A Controversy of Faces: Images from Bali and Abu Ghraib

Abstract:
The Bali bombing of 2002 and the US war against Iraq have been partly defined as media events by a series of photographs depicting the perpetrators of serious crimes in attitudes of jocularity. Photographs of ‘the smiling bombers’ and US torturers at Abu Ghraib have caused shock and outrage because their grinning, smiling and laughing seems starkly at odds with the criminal acts for which the bombers and torturers have been charged, and, in some cases, convicted. Yet divergent meanings have been assigned to the photographs by western political elites. While the Bali bombers have been characterised as representing all that is wrong with and barbaric about militant Islam, the Abu Ghraib torturers have been dissociated from the US military and its values through their representation as a few isolated miscreants. However, I analyse the smiling of the bombers and torturers as forms of symbolic communication entailing resistance and mockery of state power on the part of the bombers, and domination and knowing humiliation on the part of the torturers. The clamping of meaning around these images by powerful political interests forecloses on the possibility of a deeper understanding of what is at stake in the war on terror and, for ordinary consumers of these images, encourages complicity in the rolling back of civil and political rights.

…it is clear from even the most cursory glance at any dictionary that of the many senses in which the English words smile, smirk, and grin have

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1 Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Postcolonial Roundtable of the Postcolonial Research Group, University of Newcastle, October 6th 2004 and at the Religion and Politics in the International Multicultural Society panel at the British International Studies Association conference on December 20th 2004. My thanks to the participants at both those events for insightful comments. I also wish to extend particular thanks to Kate Manzo, Richard Fox, Robert Schütze, David Campbell and Pam Allen for their comments on written drafts and / or for suggesting helpful materials that may otherwise have escaped my attention. I hope the article lives up to the quality of their advice and suggestions.
descended to us from earlier usage and word forms...a surprising number have nothing at all to do with happiness, pleasure, good cheer, empathetic communication, or affection. On the contrary, many clearly relate to craftiness, mockery, greed, cynicism, malevolence, gloating, and plain lewdness. ’ (Trumble 2004, 85-86)

Two series of photographs involving only a handful of people look to have laid claim to determining how the Bali bombing of October 2002 and the US’s ongoing war against Iraqi insurgents are to be remembered in the future. The so-called smiling bombers deeply offended Australian sensibilities already stretched to the limit in the wake of the bombing of a popular Kuta beach bar which left 202 people dead, the largest component of which was Australian tourists. The other photographs are of US service personnel engaged in acts of abuse and torture of Iraqi detainees at the now doubly infamous Abu Ghraib prison. The photographs themselves have quite distinct origins. Photographs of the Bali bombers are almost exclusively the product of commercial mass media and have been circulated throughout the international public domain whereas the Abu Ghraib photographs are produced by individual US service personnel and were initially intended for circulation among colleagues, friends and family. Their appearance in the wider public domain arose largely as a result of investigative journalism stimulated by persistent rumours of their existence.

What both sets of images have in common is that the perpetrators of quite heinous crimes are smiling broadly for their respective audiences and it is this
in particular that drew me to thinking about the photographs, their effects on public commentary and perceptions of identity. On the surface of it, none of those depicted in the photographs seem to have much to smile about. Suspects arrested for the Bali bombing in late 2002, and particularly Amrozi bin Nurhasyim, have smiled each time they have appeared before the media, itself somewhat unusual given we have seen very little of other terror suspects held in custody, particularly those incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay. For many Australians published images of the so-called smiling bomber heaped insult upon the tragedy of 88 Australian dead and led to a steady outpouring of angry commentary by politicians and journalists (see Hirst & Schütze 2004). In the second, more recent instance, photographs emerged from the Abu Ghraib prison of US service personnel engaged mainly in what Darius Rejali (2004) calls stealth tortures but not to the exclusion of other forms that left marks upon the body, and led to the deaths of an unknown number of detainees. Indeed, one of the images features a US servicewoman, thumb raised and grinning approvingly, over the corpse of one of the victims.

These images are starkly different to those that most inhabitants of modern western cities associate with criminality. In the urban dystopia portrayed in the reality TV world of Cops, America’s Most Wanted, and similar shows elsewhere, visual images of individual criminality often conform to two basic types. One is comprised of individuals seeking to shield their faces from...
photographers with blankets or items of clothing and so resisting the territorialisation of the (criminal) archive. The second is made up of ‘mugshots’ either provided by authorities or produced by the media itself. These latter images are formulaic, constructed and uniformly present sombre if sometimes defiant faces. Remorse is not a necessary motif of either of these forms but its possibility is implicit in them. That is, the very act of hiding one’s face or staring dispassionately out from a ‘mugshot’ is suggestive not only of guilt but also contrition. However, the Bali bombers and the Abu Ghraib torturers appear to delight in the presence of cameras and the opportunity to have their images recorded. Part of the reason these photographs are so affecting is because, unlike the genre of crime photographs I have just described, they defy easy categorization, a key issue in the newsworthiness calculations of editors and in the more reflective domain of image contemplation. (Bourdieu 1999, 172). If, as Bourdieu suggests, the first utterance of people describing a photograph is generally ‘it’s a (landscape, glamour, pornographic) photograph’ then any attempt to readily classify smiling torturers at work is rendered highly complex.

