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## 9 • FROM WARRIOR TO SOLDIER?

Lakota Veterans on Military Valor

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Native American men and women are strongly represented in the U.S. armed forces. Indeed, they have more members per capita in the military than any other ethnic group. Explanations for this situation compose the grand narrative of the “warrior-to-soldier” theme that constructively links a specific ethnic background to an alleged natural predisposition for military life. Lakota<sup>1</sup> men in particular have been confronted with expectations that arose through the mythical heroization of warriors and war chiefs such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull that were disseminated through American mass media. As a result, in films, novels, and internet games, contemporary Lakota soldiers are still being depicted as naturally belonging on the battlefield. Scholarly texts also utilize racial categories as the major paradigm through which to conceptualize Indigenous masculinity and military life. In general, Native Americans continue to be represented as “traditional” in an unmoving, static, premodern or antimodern sense. Stuart Hall sees representation—the connection of meaning and language to culture—as having interactive relationships to create a “circuit of culture” in which representation and misrepresentation build identities and reflect ideologies.<sup>2</sup> While misrepresentations are usually viewed negatively for constituting epistemological violence, I want to employ them here constructively by analyzing the causes and effects of the warrior-to-soldier grand narrative in order to challenge the often repeated assumption about the “natural” nature of Native American service members. Conceptualizing a deeper, anticolonial critique of related military heroism discourses requires being more vigilant about the way we unravel the normative frameworks that help construct, perpetuate, and challenge racial and gender hierarchies. It requires adjusting the critical

aperture through which we render competing truth claims about heroism, and the ambiguous functions that “Indian warrior” stories have served in U.S. history. Military heroism narratives about “natural warriors,” I argue, help to construct and perpetuate racial hierarchies in the United States, upholding the ultimate national hero as a white, male, masculine, heterosexual soldier.

Native “traditions” that predate the settler state produce sensations, desires, anxieties, and optimisms. I try to understand what these aspirations are and how they function as social technology for consolidating the imperial and genocidal history of the U.S. military. The military was and is a central instrument in the project of settler colonialism, which has as its goal the removal, dispossession, and too often, the elimination of Native peoples in the Americas. In one of the most cited works on the subject, comparative historian Patrick Wolfe pinpointed the ongoing eliminationist nature of settler colonialism.<sup>3</sup> In the Lakota context, the unlawful—according to the U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1980—annexation of the Black Hills in 1877 and the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890 attest to that brutal history.<sup>4</sup> Over the past years, contributions by Natives to the military have been celebrated with code talker memorials, photo books, and blogs related to the U.S. military (so-called miliblogs).<sup>5</sup> Celebrating Native involvement in the armed forces clearly raises questions of representation, recognition, and reconciliation. Such terms as *reconciliation*, for instance, are highly problematic from a normative perspective, because the historical violence of settler colonialism is not over; it is ongoing.<sup>6</sup> Patrick Wolfe has indicated that settler colonialism and imperial colonialism are not to be discussed in terms of historical events but as a sturdy, enduring structure, and in this sense, not as an event but as ongoing practice. Following Elizabeth Povinelli, who suggests that before one can develop a “critical theory of recognition,” one needs to better understand the cunning of recognition,<sup>7</sup> I attempt to analyze critically the aspiration of liberation that is entailed in wedding Native “warrior traditions” like powwows and sweat ceremonies with U.S. military culture. According to Povinelli, the “cunning of recognition lies exactly in this play of parentheticals: Be (not) Real; Be (not) Alterior.”<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I ask how characteristics of heroic Native soldiers were portrayed in scholarship, and how these representations correspond with accounts given by Lakota veterans themselves. I also explore how such representations affect the life experiences of contemporary Native soldiers and veterans.

To investigate the changes of Lakota (self-)perceptions in and through the military, as well as the strands of continuity and change Lakota veterans face, between 2012 and 2015 I conducted interviews with thirty-seven veterans from Lakota reservations in South Dakota who served in World War II, the Vietnam War, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. To accommodate the limited space available here, I mainly draw on the accounts of two individuals from the Pine Ridge Reservation, and complement their reports with the accounts of three

