documents, in twelve volumes, the central role of the United States in the human rights abuses of those years: the war was sparked by the CIA's overthrow of the elected Arbenz government in 1954, and continued through the 60s, 70s, and 80s through U.S. funding, direct CIA involvement, and training for the Guatemalan military in "counterinsurgency" tactics that included disappearances, torture, and murder of civilians that were part of an attempted genocide of Mayan populations.^{xv} Although the civil war officially ended with a peace accord in 1996, violence and disappearances have continued. Even documenting illegal adoption and other human rights abuses in Guatemala is a dangerous occupation. Bishop Juan Gerardi Covedera, who oversaw the production of the REHMI report, was bludgeoned to death two days after its release.^{xvi} According to human rights groups and even the U.S. State Department, a Universidad de San Carlos professor, Mayra Gutierrez disappeared in April 2000, probably because of her research on illegal adoption.^{xvii} The office of Casa Alianza, an international children's rights group that has publicized issues of illegal adoption, have been repeatedly burglarized, and its director, Bruce Harris, has been charged with libel in Guatemalan court for his outspokenness about abusive adoption practices.^{xviii}

I could tell you similar stories about Argentina during the Dirty War, where the Truth Commission has documented that women "disappeared" in the seventies were raped and impregnated before they were killed, and where the *Madres de la Plaza de*

Mayo have transformed themselves into the *Abuelas*, or grandmothers, *de la Plaza de Mayo* in order to fight for the return of these "grandchildren" to their birth families from their "adoptive families" among the ruling junta—military leaders, we might recall, who were trained at the US School of the Americas. Similarly, anthropologist Nancy Schepper-Hughes has documented the kidnapping of children in Brazil by paramilitaries for contemporary international adoption markets, and others are looking at the kidnapping of children in the current civil war in Columbia.

But I want to look at a different kind of story in relation to Mexico, and the response of some adoptive parents in the U.S. to information about their children's roots. The first thing I need to say is that in most of the highly publicized cases where illegal adoption is uncovered, U.S. adoptive parents are conspicuously unresponsive to information, or even the shadow of suspicion, that "their child" has birth parents who wanted them. And the U.S. State Department, far from playing the mediator role that U.S. courts would in cases of contested domestic adoption, has fought fiercely to ensure that U.S. adoptive parents get to keep these children. The Elián González case in Miami is in some sense an exception to this story, but only sort of—there was absolutely no legal grounds for that child to stay in the U.S. for 2 days, never mind for nearly ten months.

This other story also begins with Mexican journalists. In October of 1998, Mexican newspapers began to report on an illegal adoption network operating along the Mexico-U.S. border through the contiguous cities of Agua Prieta, Sonora, and Douglas, Arizona.^{xix} The INS investigated the allegations, and in March 1999, a woman named Margarita Soto was arrested crossing the border into Douglas for transporting an

unrelated child whom she claimed was hers. Soto worked for a lawyer named Mario Reyes, who practiced on the Agua Prieta side of the border but lived in Douglas. He was arrested shortly thereafter (and was probably lucky to be arrested and tried by U.S. authorities, rather than Mexican ones, who accused him of smuggling 500 unlawfully obtained children and angrily demanded his extradition).^{xx} The INS accused Reyes of mail and wire fraud, and illegally transporting children. Two Long Island women, Arlene Lieberman and Arlene Reingold were held on similar charges for their roles in acting as go-betweens with New York families and Reyes.^{xxi}

Agua Prieta/Douglas made an ideal site for an illegal adoption network. It is essentially a single city divided in two by an international border, and people on either side are linked through ties of friendship, family, and commerce. There is an extensive, daily, circular traffic across the border, with people living on one side or the other but crossing to shop, socialize, and engage in political and business transactions, taking advantage of differences in law, opportunity, and costs that the border produces. In recent years, Agua Prieta/Douglas has been transformed from a quiet desert town into a booming border city by the establishment of *maquiladoras* on the Agua Prieta side, and Agua Prieta has grown from 18,000 people to a population of more than 90,000, drawn from all over Mexico by the promise of factory work, but as often as not ending up jobless in the city's growing shanty-towns. Average wages at the *maquiladoras* are about seventy-three cents an hour, according to those promoting business investment in the area.^{xxii} In Agua Prieta, social workers told the *New York Times*, wealthy lawyers regularly offer cash for children, and while most refuse, a handful, with few other prospects for earning money, accept.^{xxiii} An international airport in nearby Tucson

makes it easy to transport an illegally procured child to a waiting family anywhere who is willing to pay twenty or thirty thousand dollars. This was, essentially, what happened with the Long Island cases.^{xxiv}