Nonetheless, images of violence and abuse are, as Susan Sontag (2004) recently suggested, the site of political contestation themselves. That is, what is represented by images is often of less concern to powerful interests than their existence. Analysing the Bush administration’s response to the photos of
abuse and torture of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib published in April 2004, Sontag observes that the main concern of the administration was limiting further circulation of images that were in the public domain and trying to prevent the release of what Don Rumsfeld acknowledged were many more photographs and videos. Conversely, there has been very little attempt to deal with the ‘complex crimes of leadership, policies and authority revealed by the pictures.’ It is what is depicted in the photographs themselves rather than what these depictions represent that has led to hand wringing in the Bush administration (Sontag 2004).

The cool, distancing language of the Bush administration with respect to the crimes committed at Abu Ghraib is in stark contrast to Australian government and media commentary on images of Amrozi bin Nurhasyim that circulated shortly after his arrest about a month after the bombing of October 12 2002. Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer commented that photographs of the so called smiling bomber were ‘ugly images’ and that the ‘…sort of ugly, sneering, amused attitude…is just horrific’ (AAP 2002). The (then) Leader of the Opposition, Simon Crean, adopted a slightly different position and observed that the ‘…thought that immediately went through my mind is that, if you were one of the parents or the relatives…what would you be thinking’ (AAP 2002). It seems to me that language of this sort might equally be applied to the Abu Ghraib photographs but the Australian, like the US,
government has been remarkably reluctant to be drawn into public debate about them.

The bulk of this article focuses on the Bali bombers about whose smiling rather more has been written than that of the Abu Ghraib torturers. However, I return to discussion of the Abu Ghraib images later in the article as a means of highlighting the different ways in which the images supposedly reveal identity. Images of the Bali bombers have formed part of the Australian government’s armoury in maintaining public support for its (slight) efforts in the war against terror not least by portraying the bombers as the face of the enemy in Southeast Asia. But photographs of the Abu Ghraib torturers have been represented by the Bush administration as aberrant and a distraction from the war against Iraqi and other insurgents. On this view, the photographs tell us nothing about the character of the war on terror or of the attitudes of US service personnel towards Iraqis, Arabs and Muslims.

However, the first part of the article considers smiling as a political practice and attempts to categorise the photographs and their effects as a form of symbolic communication.

_The Politics of Smiling_
James Scott in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* argues that disguised political grumbling can take many forms including, a look, a groan, a sigh, a moan, a chuckle, a silence, a wink or a stare (Scott 1990, 155). This builds upon Foucault’s idea of making strange practices that appear as natural or common and using them for the purposes of dissent. For example, writing in the context of an analysis of laughter and carnival as forms of resistance in an era of global finance, Marieke de Goede argues that laughter can be treated as a political practice, a form of ambiguous, insidious dissent. On this view, laughter, comedy and carnival are important practices of criticism because they challenge the rationality of mainstream political processes which have little if any place for such ‘irrational’ activities (de Goede 2005, 381-382). Achille Mbembe goes further, arguing that in the simulacra of postcolonial authoritarianism, laughter in the face of official lying ‘…drains officialdom of meaning and sometimes obliges it to function while empty and powerless’ (Mbembe 2001,129; Heryanto 1999). John Pemberton describes one such expression of ‘…opposition to the current order of things…’ in recounting the ‘…howling delight of villagers…’ watching Indonesia’s former president, Suharto, delivering an official speech whilst standing on his head as a result of someone having turned a Javanese bus station’s public television set upside down. While this particular event soon played itself out and an appearance of order quickly returned, it
nonetheless marked a moment of transient opposition to New Order authoritarianism (Pemberton 1994, 3-4).

In other recent work on resistance among African Americans in the Jim Crow South, scholars such as David Nicholls and Robin Kelley have set out to debunk the idea of the ‘seeming acquiescence of the smiling negro laborer’ with a view to exploring the ‘hidden history of unorganized, everyday conflict…’ that hid behind such smiles (Nicholls 1999). Unsurprisingly, the interpretation of smiling as political practice varies from circumstance to circumstance. On the one hand, in her 1996 article on women’s resistance to the extension of Islamic influence in Iranian society, Donna Hughes notes that in 1994 Iranian police as part of a wider campaign to control women’s sexuality cautioned women not to smile in the streets because it stoked ‘satanic desires’ (Feminist Forum 1996). On the other hand, *Militant Islam Monitor* portrays contemporary Fallujah insurgents as ‘barbarism with a smiling face’ in itself an attempt to make bizarre the putative unthinking hatred of these particular Muslims for the United States and Americans.\(^2\)

