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The "Old West" in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country

ABSTRACT In this article, I examine the role of the "Indian Country" heritage metaphor in U.S. military activities in the Middle East from a critical anthropological perspective. Research has revealed the proliferation of such discourse among soldiers, military strategists, reporters, and World Wide Web users to refer to hostile, unsecured, and dangerous territory in Iraq and Afghanistan. The salience of this symbol in 21st-century U.S. armed conflicts attests to its staying power in national narratives of colonialism at home and abroad. Summoning the "Indian wars" of the 19th century in the U.S. West as malleable symbolic parallels to the current war in Iraq serves to offer combat lessons in guerilla warfare while reinscribing epic stories of U.S. military imperialism and renarrating uncritically the struggles and conflicts of Native Americans, past and present, through the lens of contemporary perspectives on terrorism. [Keywords: Indian Country, war, heritage, Iraq]

"INDIAN COUNTRY" is a complex metaphor. For Native Americans, it signifies home, territory, families and friends, sacred space, landscape, and community. One can hear of it from New England to the Northwest Coast, and from the Southwest to the Dakotas. It denotes particularly Native spaces in the geographical and cultural landscape of the United States, ones that may comprise ancestral territories and reservations, refer to sacred spaces, be framed by wins and losses in federal acknowledgment battles, and crosscut rural and urban environments. Because "Indian Country" is not just one place, it is a metaphor for what it means (and where it means) to be Native American in the contemporary United States. The national newspaper, *Indian Country Today,* attests to the ways that Indian people welcome and use this venue to voice news and concerns about their current successes and struggles.

Counteracting this positive valence is the work that "Indian Country" does in another realm: as a metaphor used by U.S. military personnel to refer to hostile, unpacified territories in active war zones. From the Vietnam War to the occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces beginning in 2003, the notion of "Indian Country" offers a powerful heritage metaphor for the armed forces. The phrase summons the history of Native American and U.S. military encounters, particularly those of the 19th century, in ways that interpret the present in light of the past, that retell (or reinterpret) the past through present political filters, and that forecast the future while justifying the present. The metaphor draws on a narrative of U.S. colonialism, triumphalism, and Othering that operated in discourses about Native Americans in the past, that surround Native American struggles and communities today, and that appear to be recast in new (dis)guise in the Middle East in the early 21st century.

By exploring how the U.S. "Old West" is discursively and practically recapitulated in the Middle East and how the national narrative of U.S. frontier expansion receives embodied support by soldiers who live in and through these heritage metaphors, I seek to explore why these metaphors work in imagined "Indian Country" and how they do work in real Indian Country. I am interested here in metaphors that explicitly involve Native Americans and not in the numerous parallel metaphors in U.S., British, French, and other national media that refer to the occupation of Iraq and its overall management strategy as reminiscent of the U.S. "Wild West" with gunslingers, sheriffs (a.k.a. "cowboy presidents"), John Wayne attitudes, and overall lawlessness. In this article, I blend together David Lowenthal's (1996) characterization of heritage practice as mobilizing the past into the present for present purposes, George Lakoff's (1991, 2003) demonstrations of the power of metaphor in the discourse and practice of war, Michael Yellow Bird's (2004) and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's (2003) worries about the need to continue decolonizing the celebrated U.S. icons of "cowboys and Indians," and Anthony Hall's (2003) and Richard Drinnon's (1990) propositions about a link between the past and present treatment of Indigenous peoples

by the United States and its military activities in the 20th and early 21st centuries in places such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Iraq (see also Den Ouden 2007; Engelhardt 2007). The analysis is based on empirical research into the use and distribution of this metaphor in print and Internet sources as kind of virtual ethnography, accompanied by initial speculation on their effects. I also examine the complex ambiguity and contestability embedded in such heritage metaphors and how they can be turned to a variety of political objectives.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND WAR: ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES

The current war in Iraq has elicited debates among anthropologists regarding their role in understanding conflict, protecting heritage, and assisting or protesting U.S. military actions. The most prominent debate has centered on whether or not anthropologists should engage with U.S. military or security issues, such as serving in military units as ethnographic advisors. On one side, cultural anthropologists have become part of the U.S. Human Terrain Team initiative that takes anthropology into Afghanistan and Iraq as a kind of "tribal engagement" to use cultural information to improve success in military operations by building local alliances and reducing casualties (McFate 2005; Selmeski 2007). On the other side, recent issues of *Anthropology News* indicate that more North American anthropologists strongly resist this participation for its perceived complicity in U.S. aggression, role in intelligence gathering, ambiguous ethics, and lack of protection for cultural informants (e.g., Albro 2007; Fluehr-Lobban and Heller 2007). This issue has attracted significant attention, resulting in a report produced by the AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities (2007) that addresses the professional and ethical dimensions—"the complexities of discerning perils and opportunities" (p. 19)—of such anthropological engagement.

