

Embedded Archaeology: An Exercise in Self-Reflection

RENÉ TEIJGELER

A year and a half has passed since I boarded a Dutch military plane to return to the Netherlands following a seven month tour in Baghdad. Since that day I have shared my experiences with many and compared them to conservation activity actions undertaken during other armed conflicts (Teijgeler 2005 and 2006). It is clear that much can be done to protect heritage in times of conflict *before* the hostilities begin, (the *pre-conflict phase*), and that possibly more can be done after the hostilities cease, (the *post-conflict phase*), but that during the fighting, (the *peri-conflict phase*), the possibilities of preventing damage are very limited. In this peri-conflict phase it is usually the staff of the heritage institution itself who, often risking their lives, try to do their utmost to save whatever possible. In a violent situation practically all non-government organisations (NGOs) and international organisations (IOs) will have left the country. This is particularly the case in the repeatedly recurrent intra-state conflicts where traditionally neutral humanitarian aid organisations are not spared the assaults of the warring parties (Nanda 1993). The developments in Iraq during the operation *Iraqi Freedom* are no exception to that rule. The Canal Hotel bombings in 2003, the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Iraq since 1991, led to the withdrawal of some 600 UN international staff from Baghdad, along with employees of other aid agencies. The need to protect cultural heritage, however, only increases as the armed conflict continues. In spite of the relevant international conventions, combatants hardly seem able to protect the cultural heritage and again Iraq is no exception. Under these circumstances, ie the mere absence of NGOs and IOs as well as the increasing need for protection, I came to the conclusion that a civil-military cultural affairs officer could make a difference. When I held the position of senior advisor for the Ministry of Culture at the Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office (IRMO) at the US embassy I wanted to believe that I prevented the Coalition forces from causing further harm to Iraq's heritage and indeed I was successful on a few occasions. Nevertheless, ever since my return, I have begun to question the notion that my presence in Iraq did make a difference. I kept wondering if my so-called success in Iraq was as effective as I thought it to be and I wondered if I could I have done more from the *outside* than on the *inside*? In reconsidering my position, I began to compare myself with 'embedded journalists', a term first used during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

EMBEDDED ARCHAEOLOGY

The idea of comparing ‘embedded journalism’ with my position in Iraq came to me after reading a very thorough study that examined the impact of embedded versus non-embedded news coverage during the USA invasion and occupation of Iraq (Haigh *et al* 2006). The results show that the embedded reporters were significantly more positive toward the military, and conveyed greater trust in them, than those of non-embedded reporters. This made me wonder. The questions raised about the ‘embeds’ could perhaps be held true for my position. Was I too sympathetic to the American side of the war and did I become part of a system that Danny Schlechter has called ‘weapons of mass deception’ (Schlechter 2003)?

An embedded reporter is defined as a media representative remaining with a unit on an extended basis (Secretary of Defense [SECDEF], 2003). The program director, Victoria Clarke, defined the process as ‘...living, eating, moving in combat with the unit that [the journalist is] attached to...’ (Department of Defense [DoD] News Transcript 2003). The embedded journalists went where and when the military command dictated. To what extent did my position in Baghdad correspond to that of an embedded reporter?

In one sense I was also attached to a unit. My unit was the USA embassy and in particular IRMO. Several of my IRMO colleagues were, like me, officers or former officers. For lodging, food, protection and transportation I was dependent on the embassy and consequently subject to their rules. Of course, as an officer I did not need a period of boot camp-style training before being allowed into the combat zone, as some of the embedded journalists had to undergo. As the embedded journalist my employment was on a fully voluntary basis.¹ At the beginning of my tour in July 2004 the main hostilities were still outside the Green Zone.² Gradually the fighting reached the Green Zone and even the embassy itself. Especially during Ramadan that year, October 14 – November 14, the embassy building itself was bombarded daily. In the same period the Green Zone café and the Haji market were bombed.³ After nightly attacks were reported embassy personnel were not allowed to leave the premises after dark.

Of course, there are many differences. But still, the comparison between the position of a senior adviser for the Ministry of Culture at the US embassy and a reporter embedded in the military might have some validity. As one of my major tasks turned out to be the protection of Iraq’s archaeology, it can be argued that I was possibly an ‘embedded archaeologist’ during the operation *Iraqi Freedom*.