These several brief examples are perhaps indicative of a political practice that Benedict Anderson describes as entailing symbolic, rather than direct, speech. On this view, smiling is a mode of political communication with some

similarities to cartooning, rituals, films and advertisements whose ‘...meanings shift, deepen, invert, or drain away with time.’ The ‘grammar’ of such communication is often elusive and the relation between form and content is simultaneously more salient and more elusive than other forms of political communication (Anderson 1990, 155). However, unlike the ephemeral resistance of laughing at an upside down president or smiling at a member of the opposite sex in the street, the photographed smile is added to the stream of images that jostle and compete for attention in newsrooms around the world. Yet once published and despite their being able to be examined repeatedly, the photographed smiling faces of the Bali bombers and Abu Ghraib torturers do not clarify the ‘grammar’ of this symbolic communication. Indeed that the feelings of perplexity experienced by consumers of these images have in some cases been transformed into bewilderment, anger, rage and disgust suggests both their potency and the elusiveness of their meaning.

Moreover, there is a parallel between terrorising through bombing and terrorising through torture in that, like smiling, there is a deeply symbolic element to these forms of practice and communication (see Hage 2003, 72-75). That is, neither the individual act of detonating a large bomb whose strategic placement is guaranteed to maim and kill large numbers of people nor the repeated acts of violence against individuals and groups of individuals in a
culture of torture are limited to the events themselves. Bombings in their capacity to hurt perceived enemies or to cause outrage through the murder of ‘innocents’, indicate resistance to perceived domination and injustice and, ultimately, assert life and vitality on the part of the communities whose actions bombers claim to represent (Hage 2003, 74). Torturers strive not to kill their victims but to keep them alive often with a view of re-inserting them into the communities from which they are (usually) arbitrarily plucked as living demonstrations of the costs of resistance. Such a strategy was widely deployed by the Indonesian regime of Suharto that circulated both the living and dead as graphic reminders of the price of dissent (Roosa 2003, 316; Tanter 1991, 131-135). But photography means that ‘real’ bodies are not critical to the success of such a strategy. For example, Neil MacMaster argues that during the 1950s the French military and police in both Algeria and Paris used photographs of tortured and mutilated victims to terrify Algerian FLN supporters and that the practice may have been utilised at Abu Ghraib (MacMaster 2004, 15). However, the use of photographed mutilated bodies as a device to procure information, instil fear or bring about social change is not confined to agencies of the state. For example, in insisting upon an open casket at his 1955 funeral, Emmitt Till’s mother was determined to use the widely circulated images of her lynched 14 year old son to provoke protest and mobilise the African American community (Campbell 2004, 57).
But there is a key difference between the smiles of the Bali bombers and Abu Ghraib torturers. While it appears that in both cases the individuals involved were mere subordinates in networks of violence and domination, I read the weapons of the Bali bombers and their subsequent smiling in the face of interrogation, trial and sentencing as weapons of the weak. That is, acts of non-state terror are often carried out by individuals and groups with only a limited range of extreme options available to them because of asymmetries of power.\(^3\) However, while the Abu Ghraib torturers appear to have been acting in accordance with instructions from higher (perhaps much higher) in the chain of command, they wear the uniform of the most powerful military apparatus yet known in the history of human-kind and as individuals within that apparatus, enjoyed relations of almost complete domination over those incarcerated and under their control (see Hersh 2004).\(^4\) It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the ways in which ordinary people are trained or have experiences that enable them to carry out extraordinary violence or torture. Nonetheless, allegations that military recruits are abused during training by their superiors and other more experienced peers arise routinely.

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\(^3\) Based on interviews with Arabs involved in the Palestinian struggle, Ghassan Hage characterises suicide bombing as ‘...a marriage between the necessity of resistance and the quantitative and qualitative deprivation of military hardware’ (Hage 2003:73).

\(^4\) The issue of whether the Abu Ghraib torturers were acting upon orders from higher up the chain of command is beyond the scope of this article. However, Edward Greer argues that ‘the systematic deployment of torture on captured Islamists’ is American policy and practice in the wake of the September 11\(^{th}\) 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. See (Greer 2004).
enough to safely argue that marking difference through violence is deeply ingrained in military cultures.

Before analysing the public interrogation of Amrozi bin Nurhasyim and predominantly Australian reactions to it, I wish to touch upon the particular history that smiling has in representations of Balinese culture.

**Bali: Land of Smiles?**

One of the striking effects of the bombing and photographs of the bombers published in the mainstream media is the contrast they provide to the Bali long regarded as a place of tranquil beauty and routinely gendered as feminine. That is, popular images of Bali largely produced and circulated by the tourism industry depict a tropical, fertile, green island fringed by beautiful beaches and populated by receptive, happy, contented people willing to share their good fortune with western tourists. A recurrent motif of Bali in tourism literature is its description as the island or land of smiles while smiling is a characteristic often ascribed to ordinary Balinese whose Hindu religion sets them apart from the Javanese to the west and Sasaks of Lombok to the east. For example, internet travel company Indo.com, refers to the Balinese as having ‘mystical smiles’ while without hint of irony, News

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5 [http://www.indo.com/culture/people.html](http://www.indo.com/culture/people.html) accessed 20/7/04)
Corporation’s Matthew Brace recently reported that Balinese people are saying that ‘Bali has got its smile back.’