The full dimensions of this issue are beyond the scope of this article, particularly because I focus here on ethnographies of war, not for war, but two additional intersections of anthropologists and war do help to set the methodological and conceptual parameters of this study. One element concerns the debates that have raged among archaeologists about the current war, most of which have revolved around the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent impacts on material heritage. Early on, many archaeologists with disciplinary specializations in the affected region issued a letter of protest in the Society for American Archaeology's *The Archaeological Record* against the impending invasion of Iraq (Letter to the Editor 2003). Two key events—(1) the involvement of some Mesopotamian archaeologists with the U.S. military to try to avoid the destruction of key ancient sites (Gibson 2003) and (2) the looting of the Baghdad Museum during the U.S. invasion in 2003—have sparked critical commentary by professional archaeologists (Adams

2005; Bernhardsson 2005; Hamilakis 2003). Susan Pollock's (2003) analysis, like that of Michael Seymour (2004) for the British public during earlier incidents in the Middle East, reveals the profound role of Mesopotamian heritage values and interpretation in how the U.S. government and citizenry react to and judge the contemporary conflict.

These particular heritage metaphors tend to be used to protect cultural sites, to recover lost antiquities, or to protest military invasion in the Middle East, hinging as they do on a cultivated (and debated) understanding of "World Heritage" in the context of the so-called cradle of civilization in the Tigris–Euphrates region. Yet this leaves untouched the other heritage discourses in play, such as the way that the U.S. military past in North America's Indigenous territories is summoned to give meaning to, if not support, conflict on the other side of the globe. Transplanting the "Indian Country" metaphor across regions, through time, and in military contexts mobilizes a complex framework of already understood but malleable national symbols to explain events, people, the nature of battle, and the very reasons for war in 21st-century Iraq.

Ethnographies of the military provide a second element of anthropology's role vis-à-vis military conflict. Studies of U.S. military bases (Lutz 2001); the experiences of soldiers as multifaceted, nonelite, and inconsistent agents of empire (Brown and Lutz 2007; Lutz 2006); and the gendered and sexist language of military training (Burke 2004) provide entry points for a critical anthropological perspective on military conflict and discourse and its participants and victims. Interviews and observations of U.S. soldiers and military officers provide key insights into the processes and contradictions of war, but other avenues are available when such traditional ethnographic study is not possible or not yet completed. For instance, "grunt literature" in the form of books and Internet weblogs offers access to military uses of such heritage metaphors, even though it lacks the direct opportunity to ask more pointedly what such words mean to them. Still, the method pays particular attention to the everyday deployments of these heritage metaphors as part of daily practice in the military, particularly by listening to those who are not making larger decisions about war but are carrying it forward (e.g., Lutz 2006).

In addition, broader discourses in diverse public media—newspapers, interviews, web sites—offer an opportunity to look more closely at the trafficking in these metaphors at various positions within the military and outside of it, such as soldiers, officers, strategists, reporters, artists, pundits, and the general public. Recent studies have shown the value of looking at broader public discourses about heritage and war (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2003; Meskell 2002; Pollock 2003; Seymour 2004). In all cases, these voices are studied to discern a pattern of accepted U.S. military and political discourse, not to serve as proof that everyone in these positions uses or even approves of the terminology. The diversity of opinions in the military has yet to be studied. The currency of the metaphor

rests not only in its place in some aspects of official military language but also in the embedded "common sense" understanding that soldiers have of their own national heritage and current military activities in the Middle East.

"INDIAN COUNTRY" PAST AND PRESENT

Although I focus my argument here on the "Indian Country" metaphor in 21st-century Iraq and Afghanistan, this context does not mark its first usage in U.S. military parlance. A detailed history of the use of the term *Indian Country* has not yet been traced (other than its likely origins during the infamous 19th-century Indian Wars as the United States expanded across the North American continent), but several observations can be made about its role in 20th-century military discourse.

The public first became aware of the "Indian Country" military metaphor in the Vietnam War. Instances of this—particularly in newspaper coverage, popular books, and films of the 1970s and afterward—have been noted elsewhere (Burke 2004:109; Drinnon 1990:368; Engelhardt 2007:175–259; Espey 1994). "Vietnam, the soldiers said, was 'Indian Country' (General Maxwell Taylor himself referred to the Vietnamese opposition as 'Indians' in his Congressional testimony on the war), and the people who lived in Indian country 'infested' it, according to official government language" (Stannard 1992:251). Transcripts of the congressional war crime hearings following the 1971 My Lai Massacre capture a revealing exchange between Captain Robert B. Johnson and Congressman John Seiberling:

> Johnson: Where I was operating I didn't hear anyone personally use that term ["turkey shoots"]. We used the term "Indian Country."
> Seiberling: What did "Indian Country" refer to?
> Johnson: I guess it means different things to different people. It is like there are savages out there, there are gooks out there. In the same way we slaughtered the Indian's buffalo, we would slaughter the water buffalo in Vietnam. [Richter n.d.]

