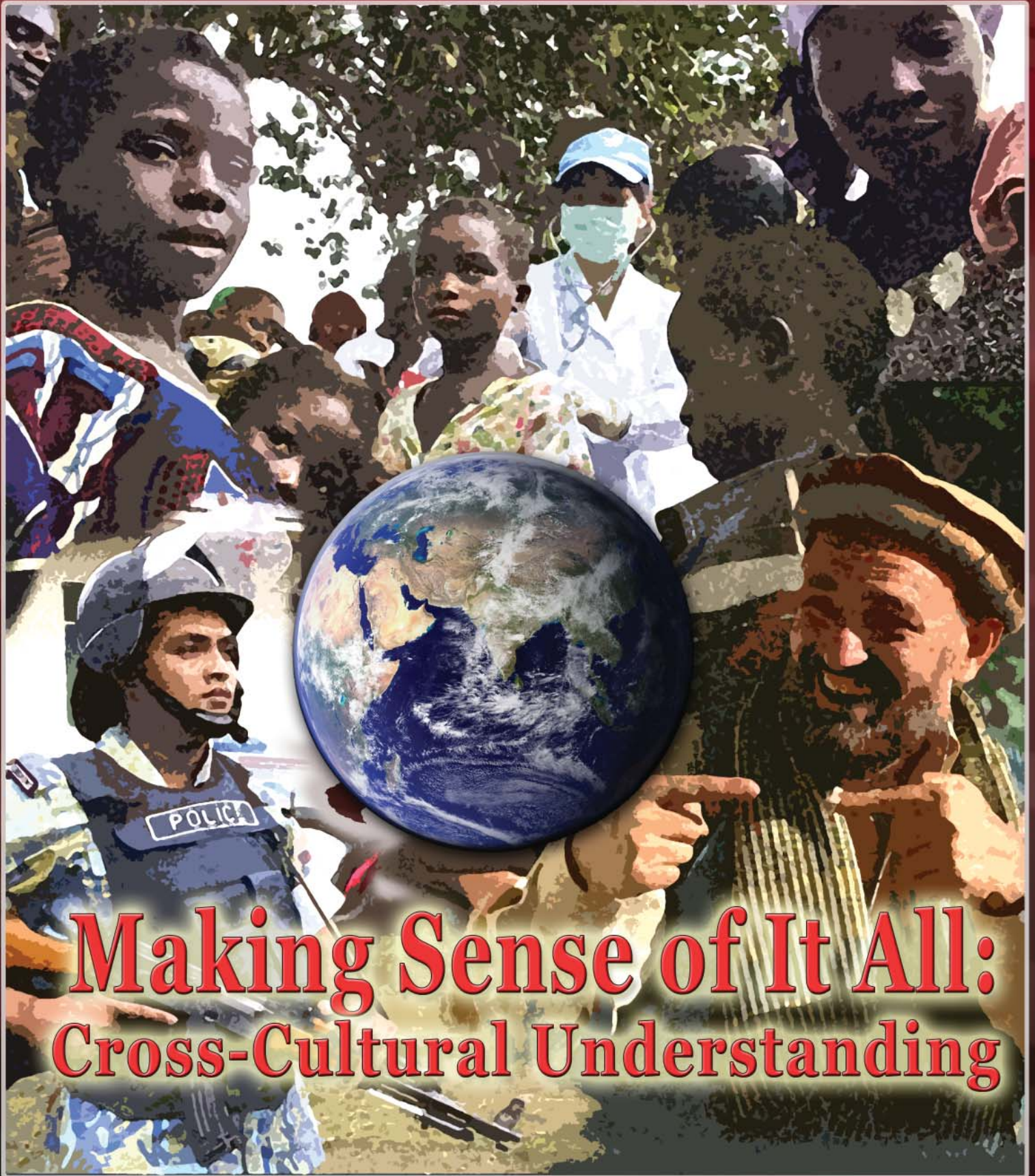


Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies



Making Sense of It All: Cross-Cultural Understanding

September 9th-12th, 2007 • Monterey, CA



Naval Postgraduate School

The Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies



The Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies (CSRS) is a teaching institute which develops and hosts educational programs for stabilization and reconstruction practitioners operating around the globe. Established by the Naval Postgraduate School in 2004 through the vision and congressional support of Congressman Sam Farr (CA-17), CSRS creates a wide array of programs to foster

dialogue among practitioners, as well as help them develop new strategies and refine best practices to improve the effectiveness of their important global work.

Located at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, CSRS also contributes to the university's research and graduate degree programs. For more information about CSRS, its philosophy, and programs, please visit www.nps.edu/csrs.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Why Is Culture Important?	3
When a Name is More than a Name.....	6
How Cultural Carriers Transmit Meaning	6
The Culture and Conflict Link	17
Implementing Cultural Concepts and Tools	19
Conclusion	21
Event Participants	23
Facilitator Biography.....	24

Writing and editing by Holly Larson of Scribble Studio, LLC. Layout and graphics by David Bilotto of dlbDesign. Cover design by Jesse Darling. Photography by Igor Borovac. Course evaluation by Dr. Ann Igoe.

Copyright © 2007 Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies. All rights reserved. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Naval Postgraduate School, the US Defense Department, or any other agency.

Executive Summary

Making Sense of It All: Cross-Cultural Understanding was designed to help participants explore culture at both a cognitive and experiential level. Through presentations, simulations, and group discussions, participants explored culture as an individual and collective experience, began developing cultural fluency, and investigated the role between culture and conflict.

Matthew Vaccaro
Program Director
Center for Stabilization
and Reconstruction
Studies

Dr. Tatsushi Arai
Assistant Professor
School for International
Training

How do you study and discuss an issue as complex and all-encompassing as culture? How does culture impact societal structure? How does culture affect conflict? And how can stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) practitioners use cultural insights and tools to improve their work in the field, from strengthening relationships to preventing or defusing conflict?

These important questions confronted participants of *Making Sense of It All: Cross-Cultural Understanding*, an intensive workshop on cross-cultural learning and communications held by the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies (CSRS) and facilitated by Dr. Tatsushi Arai, an Assistant Professor at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. The event was held in Monterey, California, September 9-12, 2007.

Human interaction is shaped by culture. As both an individual and a collective experience, culture can influence a simple verbal exchange between two people or motivate the actions of an entire people. It serves as a national and ethnic signifier: a reservoir of common symbology, stories, and rituals; a source

of shared identity and pride; and a means to differentiate one group from another. Cultural misunderstandings can provoke misunderstandings or lead to violence, including ethnic divides, hate crimes, and genocide. From Rwanda to Iraq to Darfur, recent history is rife with examples of ethnic violence where cultural differences fueled a sense of “otherness” and helped contribute to conflict. In the words of Dr. Arai, “Culture is like a fever. Fever alone doesn’t kill people, but can exacerbate illness. Similarly, cultural differences can

Learning Objectives

- Understand the deep-rooted cultural influences that shape one’s ways of thinking and behavior.
- Learn how to make sense of cultural differences experienced, either consciously or unconsciously, in professional activities.
- Explore diverse approaches to transforming cultural differences into opportunities for constructive relationship building, especially in communities divided by violent conflict.

polarize people and deepen divisions between communities, justifying and fueling violent conflict.” While the exact role of culture in these and other conflicts can, and should, be debated, no one doubts that it is a significant contributor.