SOCIAL PENETRATION THEORY

The Haig study (2006) offers an explanation of the impact of the embedding of journalists on news coverage of US military operations. It cites Social Penetration Theory developed by Taylor and Altman in 1975. It explains ‘...the range of interpersonal behaviours that occur in growing interpersonal relationships...can be quantified in terms of amount of information exchange (breadth), intimacy level of information exchange (depth), and amount of time spent talking...’ (Taylor and Altman 1975, quoted in Haigh *et al* 2006,

143). Taylor and Altman distinguish four stages of relationships:

- the orientation phase, ie getting to know each other
- the exploratory affective exchange, ie partners reveal more details about aspects of their personalities that they guarded earlier
- the affective exchange phase, ie interaction at outer layers of personality is open, and there is heightened activity at intermediate layers of personality
- the stable exchange phase, ie continuous openness, as well as richness across all layers of personality.

Taylor and Altman explain that close contact with another makes self-disclosure more constant and this leads to more affection. Others (Soeters 2000; Meyerson *et al* 1995; Wheelus and Grotz 1977) found that these stages are accelerated when military units engage in combat operations and when uncertainty levels are high and the circumstances are dangerous, such as in times of war. In these circumstances, accelerated trust bonds are formed. This 'swift trust' bond can alter a person's judgment.

The process described in Social Penetration Theory was not exactly unfamiliar to me. That 'embeddedness' will lead to the development of interpersonal relations and in the end will bias the end result of the professional is a phenomenon that is also recognised in ethnographical research as one of the pitfalls of fieldwork. In the terminology of an ethnographer, the event is described as 'going native' (see Ashcroft 1998). The anthropologist's sexual orientation and gender, as well as their age, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other aspects of their personality and individuality are of course relevant in their experiences in the field. When an ethnographer 'goes native' he gets too submerged in the cultural entity under study. He forgets to keep his distance and is bound to take sides, which will undeniably affect his data and bias his results. That is why I always kept a certain distance to the subjects in my ethnographic research. It can be questioned, however, if I could maintain that attitude in a non-ethnographic situation. Today this 'positivistic' view is much in debate, especially by humanistic anthropology - an anthropology that is lived and written in a personal voice (see Behar 1997).

Despite my experiences in field work was I, as an 'embedded archaeologist', one of the professionals who became 'imbedded' instead of 'embedded'? How dependent was I?

LIVING CONDITIONS

My office was in the embassy building and I was living, eating and sleeping on the embassy premises. It was all pre-arranged and I had no control over these arrangements. Usually I took my meals in the cafeteria and sometimes I was joined by my colleagues. While the conversations were very friendly, we never saw much of each other afterwards. Sometimes I had a drink with colleagues or I would attend a party at the back of the embassy. This 'socialising' was part of the job too, as during the meals and drinks I gathered valuable information and made many useful contacts. In the beginning I shared a trailer with an Iraqi-American colleague but we had very little in common. As my regular working hours

were from early in the morning until late in the evening, my trailer was just a place to get some sleep. After I was attacked in my trailer by a drunken bodyguard, I managed to get transferred to a trailer of my own.

Inside the Green Zone I drove around in my own armoured car but for my travels outside the zone I was subject to the strict transportation security rules of the embassy. For every trip, I had to apply for a convoy and that hampered my work tremendously as there was a constant shortage of security vehicles. Still, it was for my own protection. I did not take up my Iraqi friends' offer to have me picked up at one of the gates surrounding the Green Zone for long. Driving around Baghdad in a US military convoy was not risk-free. The convoys were often hit by roadside bombs and on more than one occasion they even became lost and we drove around Baghdad without arriving at our destination. However, when my colleague, the senior adviser for the Ministry of Education was killed⁴ because he was travelling without guards, I changed my methods of transportation and complied with the embassy security rules. Also, many trips I planned such as those to Najaf, Samarra and al-Hatra were cancelled for security or political reasons. That was very frustrating. Then once again the convoy to al-Hatra that I was to join was attacked. Travelling with either military or private guards, I learned to appreciate the dangers they were exposed to more than ever. Nevertheless, we had many heated discussions: For example, once, whilst on our way to an appointment in the city, one of my bodyguards threatened a young Iraqi boy selling newspapers at a traffic light which led to an argument between me and my bodyguard.