In 1995, Colin Powell, who would later serve as U.S. Secretary of State at the beginning of the Iraq War, recounted his experiences in My Lai in a similar way when

> he described the massacre as the tragic but understandable act of troops stuck in "Indian country." "I don't mean to be ethnically or politically unconscious," Powell said, "but it was awful. There was nothing but v.c. [Viet Cong] in there. When you went in there, you were fighting everybody." [Lane 1995:24]

Frances Fitzgerald made the powerful point as the Vietnam War drew to a close that highlights the nature of the "Indian Country" metaphor for U.S. citizens: "It put the Vietnam War into a definite mythological and historical perspective: the Americans were once again embarked upon a heroic and (for themselves) almost painless conquest of an inferior race" (Fitzgerald 2002:368; see also Drinnon 1990; Engelhardt 2007).

Despite the high numbers of Native Americans serving in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War and the rising activism surrounding Native American rights during that decade, the term did not disappear in the 1970s. The First Gulf War in 1991 revealed that such a term continued within military circles. Brigadier General Richard Neal stated in a nationally televised broadcast that they had rescued a pilot "40 miles into Indian Country," a portion of Kuwait under Iraqi control (Dunbar-Ortiz 2004; Federal News Service 1991). Not unexpectedly, Native American communities across the United States took notice and demanded an apology. As Paul DeMain (1991) reported, many Native American veterans recalled hearing this terminology during their service in Vietnam and resented the insults implied: accusations of nonpatriotism and outright linkages with the enemy. However, instead of receiving an apology, they were told that although the term had been used commonly in the Vietnam War, it was not part of any official manual or training (DeMain 1991). However, what went unnoticed was the pervasiveness of this metaphor. Several prominent news sources contained quotations of U.S. soldiers in Kuwait who used the same terminology of "Indian Country" (e.g., Branigin and Claiborne 1991; Dowden and Fisk 1991; Galloway 1991). For example, consider this statement: "Beyond the berm, the immense sand wall running the length of the Kuwait border, lies what the grunts call Indian Country, a shell-pocked no man's land" (Nickerson 1991:9).

The early-21st-century conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan involving U.S. participation have not backed away from the "Indian Country" metaphor and, in fact, may propagate it more than ever. The frequency with which this metaphor appears in military discourse indicates the comfort that its proliferators have with it as an efficacious, transparent, and acceptable "figure of speech." The availability of information on the Internet through media outlets, soldier accounts, and weblog commentaries makes it clear that the terminology remains pervasive. Because of article space constraints, Table 1 offers only a 13 percent selective sample (10 of 77 logged as of December 2007) of the "Indian Country" metaphor gathered from web search engines and LexisNexis (post-1990) using a combination of search terms. When coupled with a sample of autobiographical "grunt literature" like that reviewed by Keith Brown and Catherine Lutz (2007:326) and books by political commentators, the data indicate that this powerful symbol still speaks to U.S. collective memories about military success and dangerous violence. For example, former Marine Second Lieutenant Ilario Pantano recounts how his civil defense attorney spoke on his behalf: "This is Iraq, Indian Country where bad guys do things like take you out and cut your head off" (2006:390).

As *Atlantic Monthly* writer Robert Kaplan notes in a book that valorizes soldier experiences: "'Welcome to Injun Country' was the refrain I heard from troops from Colombia to the Philippines, including Afghanistan and

TABLE 1. Sample of public media sources employing "Indian Country" metaphor in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Statements from Soldiers and Official Media Sources	Source
"From across the river, we hear a boom in the distance. And then another. 'This is like cowboys and Indians,' relays a Marine. Indeed it is."	Hemmer, Bill 2006 Reporter's Notebook: Cowboys and Indians. Foxnews.com, March 30. Electronic document, http://ww.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,189147,00.html.
"Anbar has the savagery, lawlessness and violence of America's Wild West in the 1870s. The two most lethal cities in Iraq are Fallujah and Ramadi, and ... between them is Indian Country."	West, Bing, and Owen West 2007 Iraq's Real "Civil War." Wall Street Journal, April 5:A13.
"I guess if this were the Old West I'd say there are Injuns ahead of us, Injuns behind us, and Injuns on both sides too ..."	Editors' Report 2003 Indian Country of America. Indian Country Today, April 9. Electronic document, http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1049898023.
Paul Strand, Christian Broadcasting Network reporter, on-air exchange with Pat Robertson on March 24, 2003: "Even the base the Americans have set up on the edge of town, in an abandoned Iraqi police station, is called Forward Operating Base Comanche, with echoes of a fort in Indian country during the 19th-century expansion across the Great Plains."	Burns, John F. 2004 In the General's Black Hawk, Flying over a Divided Iraq. The New York Times, January 12:2.
"'You have so much freedom and authority over there,' one member of ODA 2021 said. 'It kind of makes you feel like God when you're out there in cowboy and Indian country.'"	Sack, Kevin, and Craig Pyes 2006 Firebase Gardez: A Times Investigation. Los Angeles Times, September 24:A1.
"LT. COL. RALPH PETERS, US ARMY (RET): '[T]he convoys, it's harder to run them, you need more protection. Basically, the wagon trains now have to go through Indian country.'"	Gibson, John, Mike Tobin, and Mike Emmanuel 2004 US Soldier Kidnapped by Terrorists in Iraq. "The Big Story with John Gibson," Fox News Network, April 16.
"Ramadi is Indian Country—'the wild, wild West,' as the region is called."	McDonnell, Patrick J. 2004 The Conflict in Iraq: No Shortage of Fighters in Iraq's Wild West. Los Angeles Times, July 25:A1
"We refer to our base as 'Fort Apache' because it's right in the middle of Indian country."	Peirce, Michael 2003 A View from the Frontline in Iraq. LewRockwell.com, April 13. Electronic document, http://www.lewrockwell.com/peirce/peirce73.html.
"Christ be careful out there. This is Indian country in the Hollywood sense of the word."	Adams, Jeff 2004 Comment on "Greetings from Baghdad," May 27. Electronic document, http://www.back-to-iraq.com/archives/2004/05/greetings_from_baghdad.php.
"Had he even lifted a finger towards it, there could have been a 'situation'. Now you know why we call this place either the 'Old West' or 'Indian Country.'"	Reese, Christopher 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom through the Eyes of an Adventurer, May 2. Electronic document, http://www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/reese.html.