Making Sense of It All was designed to explore culture at both a cognitive and experiential level, introducing key concepts and frameworks, helping practitioners understand and adopt a mindset of cultural fluency, and providing tools for conflict fieldwork. The workshop used presentations, simulations, and group discussions to help practitioners gain familiarity with new concepts and use them in real-world situations such as a cross-cultural dialogue, a hostage crisis, and a post-genocide restoration and reparations negotiation. The event was designed to be accessible and useful to practitioners working in all areas of stabilization and reconstruction, including peace operations, security sector reform, humanitarian assistance, and sustainable development activities. Dr. Arai used a curriculum he has developed in his work as an academician, researcher and conflict worker in East Asia, Middle East, Africa, and the United States.

The event brought together 34 representatives of the four communities that work in S&R environments: US and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), government civilian agencies, and the armed forces. While CSRS events usually draw a good mix of practitioners, this event was unique in that it drew a wider cross-section of the armed forces than ever before. Military participants included warfighters, educators, and policymakers. The breadth of military participation, as well as the presence of other S&R communities, underscored the industry’s growing realization that cultural fluency can help practitioners deepen working relationships and improve their effectiveness as they live and work in post-conflict environments around the globe.

Culture is like a fever. Fever alone doesn’t kill people, but can exacerbate illness. Similarly, cultural differences can polarize people and deepen divisions between communities, justifying and fueling violent conflict.

— Dr. Tatsushi Arai, Expert
on Culture and Conflict

CSRS hosts cross-community education and training events for practitioners working in the broken places of the world. CSRS runs programs within four themes: health and humanitarian affairs, institution building and security sector reform, stabilization and reconstruction skills and tools, and maritime and naval issues. *Making Sense of It All* is part of a two-event toolkit on cultural issues: its companion, *Negotiating Effectively*, helps practitioners enhance their understanding of other actors in the S&R community, learn critical negotiating concepts, and conduct interest-based negotiations that can create successful outcomes for opposing parties. Both events were developed in response to practitioner requests for education and skills training that would help them negotiate the changing dynamics of post-conflict environments. CSRS recognizes that practitioners have many educational opportunities, and so we poll our participants and work with curriculum developers and partner organizations to develop cutting-edge, hands-on content. We hope that our participants will take the insights and skills that they acquired at this workshop and put them to good use in their important, global work. ◆◆◆



Matthew Vaccaro,
Program Director

Why Is Culture Important?

According to Dr. Tatsushi Arai, culture is a system for making meaning that shapes human behavior both consciously and unconsciously. As a consequence, people aren't always aware of its full impact. S&R practitioners must implement analytical frameworks and new skills to increase their understanding of cultural others, while building rapport and an interdependent, shared future.

Every conflict is cultural, a point Dr. Arai underscored with his opening salvo: a semi-serious challenge to participants to solve a cross-cultural altercation he experienced with his Taiwanese wife over how best to sweep their tiny apartment in Osaka, Japan. According to Dr. Arai, the second participant to raise his hand "passed the test" because he asked the simple question "why?" rather than rushing to judgment. According to Dr. Arai, culture is like a set of colored lenses; while everyone wears them, the lenses so shape human perception that people are unable to see their impact. When Dr. Arai asked his wife why she was sweeping dust into the house rather than out of it, he learned that this was an important Taiwanese custom to preserve good fortune. As a person of Japanese descent, this practice simply was not part of his cultural heritage.

What happens when cultural differences exist on a larger scale? Dr. Arai gave participants a more difficult scenario: a contentious dialogue he mediated between representatives of two countries, one of which had colonized the other. While the two groups

were brought together to discuss the future of their relationship, the dialogue quickly devolved into a shouting match. To refocus the discussion, Dr. Arai had the warring parties participate in an exercise he calls "a walk through history." The two groups separated to discuss and select the seven most critical events in the history of their conflict. When they compared their selections, they were shocked at the differences. While the colonized country identified a violent incident as the start of the conflict, the colonizer predated it by two thousand years. Using that revelation as a springboard, each group worked to understand the other side's perspective on the conflict and explore the significance of the events they had chosen. As talks progressed, the colonizers accused their counterparts of behaving like delinquent children. While the other group was offended, its members used a similar metaphor to explain their perspective: Said one: "We are not delinquent children. We have grown up. We are an independent family that needs equal standing."

By asking questions, seeking insights, and using language that the other side can



Susan Slomback from the Institute for Trade and Commercial Diplomacy listens to COL Todd Ebel of the US Joint Forces Command make a point.

understand, warring parties can begin to bridge divides. However, that process is extremely fragile, so parties should take care to assess all of their actions to avoid unintended consequences. As these two groups of delegates struggled to find common accord, a well-meaning workshop facilitator posted the groups' event chronologies side-by-side, separating them with a vertical line of masking tape. That simple action reinforced the delegates' sense of separateness, causing one to explode with indignation. Said Dr. Arai, who quickly removed the tape, "Even small things can trigger deep-seated hatred or resentment." To avoid these sorts of situations, Dr. Arai usually confers with a cultural expert before holding workshops and dialogues, testing his ideas to make sure they will resonate with audiences, not inflame them.

Dr. Arai challenged participants to think deeply about this example, discussing the role of culture in conflict and why it matters. After breaking into groups to discuss these issues, participants returned to question Dr. Arai, who assumed the role of the delegation head for the colonizing country. Dr. Arai deflected

participants who offered generalities about seeking common ground, but validated those who asked simple questions such as: Why are you in conflict? Would you be willing to look at an analogous situation to see how others have resolved their conflict? Can you describe how a member of the other delegation might see the conflict? How might the other side's culture affect its attitudes towards the conflict? Through this role play, Dr. Arai tried to steer participants into exploring the root of the conflict, rather than trying to impose specific frameworks. He gently chastised one group, which had spent the exercise time discussing the identities, ideologies, and motivations of the two delegations, saying, "You are so smart and rational, but culture is irrational." The point of the exercise was to help S&R practitioners set aside existing cultural biases while considering other perspectives. Too often, people rush to judgment rather than attempting to explore the problem from the other parties' viewpoints. The result? Failed negotiations or even worse, a return to conflict.