Illegal adoption cases, in the rare instances in which they are pursued and prosecuted, present a formidable problem for a U.S. American story of rescue. In the Long Island cases, there were at least two responses: those that insisted ever more strongly that the children were “really” American, and those that negotiated more hybrid answers. The INS apparently assured the adoptive parents in Long Island from the very beginning of the investigation that they would be able to keep “their” children,^{xxv} and seeming made no effort to locate the birth parents of illegally adopted children, even refusing to allow a group in Mexico dedicated to finding kidnapped children to obtain photos of the Long Island adoptees.^{xxvi} Much of the news coverage emphasized how impoverished the children must have been in Mexico, stressing images of shanty-towns without running water and real or imagined health problems, as if poverty in itself, or living in the Third World, were sufficient reasons to believe the birth parents “unfit.” Further, it stressed how normal, American, married, middle-class, and unhappily childless the adoptive parents had been, telling the story of “desperate infertile couples,” as if they, rather than the birth parents, had been wronged. Reading the coverage of these and many similar cases, one is struck by how very angry U.S. Americans become when their desire to “do good” is thwarted, and how quickly we turn, as a nation, to insisting on our “right” to do good—by extra-legal methods if necessary. It’s not that I don’t have compassion for how wrenching it must be to contemplate losing a child one loves and has raised for years. It’s that I’m astonished how easily we move to render

counter-claims by equally bereaved birth families illegitimate and positively dangerous to their children.

Still, even more remarkably when you think about how unanimously the press, politicians, and the state department moved to condemn and render impossible any claims by birth families, some adoptive families imagined more complicated moral universes. One Long Island family, the Libertos, returned their adoptive child, nine-year old Flor Azuceña, to the birth mother the child missed fiercely, even before the illegalities of the adoption ring were revealed. Reyes had apparently persuaded the mother to relinquish her child for a few hundred pesos for food, and grandiose promises, never kept, of building her and her family a decent house. The Libertos told the *New York Times* that they decided to return their child to her family because Mrs. Liberto understood, first-hand, how painful it could be to be “rescued” from one’s working-class family: “Mrs. Liberto cried when she was asked why she agreed to let Flor Azuceña go. The decision, she said, arose from memories of growing up poor and being sent every year to a summer camp in Pennsylvania. It was the most beautiful place she had ever seen, Mrs. Liberto said. But after a few days, she recalled, she was crying and pleading to go home. ‘A family bond is something you cannot break,’ she said.” For her, it was not self-evident that poverty was a reason to separate children from their birth families, nor that the child was “really” hers or “really” American. An adoptive father in the case, David Kruchkow, wrote a book-length piece that he published on the internet entitled *When You Wish Upon a Star* that told the story of his adoption of Maria Soledad, whom he and his wife re-named Shelly. The book is fascinating, at least as much because of how the story changes in the telling from

