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"All They Understand Is Force": Debating Culture in Operation Iraqi Freedom

ABSTRACT Drawing entirely on public, open sources, in this article I trace the recent development of U.S. military understandings and uses of cultural knowledge. Military education, training, and operations reveal complexity and diversity that demands empirical study. In particular, I locate in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003–present) an internal, critical theoretical disagreement between a model of culture as a static, or slow-moving, property of a constructed "other," embraced by mainstream thought in the U.S. Army, and a competing sense of cultural process as dynamic, interactive, and emergent, emphasized by Special Forces and the Marine Corps. This disagreement feeds off of and into longer-running debates within U.S. military circles, demonstrating that the U.S. military's engagement with the concept of "culture" is far from monolithic: different services' approaches are shaped by their own histories, driving rival emphases on weaponizing culture and culturalizing warriors. [Keywords: U.S. military, culture, acultural, Operation Iraqi Freedom, weaponization]

I
n *100 MYTHS about the Middle East,* Fred Halliday of-fers as myth number 100 that "the only thing people in the Middle East understand is force" (2005:191). Other scholarly critics, too, challenge Western stereotypes about the Arab Muslim world (Little 2002; Said 1978). Stereo-typical thinking, though—whether about "force" or other concepts like "shame" or "fatalism"—has resurfaced with a vengeance, most dramatically in well-documented U.S. intelligence agency efforts to "break" Arab and Muslim de-tainees by violating sexual taboos, ideas of purity and pol-lution, and religious practices to create fear and humili-ation (Danner 2004; Hersh 2004:39; McCoy 2006:89–99, 106; Oliver 2007; Otterman 2007; for insider accounts, see also Lagouranis 2007; Saar 2005:192, 223–228; Yee 2005: 110–126).

Publicity surrounding U.S. interrogation practices at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere has prompted widespread dis-cussion of their intellectual and moral bankruptcy. U.S. anthropologists have taken a leading role, deploring what they have called the "weaponization" of culture and an-thropological know-how to "enhance" interrogation meth-ods, criticizing the unreflective use of essentialized concepts of the "Arab mind" (Patai 1973), and raising concerns over efforts to enlist practicing anthropologists (Gonzalez 2007; Jaschik 2006; Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2007; Price 2002).

Such academic activism is informed by a robust insti-tutional memory of cases in which U.S. military and in-telligence agencies have exploited anthropological insight to harm native populations, most notably in Southeast Asia and Latin America (Jorgensen and Wolf 1970; Wakin 1992). It also represents widespread, principled opposition to the use of lethal force as a means of expansionist for-eign policy and to the growth of the military-industrial complex in U.S. society (Gusterson 2007; Lutz 2002). Im-bued with the spirit of powerful disciplinary ancestors—including Franz Boas's (1919) critique of covert work, Laura Nader's (1972) call to "study up" powerful U.S. institutions, and Kathleen Gough's (1968) statement of principles for ethical practice—this scholarship emphasizes, in Carolyn Nordstrom's terms, that "militaries operate on one single truth: the strategic employment of violence" (Nordstrom 1997:114–115). Or, to put it another way, force is all that militaries understand.

This apparent symmetry between military views of "the Arab mind" and anthropologists' views of "the military mind" drives this article. Taking inspiration from contem-porary critical anthropology, which harnesses empirical ev-idence to deconstruct the essentialisms inherent in hege-monic Western constructions of the "Oriental other," I seek to document the diversity and development of U.S. mil-itary thinking about culture. My interest stems from ear-lier research on U.S. interventions in the former Yugoslavia (Brown 2000; Turregano and Brown 2006). Although I con-sider the invasion of Iraq, in contrast to military inter-vention in the Balkans, practically counterproductive and

morally wrong, I see in both operations evidence of internal debate within the U.S. military over how best to conduct the so-called "three-block war," wherein the edges between the zones of policing and war blur (Krulak 1999; Ron 2000:450).

Beyond Abu Ghraib and whatever twisted thinking its practices index, the U.S. military has not only preached a rhetoric of cultural sensitivity but also made concrete investment in a new infrastructure of predeployment training geared specifically to culture, including simulated villages on military training sites peopled by Arabic-speaking role-players, army-funded computer games designed to teach linguistic and negotiation skills, and new military centers for cultural learning and cultural intelligence.[1]

At least some of these efforts, I suggest, aim not to weaponize culture but to culturalize warriors. In making that claim, I draw a distinction between the use of cultural knowledge by interrogators or airstrike planners to identify and then target vulnerabilities (see, e.g., Woodward 1991:291) and attempts by civil affairs soldiers or peacekeepers to adapt to the fluid contexts of stability operations and counterinsurgency. Where military personnel and civilians are envisaged as potential partners, rather than as actual adversaries, cultural knowledge is cast as constructive rather than intimidatory, as life saving rather than soul destroying. Such thinking does not go unchallenged: nonetheless, it demonstrates the internal diversity and learning capacity of the U.S. military. Closer scholarly consideration of this diversity, I argue, is in line with anthropology's overall concern with the emergent and ambiguous qualities of social and cultural process and has potential to productively shift the debate over anthropology's engagement or nonengagement with the military out of its current starkly adversarial mode.[2]

METHODOLOGY

I have divided this article into three parts and in it draw on media reportage, unclassified military sources, ethnographic and historical work by other scholars of the military, and my own more limited interactions with military personnel. First, drawing on a substantial database of English-language media coverage in for the period 2004–07, I document reported developments in cultural training across different services that signal ongoing internal debates over concepts of "culture" and "culture contact." I identify in particular three approaches to culture taken at different phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom by different elements of the U.S. military, which I call the trait-list model, the negotiation model, and the interactional model. Within military circles, a model of culture as a static, or slow-moving, property of a constructed "other" is, I suggest, under continuous challenge from a competing sense of cultural process as dynamic, interactive, and emergent.