additional interviewees. Their answers reveal commonalities that could be found in all the interviews. They are Ivan Star Comes Out, who joined the Army in 1967 and was deployed to Vietnam, and his son, Ivan Starr, who served as a Marine from 2006 to 2014 and was deployed to Iraq and a number of Latin American countries. I conducted formal interviews in 2012 and follow-up interviews in 2015 with both of them. Moreover, I have had conversations with Lakota people about military experiences since 1997, when I first stayed at Pine Ridge. Since then I have continuously engaged with the community, studying, visiting, living, and working on the reservation. This connection informs my approach; my primary interpretative mode is interdisciplinary and decolonial. I trace the legacies of the colonial “warrior-to-soldier” narrative and interpret their impact through the lens of Indigeneity with its central concepts of relationship, reciprocity, and respect, while relying on oral history methodology and the practice of listening. Providing access to the individual voices of these men, the interviews are a vital and central source to comprehend the expectations U.S. society has of Lakota soldiers and to understand the tensions between Western and Indigenous notions of the heroic.

The chapter’s first section provides a definition of Lakota heroism, which is meant to show the similarities and differences between the definitions discussed in this volume’s introduction and Native interpretations of the term and the values it entails. I then sketch out the basic characteristics of the “warrior-to-soldier” narrative by analyzing the formulations of Native worth, with an emphasis on “warrior traditions” and ceremonial practices. In order to interpret the connections between expectations and actual military experiences, this chapter examines the specific interweaving of social and cultural constructions of Lakota war heroes.

## A HERO: THE GOOD RELATIVE

Generally, heroines and heroes are constructed in conversations about heroic acts. In general, heroism studies have found that heroes are people who do something that is moral, and that they are highly competent.<sup>9</sup> A hero upholds the social values and the social order of the community and, as a result, personifies its value system. Heroes in the United States include family members, athletes, statesmen, soldiers, as well as fictional characters, all of whom are regarded highly because they stand for cherished values such as generosity, self-sacrifice, struggle, persistence, and faith. Common character traits include intelligence, strength, resilience, selflessness, charisma, reliability, and the ability to care and inspire.<sup>10</sup> While many dominant American values resemble Lakota cardinal values of generosity (*wacantognaka*), wisdom (*woksape*), fortitude/respect (*wowacintanka*), and courage (*woohitika*), there are two significant differences between the value systems. For one, Lakota who act according to

common values are not put on a pedestal, but are seen as fulfilling their basic duties to the community. Value is given to the *ikce wicasa*, the common man, who proves to be a good relative and lives according to kinship laws. Dakota ethnologist and novelist Ella Deloria expresses this idea in her historical novel *Waterlily* through a character who praises a tribal member's husband by saying, "He was liked by all because he was a good relative to all."<sup>11</sup> Hence, debates on heroism among the Lakota tended to revolve around "everyday heroes," ordinary people who are lauded for their selfless service and sacrifice for the community. Accordingly, in Native nations in the Americas, Indigenous war heroes' reputations are determined not only by their deeds on the battlefield, but also by their willingness to honor their duties to their people. As Anishinaabe writer Niigaañewidam James Sinclair points out, every part of Indigenous cultures is about being a good relation.<sup>12</sup> According to Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk), professor of Indigenous governance, the way to confront the dominant media-informed stereotypes of Indigenous masculinity, such as the "bloodthirsty warrior" or the "noble savage," is "to put the image of the Native male back into its proper context, that of family."<sup>13</sup> The English word *warrior* is a very narrow interpretation of the Lakota word *akicita*. *Akicita* can mean warrior, soldier, or policeman. It has also been used as a verb meaning "to hunt for another." Ivan Star Comes Out quoted Sitting Bull's (Hunkpapa Lakota) definition of a warrior in a newspaper article criticizing the manner in which stereotypical narratives of the warrior tradition are being upheld: "A warrior is not someone who fights, for no one has the right to take another life. The warrior for us is the one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elders, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity."<sup>14</sup> Lakota *akicita* live with the expectation that they will protect and provide for their immediate relatives and the wider community—an idea of masculinity that contrasts sharply with the individualistic heroism depicted in colonial representations of Native leaders.