Did my living conditions influence my judgment? I associated with many people at the embassy on a daily basis and did gain better insight into some of their activities. Yet, our casual relations never went beyond a professional basis. From the perspective of Social Penetration Theory, my daily contacts were in the orientation phase.

IRMO COLLEAGUES

Unlike my colleagues from other countries, I received no instructions from the Dutch military command or from the Dutch government regarding how to fulfil my duties. I had no agenda whatsoever, I was my own boss and the only person I had to answer to was Ambassador Bill Taylor, the Director of IRMO, with whom I had very good relations. He never interfered with my job. As a senior member of the embassy staff and an officer I could move around freely.

During the two weeks of briefing which every Dutch soldier underwent before leaving for Iraq, we attended a number of classes on how to survive a war mentally. We learned about the signs of Post Trauma Stress Syndrome (PTSS) and the importance of the 'buddy-system' to relieve the pressure that is inherent in the job. The theory was: first find a buddy you feel comfortable with and watch over each other's mental well-being. In one colleague, a retired colonel from the USA marines, I found a good friend and we spent a great deal of our limited spare time together and while we did not agree on much personally we got along fine. The violent death of our Education colleague came as a shock to us all and intensified our bond. In spring 2006 my buddy passed through

Amsterdam. After a couple of days spent reminiscing, it was clear that our relationship as friends could only thrive under the exceptional circumstances of an armed conflict.

At one particular time I had regular contact with a colleague from the Ministry of Sports. I copied a programme of his that was very successful. For almost one thousand employees attached to the ministry, he organised classes in computer literacy, English, management, book-keeping and so forth at the American University in Beirut. I hoped that from his experience we could learn a lot, for the development of the culture ministry. Unfortunately, the programme never materialised due to political problems and lack of funds. After that, the regular contact with this colleague disappeared. For a short time I had more personal contact with four other co-workers at IRMO. We were united in our criticism of the *Iraqi Freedom* campaign and appreciated each other's company as there were so few of us with this political view. These relationships only lasted for two or three months when these colleagues returned home. I met some of them again at the end of November 2005 in the USA but, as with my buddy, our relationships proved to work only under the extreme pressures of the Green Zone.

Apart from daily early morning meetings, I did not see much of my other IRMO colleagues. Most of them considered me an oddity, being much too independent, liberal and engaged in a very minor task. In terms of Social Penetration Theory I did not have any effective exchanges with them. With my retired colonel buddy and my critical co-workers I did establish good contact in breadth and depth, ie the amount of information exchange and the intimacy level of exchange, was extensive. With the exception of my buddy friend, however, we did not spend much time together, simply because we did not find the time. According to Taylor and Altman, the relationship with my retired colonel friend was one of 'affective exchange', and with my four co-workers the 'affective exchange' never exceeded the 'exploratory phase'.

OTHER EMBASSY STAFF

Fortunately not all staff lacked appreciation of my work. The Embassy Counsellor for Public Affairs and his staff recognised the importance of Iraq's heritage as a symbol for the people and a material culture that was at the heart of their identity. Of course they were acting on a very practical level as well, as any damage to Iraq's monuments and sites was equally harmful to the image of the USA and the Coalition forces. The Public Affairs Office was continually monitoring the news - and the papers were incensed more than once at the incompetence of the USA authorities to protect Iraq's heritage. The picture in the Washington Post of a sniper on top of the minaret in Samarra cried out for an immediate response on behalf of the embassy. Also the negative press on the military occupation of Babylon was endless. To find out if such allegations could be substantiated, my office was often called in. On a couple of occasions the support of the Public Affairs Office was instrumental in convincing senior staff or the military command to take action. I must admit that I was astonished to see the impact of publicity on policy making.

On one occasion, Public Affairs asked me to join them in an interview with a reporter from the Christian Science Monitor. Hesitantly I agreed, in spite of the fact

that soon after the onset of my tour I had decided not to make any public statements. Firstly, this was because making public statements could have serious consequences for my position as a negotiator (I could lose my 'neutrality') and secondly, and perhaps even more crucially, it could endanger my own safety. Nevertheless, in this instance I became a US official quoted in a much-too-positive article on the protection of Iraq's heritage by the Coalition forces (LaFranchi 2004). Looking back I have to confess that my interpersonal relationships with the Public Affairs Office led to bias in that it had an impact on the tone used in the Christian Science Monitor story. To reference Taylor and Altman (1975), our relationship was one of 'affective exchange'. My contact with other embassy departments was incidental and was mainly confined to very practical matters; it never was more than an orientation, if that.

