

*The UC Center for Ethnography and UC Humanities
Research Institute*

cordially invite you to a

TALK

by

LAURA McNAMARA

Sandia Laboratories

Member, AAA Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US
Security and Intelligence Communities

**Iron Hands in Ethnographically-Informed Gloves?
Anthropology, Torture, and the Importance of Engaged
Critique in the Global War on Terrorism**

In May 2004, the *New Yorker* magazine published three articles which investigative reporter Seymour Hersh speculated that the 2003 Abu Ghraib abuses were informed by Raphael Patais 1973 ethnography, *The Arab Mind*. Hersh's allegation set the anthropology community in an uproar, with many scholars publicly decrying the use of anthropological knowledge in torture.

In this talk, I describe a years worth of archival research in which I looked for evidence of the connection that Hersh implied. In 2004, a coalition of civil liberties and human rights groups used the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to force the federal government to release thousands of pages of primary documentation related to detention, interrogation, and torture in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). My reading of this primary corpus has led me to believe that there is next to nothing to support the idea that Patais book provided Abu Ghraib guards and interrogators with a manual for intensive interrogation (to quote one anthropologist). In explaining how I came to this conclusion, I will not only describe what is missing from these documents namely, evidence of a smoking book but also point to sources of publicly available evidence that better explain the origins of the euphemistically named coercive interrogation techniques that surfaced so viscerally in Abu Ghraib.

This is not to say that this search for evidence of anthropologically informed torture was fruitless. The second part of this talk describes the problems that did emerge in the course of my research, from the dissemination of folk knowledge about what works in interrogation, to the problem of digital trophy photography among soldiers phenomena that point to the struggles that US national security institutions are encountering as they make sense of a global environment profoundly different than the Cold War that forged them.

In closing, I revisit the question of anthropology's relationship to national security, arguing that productive critique must extend beyond well-meaning resolutions decrying the putative use of anthropology as an instrument of torture, to include creative and revolutionary forms of engagement on the part of anthropologists themselves.

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

UCHRI Conference Room 338 – Administration Bldg.

12:00 noon-2:00pm

Light Lunch Provided **Please RSVP by May 1, 2008 to
Sandy Cushman – 949-824-3344 or scushman@uci.edu**

www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/