Second, I explore how this disagreement feeds off of and into longer-running debates within U.S. military circles over the use of violence. In this section, I draw largely on sociological and historical accounts of the post–Vietnam

War U.S. military that document how mainstream military thinking has emphasized the importance of projecting images of power and invulnerability intended to coerce submission, rather than seeking to defuse opposition and win cooperation. This approach, although easily viewed as hegemonic, has always been contested from within, by subcultures that formerly self-identified as marginal and that now, in this climate of potential change, claim for themselves the label of "insurgents."[3]

Finally, I argue that discussions of the utility of cultural knowledge constitute a site at which the tensions between different visions of the military's function and future focus. The particular history of the U.S. military's engagement with the concept of "culture" through the multiple phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom is far from monolithic, has been shaped by different services' histories, and constitutes the ground of significant internal debate. I conclude by assessing the shifting balance of power in this debate and the different spaces thus created for anthropological engagement in the period of 2003–07.

FROM SENSITIVITY TO ASTUTENESS: MILITARY PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURAL TRAINING, 2004–07

In early 2004, U.S. media reported that soldiers and Marines deploying to Iraq were receiving *cultural sensitivity training,* which included briefings on religious beliefs, body language, gender roles, and sociopolitical structures. Since then, the discourse has diversified, as elements of the military establishment refer to cultural *knowledge* (Scales 2005), *awareness* (Wunderle 2006), *astuteness* (Petraeus and Amos 2006), and *savvy* (Sappenfield 2006; Stewart 2006:7). The debate to define and operationalize these terms draws on a range of scholarly and applied sources, in which the work of intercultural communication experts occupies a central place (see, e.g., Chen and Starosta 2005; Hofstede 1997). The Marine Corps has led the way in arranging these concepts in a hierarchical order, in which cultural consideration is the most basic form of cultural awareness, rising through cultural knowledge and cultural understanding, and, finally, arriving at cultural competence (Wunderle 2006:11).[4]

Here I do not try to distinguish the referents for these terms but, rather, examine their different discursive properties. The demise of the term *sensitivity,* for example, can be argued to reflect two aspects of internal military debates. First, the word carried associations of other forms of training, especially around issues of racial and gender discrimination occurring within the military, which many personnel in the post–Cold War military derided as products of "political correctness" that threatened the warrior ethos (Gutmann 2000). Second, in a discourse that remained masculinist and heteronormative, the term bore connotations of softness and effeminacy. Its association with preparation for peacekeeping rather than combat only stigmatized the term further, because the skill set of peacekeeping, which demands nuance, restraint, and negotiation, has been

similarly categorized within the U.S. military as feminine and therefore unmilitary or civilian (Burke 2004:183; Gutmann 2000:282–283; Lutz 2001:219–220; Rubinstein 2003:17–18).

The impression that the changing nomenclature is largely a question of branding is strengthened when one considers the content of the training between 2004 and 2007. Much remained unchanged in the ways military personnel are introduced to the unfamiliar manners of Iraqis, which are often laid out in a list of behaviors, beliefs, or traits. A handout from a Marine Corps course in late 2003 and from a training course at Fort Huachuca in April of 2006, for example, offered much of the same advice: that the U.S. "OK" sign is offensive in the Arab world, and that troops should always accept offers of hospitality, should not inquire after the well-being of female household members, and should not mistake man-on-man handholding among Iraqis for homosexuality (Alaimo 2006; *Harper's Magazine* 2004). Wallet-sized "Culture Smart Cards," with lists entitled "Don't do this" and "Do this," were issued to U.S. troops in Iraq in 2005 and Afghanistan in 2006, and more extensive "fact sheets" are also a part of briefings and planning (Nuti 2006; Schmidt 2006; U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC] 2006).

DECODING TRAIT LISTS: FEET, BOOTS, AND INDUSTRIAL LOGIC

On these lists, one "don't" has become emblematic: soldiers and marines should never show Iraqis the soles of their feet. Anecdotal evidence, from memoirs as well as journalistic coverage, suggests that this admonition sticks in the minds of learners (see, e.g., Buzzell 2005:63–64; Smithers 2006:155; Spangler 2003) as well as providing a handy example for journalists. Ostensibly about Iraqi culture, this rule's sticking power can also be explained by the symbolic resonance of feet, and boots, in military life. From Achilles' heel onward, feet are frequent casualties—to trenchfoot, frostbite, self-inflicted wounds, and I.E.D.s, any of which propel the soldier out of combat, thereby demilitarizing him. By contrast, the boot militarizes the civilian: not just through "boot camp" (Da Cruz 1987) but also with its freight of aggressive meaning. Nowhere is this clearer than in oral testimony and documentary footage of U.S. soldiers' conducting house searches in Iraq in 2003–04. Soldiers kicked down doors, tramped into women's sleeping quarters, and restrained men, even if compliant, by forcing them—at times with booted feet on necks—to lie face down on the ground (Olds and Scott 2005; Shadid 2003).