THE MILITARY

Some of the senior advisers were military but most were civilians. The job did not require a military background but it certainly did help when in contact with the military. Whilst I was a major in the Dutch army, my position at IRMO was the equivalent of a two-star general. For one that meant that getting a helicopter was not too difficult. Also, I could easily sit in on military meetings and that was certainly an advantage in the case of Babylon as I often travelled to camp Victory, the Coalition headquarters, to comment on the military planning of the clearance of the base (see Plate 9). I was fully accepted and my views were heard, and I spoke their language. Occasionally I even pulled rank. In the case of the occupation of the Malwiya minaret in Samarra, I used my military rank to put a military liaison officer in a helicopter to fly over the minaret and take pictures. The minaret, dating back to AD 852, was occupied by a US sniper in the autumn of 2004. In January the insurgents shot at the soldiers on top of the tower, causing serious damage. Those pictures finally convinced a general at the embassy and he signed the order to remove the snipers nest from the minaret. Military convoys also helped me to get UNESCO pick-up trucks from the airport to the museum, to transport some of Saddam's material legacy to the museum and to facilitate the transport of the Ottoman's Archive to the national library.

It was clear to me that my work at the embassy 'should [in principle] not violate operational security', just as embedded press coverage should not (Christopher *et al* 2004). But that my job could be of direct importance to a military operation, I could never have guessed. One night I was sent for by a colonel who explained to me in secret that, the following morning, several units were to conduct a coordinated search of an entire neighbourhood in Baghdad in pursuit of terrorists. In order to coordinate the action from the air he wanted the ministers' permission to use a monument from Saddam's era. We discussed the necessity of the use of this particular building and after making some calls I agreed that there was no real alternative in the surrounding area. I drafted a Memorandum of Agreement that stipulated the maximum time of occupation, the necessity of the local guards' full cooperation, the need to maintain an extremely low profile and full compensation for any damage caused by this intervention, either directly or indirectly.

Very early the next morning, both the minister and the colonel signed the memorandum. The monument was not damaged, the action was successful and the military kept to the agreement. First of all I was glad that the colonel came to me and asked permission. He could have easily just occupied the building and chased everybody out; it would not have been the first time.⁵ Besides, he could always have referred to the Hague Convention (1954) in which an exception is made for local commanders to occupy a monument for strategic reasons.⁶ Still, I am aware of the fact that this action touched on a very sensitive issue: do we place people over heritage or heritage over people?

The Civil Military Affairs unit was another office I often frequented. The general was a kind man and had a keen interest in history. It was with his help that I finally got to the office of the general commander of the Coalition forces, to sign the final order to move the military base from Babylon. He was also instrumental in getting senior commanders to Babylon to force the Polish commander of Babylon to give up his fight against the moving of the camp. Once in a while a civil affairs officer in the field contacted me to ask for advice. As a rule I referred them to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, always pressing them to ask the Iraqi authorities first, whatever they were planning. On one occasion, a civil affairs officer took up the matter of the ammunition depot in al-Hatra with me.⁷ That was the beginning of a good relationship. I worked from my end at the embassy and he was the man in the field. We managed to cut the force of the explosions by half and set up a monitoring system on al-Hatra with the help of the University of Mosul.

I always realised that the military were part of the problem in that they were responsible, at least in part, for the destruction of Iraq's heritage. But the way I defined my job was to facilitate my Iraqi colleagues whenever I could, from within the system and with the help of the military. The contacts with the military never exceeded the 'exploratory affective stage'. As I stated earlier, my appreciation for the tough job the military faced grew in our daily contact, yet our contact always stayed professional. However, my growing appreciation may well have influenced my willingness to collaborate in putting a monument at the disposal of the Coalition forces.