The second difference is the notion of deadly sacrifice. The English word *hero* is derived from the Greek word for hero or warrior. It literally means protector or defender. The original Hero in Greek mythology was a priestess of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. When her lover Leander was lost at sea in a storm, Hero, in her grief, drowned herself. This myth may have given rise to the notion of a hero sacrificing his or her life for a greater ideal or good. Oral history among the Lakota holds that a war hero is someone who is strong, athletic, skilled, and strategically intelligent; someone who gets involved in dangerous situations but survives. The highest deed in battle is to count coup: to touch the enemy while escaping unharmed, and to spare the life of an enemy in battle, rather than kill them when presented with the opportunity. This act of

generosity and courage remains with the warrior forever as a testament of his manhood. Celebrating a Lakota war hero is celebrating life, not death.<sup>15</sup>

In the Native American context, heroism is clearly in the eye of the beholder. Lakota leaders like Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse were heroes for some and villains for others. The Lakota take pride in the fact that they have never been defeated in war by the settler military; they always defeated the U.S. army in battle, most prominently at the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Bighorn), which is commemorated in a national holiday celebrated annually on Lakota reservations in late June. Joseph Campbell, a founder of heroism scholarship, acknowledged that “you could be a local god, but for the people whom that local god conquered, you could be the enemy. Whether you call someone a hero or a monster is all relative.”<sup>16</sup> The military-government establishment depended on racist distinctions when dehumanizing enemies and subjects, but it also needed to cover up racial degradation and differences when demanding support from young men and women of diverse backgrounds. In this article, I am concerned with the multiple meanings of these essentialist constructions and their impact on Native American soldiers and veterans.

While Lakota war leaders may be perceived differently in internal debates—as complex characters with flaws—their story line of fierce warriors was soon appropriated and exploited by the U.S. military, the sports industry, and advertisers of various sorts as a bearer of certain messages, values, and gender norms, including the idea of achieving success through hard work, team spirit, and strong masculinity. As several chapters in this volume show, most ethnic minorities in the United States assigned tremendous social, cultural, and political importance to the acknowledgement of their military heroism, and reached for increased visibility on the battlefield. By contrast, Native Americans, to this day, reject the Native American warrior stereotype and the ways it is appropriated in U.S. military culture. Military equipment carries names like “Apache” or “Tomahawk.” Enemy territory is referred to as “Indian Country.” Osama Bin Laden was assassinated in “Operation Geronimo.” While some of these cultural appropriations may indicate that the U.S. military is slowly coming to terms with its ideological origins in American imperialism, the fact that the Black Hills have not been returned to the Lakota and that treaty territory is being compromised in favor of the Dakota Access Pipeline on the Standing Rock Reservation suggest otherwise.<sup>17</sup>

In general, rhetorical appreciation of non-Native service in American wars is based less on racial distinctions than on qualities of character—that is, qualities of a heroic character that lives up to the high ideals of duty, sacrifice, and courage. This “Americanism,” as defined by President Theodore Roosevelt in the early twentieth century, is guided by the ideal of inclusivity that favors

commitment over descent. The appreciation of Native American service members, however, is based on race, since Native Americans are presented—by descent—as the naturally occurring impersonation of these qualities. Kevin R. Kemper reminds us in his work on historical and contemporary representations of Apache leader Geronimo that his heroization in America's mainstream narrative followed an agenda: "American soldiers inflated their own manhood by making sure the American public thought of [a Native war chief] as a fierce warrior and of the soldiers as the conquerors of a fierce warrior."<sup>18</sup> This also explains the masculine-heroic representations of the Lakota leaders Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and Crazy Horse. It is an example of fallaciously increasing one's own manhood at the expense of others, and/or is one mechanism to perpetuate racial hierarchies in the United States. This representation of the aggressive and martial potential of Lakota masculinity, echoed even in scholarly writing, contributed substantially to the long-term perceptions of Lakota men. An example of an academic text representing the warrior-to-soldier narrative is the book chapter "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans" by Kathleen Glenister Roberts, who repeats certain aspects of or myths about the narrative.<sup>19</sup> Against the backdrop of this history, I challenge three often repeated assumptions regarding (1) Native motivations to join the military in order to protect the homeland, (2) the notion of naturally belonging on the battlefield, and (3) the role of ceremonies and powwows to transition Indigenous soldiers back into civilian life. I argue that white America's embrace of Native traditions is a form of reconciliation without redistribution.

## MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN THE MILITARY

Dakota environmental scholar and activist Winona LaDuke has asked, "How did we move from being the target of the U.S. military to being the U.S. military itself?"<sup>20</sup> It is a question often posed about Native American veterans and service members, especially where Lakota people are concerned. The mass grave for the victims of the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee lies at the center of the Pine Ridge Reservation, where the 7th Cavalry shot defenseless Lakota men, women, and children. The massacre was canonized by the U.S. military as a heroic *battle*, for which more than twenty soldiers received the Medal of Honor. It took the occupation of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement in 1973, requests by two Wounded Knee survivors associations in preparation for a centennial memorial in 1990, and much soul-searching on the part of the U.S. government in the twenty-first century to consider rescinding the medals.<sup>21</sup> Another request by the survivors associations was not met; instead of a formal apology, Congress issued a mere statement of "regret" for the wrongdoings of the past. An official apology, by contrast, would have provided grounds for reparations claims, which the U.S. government sought to

avoid. By the time Ivan Starr enlisted in 2006, it was well established among the Lakota that the 1890 massacre may be partly responsible for their distress, grief, and intergenerational trauma, with all its psychological and social implications. Unlike his father, Starr did not want to join the U.S. Army, but rather the Marine Corps, because one, he “did not want to end up in the 7th Cavalry,” and two, several cousins had already joined the naval infantry.<sup>22</sup> Primarily, though, his desire to enlist was spurred by the prospect of educational benefits. This is not specific to Native Americans; after all, information about educational benefits is at the very top of the FAQ list on the Marines website.<sup>23</sup> Winona LaDuke, examining why so many Native Americans join the armed forces, concludes that economic deprivation, domination, and racism explain the high levels of Native enlistment. Paying attention to attitudes among Native Americans and African Americans—groups who have the least reason to fight for “their” country—adds insights into the inner workings of U.S. nationalism and how it gained hegemony over individual men. Since the earliest encounters with settlers, Indigenous men served as scouts or allies for European and American armies, and the number of Native service members has continually increased since World War I. After the official closing of the frontier in 1890, a substantial number of “show Indians” were hired for Wild West shows touring in North America and Europe.<sup>24</sup> These shows may have been the first instances of Natives performing “traditions” for non-Native audiences, which created expectations that subsequent generations of Indigenous people would perform “authenticity.” Among the veterans interviewed for this study, only Gerald Ice of Wounded Knee reported “playing Indian” in the 1980s, after leaving the service and not being able to find work on the reservation.<sup>25</sup> The commercial success of the novel *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* added to the wider public knowledge of the occupation of Wounded Knee by Indigenous “warriors.” Lakota “warriorhood” had reentered public consciousness, which is one of the reasons why Gerald Ice was invited to act in films and to speak at events about the “Indian fight.”

In an attempt to find a way out of alcoholism on the reservation, Gerald Ice enrolled in a relocation program and attended San Diego City College. Although he reportedly did not pass the required entrance test, he still made his way from continuing education centers in San Diego and through community colleges into university—not as a student, but as a public speaker. After speaking at the San Diego Indian Center, he was referred to higher education institutions to talk about Custer’s last stand. Years later, his status as a Vietnam War veteran, combined with his genealogical lineage to Black Elk and Crazy Horse, served to legitimate him as “spiritual leader,” a role he performs for Native and non-Native audiences.

Although research has shown that a disproportionate number of minority group members serve in the military because of inadequate economic

opportunities in civilian life, studies of Native veterans tend to diminish, if not erase, this crucial motivating factor. Kathleen Roberts claims that “the cultural value of ‘defending one’s home’ is invoked repeatedly by these veterans as the driving force behind their choice to enlist in the armed forces,” and dismisses economic reasons as “inaccurate and condescending,” thus upholding the exotic stereotype of the spiritually idealistic warrior.<sup>26</sup> Yet, when I asked about their motivations, none of the veterans I interviewed with open-ended questions stated that they had signed up in order to defend their home or due to spiritual obligation; instead, they were looking for better economic opportunities. Ivan Star Comes Out notes, “The main reason I went was because there was no opportunity for me here. I was seventeen years old, I didn’t have a high school education, and I saw the military as an opportunity. And I had a plan. I was going to earn my GED while in the military. And serve my enlistment, which was just three years, get out, and use the educational benefits to go on to college. . . . That’s how I ended up in the military.” While briefly stationed in Germany, he finished two high school GED courses. “I still have the certificates, and those mean more to me than any medal the military gave me.”<sup>27</sup> His son Ivan Starr also reports that his specific reasons for enlisting included the prospect of receiving certain field training and using the GI Bill: “I knew if I served I’d get a GI Bill that would help me get through college.” Another father-and-son pair I interviewed was Bryan Charging Cloud<sup>28</sup> and his oldest child Bryan Kelly Charging Cloud,<sup>29</sup> from the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe in South Dakota. Their experiences differ from the Star Comes Out veterans in that their deployments never included active war zones. Nevertheless, they also named job security and educational benefits as their primary rationale to enlist. The younger Charging Cloud stated that he was used to military life, having been raised on bases in the United States and Europe, and that he was well aware of the benefits. His father, Bryan Charging Cloud, kept on studying and working on the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge reservations after he left military service; he graduated with a master’s degree from Oglala Lakota College in 2012 at the age of seventy-two. As of 2017, he was still working as a Lakota language teacher at Wounded Knee District School on the Pine Ridge Reservation, aged seventy-seven.