Boots, in this context, leave an impression, embodying the "blunt, Army-style personal confrontation" (Komarow 2004) of early Iraqi "stability operations," when thinly stretched U.S. forces relied on intimidation tactics to try to snuff out resistance. More broadly, such force projection, often coupled with the use of firepower, was a response to the tactics employed by Iraqi irregular defense forces,

the Fedayeen, who wore no uniforms and used homes, mosques, hospitals, and civilians themselves as cover in their attacks.[5] The results, combined with nascent anti-Arab racism, were ugly and deadly: one senior officer of the Fourth Infantry Division told journalists "the only thing these sand niggers understand is force and I'm about to introduce them to it" (Gordon and Trainor 2006:447; see also Filkins 2003; Ricks 2006:232–233). The violence in Fallujah, by most accounts, was sparked when soldiers from the 82nd Airborne shot and killed demonstrators in March 2003.

In Congressional hearings in mid-2004, Samir Shehata from the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown testified to the negative impact of aggressive tactics in Iraq, stating that "every house raid turns a whole street against us; every wrongful detention, a neighborhood; every casualty, an extended family" (U.S. House of Representatives 2004:73). Within the military, the Marine Corps led the push for new tactics that would replace heavy-handedness with "patience and subtlety" (Komarow 2004; see also Jacobs 2004; Saunders 2004). Marine officers openly criticized the Fourth Infantry Division and the 82nd Airborne (Gordon and Trainor 2006:447; Mazzetti 2004; Ricks 2006:312), and when Marine units were scheduled to take over Fallujah from the 82nd Airborne in late March 2004, they planned to devote funds to reconstruction and operate in small detachments, based among Iraqis. Marines were given basic Arabic lessons and encouraged to grow mustaches, in the hope that this would enable them to build rapport more effectively (Kaplan 2005:313; Ricks 2006:314). Micromanagerially, they were also instructed to show "deference" in house searches; more specifically, they were told that the feet or soles of feet are considered unclean by Arabs and, therefore, that "placing a detainee on the ground or putting a foot on him implies you are God. This is one of the worst things we can do" (*Harper's Magazine* 2004).[6]

Although some in the military and media dubbed the Marine approach absurd or naive, all its elements were drawn from prior experience. The initiative to base Marines cheek by jowl with Iraqi units recalled the Marine Combined Action Platoons of the Vietnam era (Mazzetti 2004; Peterson 1989; Ricks 2006:314), whereas the mustache growing was a trick borrowed from Special Forces during the First Gulf War (Simons 1997:11).[7] The concern with the insult presented by the soles of the feet can be traced to briefings given to U.S. troops deployed to Saudi Arabia in 1991, as well as to Somalia in 1992 (English 1991; Flint 2001:249 n. 29; see also Jonsson 2002), and was also buttressed by anthropologists and regional experts who confirmed that feet, and footwear, carry this meaning (Weeks 2003).

That said, the U.S. military's attribution of foot fixation to Saudis, Kuwaitis, Somalis, and Iraqis reveals more about U.S. perceptions than "reality." Its first effect is to create a fictive, homogenous, and predictable culture that

I here call "MEMAI." I use this acronym, from the initials of Middle Easterners–Muslims–Arabs (or Africans)–Iraqis, as shorthand for a syncretic construct combining regional, religious, racial, and national elements that underlay early cultural training for Iraq. It was via this construct that culturally inflected and self-conscious expressions of insult, anger, or protest—Iraqis using their shoes to beat on a statue of Saddam Hussein or throwing sandals at 82nd Airborne soldiers who had killed protestors the day before—were taken as evidence for a larger and wholly different claim: that those same Iraqis would automatically react negatively to U.S. military personnel showing them the soles of their feet, deliberately or no. However, lumping together indistinguishable members of MEMAI culture as indistinguishably concerned with a symbolic realm of (religiously based) pollution also presumes a world of predetermined yet irrational attitudes and of reversible overreactions on the part of an entire people. "They," the view goes, can take irredeemable affront at a simple gesture and can be appeased by a simple behavior modification. Both moves recognizably derive from the discourse of orientalism catalogued in the 1970s and subsequently traced in U.S. views of the Middle East (Little 2002; Said 1978).