How can you use culture to create constructive value in conflict? First, you



Participants listen to Dr. Arai introduce new cultural concepts and frameworks.

have to understand it. Dr. Arai highlighted key concepts the workshop would explore, as well as new cultural communications techniques participants would develop. These included:

- The role of the collective subconscious, or deep culture, in fomenting political crisis.
- The importance of stories, metaphors, and rituals for bridging different patterns of thinking.
- How to develop cultural fluency and successfully navigate unfamiliar contexts.
- The dynamic interactions between conflict and culture.
- Different approaches to creating cross-cultural synergy to transform conflict.
- How to develop cultural sensitivity for post-war peace building.

Dr. Arai introduced his definition of culture, sharing key principles that distinguish cultural mores and practices from those held by individuals and family groups.

(See **What Is Culture?** graphic on page 7.) Culture is so deeply embedded, he said, that it is often an unconscious influence. It guides our choices, telling us what is right and wrong and helping us make meaning out of events. Dr. Arai's assertion that culture is socially, rather than biologically, transmitted sparked broader discussion about whether biology predisposes one to certain cultural characteristics. An NGO representative jokingly said that she was a short-tempered Italian from a long line of forbearers with similar personalities. Could that possibly be genetic? Dr. Arai agreed that biology created conditions conducive to cultural learning, but that nurture, in the form of parenting or social influences, trumped nature. A member of the armed forces wondered if nurture evolved over time, as American culture had changed dramatically over the past several decades. Participants agreed, citing divorce, globalization, technology, and the media as some of the factors that had contributed to rapid cultural change.

To encourage participants to think deeply about culture and its impacts, Dr. Arai led a

metaphor exercise. He instructed participants to brainstorm creative comparisons for culture. Participants broke into table groups and selected the best metaphor to share with the larger group. They said that culture was like:

- A river, because it is dynamic, changes the landscape, and must be navigated.
- The Windows Operating System, because it runs deep inside a machine and supports the applications that we see.
- Clothing, because everyone wears it and what a person chooses reveals aspects of his personality and influences how he interacts with others.
- An easy chair, because it creates a comfort zone, values, and practices and creates a boundary between an individual and the outside world.
- A sponge, because it absorbs liquid but also drips.
- A magnet, because it attracts most people, but can also repel them.

When a Name is More than a Name

What were the commonalities between participants' different metaphors? Participants said that their metaphors addressed culture's porousness, connectivity, and universality. Culture, said Dr. Arai, is a system for making meaning that shapes human behavior both consciously and unconsciously. To demonstrate culture's ubiquitous influence, as well as highlight key differences between cultures, Dr. Arai had participants share their first names and explain its significance. In the group, most of the American men and women were named after family members and Biblical leaders. NGO representatives contrasted these preferences with Africa and Asia where children are named after desirable attributes, such as Precious and Innocent in Botswana or Smiling in China. Meanwhile, Muslim

children often possess names that represent the attributes of Allah. Names are an important cultural carrier, because they demonstrate what people prize. They can also evidence a kind of duality, said two participants who cited cultures such as Asia, where children often possess both a Chinese and American name, and Africa, where one's last name heralds one's place of origin. An NGO member said that American names were by far the least revelatory, as many ethnic groups had changed their naming conventions as they assimilated into the country.

Participants then repeated the exercise, sharing the street names where they lived. Dr. Arai pointed out the commonalities: natural and geographical features, numbers, and important people's names. How did this compare with other countries? An NGO member said that in his native country of Ethiopia, street names were ancient words that were no longer in common parlance. Another NGO member said that many street names in colonized countries were named after their conquerors. In Japan, street names are typically virtues or directions, said Dr. Arai. The significance? Potentially profound. While an American might pay very little attention to street names, using them only to navigate directions, a Japanese person would likely view them as an integral part of his life. A name is much more than a name, according to Dr. Arai. It can be an evocation of cultural values, past successes, or history. It can also be a way to reclaim one's "power." After a war or conflict, renaming cities, streets, and institutions allows formerly disenfranchised people to assert their strength.

How Cultural Carriers Transmit Meaning

The two exercises introduced the concept of cultural carriers, which transmit meaning

Dr. Arai defined culture as a system of meaning making that meets several important criteria, enumerated below. Among them: Culture must be accepted by the social group, guide its behavior, and be passed down from generation to generation.

What Is Culture?

According to **Dr. Tatsushi Arai**, culture is an ever-evolving system of shared patterns of meaning making that consciously and subconsciously shapes and reshapes human behavior and perception. Culture is also a dynamic process through which people assign symbolic meanings to natural and social phenomena, validating what they believe is legitimate and rejecting that which does not fit prescribed norms.

Culture forms continuously. As such, it changes from one generation to the next. Culture is catalyzed and facilitated by socially constructed carriers such as stories, education, religion, music and other shared tools for meaning making. It is not transmitted genetically.

- # Culture is:
- 1 *Shared*
 - 2 *Embedded in the conscious, subconscious, and even unconscious*
 - 3 *Repeated*
 - 4 *Part of communal life*
 - 5 *Accepted as normative and guides a group's behavior*
 - 6 *Symbolic*
 - 7 *Cumulative*
 - 8 *Passed across generations*
 - 9 *Transmitted socially, not biologically*
 - 10 *Ever-changing*



At left: Dr. Arai exhorts participants to use new insights and tools to help warring parties understand the opposite side's motivations and cultural perspectives.

At right: Miriam Turlington of the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies speaks with MAJ Eric Schroeder of the US Army's XVIII Airborne Corps.

and significance. Dr. Arai defined cultural carriers as concrete objects and abstract ideas that convey symbolic messages. This passage can occur within and across specific social milieus, as well as across time and space. For example, organizers in Mozambique, which had experienced a devastating 16-year civil war, created a traveling art project that used guns and grenades to create art, monuments, and musical instruments. Two participants challenged this example, with a military officer saying that this project reinforced the image of Mozambique as a warrior culture and an NGO member saying that the project was an artificial construct and likely had a negligible effect on the society. Dr. Arai disagreed, saying that changing the cultural carriers allowed countries to begin to change their culture. He cited another example, the Vietnam War, where the Vietnamese people had used tires from gunned-down American planes to fashion shoes during a time of great scarcity; this practice is now replicated with tires from US car junkyards, benefitting poor people and turning environmental waste into a useful resource.

If names are as important as signifiers, what about the things they represent? Dr. Arai launched a discussion about the relationship between culture and structure, or the intangible and tangible. Dr. Arai used a series of simple examples – doors, diaper changing stations, and kitchens – to draw important points. In East Asia, doors slide, rather than swing, because of limited space. This structural difference has become a cultural one, with individuals bowing before entering rooms. At a Taiwanese train station, a sign for a diaper change in front of a men's room signals that men's roles in that country have changed significantly over the last decade. And in various countries, the placement of a kitchen, whether it is centrally located or placed at the rear of a house, demonstrates whether that society promotes women's equality or is more traditionally patriarchal. Dr. Arai used these examples to show that culture and structure are mutually reinforcing. Policy changes create cultural changes, and major shifts to social values typically impact a country's structures.