beginning to end as for what the content is. Kruchkow begins his tale as the arrogant American consumer, choosing a race, age, sex, and country of origin of the child he seeks much as one would pick out a car or other commodity. Birth parents are not even sort of on his imaginative horizon; *maquiladoras*, not in his vocabulary. His naivete about immigration and Mexico as a whole would be reprehensible if it were not so absolutely complete. But in the course of the investigation and trial, his growing belief that the INS was purposely limiting its investigation, willfully not-knowing about hundreds of other cases in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, brings him up short. His sense of connection and relation to his adopted daughter's birth parents, through loving her, disaligns him from the INS and US nationalism. He becomes an activist, in a small, internet way, for cleaning up illegal adoption. He railed against the corruption of the high-profit intercountry adoption industry, raised questions about coercion and illegitimate pressure on birth parents in places like Guatemala and Mexico to relinquish their children, and mourned the loss of the possibility of contact with his daughter's birth parents due to the shady dealings of Mario Reyes and his associates. He wrote about the local politics in Agua Prieta that had first allowed Mexican officials to ignore Reyes' illegal trafficking in children, and then to demand his prosecution. Kruchkow became a vocal and sophisticated analyst of the political and affective economies of intercountry adoption.^{xxvii} He is not alone among U.S. adoptive parents in calling for reform, or in tacking steadily to the left with respect to the politics of the Third World or adoption-- these kinds of sentiments are persistently if quietly raised on adoptive parents' listservs and in their books and stories.

So. What does all of this mean? We find sex and gender at the heart of a story about militarism and human rights at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, and we equally find questions of militarism and human rights at the center of a story about children and reproduction. And these, then, are the thoughts I want to leave you with. First, that sex, gender, and reproduction are crucial to foreign policy, that, to play with the words, the foreign and the domestic are the same thing. Our habit of imagining that foreign policy is a boy thing, and family and sex is a girl thing, is part of what blinds us to the ways sex, gender, family, and foreign policy are an entangled knot of concepts, practices, and ideologies. Second, once we see that, it becomes increasingly clear why the language of sentiment, rescue, and "doing good" in the world is never innocent, and is ultimately as dangerous as "virile" discourses of militarism. And finally, though, whether we come to these questions through the side of war or of women and children, through soldiers or adoptive parents, there are those who use our human rights tradition to champion those who are being victimized—and those who use it to victimize people. And I think finally each of us has to choose which side we are on, what we think languages of morality and rights are for, and commit ourselves to the hard work of discernment—dare I say theorizing—what is at work and why.

ⁱ Todd Purnham, "The Nation -- The War Within; What They're Really Fighting About," *The New York Times* (29 August, 2004), Sect. 4, p. 1.

ⁱⁱ Steven Miles, "Abu Ghraib and its Legacy for Military Medicine," *Lancet* (2004) 364: 725-29; Robert Jay Lifton, "Doctors and Torture," *New England Journal of Medicine* 351 (29 July 2004):415-416. Ira Flato, "The Role of Military Doctors in Abu Ghraib," *Talk of the Nation*, 27 August 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Geneva Conventions recognize "unlawful combatants," not enemy combatants.

^{iv} Louis Werner, "Mind over matter," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (1-7 July 2004) <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/697/op64.htm>; Emram Qureshi, "Misreading 'The Arab Mind'" *Boston Globe* (30 May 2004), Lee Smith, "Inside *The Arab Mind*" (27 May 2004), <http://slate.msn.com>; Ann Marlow, "Sex, violence and 'The Arab Mind'" (8 June 2004), Salon.com/books/feature/2004/06/08/arab_mind

^v Seymour Hersh, "The Gray Zone," *New Yorker*, (24 May 2004)

http://www.newyorker.com/fact/040524fa_fact.

^{vi} Charles Krauthammer, "Abu Graib as Symbol," *Washington Post* (7 May 2004): A33.

^{vii} Nicholas Kristof, "Sentenced to be Raped," *New York Times* (29 September 2004): A27.

^{viii} State Department, *Immigrant Visas Issued to Orphans Coming to the U.S.* (State Department, 2002 [cited 11 August 2003]); available from http://www.travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html.

^{ix} Alan Zarembo, "A Place to Call Home: The Anger, Tears and Frustrating Runarounds of a Guatemalan Adoption Case," *Newsweek*, July 15 2002.

^x One of the women, June Weinstock, returned to her home state of Alaska in a coma and never recovered.