This vision is often coupled with an image of Bali as threatened by the very irresistibility of its allure for tourists from all over the developed world. Such representations of paradise and paradise under threat are inherently Orientalist but elide similarly essentialist Dutch colonial representations of the Balinese as savage and war-like that prevailed up until the early decades of the 20th century. Moreover, it is only forty years ago that violence erupted with particular ferocity in the wake of the alleged communist coup attempt of 1965 that brought Suharto to power in Indonesia (see Cribb et al 1990, 241-60). Ironically, Suharto, long supported by US and Australian governments among others (initially because of his slaughtering of the Indonesian Communist Party membership and its real and imagined fellow travellers), was sometimes nicknamed ‘the smiling general’, the title of an early biography of Suharto (Roeder 1969). Suharto’s carefully self-cultivated avuncular image was further nurtured by sympathetic western governments eager to maintain his preference for ‘…Indonesia’s position of essential invisibility…in the international media’ (see Pemberton 1994, 4).

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6 (http://escape.news.com.au/story/0,9142,9166145-27983,00.html accessed 20/7/04)
In the present, contemporary feminised representations of the warm, open, receptive Balinese can be interpreted as a measure of the economic and social changes wrought by tourism in Bali. That is, the welcoming smiles of the Balinese can be read as symbolic of their subjugation and integration into the global economy. Indeed, as James Scott argues, shows of discursive affirmation from below are valuable because they contribute to the impression that the symbolic order is willingly accepted by its least advantaged members (Scott 1990, 58). Now while it may be difficult to make a case that the Balinese are (economically) disadvantaged as a result of mass tourism, it is plausible to argue that the smile serves to demonstrate Balinese acceptance of their status as tourist Mecca. Visual depictions of the happy, smiling Balinese in tourism advertising confirms for travellers that Bali has been tamed, stabilised and made welcoming by the capital of travellers from around the world, which helps locate Bali in the globalised hierarchy of nations. In this sense, Bali, as Adrian Vickers argues, is a paradise created (Vickers 1989).

Bali is not an independent nation but my implying that it is, is deliberate.

Prior to the bombing Bali was widely regarded by Australians and others as

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7 The term ‘Mecca for foreigners’ along with accompanying images of Bali beaches was used on the (US) NBC Evening News on October 12 2002. See Richard Fox, ‘From chaos to coherence: Critical comments on media coverage of the October 12th bombing in Bali’ Conference paper presented to the Third International Convention of Asia Scholars, 19-22 August 2003.
an oasis of calm and security in what the Australian government described in its 1998 Defence White Paper as an arc of instability (see Philpott 2001a). To varying degrees, fear of Indonesia has been a leitmotiv of Australian relations with that (and other Asian nations) nation for decades. Reporting of Indonesia in the Australian media generally conforms to a shorthand of (white) Australian insecurity by invoking its enormous population, its status as the world’s largest Muslim nation and by emphasizing the political instability, violence and division that have characterised much of Indonesia’s independent history (see Philpott 2001). But Bali seemed immune to the problems that beset Indonesia although even minimal inquiry into contemporary Balinese social relations and its recent history demonstrates the folly of this belief.

Moreover, given the widespread discursive practice of identifying threats to a polity’s security as arising from outside its borders, it is not surprising that the Balinese themselves have increasingly made a point of linking social problems on the island with the influx of other (primarily Muslim Javanese) Indonesians to Bali (see Allen 2004). In the wake of the bombing, the Balinese and the western media struggled to accept that this was an act with its genesis within the Balinese community. Indeed, within hours, speculation mounted in the media that the bombing was inspired by Al Qaeda thereby invoking radical Islam and suggesting that a new theatre in the war on terror was
imminent (see Fox 2003). On this view, the bombing of a nightclub in Bali constitutes not only mass murder, but also an attack on the thin sovereignty extended over Bali by (mainly) Australian tourists and the destruction of an idyll central to a certain Australian way of life.\(^8\) Beyond the immediate outrage, the bombing was, arguably, read as a betrayal of the paradise that it had become for many western tourists. One Australian headline a week after the bombing captures precisely this mood: ‘Paradise lost in Bali blast’ (Jackson and Brook 2002).

Amrozi’s smiling for the media challenges the economic hierarchy of globalisation by emptying the Balinese smile of its symbolic content of passive acceptance of mass western tourism and recoding it as a marker of violent resistance. This argument resonates with the view of the curator of *Inconvenient Evidence*, an exhibition of Abu Ghraib photographs recently showing in New York. Brian Wallis argues that images like those from Abu Ghraib raise ‘…questions about how photographs can be used as propaganda to assert cultural dominance locally and as triumphant trophies of war that serve to reinforce racial and political hierarchies globally.’\(^9\) On this view, the persistent smiling of Amrozi and other bombers can be and is, I think, read by

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\(^8\) Rebecca Stein notes that Palestinian attacks on Israeli cafes have similarly been represented in the Israeli media as containing a highly symbolic element. See Stein 2003.