So, too, invoking culture and religion to "explain" predictable Iraqi reactions seems to represent classically orientalist reasoning on the part of the Marine briefing's author. A skeptic might ask whether one really needs intermediary concepts of "honor," "shame," "face," or "fervent religious belief" to understand why a householder might be offended or provoked by having a boot placed on his neck. One effect of introducing such a concept is to portray as alien—read "culturally driven"—some Iraqi reactions that a soldier or Marine might otherwise find intelligible or normal. And the effect of that, in turn, is to maintain the vision of the U.S. military's own operations—including house searches, detentions, and roadblocks—as tactical imperatives, in and of themselves nonoffensive. Marked as demonstrations of U.S. "practical reason," they are cast as putatively acultural (Sahlins 1976).

Viewed critically in these terms, it could be argued that cultural sensitivity training could have the opposite effect of that which ostensibly drives it. Encountering the curious ways of others can serve as an impetus to recognize the arbitrary nature of one's own commonsense assumptions: Why should, for example, a raised middle finger constitute an insult? Or, in Marshall Sahlins's classic explanation of Western hierarchies of domestic animals, by what cultural complex are dogs allowed on the furniture (and never, ever, eaten)? (Sahlins 1976:169–177). But trait lists of the kind found in these briefings and documents appear instead to have served to legitimate and naturalize the beliefs and practices with which they are in implicit contrast: those of the U.S. military, which are thereby rendered as acultural and normal. For many U.S. personnel, such lists combined with strong visual, aural, and especially olfactory impressions of Iraq as fundamentally other not only in space

but also in time. As Laura Nader notes, this sense of pastness generates in turn an overemphasis on Islam, and the Koran in particular, as key to unlocking the particularities of people's conduct (Atiyeh 1977:184) and drives a particular focus on "sheikhs" and "tribes" as the "real," "traditional," and enduring structure of Iraqi society.

Further, trait lists and the consequent construction of MEMAI culture as rule driven, static, and therefore legible can also be seen as a function of the industrial logic of modern military training. Training manuals, memoirs, and firsthand accounts make clear how skill sets—whether unarmed combat, stripping and cleaning a weapon, loading ammunition pouches, reading a map, or establishing radio communications—are broken down into their most basic subroutines. The goal is for such operations to become second nature, so that they can be executed swiftly and accurately under the stress of combat: the pedagogical principle is that repetition builds muscle memory (for the application of this principle to killing, see Bourke 1999:86ff.). The approach to cultural training described briefly above conforms to this model, in that it breaks down a fully known, external, and mechanistic subject ("Arab culture and behavior") into readily digestible and memorizable chunks. In the process, it recasts a complex sociocultural order, continuously reshaped by power politics, into an aggregation of atomized yet deindividualized rule followers, marching sluggishly through the centuries.

CELEBRATIONS AND ROADBLOCKS: CULTURE IN TRAFFIC

Commentators have stressed the production-line, Fordist quality of such training and emphasize its origins in the modern, industrial age. We can extend the metaphor of industrial logic to other aspects of U.S. operations, where they proved incompatible with the circumstances of contemporary conflict. Interrogation techniques, for example, were derived from Cold War operating procedures designed to handle large numbers of Soviet prisoners of war: if a subject did not "break" quickly, an interrogator could apply the same techniques to a new prisoner who might. The approach proved useless in situations where a group of so-called "high-value" prisoners were held together for an extended period (Mackey and Miller 2004:45, 180). Similarly, the "briefing" approach to cultural sensitivity appeared to envisage most contacts occurring in what social scientists would call "traffic relationships": that is, fleeting, one-off interactions between strangers (Wirth 1938).

Conceived as a metaphor for the kind of urban encounters of industrialization, the "traffic" relationship in fact described many early U.S–Iraqi encounters quite literally. An early example can be found in a June 2003 incident where Fourth Infantry Division soldiers shot up a truck, killing or wounding 13 unarmed teenagers who were part of a wedding party, other members of which had been engaging in "celebratory gunfire" (Clover 2003). Other memoirists and

journalists described cases where civilians were killed by U.S. troops after being judged a threat or getting caught in crossfire (Brown and Lutz 2007; see also Enders 2005:80–81, 103–104). Key sites for lethal interactions are roadblocks, which are frequently set up by U.S. troops as part of their efforts to interdict the movement of weapons and catch "bad guys" but at which innocent civilians are frequently victims (Bender 2006). Rules of Engagement issued to soldiers, as well as the demands of force protection, not only permitted but also compelled deadly force against vehicles that do not stop when ordered: as one Marine General put it, "You don't have the right not to shoot" (Ricks 2006: 361).

Celebratory gunfire, or a car failing to stop as it approaches a roadblock, are inherently "kinetic" situations, as bullets or vehicles are in motion, posing a threat to U.S. Forces.[8] But U.S. military personnel, from general to grunt, recognize the need for something beyond a kinetic response. They are also aware that what I call above "trait-list based understandings of culture" may be useless or worse. Before taking command, General Petraeus acknowledged that unwillingness to stop at roadblocks might be not a product of misunderstanding but of reasoned reaction to overall insecurity: U.S. troops are not the only men with guns flagging down cars; kidnappers and militia do the same (Petraeus 2006:46); therefore, merely getting the hand signal right for "stop" will not fix the problem. Soldiers also report frustration at official tolerance of celebratory gunfire out of respect for Iraqi "gun culture," arguing instead for a crackdown, based implicitly on practical reason, against Iraqi civilians owning and discharging weapons (Tucker 2005:66, 163).