According to some internet sources, she was a leftist who had gone to the region to support the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. Jose Gutierrez, *June Weinstock* (Radio Farabundo Marti Australia, 1994 [cited August 11 2003]); available from <http://csf.colorado.edu/femisa/1994/msg00150.html>. The other woman's name was Janice Vogel. Edward Orlebar, "Child Kidnaping Rumors Fuel Attacks on Americans; Guatemala: Military May Be Fomenting Fear of Foreigners. Hysteria May Invite Hard-Liner Backlash.," *Los Angeles Times* 1994.

^{xi} ``Todo es legal, entre comillas, es legal. Nosotros vemos con preocupación la cantidad de gente metida aquí en Guatemala que por unos cuantos quetzales logra sustraer al menor". Jaime Avilés, "El Tonto Del Pueblo: Beneplácito Un Nuevo Pinochet," *La Jornada*, April 1997, Karina Avilés, "Desde Guatemala, Red Internacional De Tráfico De Niños," *La Jornada*, 22 September 1997, Karina Avilés, "En Quetzaltenango, 29 Niños En Calidad De Productos Caducos E Inservibles," *La Jornada* 1997, Karina Avilés, "Impunes, Tratantes De Niños En Guatemala," *La Jornada*, 2 September 1997, Karina Avilés, "Robo De Infante, Delito Común En Ese País: Casa Alianza, Ong Internacional," *La Jornada*, 23 September 1997, Karina Avilés, "Se Utilizó El Hospital De Malacatán, En Guatemala, Como Expendio De Menores," *La Jornada*, 24 September 1997.

^{xii} Jorge Camil, "Tráfico De Niños," *La Jornada*, September 1997.

^{xiii} Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, *Guatemala: Memoria Del Silencio*, 12 vols. (Guatemala: Oficina de Servicios para Proyectos las Naciones Unidas, 1991), vol. 3, 71-78, Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again. The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala*, abridged English edition ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 37-38.

^{xiv} Recovery of Historical Memory Project, *Guatemala: Never Again. The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala*, 38.

^{xv} Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, *Memoria Del Silencio*.

^{xvi} Serge F. Kovalski, "In Guatemala, Grief Grows into Suspicion: Many Feel Bishop's Killing Was Motivated by Politics," *Washington Post*, April 30 1998.

^{xvii} Human Rights Groups like the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo have championed her case for years. Even the skeptical U.S. State Department termed the account that her disappearance was political termed the allegation "credible." Human Rights Bureau of Democracy, and Labor, "Guatemala: Country Reports on Human Rights 2000," (Washington, DC: State Department, 2001), 13.

^{xviii} Alianza, *They Shoot Children, Don't They?* ([cited]).

^{xix} David Halbfinger, "U.S. Accuses 3 of Smuggling Mexican Babies," *New York Times*, 28 May 1999 1999.

^{xx} Christina Ortiz, "Identifican a Traficante De Menores," *La Reforma*, 13 January 2000.

^{xxi} Mike Allen, "Women Accused of Smuggling Used a Friendly Approach," *New York Times*, 31 May 1999, Jim Cason and David Brooks, "Tres Detenidos En Eu Acusados De Tráfico De Bebés Mexicanos," *La Jornada*, 28 May 1999, Halbfinger, "U.S. Accuses 3 of Smuggling Mexican Babies.", Ginger Thompson, "In Mexico, Children, and Promises, Unkept," *New York Times*, 2 June 1999.

^{xxii} City of Douglas, *Discover Douglas, Arizona* [web site] (1 June 2000 [cited 1 June 2003]); available from <http://www.discoverdouglas.com/EconDev/Agua%20Prieta.htm>.

^{xxiii} Thompson, "In Mexico, Children, and Promises, Unkept."

^{xxiv} Ibid.

^{xxv} David Kruckow, *When You Wish Upon a Star: An Adoption Story* [Web site] (2001, 2002 [cited August 11 2003]); available from <http://saradave.tripod.com/adoptionstory/index.html>., ch. 11.

^{xxvi} Virginia de Viana, "Presentarán Queja: La Secretaría De Relaciones Exteriores No Ha Respondido a La Fundación Nacional De Investigaciones De Niños Robados," *El Imparcial.com*, 31 August 1999.

^{xxvii} Kruckow, *When You Wish* ([cited]).