Note: Sources are not repeated in References Cited unless also cited specifically in text. All weblogs accessed October 18–20, 2006.

Iraq" (2005:4). Contrary to statements made by U.S. military officials, the traffic in these metaphors may be part of the sanctioned but, perhaps, not "official" lexicon of the U.S. government (see Bolger 1995). In October 2006, the Baghdad Overseas Security Advisory Council website had the following statement (which one year later no longer existed): "We will post other things ... so that your teams can have the best information available if they run into trouble out in 'Indian Country' " (Baghdad Country Council n.d.). Recent newspaper quotations from Stephen Biddle, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and former professor at the U.S. Army War College, further emphasize the currency of this metaphor among military leaders and strategists. The *Los Angeles Times* quotes him with reference the U.S. Embassy: "If the government of Iraq collapses and becomes transparently just one party in a civil war, you've got Ft. Apache in the middle of Indian country, but the Indians have mortars now" (Zavis 2007: A1). The *International Herald Tribune* quotes Biddle saying "those convoys are going to roll through Indian country with no cavalry" (Knowlton 2006). Even U.S. country music superstar Toby Keith commented on traveling to Iraq to entertain soldiers "in Indian country, in the Wild Wild West" (Masley 2005: W16).

Some may use the metaphor haphazardly in everyday conversation, but others, like Kaplan (2004, 2005), have reflected on it and embrace the imagery as evocative of U.S. soldier's experiences past and present. In fact, Kaplan (2004, 2005:4) claims that the use of the "red Indian metaphor" does not show soldier disrespect for Native Americans but, rather, honors them, much like the Indian names during radio calls that he also mentions. Some military sectors (and many critical scholars) do have concerns about the respectfulness of such military mascots, though. For example, in 2005, the U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)

removed Native American names from some of its military exercises and equipment (Scarborough 2005). Yet, in Kaplan's writings, the metaphor becomes more than symbolic reinterpretation of past and present Native Americans and the U.S. military; it is racist in its extension of analogical reasoning.

> The American Indian analogy went far in Mongolia, for the Plains Indians were descendants of the very peoples who had migrated from this part of North-Central Asia across the Bering Strait and down into North America. Gen. Joseph Stilwell, the American commander in China during World War II, remarked that the "sturdy, dirty, hard-bitten" Mongols all had "faces like Sitting Bull." The Mongolian long-song took you back to the chants of the Sioux and Apaches. Helping matters were the cowboy hats that Mongolians wore along with their traditional robes. As [Lt. Col. Thomas Parker] Wilhelm never stopped saying [in 2003], "Mongolia is real Injun Country." [Kaplan 2005:100]

MAPPING THE METAPHOR

The "Indian Country" metaphor entails a series of analogical links between Native Americans and Iraqis and their lands under military siege by the U.S. military. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980) terminology of mapping "source" and "target" domains helps draw out the connections. The source domain is North American Indigenous people living in what the United States called "Indian Country"—the lawless frontier of advancing civilization in the 19th century—as dark-skinned savages with little technological development, no adherence to Christianity, warring tribes and factions, land that should be turned over to more appropriate governance and use, and knack for guerilla fighting in a war that they did not (could not?) win. The discourse by soldiers and officers readily maps these characteristics onto the target domain of Iraq. Iraqis can be and often are portrayed in all of these same ways in military and civilian discourse.