Dr. Arai introduced the concept of cultural continuums, or the way people interact and



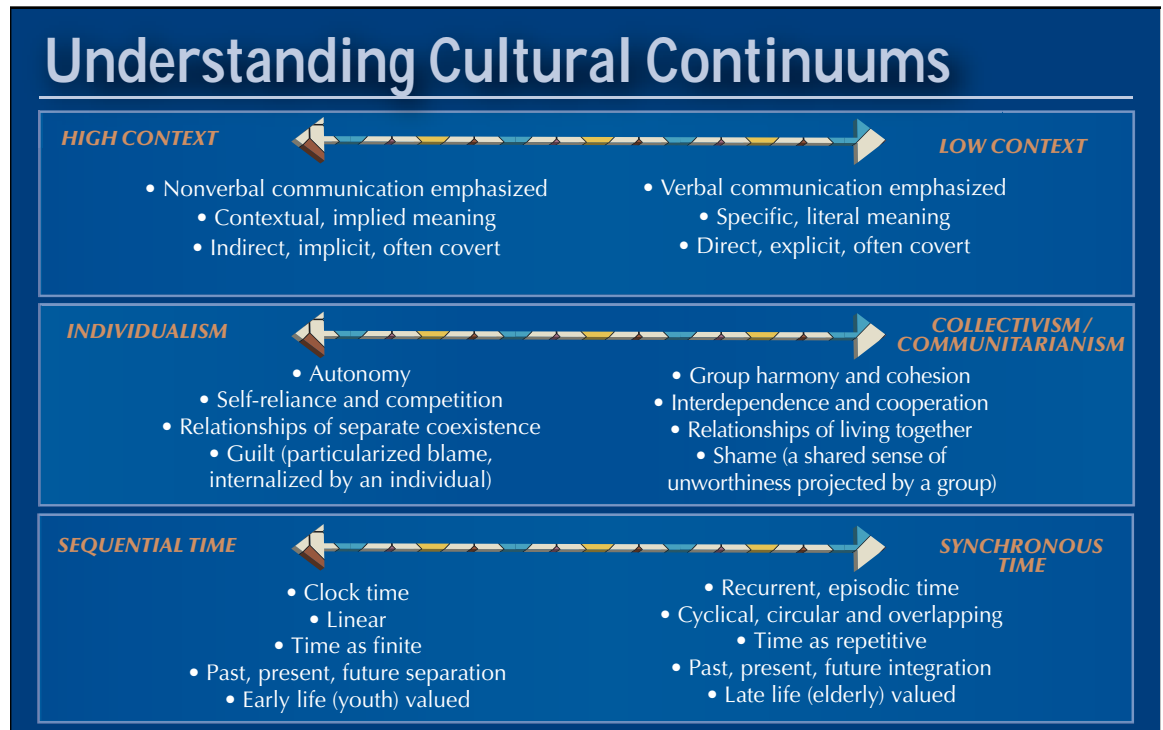
Pictured from left to right: Dr. Shireen Burki of the US Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Cultural Understanding, Jonas Horner of the Small Arms Survey, Dr. Yvonne Sidhom of RTI International, Gerry Schwaller of the Red Cross, and CPT Carlos Poveda of the US Air Force's Special

perceive each other. (See **Understanding Cultural Continuums** graphic on page 10.) In high context societies, people rely on subtle social cues to guide their behavior; in low context societies, explicit verbal communication is the rule of the day. Not surprisingly, there can be great tension when people from high and low context societies interact. Participants gave some examples: a military officer's great discomfort when a male friend tried to hold his hand in public overseas; an NGO worker's realization that discussing HIV in Rwanda was taboo, due to victims' sense of shame and stigma; and an officer's tardy realization that the hissing sounds his overseas peer made indicated great displeasure. Sometimes, however, people from high and low context societies can vocalize these differences and bridge what seems like an insurmountable gap. Dr. Arai shared an example of a Nepalese woman who refused to open a gift from a German guest in his presence. When the German visitor became agitated, she explained that it was customary in her country to open gifts in private, to avoid the embarrassment she would surely cause if she did not like the gift and could not

feign pleasure about receiving it. What was unusual about this situation? The woman was able to understand and articulate the differences between the two cultures. Typically such conflicts escalate or go unresolved, as the two sides are unable to explain their actions in a manner that makes sense or is accepted by the other side.

While there are important differences between high context and low context cultures, Dr. Arai cautioned participants against using this model to stereotype specific countries. Cultural continuums do not exist in a vacuum: Which contexts are deemed high or low depends upon the observer's interpretive lenses. Thus, the distinction is necessarily subjective and relative in nature.

Culture is so deeply embedded in the collective unconscious that people are wholly unaware of the things they do. In such instances, behavior can be reflexive and premeditated. Dr. Arai gave an example of a young military enlistee taking his first airplane flight. The man kept swearing and crossing himself, pausing only to comment on the attractiveness of a stewardess in a



Graphic synopsised from content presented by Venashri Pillay in "Culture Exploring the River" in *Conflict Across Cultures*, edited by M. LeBaron and V. Pillay, Intercultural Press, 2006

somewhat juvenile fashion to his fellow military travelers. What was happening with this young man? Participants talked about how his primal motivations – fear, a yearning to seek the comfort of faith, and a survival impulse – were supplanted by desire and his wish to conform to his social group. An NGO member, who understood some elements of psychoanalysis, said that the unfamiliar situation caused fear to chip at the man's superego, or cultural consciousness, and thus his id arose. Dr. Arai used that example to set the stage for the next cultural concept: psychoanalysis, or the science of the unconscious mind. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychoanalysis, stressed the importance of the unconscious, sexual development, and repression in shaping human behavior. While repression is a part of both individual and societal behavior, sometimes that control mechanism gets broken early in life. If a child's psychological bond with his parents is broken and irreparably violated, his trust in the world will be shattered. Dr. Arai shared his experience watching a five-year-old Rwandan boy who had survived genocide draw a picture of a person as a

skeleton. Having witnessed much carnage, the boy was so alienated that he was depersonalizing other humans. What is the future like for a child, asked Dr. Arai, positing that he was at risk for major psychopathology.

Why is psychoanalysis an important tool for studying culture? Human beings, while part of a larger society, have individual motivations and behavioral impulses. A collective action, such as genocide, is the result of individual action by many human beings.

Participants talked about grief as an important technique to bind the individual and collective spheres and provide an effective mechanism to mourn and process loss. An NGO worker said that in Kosovo, a friend mourned her brother's death by wearing black for a full year and refusing to smile or laugh. That personal trauma was collectively acknowledged through the society's recognition of these symbols and through a ceremony where the girl donned brightly hued garments to signal the end of her mourning. Dr. Arai agreed, and said that collective traumas and glories are another way to unify the individual and societal



Matthew Vaccaro of the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies welcomes participants to the workshop, describing the work of the Center and giving them a preview of upcoming events.

experience. A chosen glory is an event that a group remembers and internalizes as a glorious success, handing down the memory to successive generations, while a chosen trauma is an event that a group remembers as a humiliating injury. These events, which become emotion-infused memories, are rallying symbols for people during times of crisis and conflict.