\(^9\) (http://www.icp.org/exhibitions/abu_ghraib/introduction.html accessed 5/10/04). My thanks to David Campbell for bringing this exhibition to my attention.
the western media, governments and ordinary consumers of media images as the celebration of a victory in a skirmish whose broader context, however inchoate, is to overturn precisely the racial and political hierarchies Wallis refers to. The smiling, seemingly the very antithesis of remorse and regret, is thus read in the west as a form of symbolic political resistance and perhaps an appeal to others dissatisfied with the existing order of things.

**The Interrogation and Trial of the Smiling Bomber:**

Amrozi bin Nurhasyim was arrested about a month after the bombing of the Sari bar and nightclub in Kuta, Bali on October 12 2002. He was paraded before the Indonesian national and the international media by the Balinese police who, with Australian Federal Police assistance, conducted the investigation into the bombing. Public interrogation of a suspect is unusual in Indonesia and proved to be a light hearted event. Indeed, at one point Amrozi gestured towards western journalists saying ‘It’s people like them who I was trying to kill!’ a comment producing fits of laughter from many in the room, including the interrogating officers (Goodsir & Miller 2002).

To most non-Indonesian observers, the public interrogation of Amrozi but more particularly his smiling countenance and jocular manner were unusually offensive, provoked media and political comment in Australia and entrenched the already hostile view of him held by many Australians.
Headlines in leading Australian broadsheets capture both the perplexity and anger concerning the events surrounding Amrozi’s parading and interrogation: ‘Outrage over “bizarre, insensitive” interview’ (The Age, 14/11/02); ‘Smiling assassin interview “a circus”: police chief’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 14/11/02); ‘Laughing bomber on parade’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 14/11/02); ‘Howard repulsed by grinning bomber’ (The Age, 15/11/02).

Amrozi was duly tried and convicted, now under appeal, for his role in the bombing and sentenced to death. But long before these events, indeed, within hours of his arrest and interrogation, the Australian Foreign Minister in calling him bloodthirsty effectively pronounced Amrozi guilty. Arguably, the widespread abuse of legal processes, a hallmark of the war on terror, contributed to the decision of the Indonesian police to turn Amrozi’s interrogation into a public forum. For example, Sydney Morning Herald reporter Wayne Miller suggested that the parading of Amrozi may have been a spontaneous response to the ‘enormous pressure’ Indonesian police had been under from across the archipelago and an attempt to alleviate suspicion that Amrozi was a merely a patsy to convince sceptical Indonesian and international publics that the police were on top of the investigation (Miller 2002). Interestingly, these assertions are made in a brief article entitled ‘Interview made perfect sense to Indonesians’ which, given the incomprehensible scenes for Australian observers, serves to place distance
between the bereaved of both countries (the second largest component among the dead were 38 Indonesians) and plays upon white Australian insecurity with respect to Indonesia.¹⁰

Miller argues that in Indonesia it is the cultural norm:

…not to show anger, and to laugh out of embarrassment or to show compassion. The interview room looked like everybody was happy, and this was good for the police and Muslims. It is important to Muslims that they tell the truth, and in this regard Amrozi publicly measured up (Miller 2002).

An Indonesian commentator agreed, arguing laughing in Indonesia is sometimes just ‘…a manifestation of nervousness or embarrassment’ (Fatwa in Faroque 2002).

However, there are several reasons for treating with caution Miller’s argument. Firstly, before there was a clear picture established about the motives and motivations for the bombing, Amrozi’s religion becomes a focal point of analysis of his behaviour, implying a link between Islam and Amrozi’s criminal actions. This implication fits all too comfortably with discourses of the war on terror with their Orientalist imaginings of an inherently violent Islam. On this view, Amrozi’s personal responsibility for

¹⁰ Just what Indonesian audiences made of the interrogation is an open question. However, Angus Trumble, without supporting evidence, claims that the Indonesian media paid little attention to the interrogation and made little or no comment about Amrozi’s demeanour. See Trumble 2004: xxxii-xxxiii.
his (alleged) crimes is collapsed into his religious beliefs. Secondly, if it is accepted that the bombing is motivated by Islamic anger, then it seems unlikely that the bombers will be concerned about appearing as ‘good Muslims’ of the kind Miller identifies. It seems inconceivable that a well mannered Muslim would be making admissions of (and later convicted for) mass murder! Thirdly, Miller makes no attempt to analyse the interrogation as a media event despite recognising police anxiety as an influential factor in the decision to parade Amrozi. Dewi Anggraeni, the Australian correspondent for the Indonesian newsweekly *Tempo*, agrees arguing that the public interrogation was ‘an unusual public relations exercise…mainly for the benefit of the international media’ (Anggraeni 2002a). Moreover, Aggraeni suggests the Indonesian police were anxious to show Indonesians and the wider international community not only that they were making progress with their investigation but also that Amrozi had not been subjected to pressure or bullying. Thus, the Indonesian police chief, Da’i Bachtiar, was amenable to laughing at Amrozi’s ‘inane comments’ to demonstrate the non-coercive relationship that existed for the purposes of the interrogation (Anggraeni 2002a). Melbourne University’s head of Indonesian studies, Arief Budiman endorses this line of argument, suggesting that ‘…there is often a “rapport” between suspect and police….they still arrest and punish, but somehow communication is more “personal”’ (Faroque 2002). For Amrozi however, the possibility of demonstrating his closeness with no less than the Indonesian
chief of police was an opportunity perhaps too good to pass up (Anggraeni 2002)! Whatever the intentions of the police, the interview cannot be regarded as a success if it was meant to impress western observers, a point emphasised by Indonesia specialist Richard Chauvel who argues that the Indonesian police failed to understand the way that the public interrogation would be understood internationally (Faroque 2002).