The efficacy of this metaphor relies not in the accuracy of the historical or cultural details in the source domain (for these are terribly inaccurate, racist, and stereotypical), but on the believability and acceptability of them as part of a narrative of conquest and nation-building by some of its citizens. The refraction of this narrative through Hollywood and the cinema genre of "Westerns" must be acknowledged as well. Equally important to the parallels are the presumed constants in both source and target domains: the U.S. military and reasons for war. Those who use the "Indian Country" metaphor do so because they feel historical, cultural, and national kinship with soldiers who similarly waged wars of pacification against unruly adversaries who could be subjugated with appropriate force. In both cases, whether battling Indians in the 19th century or Iraqis in the 21st century, the U.S. military discourse attempts to convey civilization's battle against savagery, a discourse that Robert Ivie notes has been "deeply rooted in the American political lexicon, its culture and collec-

tive psyche" (2005:56) since the American Revolution in the late 1700s. Similarly, Tom Engelhardt notes that "the paradigm of the frontier and of the Indians Wars settled deep into the American soul . . . and the framework of the Indian Wars, however suppressed and transformed, remains in some fashion powerfully with us" (2007:315).

Heritage serves to install a widely accepted and unambiguous past—whether as event, interpretation, feeling, or personal qualities—into the present for the purpose of taking action or finding meaning (Lowenthal 1996). A powerful feature of heritage is not simply that it provides a static view of the past and its values for today, but that each performance of heritage does not remake the past but, rather, the story we tell about it. Therefore, metaphors do not simply draw on a past assumed to be immutable and factual; they also serve as mechanisms for reinscribing and updating it as heritage in arenas of social and political power. Calling a current context by a past referent, such as "Indian Country," serves to draw on a presumed collective memory at the same time that it contributes to memory making today. The power lies in the fact that no one needs to explain "Indian Country" to U.S. soldiers who use or hear it, even if such individuals might well fail an "objective" history test about that history. The metaphor is emotive and presumably transparent.

Referring to "enemy territory" in Iraq as "Indian Country" works in all of these registers. It asks soldiers to draw on their collective, national memory to remember that U.S. military forces have faced such situations before and to think about doing what their predecessors might have done. Therefore, the past is a training ground that "the military" has already explored. New experiences for individuals take on familiarity from the repertoire of supposedly shared, collective historical experiences. The metaphor also renarrates the past through the filter of the present to provide the common link. An individual does not merely collectively remember and commemorate the past through performance but, rather, vicariously experiences the present as though it were also the past. Could a U.S. soldier who has fought in contemporary "Indian Country" in Iraq read a historical account of the Battle of Little Bighorn without assuming that he or she might know what that past must have been like? The assumed constancy of the U.S. military between source and target domain suggests not.

However, the terminology also serves to make the outcome of conflict in "Indian Country" predictable and, therefore, more acceptable. U.S. military personnel know—whether they played the role of cowboys or Indians when they were children or slept through history class—that the Indians might have won a battle but they never won the war. Transforming Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry's absolute defeat in 1876 by Northern Cheyenne, Lakota, and Arapaho at the Battle of Little Bighorn in Montana into the ultimate hero sacrifice for Manifest Destiny happened almost immediately after the battle and still resonates with national and

military memory today (Elliott 2007). Therefore, to return to Indian Country, this time in the Middle East, is to return victorious, because history has already established this legacy. Referring to hostile enemy territory as Indian Country underwrites the necessity and value of fighting in it for a greater good. The sacrifice of U.S. soldiers then can be rationalized as acceptable means to an otherwise "noble" and predictable end, as can the loss of Iraqi civilians, including men, women, and children:

> When the Cavalry invested Indian encampments, they periodically encountered warrior braves beside women and children, much like Fallujah. Though most Cavalry officers tried to spare the lives of noncombatants, inevitable civilian casualties raised howls of protest among humanitarians back East. [Kaplan 2004]

METAPHORS OF MILITARY PRACTICE

One might claim that the preceding interpretations are off the mark because these military metaphors are only made in the heat of dangerous combat to draw out parallels to assist with strategy. In other words, similar conflict settings could be mobilized just as easily for the same purpose. Yet research suggests that they are not. Those who utter such metaphors concern themselves not with historical details and accuracy but, rather, draw on them for emotive and assumed meanings. Take, for instance, the statement by Defense Policy board member, James Woolsey: "Without the trained Iraqis, it was like the Seventh Cavalry going into the heart of Apache country in Arizona in the 1870s with no scouts. No Apache scouts. I mean, hello?" (Rose 2007). However, the Seventh Cavalry never engaged the Apaches, instead having been the cavalry units who fought at Little Bighorn in 1876 and participated in the disastrous massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.