A recent example is September 11th, which brought US citizens together during a time of great insecurity and national suffering. To explore this concept further, and show the impact of chosen traumas and glories on deep culture, Dr. Arai presented a case study on the Yasukuni Shinto Shrine in Tokyo, Japan, which was established to honor the nearly 2.5 million Japanese who died fighting for their country. These individuals, who include more than 1,000 war criminals, are listed in the Book of Souls and venerated as gods. The museum also includes emotion-provoking items such as flags colored red with the blood of teenage girls and the last message of a doomed soldier. The shrine is visited frequently by the Japanese prime minister, causing international controversies.

Political leaders and citizens of neighboring countries, which fought against Japan, believe that the shrine sanctions unjust wars and venerates common criminals. Many have spoken out against it, and it has become a significant point of tension between Japan and its neighbors.

Participants discussed how the shrine allows Japan to celebrate a chosen glory, the war dead, to avoid dwelling on its humiliating military defeats to the United States, or chosen traumas. In addition, the shrine enables the Japanese to avoid reflecting critically on war atrocities they have committed, said one participant. How could Japan reframe the political dialogue about the shrine? One way would be to create a multi-national and religiously neutral memorial site that honors all war dead, including people from other countries. This type of shrine could serve as a meeting place for political leaders, to help them build bridges and affirm the importance of peace.

In a similar manner, Estonians have repurposed a Russian training site in Klooga, which symbolizes their previous

Developing Cultural Fluency

ANTICIPATION

- Observe behavioral patterns of cultural others.
- Reflect on one's own cultural patterns.
- Explore how these different patterns may interact.
- Be open to unexpected interactions and resist stereotyping.

EMBEDDEDNESS

- Acknowledge deep-seated unconscious assumptions.
- Reflect on where such assumptions have come from.

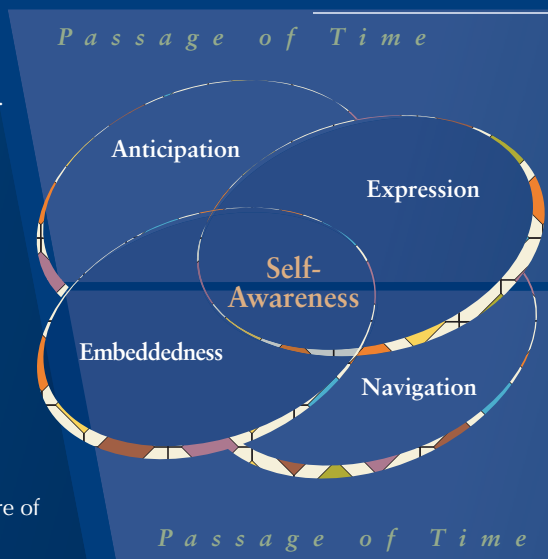
EXPRESSION

- Activate empathy and imagine oneself in the shoes of cultural others.
- Jointly explore how to communicate deep-rooted assumptions.

NAVIGATION

- Pragmatically envision how to co-create a future of cross-cultural synergy.
- Take joint action towards achieving the vision, assuming inevitable risks.

To develop cultural fluency, S&R practitioners need to develop four types of capacity – anticipation, embeddedness, expression, and navigation. By so doing, they will move beyond simple understanding to a place where they can discuss cultural imperatives and build an interdependent future with cultural others.



oppression under Russian rule, as a shooting range. While shooting practice is wholly unnecessary, Estonians use the site each day to disembed the chosen trauma which exists in their collective mindset. Dr. Arai observed that in an informal dialogue process organized in the 1990s Estonian leaders used the metaphor that Russians are like elephants and Estonians are like rabbits. Only by skillfully managing relationships with Russians could the Estonians survive being stepped on. Although the Russian occupation is over, it lives on in Estonian practices and language. Estonians will not reshape their belief system until they change their cultural carriers, stories, and metaphors of oppression.

Dr. Arai led participants in a map exercise to explore further the notion of deep culture. Participants had to draw two radically different types of maps that reflected two cultures' views of the world. In the first instance, participants had to envision what a Thai map in the 1800s would look like. In keeping with Buddhist cosmology, the map depicted the spiritual geography its users would traverse when progressing upwards in search of salvation. As such, it did not represent any kind of physical

topography. One group envisioned the map as a series of zigzags surrounding a central line, while another group saw it as a series of stacked planes. In the second scenario, participants had to draw a military map for Chinese warriors. While participants drew a more conventionally Western-style map, the actual map noted items of military importance such as rivers to ford and directions for marching. It did not use a contemporary sense of scale or three-dimensionality. The point? Even commonly accepted tools like maps are cultural constructs.

So how can participants develop cultural fluency? (See **Developing Cultural Fluency** graphic above.) Dr. Arai introduced the ideas of four types of capacity: anticipation, embeddedness, expression, and navigation. Anticipation is the ability to study one's own and other cultures, understand key interactions, and continually update one's perceptions. Embeddedness is the ability to acknowledge and share unconscious assumptions with cultural others. Expression is the ability to communicate cultural imperatives, using empathy to deepen one's understanding and ability to share meaning making patterns with others. And navigation



Pictured: Noor Kirdar of the US Institute of Peace.

is the ability to recognize cultural expectations in specific contexts, while co-creating an interdependent future with cultural others. As an example of these concepts in action, Dr. Arai shared his experience as a junior delegation member attending an important banquet in China. In his ignorance, Dr. Arai entered the banquet hall ahead of other dignitaries and headed for a nearby seat. Displaying expressive capacity, a Chinese official pulled Dr. Arai aside and educated the young delegate about the Chinese custom of honoring senior diplomats by allowing them to enter ceremonies first and sit in places of honor. Realizing that he was the youngest member of the group, Dr. Arai used anticipatory capacity to find his seat: the one that was in the furthest corner of the room.

A military officer shared an example of how he used navigational capacity: When he was serving in Iraq, he was introduced not by his military rank, as is customary in the United States, but by his role, as a commander of forces in a specific region. The latter designation carried far more weight with his Iraqi counterparts and gave him power he could wield when needed.

These examples launched a discussion of whether S&R practitioners should simply adopt other cultures' practices, or attempt to share their own. "Cultural understanding needs to be reciprocal," said an NGO member. Sometimes that sharing can be quite direct when relationships are strong: An NGO member said that when she visited her Kosovan students at home, her American colleague would circumnavigate local customs by serving her tea before the male guests, telling the group that this was how Americans honored women. However, many times such direct sharing is not possible; it could be viewed as disrespectful or hostile, and thus rejected by the listener. Dr. Arai shared an example of how he used gentle questions and analogies to help a senior Iranian colleague understand that his direct, abrupt, and excessively provocative questions had puzzled an elderly Chinese politician in a public setting. While face saving is important in many cultures, it is particularly critical in China, as failing publicly can create a sense of shame that is imposed by the group. By helping the man compare the situation to Iranian political customs of seniority, Dr. Arai helped his colleague increase his cultural awareness of what would be customary behavior in that setting. As participants build these types of capabilities, said Dr. Arai, they must take care not to stereotype cultural others: With anticipatory capacity, one prepares for a range of experience, while with stereotyping, one closes oneself off to all save one possibility.

