

Lived out in the incremental steps of an individual's life, fear shapes identity, self, home, relationships and even love. It is little understood, and even less documented.

We can do better.

Join us. SOLGA wants you! Visit www.solga.org for news, mentors, listserv and more. Please send any comments, suggestions and ideas for new columns, or just say "hi" to David Houston at dlrh+an@uvm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

What Can Gitmo Detainees Read?

By James Stanlaw

Last November an intriguing government document was leaked onto the Internet. The "Camp Delta Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)" was authored by the Joint Detention Operations Group headquarters and went into effect on March 28, 2003. This is "the book" on how the Guantanamo Bay detention center was to be run, giving both mundane information regarding how detainees should bathe to addressing more sensitive issues like how to deal with requests from the Red Cross to meet prisoners.

While this document was not top secret or even classified, the camp commander, Major General Geoffrey Miller, labeled it "For Official Use Only." Thus, when Wikileaks posted the 238 page manual they were asked by Daniel Quinn, an Information Security Manager at the Pentagon, to remove it on November 14, 2007. Presumably, the Pentagon was more upset that official Freedom of Information procedures were not followed than that the contents were released. Nonetheless, the ACLU has apparently been denied FOI access to the document. The Wikileaks website has since been closed down by order of US District Judge Jeffrey White over a release of Swiss bank records supposedly implicating several wealthy clients in money laundering schemes in the Cayman Islands. This ruling is being challenged by the ACLU, the Associated Press and the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Regardless, the manual is now available as a PDF file under the name [gitmo-sop.pdf](#) on hundreds of sites. Indeed, on December 3, 2007 Wikileaks even released a 13-page document indicating how the later 2004 manual was changed.

What is of interest here is Chapter 15, Linguistic Operations. We must mention that to the military "linguist" is synonymous with "interpreter." Gitmo linguists have three tasks: interpreting for guards or interrogators, translating and monitoring prisoner mail and maintaining a library consisting of "materials in a variety of languages for the detainees" as well as materials to aid interpreters (15.1). The following languages are to be handled on

the premises: Arabic, Pashto, French, Farsi, Urdu, Tajik, Uzbek, Uighur, Russian, Turkish, Spanish and German. Due to a lack of qualified linguists, the following languages are handled "off-island:" Bosnian (Serbo-Croatian), Bengali, Divehi and Kurdish. Divehi is spoken in the predominantly Muslim island nation of the Maldives. As there was only one prisoner taken from the Maldives, and he has since been released, Divehi seems unnecessary now.

Linguists are ordered to keep all personal information away from detainees. Nameplates are to be covered with duct tape, and the concealment of service affiliation, rank and unit patches is recommended. This apparently is not only for interpreters' safety, but it is also to discourage fraternization.

Much of the linguistics section deals with library procedures. All materials and their circulation are highly monitored, and the librarian inspects them for damage and notes or codes. The whole prison block loses their privileges for any infraction. Banned items include the expected anti-US writings or information on militant Islam, and language instructional materials and dictionaries have also been prohibited ... until recently.

Now we are seeing a kinder gentler Gitmo from the current commander, Colonel Bruce Vargo, at least in Camp Four, housing the most compliant prisoners. He told the Associated Press this February that language courses are now available to detainees in English, Arabic and Pashto. He added that he hopes to offer classes on oceanography in the future. Ocean science aside, one would at first wonder why Arabic and Pashto are being taught to prisoners who either speak these languages to begin with or could use these skills to facilitate communication with each other. Presumably, Vargo's reasoning involves camp safety. "It is my thought that if they are focused on those [programs], then the level of assaults [on the guards] and things of that nature will go down," Vargo said.

However, elsewhere it appears that what Colonel Vargo really is talking about is literacy. In the Gitmo newsletter last fall First Lieutenant Rominita Rodriguez, the officer in charge of the language program, reported that it has two purposes. "The commander's intent is to provide a program aimed at improving the literacy rate of detainees ... so we can aid them with reintegrating to their country. Secondly, we hope participants in the program will be able to read and understand the Quran for themselves" (www.jtfgtmo.southcom.mil/storyarchive/2007/07octstories/101107-2-detaineed.html).

Both these goals seem laudable. The Afghan detainee literacy rate in Pashto is only about 20%, and while the majority of Arabic-speaking detainees are high school or college graduates, the Arabic taught is the classical variety used in the Quran, a register quite different from all current Arabic vernaculars.

However, it is not clear if these good intentions will have much real personal benefit for

prisoners. There are still 275 Gitmo prisoners, and as Colonel Vargo says, "Make no bones about it, these are very dangerous men." The likelihood of their release soon is still in doubt.



Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA Contributing Editors Jim Stanlaw (stanlaw@ilstu.edu) and Mark Peterson (petersm2@muohio.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Mark Your Calendar! SMA 2008 Award Competition Deadlines

Eileen Basker Memorial Prize

SMA welcomes nominations for the 2008 Basker Prize for a significant contribution to excellence in research on gender and health by scholars from any discipline or nation, for a specific book, article, film or exceptional PhD thesis produced within the preceding three years. Some previous recipients of the Basker Prize include Sophie Day (2007), Michele Rivkin-Fish (2006), João Biehl (2005), Sandra Morgen (2004) and Caroline Bledsoe and Fatoumata Banja (2003). For details, contact Carolyn Sargent (csargent@smu.edu), Basker Prize Committee Chair, or visit www.medanthro.net/awards/basker.html. Deadline: June 30, 2008.

Career Achievement Award

The Career Achievement Award honors an individual who has advanced the field of medical anthropology through career-long contributions to theory or method, and who has been successful in communicating the relevance of medical anthropology to broader publics. Nominations for the award should include a letter of nomination, an additional supporting letter, a biographical statement by the nominee and the candidate's current CV. Send materials to Alan Harwood, Career Achievement Award Committee Chair, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA 02125. For more information, visit www.medanthro.net/awards/career.html. Deadline: September 1, 2008.

New Millennium Book Award

The New Millennium Book Award, first given in 2006, recognizes an author whose work is judged to be the most significant and potentially influential contribution to medical anthropology in recent years. Books of exceptional courage and potential impact beyond the field are given special consideration. Solo-authored (or coauthored) books published or copyrighted between 2005 and 2008 are eligible. The previous recipients of this award are Sharon Kaufman (2007) and Adriana Petryna (2006). For details, contact Carolyn Smith-Morris (csmorris@smu.edu), New