What makes a man or a soldier who he is in today’s Lakota culture? The answer is more complex than suggested by the simplistic warrior-to-soldier narrative—a representation of Lakota masculinity that holds the Lakota soldier captive in a certain time and place and reduces him to his physical attributes. Historically, the education system’s portrayal of Native men was limited to their physical aspects. Their bodily strength could be exploited in sports, in the labor force, and in the military. This tendency to reduce Native men to their physicality persists in spite of their achievements in intellectual arenas. Today, the struggle for *survivance* (Gerald Vizenor) occurs on different battle-

fields: in the courtroom, in the hospital, in schools, in the universities, and in texts—all of which require formal education. Every veteran I interviewed mentioned the Veteran Assistance education benefit programs they were attracted by and later used to attend school or college. For some, the educational benefits were their sole reason to join the military.

Lakota people create their own meanings of their culture and specific concepts like masculinity and martial heroism. The interviews conducted with Lakota veterans indicate that their own ideas of Lakota manhood diverge from the heroic warrior stereotype. They reported that a man fulfils his role when he honors his relatives, honors the women, provides for the family and community, and leads his life according to the cardinal Lakota values mentioned earlier. Ivan Star Comes Out, in his occupation as a journalist for Lakota newspapers and as an author who theorizes posttraumatic and intergenerational stress, interacts with these discourses and challenges them. In his writing, Ivan Star Comes Out encourages the younger generation to think critically about the scripts they have inherited. He is projecting stories that are different from those presented in mainstream culture. He shows the real-life impact the intellect can have on behalf of the community, while counteracting the ongoing erasure of Indigenous knowledge—giving voice to perspectives that are often silenced. In this sense, he is out on the front lines, protecting and serving the people in a manner similar to the way so many veterans used military status to earn income, to further their education, and to provide for their families and the community.

## THE TALE OF THE NATURAL WARRIOR

Most explanations for their overrepresentation in the armed forces portray Natives as naturally belonging on the battlefield. Although Kathleen Glenister Roberts indicates that she is primarily concerned with the construction of Native American masculinity, her data and her argument reveal that seemingly, only dancing and praying are required for the essentialist Native “warrior” to lead his people into a healed future. She backs her claims that “the warrior ideal runs the gamut through both time and space, from the Ghost Dance through the fancy dance,” and that it stemmed from an “ancient” perspective, with quotes from white anthropologists’ outdated publications on Native warrior traditions, a summary of Leslie Marmon Silko’s 1977 novel *Ceremony*, and impressions from a few visits to commercial powwows.<sup>30</sup> Evidently, her research is not on par with today’s Native American and Indigenous studies, but it is worth a critical reading because her chapter is included in the prominent 2011 anthology *Global Masculinities and Manhood*, edited by Ronald Jackson and Balaji Murali. Several problems with Roberts’s claims should not go unmentioned. They start with her portrayal of contemporary Native soldiers as

continuing warrior traditions that existed prior to settler contact, as if there were no difference between Indigenous warrior societies and the U.S. military. Disparities have been obscured through media portrayals of a specific kind of military masculinity that was not tempered by communal decision making. Yet, the differences are substantial. Lakota interviewees report that basic training is designed to break personal identity, remove it, and turn soldiers into “killing machines.” Although this trait was unheard of in prereservation times, Ivan Star Comes Out and Ivan Starr had experienced equally hierarchical institutions on the reservation before joining the U.S. military. The father, Ivan Star Comes Out, quit his Catholic boarding school despite his good grades in order to escape its oppressive structures. He indicates that the boarding school was based on military protocol, noting that “the military was hardly any different.”<sup>31</sup> His son joined the Marines after having been a tribal police officer; “basic police school,” he stated, “is paramilitary.” Father and son encountered their own disappointments in the military. Ivan Star Comes Out envisioned becoming a mechanic and having a quiet time in the garage, but was flown to Vietnam soon after boot camp. Ironically, his son expected lots of action but instead was sent to automotive school, where he became a motor transport mechanic. Starr reports: “When I first joined I was expecting a high-speed-low-drag, doing something exciting every day. I remember thinking I’m gonna [be shooting] machine guns, kicking doors open, doing military operations on urban terrain, all the stuff you see on TV and on the internet.” Reality confronted him with seemingly endless hurry-up-and-wait situations and countless cleaning assignments. “They had nothing else for us to do, so that was pretty much all we did: cleaning. We’re pretty much janitors.”