Another concept that S&R practitioners must understand is that each culture has its own embeddedness, with its people holding deep-seated assumptions about how things are done. If practitioners are uncomfortable with another culture's practice, they should ask themselves why and explore their own cultural assumptions before rejecting another's. Dr. Arai shared an example of two young Rwandan women who received news of their brother's



At left: Melissa Sinclair of World Hope International.

At right: Feza Koprucu of the US National Defense University & US Industrial College of the Armed Forces (left) speaks to LT Tim Harvey of the US Navy (right). MAJ Paul Hains of the US Army's XVIII Airborne Corps is pictured in the background.

extremely brutal killing, yet showed up to take university exams a few days later. Dr. Arai was even more astounded when they received excellent marks, as he expected the women to be overwhelmed with grief. While the women had received devastating news, they lived in a culture of war and had a practical understanding of the fragility of life. Thus, they were able to resume their responsibilities quickly, compartmentalizing their suffering, as they had already witnessed so much devastation.

Dr. Arai asked the group to offer their own examples of how they had either failed or succeeded to demonstrate cultural fluency. Participants shared their own stories at the tables and then selected the best story to share with the group. A military officer spoke about participating in a bilateral military exercise overseas; as a treat, the event's hosts gave the Americans local fruit at one of the breakfasts. While the officer's colleagues ate it in silence, he spit it out, loudly proclaiming how horrible it tasted. The officer was chastised by his boss, who said that the rest of the officers were aware that the fruit was distasteful, but had managed to honor their

hosts by eating it with gusto. In this scenario, the one officer lacked the anticipatory capacity that his peers possessed. Laughingly, an NGO worker offered advice on how she had successfully circumnavigated these types of situations in Kosovo. As she introduced herself to new people, the NGO representative would immediately declare that her favorite food was stuffed peppers. When invited to dinner, she could anticipate that a safe food would now be on the menu. Another NGO member suddenly developed highly specific allergies to food she did not like; this allowed her to skip eating certain items while not offending her hosts. An educator in the group remarked on how food was absolutely integral to culture, as evidenced by the many stories participants shared about hospitality situations. By such simple acts, either accepting or refusing local delicacies, S&R practitioners could build bridges or create barriers between themselves and cultural others, from aid recipients and other stakeholders to important colleagues and decision makers.

In another example, a military officer demonstrated navigational capacity by



Michael Zeleke of Witwatersand University in South Africa brainstorms an approach to a case study exercise.

agreeing to pursue a request he knew he could not satisfy: obtaining permission for a Colombian officer's wife to fly to the United States and come on base. "Having been brought up in a similar culture, I know it's important to show effort. But as an American officer, I also knew I had limits, so it was tricky." While the request was denied, the officer felt it strengthened his relationship with his overseas counterpart to pursue it.

Sometimes cultural fluency comes at a cost: previous failures. A military educator described how she had worked closely with the Aboriginal community in Canada, only to be told time and time again by an older member of the tribe how much she was bungling the project. After two years, she confronted her critic who said that she had misinterpreted the rebukes. "If I didn't feel like you were doing something valuable, I wouldn't take the time to correct you. I am older and have something to teach you," said the older Aboriginal woman. Having been brought up in a culture that prizes positive feedback, the educator said that she had misinterpreted the input.

Similarly, a military officer spoke of briefing Ministry of Water and Agriculture officials in Iraq on the need to turn off canal water so that US forces could replace destroyed pumps. While Ministry officials acquiesced, the forces waited fruitlessly for action. Finally, after several days the officers returned to the Ministry. This time, they held a meeting where Ministry officials participated in brainstorming a solution to the issue. The next day, the water was turned off, and troops were able to install the pumps. "The lesson learned is that you must include people," said the officer, "if you want their cooperation."

Just because you know the language, doesn't mean you know the culture. It may not be natural for you. You may still have to go through a mental checklist of what's appropriate.

—NGO Representative

Sometimes, S&R practitioners can become so embedded in another culture that their local counterparts presume fluency that isn't



Pictured from left to right: Blaine Gibson, Susan Slomback, and Larry Levine of the United Nations Association's Monterey Bay Chapter.

complete. A female NGO worker offended the parents of her Chilean boyfriend when she kissed them upon arriving at their house, but not upon leaving it. Said another NGO worker: "Just because you know the language, doesn't mean you know the culture. It may not be natural for you. You may still have to go through a mental checklist of what's appropriate." When S&R practitioners are uncertain, they should seek behavioral cues, like the NGO worker who sought a primer from her Egyptian friend on who to kiss (his mother) and who not to kiss (his father). Dr. Arai said he always

asks his hosts: "Are there any questions I should have asked?" a humble, reciprocity-seeking approach that has served him in good stead. A cross-community educator concurred, saying that approach had helped him cut through a roadblock with Taiwanese counterparts who fixated on the costs of an event the two groups would soon sponsor, instead of the content, which was far more critical. Instead of getting angry, the educator asked them: "You have asked this question several times, and I have tried to answer it. Is there another one?" And indeed there was. ◆◆◆

The Culture and Conflict Link

To put new insights into action, Dr. Arai had participants brainstorm a response to a real-life crisis: the capture of three Japanese civilians in Fallujah, Iraq. Participants had to consider the culture of the Iraqi kidnappers and Japanese diplomats and craft an approach that would meet the underlying interests of both sides, while allowing them to save face.

Circling back to his earlier declaration that all conflict is cultural, Dr. Arai offered definitions for culture, conflict transformation, violence and peace. (See **Understanding Conflict** definitions at right.) To help participants make the link between conflict and culture, he offered the following scenario: the capture of three Japanese citizens, an NGO worker and two journalists, in Fallujah by unknown kidnappers. How should Japan deal with this crisis? With few troops in the region and little experience with hostage-taking, the country would be ill-equipped to undertake a large-scale search operation. Moreover, the kidnappers have given the nation only three days to respond to their demands that all forces be removed from the region. Participants broke into table groups to brainstorm their approach.