SOLATIA AND *DIYA*: CULTURE, CONDOLENCE, AND NEGOTIATION

Death and destruction in house searches and roadblocks led to a further level of cultural engagement beyond anticipated "one-off" encounters, centered on negotiating values and meanings. In the case of "hard" house searches, for example, some commanders sent "soft" follow-up teams to offer financial compensation and thus repair damaged civil–military relations. This was in keeping with military doctrine regarding *solatia,* which are defined as payments "made in accordance with local custom to express remorse or sympathy" (U.S. Government Accounting Office [US-GAO] 2007; Masterton 2005:51). Such payments are used by the U.S military in Korea (where up to $5,000 may be paid for a civilian death), and they were formally authorized for use in Iraq and Afghanistan (with a maximum of $2,500 per death) in November 2004 by army lawyers. Before that date, the Air Force had had jurisdiction and ruled that Iraq had no similar "local custom" to warrant solatia: army unit commanders had nevertheless offered what they called "solatia-like" payments (Ford 2004:36; see also McCarthy 2003).[9]

The case of condolence payments in Iraq thus demonstrates both a history of military theory and practice regarding cultural attitudes toward fiscal compensation for personal losses and interservice differences in assessment of where and when such compensation is culturally appropriate. In parallel, and further blurring the lines between U.S. military doctrine that acknowledges "local custom" and indigenous reconciliation practices, some commanders sought to brand their payments as equivalent to *diya,* "blood money" given as compensation for an accidental killing, a concept tied to systems of interclan relationship in Middle Eastern history (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993:9). Although Iraqi demands were reportedly refused in the June 2003 Samarra shooting described above (Clover 2003), by September 2003 payments were being offered that were processed as solatia but presented to Iraqis as diya (Hendawi 2003); diya was also later included in an armywide handbook on Arab Cultural Awareness (TRADOC 2006).

Such attempts to harness knowledge of local cultural institutions represent a clear move beyond trait lists. Although still "defensive" in orientation, this approach acknowledges culture not as static agglomerations of ideas and behaviors but as functioning systems, with their own mechanisms of crisis management. As such, in contrast to the predictably legible model of MEMAI culture, it recognizes that similar scenarios may have different outcomes. It also, arguably, embeds culture not in the "mind" but in institutions maintained over generations. It therefore reflects what one anthropologist specializing in negotiation has called "cultural competency," with the same relationship to "etiquette lists" as knowledge of grammar has to knowledge of vocabulary (Avruch 2004). Kevin Avruch argues that cross-cultural negotiators need to do more than simply provide "correct" responses, as this simplifies and arguably deindividualizes counterparts by imagining them as mechanical rule followers who will somehow be mollified by mechanical rule following. The would-be communicator needs to understand the fluidities involved within institutions.

The U.S. military's effort to map solatia onto diya, a locally recognizable system of compensation, demonstrates both how tricky cultural negotiation remains and also the tendency of those who attempt it to slide back into more familiar attitudes. Besides questions over the appropriate amount to be paid for various victims of U.S. firepower—which serve to blur lines between dignified negotiation and unseemly haggling—diya is far more socially embedded than the U.S. military concept of "solatia." Diya payments historically operated as a form of communication between existential equals—different families or clans—and could, over time, be given in both directions, thus cementing an egalitarian ethos. With solatia, the U.S. government is always in the position of giver rather than recipient. Payments can therefore be perceived as attempting to "buy off" relatives, as it is always U.S. treasure (and, observably, somewhat small amounts of it, suggesting a rather low value

attached to Iraqi lives) that is exchanged for Iraqi blood. Such impressions are strengthened when U.S. personnel assume that the condolence payment represents closure for its recipients. This attitude, again, reflects a style of thought that privileges practical reason over culture and pays insufficient attention to the latter's systemic properties (Joseph 2007) as well as its own hidden cultural preconceptions.

WASTA AND RAPPORT: CULTURE, IMMERSION, AND INTERACTION

A third form of cultural engagement over the course of Operation Iraqi Freedom is described in a 2006 *Washington Post* article in which a Special Forces sergeant reports that the "real battles . . . are unfolding 'in a sheikh's house, squatting in the desert eating with my right hand and smoking Turkish cigarettes and trying to influence tribes to rise up against an insurgency" (Scott Tyson 2006). He laments, by contrast, the "predictable tactics" of the army battalion to which his team was attached, which once included detaining Iraqis with whom the team had been working closely. A similar approach, emphasizing close contact with Iraqis, was often taken by Civil Affairs teams (until recently, part of Special Forces Command). In one documented case, a Civil Affairs team walked to lunch in a local restaurant while regular combat troops were either in lockdown or driving around in full-force protection posture (Schultheis 2005:99).

The Special Forces teams described here were committed to building relationships with local counterparts. In the 2006 case, they did so through the Arabic idiom of *wasta,* which receives next to no attention in the cultural training literature described above. Translated by one journalist as "pull," but more correctly as "middle," wasta are the Arabic world's correlates to ostensibly informal yet carefully and culturally choreographed mechanisms of reciprocal exchange familiar in anthropological literature.[10] Built through extended social interaction, wasta are dynamic, reciprocal relationships, maintained by the flow of goods and services between individuals or families. Anthropologists have stressed the affective and instrumental dimensions to these relationships, as well as the central importance attached to them by members of societies in which they serve such a vital function.