Soldiers fighting in Iraq do not claim to be mirroring a battle during the American Revolution or Civil War, both of which have resonance in the psyche of the United States as wars for freedom, unity, and democracy and are highlighted by the U.S. government in the current war in Iraq. Without debating these larger principles or their validity, the fact that soldiers in the Middle East draw on the "Indian wars" of the 19th century to inform their daily experiences in combat suggests other dimensions. The "Indian wars" were not designed to unify a country and bring all of its citizens under a free democracy, contrary to the revisionist retelling of that history by a soldier in Iraq: "To me, they're going through the wild wild West phase of the United States when we first started as a democracy ... And it's going to take them longer to get out of the wild wild West phase than it did for us" (Gordon 2004). Instead, the "Indian wars" were designed to remove resistant Native Americans from lands that the U.S. government wanted for mineral extraction, railroads, or White settlers. U.S. soldiers today do not feel like they are fighting against an empire who oppresses a region's inhabitants but, rather, against a group of so-called infidels who resist being made to conform to another government's wishes. For example, Max Boot argues that the United States can win in Iraq the same way it did in the western United States: "cutting off the guerrillas from their population base by herding tribes onto reservations; utilizing friendly Indians for scouting and intelligence, and by being relentless in the pursuit of hostile braves, never giving them a moment of rest" (2003b:1b).

One might argue that the parallel lies less in the purpose of the conflict and more in the similarities to combat situations. Instead of heavily armed empires going head to head in a battlefield, U.S. soldiers confront guerilla-style tactics of Sunni, Shiite, and Taliban fighters. This would certainly make the situation less like Gettysburg in the American Civil War and more like the combat settings in 19th-century western North America, a point that Kaplan makes repeatedly when he claims that troops could succeed by acting like Apaches rather than with "dinosauric, industrial age infantry divisions" (2005:6; see also Cassidy 2004:42). A responder to Kaplan's *Wall Street Journal* commentary agrees that "employing the native population to ferret out a determined opposition" will insure "the greater success we will see in this century's 'Indian Wars'" (Paisley 2004). Even the editor of *Indian Country Today* concedes that smaller fighting units and local alliances might help end the conflict in Iraq but notes that "Indian country is not the enemy. It is a valuable source of experience and wisdom" (Editor's Report 2004a).

Perhaps soldiers claim to fight in Indian Country to learn from past successes and mistakes in similar guerilla fighting situations, but the discourse only works because these metaphors derive from national consciousness and triumphalist visions of military conquest for the greater good in the North American homeland. They do not turn to the many other "small wars" that Boot (2003a) outlines in his adulatory treatment of the United States's rise to military power. In addition, other nations' soldiers do not turn to the Indian Wars of the 19th-century United States to inform their on-the-ground maneuvers, even though their strategists surely know of them as part of world military history. Therefore, the use of this U.S. military metaphor indicates a far deeper symbolic connection than simply understanding guerilla warfare. It is national heritage rooted in colonialism and aggression, and it feeds on a belief in the continued rightness, historical legitimacy, and expected military success of the United States (Drinnon 1990; Hall 2003; Ivie 2005). The discourse also seems to feed on elements of White supremacy, because, historically, the racialized metaphor has been used in nonwhite, non-Western regions such as Vietnam and Iraq that can be rendered as "savage." It takes little imagination to answer in the negative the question of whether the "Indian Country" metaphor would ever be used if the U.S. military invaded a European or primarily European-descendent nation such as Great Britain, Germany, or Canada.

IMPACTS IN REAL INDIAN COUNTRY

Conflating Indian Country real and imagined, past and present, sets the stage for a dangerous symbolic inversion when the simile "Iraq is like Indian Country" transforms into "Indian Country is like Iraq" (or "Indians are like Iraqis"). The past is recast in the present, not only to confirm the assumptions about the present but also to insure that the past fits the expected mold. Referring to the Iraq battlegrounds of the U.S. "global war on terror" as "Indian Country" means, quite simply, that Indians must have been (and still are?) terrorists. A Native American writer recently worried:

> My immediate thoughts—the first time that I heard the reference to the war torn streets of Baghdad as "Indian Country"—was that after 515 years of conquest—in the minds of Imperial America—the First Nations of the "Americas" are still regarded as enemies, hostiles, obstacles to progress . . . as terrorists. [Starr 2007]

Even if the rendering of terrorist and infidel zones in the Middle East as "Indian Country" serves more as historical metaphor, and even if soldiers would not consider their Native American neighbors or fellow soldiers today as terrorists, one still cannot escape the problematic renarration of those historical Indian Wars as conflicts with terrorists, despite the obvious common thread of the United States as the invader.

It takes little imagination to create the metaphor's inversion when some purveyors spell it out quite clearly. Kaplan makes the following observation that explicitly links past Native Americans with terrorism and radicalism:

> Colombian narco-terrorists had forged strategic link with radical Islamists: proof that while the frontier of Indian Country used to begin eight miles west of Fort Leavenworth—where the Santa Fe and Oregon trails separated—it now circumscribed the earth, and was not confined to the Middle East. [Kaplan 2005:43]

This comparison is possible, in part, because of his characterization of "Indian Country" in the 19th-century United States as "a Hobbesian world" with "throwbacks," a "panoply of mobile guerilla forces," and the equivalent of "warring ethnic and religious militias" (Kaplan 2005: 8–9). In a similar vein, a "senior U.S. official" referred to the search for Osama bin Laden in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States by saying that "we don't see any of his Indians doing anything on his behalf" (Scarborough 2002: A01). In the clearest association between Indians and terrorists, Kaplan calls the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876 and "the massacre of Custer's 7th cavalry—the 9/11 of its day" (2005:367).