Returning to the larger group, participants share their strategies. Among them: Air programs on Al Jazeera that use Koranic messages to rebuke the kidnappers for targeting noncombatants to sow seeds of doubt and shame. Create video appeals that use interviews with family members to personalize the hostages, stress their

noncombatant status, and evoke a future back home. Promote the relief work of Japanese troops, which are helping rebuild health services and local infrastructure. Consider creating new services, such as

Understanding Conflict

Dr. Arai offered the following definitions:

- **Conflict** is an evolving process of dynamic interdependence between two or more actors pursuing aspirations that they are unable to achieve because they perceive that the other stands in the way of the attainment of their goal.
- **Conflict transformation** is a sustained process of examining conflict sources and contexts systematically and developing relevant means to redirect its momentum into constructive relationship building.
- **Violence** is any form of social influence that harms the human body, mind, and/or spirit either directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally.
- **Peace** is a sustained process of overcoming all forms of violence, whether direct or indirect, personal or structural, to actualize the fullest potential of individuals and groups in society.



Pictured: COL Todd Ebel.

health exams for school children, to increase public sympathy for the troops. And reach out to local powerbrokers to create lines of communication with the kidnappers.

Dr. Arai complimented the group on the sophistication of their strategies, especially their desire to leverage local channels. However, he advised them to take a step back and analyze the needs and goals of both the Japanese government and the hostage takers. For example, the Japanese government will likely want to protect the integrity of the nation while working towards the release of the hostages. Meanwhile, the hostage takers are probably motivated by a desire to create

greater freedom for fellow Iraqis. Before rushing to design solutions, it is important to understand underlying motivations. Sometimes it is possible to craft a winning approach that meets the underlying interests of both sides, while allowing them to save face with important constituents.

S&R practitioners face cultural conflicts in their work every day, whether they are mundane misunderstandings or issues of life and death. To demonstrate the range of issues S&R workers face, Dr. Arai invited three participants to give short presentations on their work. Presenters included **Susan Slomback** of the Institute for Trade and Commercial Diplomacy, **Jonas Horner** from the Small Arms Survey and **Feza Koprucu** of the US National Defense University and US Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Ms. Slomback discussed the cultural clash between Sri Lanka's Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. Mr. Horner discussed gun cultures, where countries' widespread use of firearms symbolizes power, freedom, and masculinity. In such countries, small arms are used at celebrations, displayed as jewelry, and given to boys entering puberty. Finally, Mr. Koprucu discussed the military's new emphasis on cultural awareness training and how it is seeking to provide its troops with tools and insights that will enable them to be better warfighters and policy makers. That training is starting early, as **Major Rebecca Patterson** attested, with cultural awareness courses at West Point and other military schools. ◆◆◆

Implementing Cultural Concepts and Tools

The final case study, an in-depth look at two groups of Hutu refugees, allowed participants to explore the nuances of sub-cultures. Although the refugees shared a common ethnic heritage and enemy, their cultural identities quickly diverged upon resettling. Participants discussed how the two groups' culture identities would impact their negotiating styles and offered suggestions for aligning their interests.

To help participants adopt and implement new concepts and tools, Dr. Arai set up a challenging case study based on Liisa H. Malkki's ethnography, *Purity and Exile*. Participants would examine the cultures and motivations of two separate groups of Hutu refugees who had fled Tutsi persecution in their homeland of Burundi. After a 1972 massacre which killed 100,000 Hutus within the space of a few weeks, thousands crossed the border into Tanzania. Some of the Hutus chose to settle in remote villages, such as the Mishamo refugee settlement, while others migrated to towns, such as those in the Kigoma region. While the Hutus shared an ethnic heritage and refugee status, their cultural identities quickly diverged. Those who settled in Mishamo, a rural, physically isolated agricultural area, saw themselves as Burundi's rightful heirs after exiles; after overcoming trial and tribulation they would return triumphantly to regain their rightful place in their homeland. Though the group farmed for food, it also relied upon financial and logistical support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to operate the camp. Meanwhile, those refugees who had moved to Kigoma, a more cosmopolitan environment,

focused on assimilation. Many intermarried with non-refugees, practiced two or more occupations to make ends meet, and had porous identities that shifted with each situation. Not surprisingly, this group viewed the prospect of a return home or move to Mishamo as a loss of hard-won new freedoms.

Participants were asked to assume the roles of third-party mediators in secret peace negotiations between Burundian Hutu and Tutsi representatives during the late 1980s. The Hutu delegation would be comprised of an equal number of refugees from Mishamo and Kigoma. As mediators, they would help facilitate discussion on the Hutu refugees' right to return and Tutsi-Hutu power sharing, among other issues. How would the two groups' differing cultures affect their motivations and negotiation strategies?

After reading the scenario, participants discussed the cultural identities of these two refugee groups. The Mishamo group, they said, sees itself as a homogeneous entity that is set apart from the other Hutus, a viewpoint reinforced by the group's physical isolation. Members relive the chosen trauma of the



Pictured from left to right Nicholas Tomb of the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies and Jonas Horner of the Small Arms Survey.

genocide daily, keeping it alive through their language and stories. Participants who assumed the role of the villagers complained about the UNHCR, but declared that the food donations were their right as the true Burundian exiles. When questioned about their plans to return to Burundi, participants said they were too poor to devote the resources to creating such a plan but would go back when Hutus were finally in charge. Participants who role-played Kigoma settlers were far more pragmatic about their options. One said that it would be nice to return, but that he had married a Tanzanian wife and had children. Another, who was afraid of being identified as an illegal, denied that he was a refugee, saying he belonged in the town. Still another refused to meditate on past wrongs, saying, “Sometimes you just have to move on.” The consensus, as one participant put it, was that “Burundi is a passport; Hutu is history.” Because this group had benefited greatly from assimilation, most sought to downplay their ethnic heritage, while others sought to deny it.

How would this affect how each group sees the other? The Mishamo group would likely view their Kigoma counterparts as impure

and unworthy, having compromised their refugee identity for their economic livelihood. Meanwhile, the Kigoma settlers would probably feel that they were the true survivors, having worked hard to create a better future instead of relying on aid handouts. They might view their Mishamo brethren as rigid, ignorant, and needlessly stuck in the past.

When the two sides come to the negotiating table, the Mishamo delegation will likely be hard-line and will fight hard for reparations. However, they will likely act a cohesive bargaining unit. The Kigoma group will probably be fractured, as people will pursue individual interests rather than an ethnic party line.

After brainstorming ways with their tables, participants returned to offer strategies for optimizing success in the upcoming negotiation. Participants recommended that the two groups come together for discussions and team building exercises. What tools would they use, asked Dr. Arai? Suggestions included using “a walk through history” and sharing stories to create common ground and validate the past trauma of the genocide. Other groups proposed family exchanges between the two cultures; soccer matches that featured mixed Mishamo-Kigoma teams; and a party with Burundian food, dancing, and culture. One group laughingly proposed cow tipping as an icebreaker, a nod to the Burundians’ cultural heritage as cattle farmers. Dr. Arai pushed participants to offer practical strategies for how they would handle the actual negotiation. One he suggested was “a walk through the future,” to help the two groups create a shared vision for their return to Burundi. “As a facilitator, you have to improvise things on the spot,” he counseled participants. “Not all skills apply to each situation.” He also pointed out that none of the groups had asked him about his heritage, instead assuming that he represented a western organization. That was an oversight, as he could easily have represented one of the two sides and introduced spoilers into the negotiating process. ◆◆◆

Conclusion

S&R practitioners play vital roles in troubled countries around the world, building bridges between warring parties. Cultural insights and tools can help them maximize their effectiveness and successfully navigate the continually changing environments within which they work.