Here and elsewhere within the U.S. military, one can trace recognition of the interactional, dynamic nature of culture as process and a commitment to engage in that process. In addition to the cases of Special Forces teams drinking tea and building rapport and connections with local actors, there are reports of U.S. personnel's willingness to work on "Iraqi time" instead of maintaining U.S. efficiency (Schultheis 2005:150) and of individual officers being granted the title of sheikh (King 2006:182; McFate 2005:25). Such developments, taking place through iterated interactions, suggest progress toward acknowledgment of social commensurability between roles of Americans and Iraqis, which operated even along lines of apparent distinction. Colonel Alan King, a U.S Civil Affairs officer who

worked closely with Iraqi sheikhs, made no secret of his Christian faith but also drew on his knowledge of the Koran in conversation (and, at times, harangues) through which he established his bona fides as a social being. In his memoir, he acknowledges that such "thick" engagement sometimes generated negative reactions but argues that this is a dimension of a meaningful relationship (King 2006).

KINETICS VERSUS EMPATHY: CULTURE AND THE MILITARY MIND

U.S. troops in Iraq, then, engage with issues of Arabic, Muslim, or Iraqi culture in a number of different modalities, of which some clearly reveal orientalist roots, and others appear more reflexive. As suggested above, in the discussion of Marine and Special Forces criticism of "big army" tactics, these different forms of engagement are tied to cultural differences among branches of the U.S. military. Although the civilian–military distinction in the United States remains important—and, if anything, has gained in salience since the introduction of the all-volunteer force (Huntington 1957; Kaplan 2005)—the existence of distinct schools of thought about culture within the military is not simply a reflection of petty Freudian differences but, rather, marks enduring divisions.

A key fault line relates to explanations of the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War. In a seminal work, Andrew Krepinevich suggests that among career officers the defeat was interpreted as a result of civilian mismanagement and lack of will (Krepinevich 1988; see also Middleton 1982). General Westmoreland famously advocated unfettered use of the full arsenal of the United States to annihilate the enemy, an approach reportedly thwarted by Secretary McNamara's strategy of "graduated response." The next generation of army leaders inherited the view that firepower, delivered by high-technology weapons systems, was the key to U.S. victory and that their forces could only be defeated by their own faint-hearted civilian leadership. Such views were not conducive to thinking seriously about counterinsurgency, a concept that disappeared from army doctrinal manuals (Nagl 2005).

Westmoreland—who maintained that "meaningful force" was "the only language they [the North Vietnamese] understood" (1976:120)—still epitomizes the U.S. military for many outsiders. Two branches of the service, though, gained a reputation for viewing the recent past in contrarian fashion. The Marine Corps, as noted above, had deployed Combined Action Platoons in Vietnamese villages, which gained knowledge of the local terrain, patrolled or ambushed regularly, trained, and lived among the locals— and, by so doing, built security. This was a core tactic in the "inkspot" theory of counterinsurgency, which saw "hearts and minds," as well as cultural sensitivity, as important and built connections from the village up (Peterson 1989:43–46). Although continuously undermined by Westmoreland during Vietnam, the Marine Corps preserved its

institutional memory and drew on this legacy in planning for Iraq in 2004.

The commitment to trusting, training, and empowering local forces also constituted the original mission of the U.S. Army Special Forces, as set out by President John F. Kennedy in his effort to increase U.S. capacity in counterinsurgency. Although Special Forces' "strike force" capacity attracted more attention, their core competency was training U.S. allies in foreign countries, adopting local dress and weaponry where necessary (Simons 1997). Those characteristics earned them the nickname "snake-eaters," as well as profound suspicion from "big army," in which "decorum" and "bearing" are all important (Sherman 2005). The greater autonomy and egalitarianism of Special Forces detachments sparked criticism of their willingness to "go native" or "freelance," threatening the hierarchical order on which the army depends.

As in the aftermath of Vietnam, the U.S. military focused on the Soviet enemy and emphasized large-unit fire and maneuver capability, and Special Forces were systematically reduced in size and its officers largely shut out of promotion to staff rank (Donnelly 1985; Thomas 1986). The Marine Corps, meanwhile, remained subject to the Navy and was consistently underfunded. As early as the mid-1980s, though, President Reagan's interventionist policy in Latin America drove the resurgence of Special Forces, as the military was increasingly tasked with missions where political factors demanded something other than full weight of arms.[11] The end of the Cold War accelerated the demand, as a number of terms were used for such missions, including *Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC), Support and Stability Operations (SASO),* and *Operations Other Than War* ([OOTW]; see Bolger 1995). Marine generals were at the fore in recognizing that the new challenges facing the U.S. armed forces in a world where the conflicts they were dealing with were asymmetrical and—as in the Vietnam War—tactical victories, through the role of media and by the rules by which an unconventional adversary played, were often strategic defeats (Krulak 1999; Zinni 1994; see also Priest 2003).