Not much reading between the lines in this discourse is necessary to realize that Native Americans who fought to keep their homelands against aggressive U.S. military encroachments now have become terrorists who caused unexpected heavy casualties without provocation. How can an 1870s victory in battle by Native Americans against a regiment of the U.S. Cavalry—led by an aggressive Custer who was coming to force them onto reservations and to help prepare the land for White settlement and mineral extraction—be likened to the heavy civilian casualties suffered by U.S. and world citizens in the surprise attack orchestrated by al-Qaeda on the Twin Towers in New York City in 2001? It cannot. Suggesting otherwise involves (1) a misrepresentation of well-known U.S. history (one that is, in fact, commemorated by the U.S. National Park Service at the Little Bighorn battlefield with monuments to soldiers and monuments to Native American warriors and their bravery [see Elliott 2007]); (2) an attempt to instill fear by fabricating a threat of terrorism and savagery that, by extension, must have affected the United States since at least the 1870s and continues to require vigilance (per Ivie 2005); and (3) a complete disregard for the cultural and political casualties for Native Americans caused by such a flawed comparison.

More than history is at stake. The "Indian Country" metaphor also represents the language of colonization in the present. Summoning this kind of metaphor for a military effort in the Middle East conveys that the occupying troops are agents of colonization, imperialism, and the presumed highest orders of civilization. As a result, the military speaks of "Indian Country" as a place to dominate and control, not as the homelands of some of its current enlisted men and women who frequently serve their country in percentages higher than in the overall U.S. population. What must it be like as a Native American soldier to hear a phrase that means one's homeland being used to refer to a hostile and dangerous place that needs to be conquered and subdued? What are the implications of knowing that fellow soldiers are playing the proverbial cowboy? What dimensions are invoked when Native American visitors, such as the Native Star Dance Team from New Mexico headed by retired Army Sgt. First Class Nick Brokeshoulder (Hopi–Shawnee), perform for soldiers in Iraq (see Figure 1)? How are these representatives of real Indian Country discursively and practically reconciled with references to imagined Indian Country in war zones? The same question can be posed for the U.S. Department of Defense's November 2006 celebration of American Indian Heritage month that honored Native American service in the U.S. military, past and present (U.S. Department of Defense 2006). Can one-time, mandated, positive commemorations subvert the dominant, multisited, spontaneous, negative language of military war zones directed at Native American people and their ancestry? Further ethnographic research will be required to provide answers.

In the interim, one might propose that the effect, at a structural and discursive level, is recolonization in the heat of combat. These discursive moments involve social and psychological impacts during war, but these heritage performances do not remain in Iraq. If soldiers leave their imagined "Indian Country" in the Middle East as a place of violence, bloodshed, terrorism, savagery, and resistance, what is to encourage them to think differently of Indian Country in the United States, despite how Native American

FIGURE 1. Native Star Dance Team from New Mexico, headed by retired Army Sgt. First Class Nick Brokeshoulder (Hopi/Shawnee), performing for soldiers in Iraq in November 2006, sponsored by U.S Army-Europe as part of American Indian Heritage Month. (Photo courtesy of Private First Class Durwood Blackmon, 25th Infantry Division Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs)

soldiers and civilians characterize it? It will insure that the war in Iraq becomes another arena for the complex perpetuation of U.S. colonialism on Indigenous people within its own national boundaries. Recognizing this problem, Native American spokespersons demanded in 1991 that former President George Bush Sr. apologize for the U.S. military's use of such colonial metaphors and not expect that Native American soldiers will fight in what the military deems to be "Indian Country" (DeMain 1991). Neither has happened. The editors of *Indian Country Today* recently asked: "We urge author Kaplan to reconsider his approach and definitions of the term and the never-ending hostility that those imply for the real and still-remembering people of Indian country" (Editor's Report 2004b; see also Editor's Report 2003). Because these are impacts in real Indian Country, additional ethnographic work on these material and linguistic effects on Native American soldiers is necessary.

FURTHER METAPHORICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Despite the prevalence of the "Indian Country" metaphor in military discourse in the Middle East and beyond as an enabler, some scholars and media commentators have taken issue with its use by soldiers and writers, and still others have capitalized on the ambiguity of the heritage metaphor to criticize U.S. military and policy actions. His-

torians, such as Dunbar-Ortiz (2003, 2004) and Engelhardt (2006), have considered Kaplan's apologetic position on the use of "Indian Country" to be racist and neocolonial:

> The term "Indian Country" is not merely an insensitive racial slur to indicate the enemy, tastelessly employed by accident. ... "Indian Country" is a military term of trade, a technical term, such as "collateral damage" and "ordnance," which appears in military training manuals and is used on a regular basis. "Indian Country" is the military term for "behind enemy lines." Its current use should serve to remind us of the origins and development of the U.S. military. [Dunbar-Ortiz 2004]

Responding to Kaplan's (2004) *Wall Street Journal* opinion-editorial, writers in media with a predominantly Native American readership—such as *Indian Country Today*—have also voiced concerns (Editor's Report 2004a, 2004b; Newcomb 2004; Norrell 2004; see also Starr 2007).