As S&R organizations study the linkages between culture and conflict, many are realizing that they need to empower practitioners with better skills and tools to work in post-conflict environments. These environments are often host to multiple ethnic groups, each with its own customs and patterns of meaning making that are deeply embedded in the local culture. Tensions may be high, especially if one group has maintained supremacy at another's expense. Conflict histories likely diverge greatly, making it difficult to discuss the past or create a vision of a shared future. Both sides use cultural carriers such as stories, metaphors, and rituals, among others, to reinforce their viewpoint and assert their sense of superiority. This worldview is so pervasive that its adherents may be totally unconscious of its impact and effect on others. To echo Dr. Arai, it is as if each cultural group wears its own set of colored lenses. Adding to the complexity is the fact that these lenses change hue and shape over time as culture is shared between its adherents and passed down to subsequent generations.

S&R practitioners who live and work in these environments must step outside their own cultural perspectives and continually refine their knowledge and understanding of cultural others. Culture influences their every action and interaction, from their body language and verbal exchanges, to their behavior in social and professional settings, to their role as conflict workers handling multi-party mediations and negotiations. As such, S&R practitioners are important actors in post-conflict environments. They can help build bridges between warring parties or potentially impede the peace process.

Culture isn't rational. You have to activate your six senses and tap into your childlike sense of wonder. That's the realm where culture exists.

— Dr. Tatsushi Arai

While cultural understanding is a first step, it is a limited one. To be truly effective, S&R practitioners must be able to communicate effectively and work with



At right: Mr. John Zarkowsky of the US Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (left) and LT Dan Reiher of the Naval Postgraduate School.

At left: Maria Chan of the Family Life Center.

cultural others to build an interdependent future that considers the needs of all. It is in this spirit, that CSRS developed *Making Sense of It All* to provide practitioners with a cultural primer and tools they can use in their fieldwork.

During the multi-day event, participants implemented new skills by executing a series of exercises, ranging from metaphor brainstorm exercises to a difficult hostage negotiation scenario. Exhorting participants that “Culture isn’t rational. You have to activate your childlike sense of wonder. That’s the realm

where culture exists,” Dr. Arai sought to shake participants free of their preconceived notions on how to solve typical S&R challenges. Whether it was asking warring parties simple, direct questions about the conflict; helping them share different conflict histories; exploring the meaning of cultural carriers; or using simple visioning tools to paint a picture of a common future, Dr. Arai sought to provide participants with new insights and tools. As participants deploy to troubled countries around the world, they will have powerful resources to help them serve as voices of peace and agents of change. ◆◆◆

Event Participants

Participants

Dr. Shireen Burki

US Marine Corps Center for
Advanced Operational Cultural
Understanding

COL Jim Campbell

US Air Force War College

MAJ Robert Castro

Joint Advanced Warfighting Division
Institute for Defense Analyses

Ms. Maria Chan

Family Life Center

**Special Agent Katrina
Cordova**

Office of Special Investigations
US Air Force

Ms. Beth Craig

Red Cross

Mr. Russell Crumrine, Jr.

US Army Command
General Staff College

Ms. Karen Davis

Canadian Forces Leadership
Institute of the Canadian Defense
Academy

COL Todd Ebel

US Joint Forces Command
Standing Joint Forces Headquarters

Dr. Deborah Gibbons

Living Bread International
& Naval Postgraduate School

MAJ Paul Hains

XVIII Airborne Corps
US Army

LT Tim Harvey

US Navy

Mr. Jonas Horner

Small Arms Survey

Ms. Noor Kirdar

US Institute for Peace

Mr. Feza Koprucu

US National Defense University
& US Industrial College of the
Armed Forces

Mr. Larry Levine

Monterey Bay Chapter
United Nations Association

LTC A.B. Nettles

XVIII Airborne Corps
US Army

Ms. Sally Nist

Office of the Coordinator for
Reconstruction and Stabilization
US Department of State

MAJ Rebecca Patterson

US Military Academy
US Army

CPT Carlos Poveda

Special Operations School
US Air Force

LT Dan Reiher

Naval Postgraduate School

Ms. Gwendolyn Sanders

Naval Postgraduate School

MAJ Eric Schroeder

XVIII Airborne Corps
US Army

Ms. Gerry Schwaller

American Red Cross

MSG Pat Scott

XVIII Airborne Corps
US Army

Mr. Andrey Sekunov

United Nations Department of
Peace Keeping Operations

Dr. Yvonne Sidhom

RTI International

Ms. Melissa Sinclair

World Hope International

Ms. Susan Slomback

Institute for Trade and Commercial
Diplomacy

CPT James Stovall

US Air Force

Mr. Casson Trenor

Conservation Strategy Fund

CPT John Wishart

Naval Postgraduate School

Mr. Chris Wolfe

Global Majority

Mr. John Zarkowsky

Bureau of Medicine and Surgery
US Navy

Mr. Michael Zeleke

Witwatersrand University

Facilitators and Staff

Dr. Tatsushi Arai

School for International Training

Mr. Igor Borovac

Independent Consultant

Mr. John Christiansen

Center for Stabilization and
Reconstruction Studies

Mr. Jesse Darling

Independent Consultant

Mr. Richard Hoffman

Center for Civil-Military Relations

Dr. Ann Igoe

Independent Consultant

Ms. Holly Larson

Independent Consultant

Ms. Miriam Turlington

Center for Stabilization and
Reconstruction Studies

Mr. Nicholas Tomb

Center for Stabilization and
Reconstruction Studies

Mr. Matthew Vaccaro

Center for Stabilization and
Reconstruction Studies

Facilitator Biography

Dr. Tatsushi Arai is an academician and practitioner in conflict transformation. He has worked in a wide array of interventionary roles, including labor disputes, community dialogue, inter-state conflict resolution, and post-genocide nation building in North America, East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.



Tatsushi Arai, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at the School for International

Training, located in Brattleboro, Vermont. Previously, Dr. Arai taught at the National University of Rwanda.

Dr. Arai brings expertise in needs-based intensive training and sustained dialogue facilitation to his academic work. He has

more than 10 years of hands-on experience in conflict work, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration, reconciliation, and policy advocacy. He has worked in an interventionary role in labor disputes, community dialogue, inter-state conflict resolution, and post-genocide nation building in North America, East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Dr. Arai holds a BA from Waseda University in Tokyo, an MA from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and a Ph.D. from George Mason University. ◆◆◆

Making Sense of It All: Cross-Cultural Understanding

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA · SEPTEMBER 9-12, 2007



CENTER FOR STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION STUDIES



Additional copies of this report are available online at www.nps.edu/csrs.