"Big army," as well as the Air Force and the Navy, continued to resist this message, in ways that became glaringly obvious during U.S. military deployment to Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In Haiti, in particular, first-hand accounts highlighted the gulf between "America's two armies"—the regular forces, increasingly cocooned within large bases, and the Special Forces A teams, living cheek by jowl with Haitian security forces they were attempting to "stand up" (Shacochis 1999). In Bosnia, where U.S. forces operated alongside NATO allies, a similar dichotomy was manifest. "Big army" units were instructed to adopt a deliberate intimidatory approach and present the U.S. contingent as "the meanest dog on the block" (Baumann et al. 2004:128). Force protection was so highly stressed that, in contravention of policy on bases elsewhere in the world, soldiers ate their meals fully armed and armored. U.S. Special Forces, by contrast, had embraced other national contingents' approaches of "social patrolling," designed to foster a sense of normalcy and shared security, perhaps involving a stop for coffee and informal conversation with locals. The ironic result was that U.S. Special Forces would put on body armor when entering the apparent safety of U.S. bases, rather than when leaving (Baumann et al. 2004:134). The clash between Special Forces and the regular U.S. Army boiled down to different views on the achieving progress: Special Forces regarded the creation of distance as undermining the mission, whereas army commanders insisted that the distance served the needs of force protection (Baumann et al.:204; see also Kaplan 2005:159).

CONCLUSION: OF CULTURE, CULTURES, AND CULTURE CONTACT

These differences, dating back to Vietnam, remain apparent in operations in Iraq. A powerful lobby remains committed to fighting short, decisive wars at a distance, utilizing U.S. technological superiority to break enemy will. This was the mindset embraced by civilian leadership in the White House and the Pentagon in 2003 and shared by many soldiers and marines, all of whom anticipated a rapid withdrawal of U.S. troops from intimate contact with the Iraqi population and a reestablishment of a clear distinction between military and civilian domains. Even after the explicit U.S. occupation and the continuing large-scale military deployment, the legacy of this approach remained. Opportunities for encounters with Iraqi citizens were minimized by the creation of big bases staffed mostly by third country nationals (TCNs), offering food, amenities, entertainment, and (ideally) security that mimicked life in the United States (e.g., Hastings 2008:95). Patrols from such bases emphasize force protection and have only fleeting contact with locals. Culture, in this philosophy, is envisaged as spatially elsewhere, out in what U.S. soldiers still call "Indian country" (Kaplan 2005:8). And conceptually, too, culture is externalized, fraught with mission-polluting power that is best managed through essentialization, reduction, and codification.

But emerging alongside this view of culture, one can trace military recognition of the interactional, dynamic nature of culture as process and a commitment to engage in that process. U.S. units and commanders operating in this mold have, in different deployments, used emergency funds to provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance and have also sought to foster more interaction between soldiers and local communities by basing troops in neighborhoods instead of large, fortresslike redoubts. This approach has its roots in counterinsurgency theory, where the critical point is to make links with local populations. The basis for those links, though, is meshing soldiers and Marines into the local fabric of life so that they come to share experiences (whether in of the form of enduring electricity shortages or eating food or drinking coffee) and, in the process, promote a sense of normalcy. It is an approach

for the long haul, which does not reify a frozen image of MEMAI culture as something to be acted on from outside; rather, it creates channels of exchange that, arguably, soften the hard edges of cultural exceptionalism and stereotypical thinking.

I have, self-evidently, pulled out and juxtaposed two strands from an ongoing struggle within the U.S. military to conceptualize culture. The stakes are high: the two approaches envisage very different methods as key to success and demand different kinds of training and procurement. But the fact that they can be identified, and that the debate is now apparent, signals that it is misleading to cast U.S. military culture as singular or static. In particular, I hope to have shown that although heirs to General Westmoreland exist (see, e.g., Dunlap 2008), their single-minded focus on the optimal application of destructive force against alien enemies has always been challenged. The experience of military personnel in the diverse missions of the 1990s—including, in Bosnia and Kosovo, serving alongside foreign militaries with different traditions—and the longer legacies of Marine and Special Forces efforts to find common ground with foreign allies drives current interest in partnership building as part of the military's skill set. The concept of "culture"—as exploitable, discardable tool or as shared resource—is a key site at which this disagreement plays out.

Does the evidence of internal diversity and contestation have implications for anthropologists? In an insightful review article, Eyal Ben-Ari notes that anthropological study of the U.S. military appears "morally tainted," especially insofar as the debate has centered around the ethics of helping soldiers understand "the other" (2004:340, 345; see also Rubinstein 2003:16). It is clearly an important scholarly task to highlight the inherent contradictions involved when an institution that was built on industrial lines to efficiently deliver lethal violence against the nation's enemies is tasked with peacekeeping and nation-building—both drawing funding away from civilian agencies as its domain expands and also coming to represent a privileged, near-unitary site of patriotism and service (Lutz 2001, 2002; see also Kennedy 2004:235–323). Such system-level analyses represent a form of sophisticated engagement that nonetheless leaves space for overessentialized views of a singular military mindset.