The persisting inscription of stereotypes of the natural warrior still affected soldiers in Vietnam. Ivan Star Comes Out had to perform certain tasks stereotypically expected of Natives. An officer kept assigning him to walk point, though he had not received any training in that task. “I was just absolutely terrified,” he reminisced about this dangerous assignment. In conversations with other Native veterans, he found that many had experienced similar situations. “These military officers more than likely thought that we, being Native, could see in the dark, hear better than everybody else, maybe we were impervious to pain, and that we were natural-born fighters, natural-born killers.” He could not identify with these stereotypes: “I was just as scared as everybody else. And I knew that I would die just like everybody else. Bleed just like everybody else. . . . Somehow, I survived. But I don’t think it has anything to do with being Native. I am human, you know. I am not a superman.” These reports of placing Native American soldiers into more dangerous situations than non-Native soldiers may explain their greater exposure to combat in Vietnam and their comparatively high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>32</sup> Winona LaDuke links high rates of PTSD to her findings that “the impact of military

service on individual Native people is dramatic—and all too often traumatic,” particularly for inductees from rural areas or with limited experience spending extended periods of time away from their family and community.<sup>33</sup> Roberts’s and other scholars’ portrayals of Native servicewomen and -men as “unique,” “tragic,” and inherently “traditional,” as well as “spiritual,” reflect a view that is still rooted in colonial thinking in which the Other can be defined, exoticized, and interpreted at will.<sup>34</sup> Against the backdrop of such thinking, the vast majority of the interviewees reveal themselves to be far from unique, but rather average human beings who lead ordinary lives as tribal members and as citizens of the United States.

During the Vietnam War era, Native veterans were seen as different not only by anthropologists and comrades, but also by the enemy. Ivan Star Comes Out recalls two instances when Vietnamese were directly addressing him. In one instance, an elderly woman pushed him angrily, placed her arm next to his, and said something that Star Comes Out understood as “We’re the same. Why are you doing this?” Tom Holm noted something similar in an early survey, reporting that several Indigenous soldiers were addressed by Vietnamese with “You-me, same-same.”<sup>35</sup> The ideology of nationalism seeks to bind people together in support of state power. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more than anything else, declarations of war against foreign enemies prompted Americans to think more about what they had in common. For Native Americans in Vietnam, however, their enemies frequently reminded them of what set them apart from fellow U.S. citizens, since they became aware of similarities between their own situation in the United States and that of the Vietnamese population in Southeast Asia. But as the interviews show, Lakota soldiers rarely thought about their patriotic obligations when fighting in Vietnam. Describing it as a fight for survival, Star Comes Out recalled: “When we were in Vietnam we didn’t actually fight for that flag because in reality we fought to get out of there, to make it out of there alive, in one piece. And we helped each other in that goal, in that mission.”

Over longer passages of Roberts’s text, she reiterates findings of Tom Holm’s early investigations into the phenomenon of Native soldiers’ willingness to serve in the U.S. military. Holm sees a major difference between traditional warriorhood and modern Western-style soldiering in that the former represented a relationship with the rest of the community, while in the latter, soldiers are servants of a very impersonal institution. “Soldiering is playing a role; warriorhood is a relationship,” Holm writes.<sup>36</sup> While the U.S. military is clearly a much more hierarchical institution than traditional *akicita* societies, the interviews I conducted suggest that Lakota soldiers are not playing a role; rather, they are doing their job. Many report that they embrace the military as a chosen community with which they establish and maintain relationships. While the shared experience of serving (in a war) together may have not erased

ethnic and racial lines, it did bring Americans of different backgrounds closer together.

Masculinity, as a social interactional determination, is grounded not in principles of exactitude but in principles of perceptual expectedness—perceptions that are fluid and limited to the larger possibilities of performing gender and embodied presence. Likewise, Native men are expected to perform masculinity and Nativeness. Yet, Native veterans do not perceive themselves as only the product of a warrior culture, but as complex human beings in contemporary times. One can read and write about the continuation of the “warrior-to-soldier” grand narrative, but I regard it as necessary to take into account local histories and oral testimonies that, although far less easily accessible, tell a different story. In contrast to the oversimplifying warrior-to-soldier narrative, Native American military heroism is much more multifaceted and requires taking into account traditional Indigenous values in a contemporary context.