While it is impossible to establish whether Amrozi was consciously pursuing a strategy of resistance, his irreverent conduct in the face of state power is not without precedent in contemporary Indonesia. Indeed, extensive media coverage makes it at least possible that Amrozi would be aware of unconventional styles of resistance that characterised the late Suharto era. For example, Ariel Heryanto documents students standing trial for various kinds of dissent and treating courts as ‘…fiesta[s] of simulacra…’ stripping them of their legality and rationality. Students devised numerous methods to disrupt proceedings (rather than contesting their legality) including organising mass pizza deliveries to the court, falsely advertising jobs and arranging for job interviews to be conducted by a trial judge at the time and place where verdicts were being delivered, and, dressing as bandage-wrapped zombies (Heryanto 1999, 165-166). Amrozi’s conduct and that of his colleagues similarly mocks state power and threatens its legitimacy by drawing investigating officers into a simulacrum of state authority. Ironically, in
attempting to demonstrate their efficiency and rigour, Indonesian police participated in undermining the veracity of the interrogation.

The western media also inadvertently contributes to doubts about the interrogation and later, the trial, by tapping into a long history of representations of Muslims as violent but also inept (Eisele 2002, 87). For example, Matthew Moore (2002) gently mocked Indonesian authorities who claimed they ‘forgot’ that Imam Samudra (allegedly the mastermind of the Bali bombings) was already wanted for questions about bombings when they inadvertently issued two new identity cards to him in 1999 and 2000. And in expressing her surprise at the reasonably prompt arrest of Amrozi, Jane Perlez (2002) simply observes that police in Indonesia are ‘…largely corrupt and not overly competent.’ Interestingly, the officer in charge of the investigation, Gen. I Made Mangku Pastika (a Hindu), acknowledged the lack of faith in the police’s competence while highlighting the ‘several basic mistakes’ made by the bombers and which led to their becoming suspects quite early in the investigation (Perlez 2002). The implied amateurishness of the operation is further emphasised by one of the bombers himself. In a re-enactment of the bombing, one of the suspects, Ali Imron, joked, claimed not to know that Australia was an ally of the US, and told police that the bombers had forgotten to attach the mobile phone that was to be used to detonate the bomb (Moore 2003). Moreover, prior to the arrest of the suspects, numerous
Indonesian observers and commentators argued that the bombing had to be the work of foreign elements, the operation being too large and too sophisticated to be the work of Indonesians (Moore 2003a). The pervasiveness of Orientalist accounts of identity appear starkly in such utterances.

Thus, unwittingly or otherwise, the bombers through their conduct in the face of authority stripped away perceptions of its competence and legitimacy and in this are, inadvertently, assisted by the western media. That is, representations of the bombers as yet more hateful and vengeful madmen with unclear motives for their violence against the west draws upon and extends the Orientalist discourses of Islamic otherness (see Eisele 2002, 87). On this view, the actions of the bombers are explicable only to the extent that unthinking violence is integral to Muslim culture and identity (Karim 2003, 73-87).

Amrozi’s seemingly cheerful demeanour continued throughout his trial, his conviction and his sentencing to death by the trial judge on August 7 2003. *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2003) editorialised that the judiciary helped fix the smile on Amrozi’s face by granting his desire for martyrdom and thus becomes complicit in the crime. But arguably, Amrozi’s smiling can also be read as a means of circulating images of encouragement and resistance among an audience with strong feelings of antipathy towards the US and its wars on
terror and Iraq but who perhaps waver in the face of taking direct action against perceived enemies. Jason Burke makes much the same point in arguing that the videoing, copying and distribution of the execution of western hostages in Iraq is proving a highly successful radicalising and recruitment technology for Muslim militants (Burke 2004).

By trial’s end the images of Amrozi in particular had become hyper-real; a story in themselves and disconnected from the events that the images originally illustrated.  

Arguably, the vengefulness incited in consumers of these images draws them into complicity with the worst excesses of the war against terror. That is, the images, by ‘proving’ the barbarity of those George Bush routinely refers to as evil-doers, contribute to the maintenance of sufficient public support for continuing detention without trial of those incarcerated by the US as a result of its campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, endorsement of the illegal doctrine of pre-emption and the erosion of legal process and civil liberties in the western democracies and beyond.  