CONCLUSION

Several archaeologists refused to go to Iraq after *Iraqi Freedom* started in March 2003. For the record I would like it to be known that I do not blame them at all; it was a dangerous exercise and it only grew worse. Of course, others stayed at home because they were totally against the invasion of Iraq. Against my own political views, I chose to go and work from the inside in order to contain, as much as possible, the damage to Iraq's cultural heritage. Also, because I believe that once the NGOs and IOs leave the country, the only possible way of getting things done was and is under the protection of the Coalition forces. But now, 22 months after my return from what I consider the most difficult position I have ever held, it is time to review how independent I was and whether or not 'embedded archaeology' leads to bias.

Notwithstanding my dependency on food, lodging and secure transportation, I was free to do my job in whichever way I pleased. In that sense I was not troubled with any restrictions. Yet, I realise that my agenda was partly set by the enquiries by the Public Affairs Office and, to a lesser extent, by the military. Still, the questions were genuine and within the remit of my job description. It was precisely in those two departments that I reached the limits of sound judgment. In at least two cases it can be argued that close contact with these departments lead to a deeper relationship and that this subsequently influenced my decisions and conclusions.

In time I also learned to appreciate the dangers to which the military and private guards, who protected me outside the Green Zone, were exposed. I realise now that that was probably caused by a 'swift trust' bond. Yet, I cannot find examples of this bond influencing my opinion in other matters concerning them. These short information exchanges were based on humanitarian and utilitarian principles. That also applies for the rest of my interpersonal relationships with most of my colleagues in the embassy. I associated with colleagues in a polite manner and sometimes in the search for additional information.

My surroundings were very sympathetic to the American side of the war but I often took the liberty of disagreeing and never disguised my feelings, not even with my buddy. On the contrary, we had many heated discussions perhaps precisely because of the frequent affective exchange of information. After my mission at the US embassy ended I did not change my opinion on operation *Iraqi Freedom*. I was able to see many sides of the story and must, somewhat sadly, conclude that the whole story is not always conveyed.

Notwithstanding the conclusions drawn above, I believe it is necessary to further examine the position of an 'embedded archaeologist' working in a peri-conflict phase. A *Code of Conduct* should without a doubt help those archaeologists who choose to work from the inside in future intrastate conflicts.

NOTES

1. Unlike an American reserve officer an officer in the Dutch reserves can in principle refuse to join a mission. It goes without saying that when he refuses a couple of times his contract will not be extended.
2. According to Global Security the Green Zone (today known as the International Zone) is the heavily guarded diplomatic / government area of closed-off streets in central Baghdad where US occupation authorities live and work. The Green Zone in the central city includes the main palaces of former President Saddam Hussein. The area houses the civilian ruling authority run by the Americans and British, and the offices of major US consulting companies. (see <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/baghdad-green-zone.htm>, accessed December 18 2006)
3. The Green Zone Cafe was a restaurant in the northeast corner of the Green Zone. The restaurant was housed in a fabric and metal-frame building established in the parking lot of a former gas station. It was a popular and successful business, primarily serving the Western inhabitants of the Green Zone and featuring a middle-eastern cuisine. On 14 October 2004, the restaurant was destroyed, one patron was killed and five wounded by a backpack bomb (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Zone_Cafe). The Iraqi Bazaar, popularly called the Haji market, and not far from the café is visited by many foreign personnel. It was hit the same day by a suicide bomber (see http://www.womeninleadership.com/jan_1,2005.htm).
4. Jim Mollen, the senior advisor for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education at IRMO, was killed on 24 November 2004 on his way back from the Ministry of Higher Education, three days before his tour of duty was due to end.
5. In October 2004 a USA patrol entered the Baghdad University compound in Qadisiya in search of insurgents. They occupied the first building they saw, evacuated all the occupants and started to arrest students left and right (personal communication Jim Mollen, senior advisor for the Ministry of Higher Education, 10 October 2004).
6. For more on the Hague Convention see http://portal.UNESCO.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8450&URL_D0=D0_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
7. Al-Hatra, a World Heritage site, was severely threatened by a detonation programme of the coalition forces by the end of 2004. Five kilometres away Saddam built the largest ammunition depot that had to be dismantled and cleared. For this a five year programme was designed. At regular intervals large amounts of ammunition was detonated after being buried in the ground. It turned out that the vibrations were causing damage to the ruins. After long negotiations with the military I managed to lower the force of the detonations by half and agreed with them to monitor the site to see if further damage had been done to the ruins.

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