## HEALING THROUGH CEREMONIES

In a number of publications, Tom Holm has emphasized the importance of the social absorption of stress by families, especially through ceremonial process.<sup>37</sup> His texts examine the meanings and effects of sweat lodge ceremonies and powwows—two quite different occasions that Holm treats in an undifferentiated manner. The latter is a social gathering, while the former is an intimate ceremony, and its content should not necessarily be discussed and shared publicly.<sup>38</sup> Tom Holm is regarded as an authority—if not a “hero”—on the study of Native American veterans. Unfortunately, he is often cited and read uncritically. For instance, when Holm “acknowledges the role powwows play in fulfilling tribal obligations to the Creator,” the implied spiritual aspect of powwows is taken at face value.<sup>39</sup> Yet, among most Indigenous nations, powwows are social, not spiritual or ceremonial.<sup>40</sup> Kathleen Roberts reiterates the misconception of white anthropologists that “the modern-day powwow has grown out of a tradition of war dancing,” and that “continuities between warrior societies, warrior traditions, and powwow competitions are clear”—an inaccurate conclusion that ignores the intricate aspects of social life among Plains tribes, while clinging to and perpetuating the “Indian warrior” stereotype.<sup>41</sup> Part of the problem may have to do with when and where Roberts collected her ethnographic data: at a large commercial and competitive powwow, not a community powwow. She might have interpreted it as a “ceremonial competition”—an oxymoron in the Native American context—and a powwow dancer as a “competitive ‘warrior.’”<sup>42</sup>

Still drawing on Tom Holm, Roberts argues that Indigenous people can overcome traumatic experiences of war through their ceremonial life.<sup>43</sup> A number of norms in Native cultures, Holm and his followers declare, encour-

age better healing practices and results than Anglo norms could achieve. One of the Lakota norms is to welcome the warriors back into civilian life. For example, after his return from Vietnam to the reservation, Ivan Star Comes Out knew that his community would honor him. Yet, he could not appreciate it when they did so during the New Year's powwow after his return. "They didn't know what was going on in my head. They didn't know that people were still dying over there. War's not over yet. . . . I felt so outta place. . . . They honored me with my brother-in-law, Larry He Crow. . . . They had us sitting out in the middle on chairs with star quilts on them. . . . I was getting upset and angry, especially when people started shaking our hands. I felt like I didn't deserve that." Trauma research suggests that veterans can succeed in overcoming the gap between the experiences of war and their civilian life when they regard themselves as part of the collective. The honoring at powwows reminds veterans that they are part of the community. While cultural practices of precontact times may have been successful in addressing war experiences of that time, the interviews suggest that they are not necessarily superior in all contexts.

Moreover, it is doubtful that these ceremonies would serve the same purpose they serve in Native communities if they were copied and transferred into a non-Native context, as Lawrence Gross and his colleagues have suggested.<sup>44</sup> Psychologists have proposed and actually appropriated Indigenous rituals to develop treatment programs to benefit veterans of various ethnic backgrounds.<sup>45</sup> While white veterans have reportedly appreciated this treatment, this appropriation of cultural and intellectual property is problematic in the light of the American Indian Arts and Crafts Act and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>46</sup> By the 1970s, it had become a "tradition" in white American culture to take pleasure in and consume Indigenous traditions in the form of art, music, and cultural tourism. Twenty years later, questions were raised as to whether the profits from the art and tourism industry were fairly returned to Indigenous communities. The history of expropriation dates back to the first encounters between Natives and settlers. The Lakota word for the settlers, after having observed their conduct, was *wasicu*—literally, "takes the fat," or "he takes what is of value."<sup>47</sup> In the military context, appropriation of Native worth starts with declarations about "our American Indian warriors" and continues with material appropriation and expropriation of Indigenous resources and lives, leading to the exploitation of Native terms and images in the cultural and intellectual domain.<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Gross finds it shameful that "no work has been done to examine how lessons drawn from American Indian experiences can be applied in mainstream society beyond the realm of psychological treatment, particularly in regard to religion."<sup>49</sup> He proposes, "It would be well for American Indians to work with various non-Indian religious groups to develop rituals and other practices appropriate to the non-Indian traditions to help non-Indian veterans