For example, senior Australian government members and their counterparts in the Opposition put aside official and bi-partisan Australian opposition to the death penalty and endorsed the death sentence handed down to Amrozi by

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11 The concept of hyper-reality is of course Baudrillard’s.
12 I acknowledge this is a bold comment, but the governments of George Bush, John Howard and Tony Blair have been comfortably returned in recent elections despite a great deal of evidence suggesting that vital information was withheld from the public and ignored by these administrations in their determination to invade Iraq.
the Indonesian court (Kingston 2003). Moreover, in the wake of the overturning by the Constitutional Court of Idris’s conviction with respect to his role in the Bali bombing, the father of one of the victims demanded that the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister ‘…do something [because] unless we stop them, nobody else is going to’. In reiterating his desire that the bombers be shot, this individual’s respect for due process and Indonesia’s sovereignty simply vanishes (see AAP 2004).

*Photographs, Having Fun and Identity:*

Upon seeing Amrozi’s smiling post-arrest appearance in late 2002 the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, commented that ‘I think these people are so bloodthirsty, their sort of ugly sneering, amused attitude at the slaughter of innocent people is just horrific’ (Miller 2002). Yet also in 2002 Australia’s conservative Howard government took a decision to discontinue funding of a mere $1million to support Asian language programmes in Australian schools. One immediate effect of the cutting of Asian language programme support has been a 75% reduction in Indonesian language enrolments in Australian universities. The government seems happy enough with the fact that more than 50% of 13-14 year olds cannot find Indonesia on a map and less than a quarter know Indonesia is a majority Muslim nation (Williams 2004). The lack of curiosity about the lives and motivations of what appear to be the most ordinary of people turned mass-
murderers suggests that the photographs of the smiling bombers tell ‘us’ all ‘we’ need to know about ‘them’ to reaffirm ‘our’ commitments to the war on terror.

And yet according to George Bush, images of US service personnel torturing Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib tell us nothing about the US or the US military and that they are inconsistent with the ‘true nature and heart of America’ (Sontag 2004; MacMaster 2004, 14). No such subtle distinctions have been drawn by western politicians with respect to photographs of the Bali bombers. The grinning torturers are represented by the Bush administration as a few bad eggs that have brought disrepute on the US. James Inhofe, an Oklahoman Republican and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee goes further declaring himself (among others) as ‘outraged by the outrage’ with respect to the photographs and arguing that Americans are the true victims in trying to deal with those he describes as murderers, insurgents and terrorists. Moreover, the photographs rather than providing evidence of a culture of abuse and giving cause for reflection and disciplinary action are portrayed by Inhofe as the work of ‘the media’ at whose feet he lays the blame for what he regards as the inevitable American deaths that will arise from the photographs. (Sontag 2004).
Lack of clear, unambiguous condemnation, including use of the word torture to describe what happened at Abu Ghraib, on the part of the Bush administration has, arguably, helped create a mood for exoneration among large sections of the American public. For example, one caller to Rush Limbaugh’s widely syndicated radio programme argued that too much was being read into the photos from Abu Ghraib and that they were synonymous with fraternity hazing parties in the US. Limbaugh himself suggested that the explanation for the actions of the US soldiers engaged in abuses of Iraqi detainees was a form of emotional release in response to the pressures of daily life in Iraq for US service-people. They were, according to Limbaugh, simply having a good time (Sontag 2004). The issue of whether Lynndie England and Charles Graner were merely ‘joking around, having some fun, during the night shift’ is the contentious heart of the trial of Private England as England now claims she was coerced by the US army into making these admissions (AP 2004). Interestingly, photographs\(^\text{13}\) of (white) Australian servicemen in mock Ku Klux Klan hoods looming over (Aboriginal and dark skinned) colleagues have also recently described by Australian conservative MP Peter Lindsay as ‘a fun thing before the troops went overseas…the spirit of thing that out in the general community, nobody would even turn a hair at’ (AAP 2004b). The flat refusal of governments to draw the links between

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\(^{13}\) The photographs came to light and were published in the Australian media on November 11\(^{\text{th}}\) 2004, Remembrance Day, but were allegedly taken in September 2000 before the troops in question were deployed to East Timor.
hazing abuses and abuses of combatants and detainees defies decades of seemingly obvious evidence to the contrary.

On this view, rather than being an aberration, the Abu Ghraib photographs digitally manifest what Sontag calls the Bush administration’s ‘pseudo-religious doctrine of…endless war’ (Sontag 2004). Moreover, as Darius Rejali argues, the mode of abuse suggests not that US soldiers acted out of ignorance but in full awareness of the particular forms of humiliation inflicted on Muslim Arab men. ‘Cultural torture’ is invented by people from outside of the societies it is inflicted upon. It is not born of indifference or ignorance but calculated maliciousness (Rejali 2004a; Hersh 2004). In this instance, the US military, drawing upon Orientalist anthropology, formed the view that Arab men are particularly fearful of sexual humiliation which perhaps explains not only the nature of the torture of the Abu Ghraib detainees but the involvement of US servicewomen (MacMaster 2004, 15). Such views lend weight to the argument that torture never occurs in isolation but is ‘…one key component in a wider, integrated system of repression’ (MacMaster 2004, 6).