Rather than reject the problematic metaphor entirely, some journalists and commentators have retained the metaphor but subverted its regular usage into critique. That is, instead of using "Indian Country" to describe enemy inhabitants and soldier experiences as part of the larger national narrative of U.S. success, they use it to draw critical attention to U.S. international and military policies of imperialism (e.g., Brown 2006; Mayfield 2003; Smith 2007). That is, the metaphorical comparison involves the reasons for war and not the participants therein. These commentators claim that the war in Iraq is like the wars in Indian Country of 19th-century North America: a misguided imperial attempt on the part of the United States to quash (frequently nonwhite) people and nations considered in the way of important resources and to initiate long-term and violent conflicts to tame a proverbial frontier. The parallels between these two military contexts and the discourses about them have not been lost on academic writers either (Elliott 2007:278–279; Engelhardt 2007; Hall 2003).

However, the metaphor offers subtle danger, too, even for those who otherwise attempt to critique current U.S. military actions and international policies by perpetuating racist ideas of who occupies (or occupied) Indian Country. Susan Faludi (2007b) has developed criticisms of U.S. national myths and military from a gendered perspective and attempts to show the deep history of national narratives of terror and insecurity. Yet, for many readers, her tactic will collapse al-Qaeda from the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and Native Americans from King Philip's War–Metacom's Rebellion in 1675 New England both as being aggressors on "home-soil":

> Sept. 11 cracked the plaster on that master narrative of American prowess because it so exactly duplicated the terms of the early Indian wars, right down to the fecklessness of our leaders and the failures of our military strategies. Like its early American antecedents, the 9/11 attack was a homeland incursion against civilian targets by non-European, non-Christian combatants who fought under the flag of no recognized nation. [Faludi 2007a: A29]

CONCLUSION

This analysis has served double duty as an academic exposé on the use of colonial heritage metaphors in U.S. conflicts in the Middle East and a critical examination of the complex ways that the past and present merge and undergo reinterpretation in deployment of such metaphors. It is important here to resist the claim that these are "mere semantics" or inconsequential references to vague histories with little import in people's lives since metaphors are fundamental to thought and not just incidental to communication of those thoughts (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Uncritically attributing them some entertainment value in combat thanks to the proliferation of "cowboy and Indian" movies in the 20th century does not negate or depoliticize their impact either. Such an apologetic approach, in fact, accentuates the subtlety, pervasiveness, and longevity of those impacts. Linguistic practices and discourses have social, political, and cultural effects, particularly when they comprise the language of colonialism and of power. They are not neutral. These discursive practices solidify understandings that people have of their surroundings, the people with whom they interact, and their collective origins.

The ambiguity embedded in such heritage metaphors reveals the incompleteness of colonialism and the spaces of resistance. The metaphor's ability to mobilize soldiers, Native Americans, anthropologists, and public commentators to very different positions reveals the power and the fragility of the narrative of both past and present to which it refers. Unlike the wars that the United States has fought outside of North America, the Indian Wars sit at the very foundations of colonial nationhood. Members of the U.S. Armed Forces use the "Indian Country" metaphor to negotiate a particular colonial and military legacy but one that is far from unequivocal and consensual.

For those who support the war in Iraq on grounds of democracy and freedom, continuing the use of "Indian Country" terminology conveys to others that, in fact, something else is at work. Why use the language of colonization rather than of freedom? Is the public message of the U.S. government not actually manifest in the everyday experience of soldiers on the ground or in the ways that they are trained to think and act during combat? By realigning the metaphor to say that troops should fight more like Apaches, Kaplan (2004) reveals potential imperial and colonial reasons for U.S. occupation of Western North America (and Iraq) and for Apache (and Iraqi) resistance therein. Then again, some U.S. citizens may not have a problem with such a historical and contemporary vision on domestic or international fronts. However, for those who oppose the current U.S.-led war in Iraq, the frequency of the "Indian Country" metaphor in common military parlance rings alarm bells. Linguistically and practically, the discourse conveys an attempt to suppress and colonize those who are perceived as savage and uncivilized and to recapitulate the presumed successes of the U.S. military against Native Americans. To the editor of *Indian Country Today*, "it feeds the heart-wrenching realization that American public discourse is increasingly revisionist, distorted, inherently biased and so self-absorbed in its own supremacist thinking that it can only become the object of world condemnation" (Editor's Report 2004b).

The problem is one of past and present. In the case discussed here, the past loses its difference and its independence to inform or critique the present; it becomes an inevitability and a figment of (re)imagination. History has been recast in present guise through a mere phrase that draws its meaning from shared ideology and powerful national narratives. The present suffers as well in the revived tropes of savagery and the continued neocolonial and racist treatments of Native Americans at home and abroad.

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