Even after one distinguishes the military from the civilian-led Pentagon, the "other government agency" (the CIA), and the range of contractors operating in Iraq, from Blackwater's mostly First World mercenaries to KBR's (formerly Kellogg, Brown and Root's) underdocumented Third World service personnel, one is still confronted with diversity among different divisions of the U.S. Army, the Marine Corps, and Special Forces. Within these different groupings, some dismiss culture altogether; others treat it as something to be acted on, whether to kill more effectively or reduce killing; and still others recognize culture as context to be acted within. This institutional and attitudinal diversity is flattened in any anthropological discourse that insists on the monolithic dimensions of a fictively singular "security"

culture, in which, if one scratches hard enough, everyone in uniform hides an inner Westmoreland, bent on killing (or torturing) their way to victory. Apparent efforts at reform or initiatives that might subvert once-dominant paradigms can easily be dismissed as superficial, inauthentic, or naive when one knows that, deep down, force is all they understand. But insofar as anthropology retains its commitment to harness empirical evidence to deconstruct essentialism, such morally tinged certainty about the military "other" demands some interrogation of its own.

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NOTES

1. On the growth of simulated Iraqi villages on U.S. bases in Texas, California, Louisiana, and Arizona, see Filkins and Burns 2006; Gonzalez 2006; Jacobs 2004; Mueller 2006; Spangler 2003; and Squires 2006. Fort Huachuca is a key center for Special Forces, who have been at the forefront of arguments supporting the need for cultural awareness training. The Marine Corps Headquarters at Quantico, VA, hosted two differently oriented initiatives in the cultural field: the Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Learning (CAOCL), which offers training to units deploying to Iraq, and the Center for Cultural Intelligence. Besides these two, TRADOC and the Air University in Alabama have also developed initiatives to address the importance of understanding cultural difference.

2. In this regard, my goals in this article align with those expressed in Peacock et al. 2007:24.

3. I noticed in particular the repeated "off-line" self-referential usage of this term by Marine advocates of cultural understanding at a conference entitled "Pedagogy for the Long War: Teaching Irregular Warfare," held between October 29 and November 1, 2008, at the Marine Corps Base at Quantico. For a discussion of similar appropriation of, and ambivalence around, the term within military discourse, see Lutz 2001:95–99.

4. Although Wunderle uses the term *competence*, drawing on the work of the U.S. Marine Corps Cultural Awareness Working Group's "cognitive hierarchy," the military debate makes virtually no reference to the discussion within the U.S. medical profession over "cultural competency" described by Taylor (2003). See, however, the discussion of how Avruch's (2004) definition of that term fits some military practice.

5. In this regard, the course of U.S. military reactions bears some resemblance with that of the German military in Belgium in 1914. Frustrated soldiers focused on the *franc-tireur*—a treacherous, deceitful enemy operating in civilian guise—as the cause of difficulties they faced, and the result was distrust and aggression toward the civilian population, culminating in documented atrocities (Horne and Kramer 2001).

6. An alternative mode of dealing with the problem of the boot's impurity, which also cropped up when soldiers needed to enter mosques, was identified by the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL). The center suggested that troops could don surgical bootees over their combat boots in mosques, an interesting cross-cultural gesture of using health service standards of hygiene to address issues of symbolic purity (CALL 2004).

7. The precise rationale for growing mustaches remains slightly opaque. It has been a mark of Special Forces that they are more relaxed with regard to hair length and facial hair than the rest of the U.S. military, which makes the Marine adoption of this tactic still more striking. One Marine briefing claims that the amount of facial hair is considered directly proportional to religious faith (*Harper's Magazine* 2004), whereas elsewhere the argument has been advanced that Iraqis consider being clean-shaven a mark of youth, and in a culture where respect aggregates with age, Marine commanders may have wanted to give their young troops gravitas. When the Marines at Fallujah were ordered to assault the city in early April 2004, in violation of their preferred approach, commanders ordered their troops to shave off their mustaches—a signal to them, and to Iraqis, of a return to a direct approach (Kaplan 2005:348).

8. Widespread testimony indicates that U.S. military personnel also shoot to kill people on foot. The prevalence of Improvised Explosive Devices (I.E.D.s) triggered wirelessly and suicide-bombing attacks have expanded the domain of perceived "kinetic" threat to almost any human movement: answering a cell phone, clenching a fist, reaching into a pocket, or walking too close to U.S. personnel.

9. Some unclarity persists over distinctions between solatia and condolence payments that the General Accounting Office formally distinguishes (USGAO 2007:13).

10. Other journalists of the conflict translate the term as "an in" or "personal connections" (Chandrasekaran 2004; Shadid 2004). Although the parallels are not exact, Arabic *wasta* share family resemblances with Chinese *guanxi,* South Slavic *veze* or *vrski,* Albanian *lidhjet,* or Russian *vzaimopomoshch'* and their acknowledgedly illicit correlate, *blat* (see, e.g., Kipnis 1997; Lonkila 1997).

11. For many critics, this period was marked by U.S. civilian and military willingness not just to tolerate human rights abuses by allies but also to offer counterinsurgency training that encouraged such abuses (Gill 2004; Nelson-Pallmeyer 2001).

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