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14 Significantly influential Christians in US public life have, intentionally or otherwise, given credence to Sontag’s argument by describing Islam’s claims to be peace loving as fraudulent (Pat Robertson), by describing Islam as evil and wicked (Franklin Graham), and by describing Muhammad as a demon possessed paedophile (Jerry Falwell). See Chris McGillion, ‘Beware Christ’s zealots as they fan the flames’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15/10/02.
The genealogy of the Abu Ghraib images may be found in the post US civil war practice of lynching and in recording images of such events (Carby 2004). Hazel Carby argues that in both cases the images can be regarded as messages to be shared among oppressors. They also serve as celebration of the wielding of power, the performance of conquest over an enemy and as a warning to others of what awaits them should they challenge such power. On this view, photographs are a brutal assertion of supremacy over possible future victims (see Campbell 2004, 57). David Campbell draws similar conclusions about the practice of lynching, arguing that photographs were necessary to ensure their status as historical events (Campbell 2004, 57). Moreover, the highly ritualised posing of bodies, both alive and dead, by lynching parties and the Abu Ghraib torturers is evidence of the pleasure taken in torture and killing.\(^\text{15}\) The element of ritualised display extends to the facial expressions of the perpetrators ‘including smiles of pride in accomplishment, as if the torturers have truly dispensed justice’ (Carby 2004).\(^\text{16}\)

Curiously then, the Bali bombers and Abu Ghraib torturers may be smiling because they are satisfied in their dispensing of rough justice and seek to establish a historical record of their actions. Yet the Australian and US

\(^{15}\) Darius Rejali suggests that the smiling can be interpreted as Carby proposes, may be a measure of the surreal events in which relatively inexperienced people like the Abu Ghraib torturers find themselves in, or may be a way of making all consumers of the images complicit with the crimes. Personal communication, September 2004.

\(^{16}\) (See, for example: http://www.maafa.org/lynch3.html accessed 27/10/04).
governments respectively have interpreted the images quite differently. For the Australian government and journalists close to it such as the foreign editor of *The Australian*, Greg Sheridan, the smiling faces of the Bali bombers are evil personified, a mantra repeated endlessly not only in the wake of the bombing, the interrogations and trials of the bombers, but also throughout the war on terror (Hirst & Schütze 2004). But there is little in the public statements of the bombers to suggest that they bring any sophisticated political thought to their criminal actions or prior to their crimes had anything other than ordinary lives. The Australian government poses as equally unsophisticated in its commentary on the bombers, demonstrates little or no interest in understanding the complex nature of political Islam in Indonesia but parrots the ‘they hate us because of who we are’ line that plays like an endless advertising slogan for the war on terror (Hirst & Schütze 2004). In a broader sense, the unreflective category of terrorist is itself a form of symbolic violence that enables the pathologisation of some kinds of violence, the normalisation of others. It is the normalisation of the US’s imperial violence in contemporary Iraq that influences the ways that ‘we’ distinguish between ethical and illegitimate violence (see Hage 2003, 72).

Conclusion:

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17 Hage’s arguments specifically concern Palestinian suicide bombers and their role in the campaign against Israeli colonialism but the principle, I think, is relevant to my discussion.
While it is impossible to clearly establish the motivations for the criminal behaviour of the relatively few people depicted in the photographs analysed in this article, their seemingly cheerful dispositions, most in evidence through their smiling, has added complexity to the simple ‘with us or against us’ logic of the US and its allies since September 11 2001. On the one hand, published images of the Bali bombers have drawn upon and extended Orientalist accounts of an unthinkingly, instinctually violent Muslim world. Ironically, this has occurred despite serious Australian media attempts at analysing the conduct of the bombers whose smiling visages have become the hyper-real leitmotiv of the bombings in Bali. On the other hand, the Bush administration has sought to downplay the significance of the Abu Ghraib torturers at work arguing that they are no more than evidence of a limited number of undisciplined actions. Unlike photographs of the Bali bombers that allegedly prove their bloodthirsty barbarity, images of US service personnel tell ‘us’ nothing at all about ‘ourselves’, the US, its service personnel or the tactics entailed in waging the war on terror according to the Bush administration. The photographs tell ‘us’ almost nothing and distract ‘our’ attention from the tasks laid down by the war on terror.

In both instances the rush to impose meaning on these perplexing images by powerful interests forecloses upon the possibility of understanding the symbolic communications entailed in these images. This is entirely in keeping
with the character of the war on terror where to ask questions, or to hold the
view that the world does not necessarily turn to us a legible face, is to join
with the ranks of the evil-doers. Perhaps then the photographs tell us rather
more about ‘ourselves’ than we could care to acknowledge.
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