recover from post-traumatic stress disorder and to honor them for their service.”<sup>50</sup> His postulation that “I view working with non-Indian religious groups in this regard as one of the most important tasks facing Native peoples”<sup>51</sup> sounds cynical when taking into account the long history of white people effectively destroying Indigenous cultures—including their healing rituals. As Gross is surely aware, the U.S. federal government—in league with Christian missionaries, executed in part by the U.S. military—implemented policies under which Native Americans were stripped of many of their tribal land, their lives, rights, sovereignty, customs, ceremonies, and institutions. These issues transcend America’s military heroism discourse, but are inextricably intertwined with its racial ramifications.

## CONCLUSION: EMBRACING NATIVE WORTH

Whereas postcolonial scholars have suggested that colonial domination worked by inspiring in subjects a desire to identify with their colonizers, multicultural agendas embrace the Other. As the military stretches out its hands to Native Americans, Indigenous subjects are called on to perform an “authentic difference” in exchange for the nation’s appreciation. I argue that the warrior-to-soldier narrative—with its legacy of intertribal powwows on bases and miliblogs<sup>52</sup> written by Native service members—is supposed to consolidate the imperial and genocidal history of the U.S. military. Yet, the social consequences of “the nation” embracing Indigenous traditions are quite different from the consequences of Indigenous people embracing them. The example of the celebration of Native American service members suggests that multicultural domination works by inspiring minority subjects to identify with the impossible objects of an authentic self-identity—that is, with a domesticated, nonconflictual, “traditional” war chief. The celebration of Native worth remains inflected by the conditional. Native warrior traditions are celebrated as long as this recognition is disconnected from the specificity of actual Native struggles, from differing tribal social agendas, and from the demands made on the contemporary nation-state. White America’s celebration of Native American heroism, too, is conditional and ignores Indigenous traditions that directly challenge the white warrior hero ideal.

## NOTES

1. When possible, I use the self-referential term *Indigenous nations*; in this case, Oglala Lakota. In transnational contexts, I prefer the terms *Indigenous* and *First Nations*, emphasizing land and sovereignty rights.
2. Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall, vol. 2 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage/Open University, 2009), 15.

3. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.
4. United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, 448 U.S. 371, 376 (1980).
5. Herman J. Viola and Ben Nighthorse Campbell, *Warriors in Uniform: The Legacy of American Indian Heroism* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2008); Gary Robinson and Phil Lucas, *From Warriors to Soldiers: A History of American Indian Service in the United States Military* (New York: !Universe, 2010). On miliblogs, see Frank Usbeck, "The Power of the Story: 'Popular Narratology' in Pentagon Reports on Social Media Use in the Military," in *Poetics of Politics: Textuality and Social Relevance in Contemporary American Literature and Culture*, ed. Sebastian M. Herrmann, Carolin Alice Hofmann, Katja Kanzler, Stefan Schubert, and Frank Usbeck (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015), 313–333.
6. Glen S. Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 437–460.
7. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 16.
8. *Ibid.*, 176.
9. George R. Goethals and Scott T. Allison, "Making Heroes: The Construction of Courage, Competence, and Virtue," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 46 (2012): 186.
10. Hugh Gash and Paul F. Conway, "Images of Heroes and Heroines: How Stable?" *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1997): 349–372; Michael P. Sullivan and André Venter, "Defining Heroes through Deductive and Inductive Investigations," *Journal of Social Psychology* 150, no. 5 (2010): 471–484; Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
11. Ella Cara Deloria, *Waterlily* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 98.
12. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, "After and Towards: A Dialogue on the Future of Indigenous Masculinity Studies," in *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood*, ed. Sam McKegey (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 235.
13. Taiaiake Alfred, "Reimagining Warriorhood: A Conversation with Taiaiake Alfred," in McKegey, *Masculindians*, 78.
14. Ivan Star Comes Out, "Is It Time to Rethink the Warrior Tradition?," *Native Sun News*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.indianz.com/News/2015/017221.asp>.
15. Bruce E. Johansen, ed., *American Indian Culture: From Counting Coup to Wampum* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2015), 214.
16. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 156.
17. Exploring the involvement and celebration of veterans during the 2015–2016 protest camp at the Standing Rock occupation could add insights to the U.S. military heroism discourse.
18. Kevin R. Kemper, "'Geronimo!' The Ideologies of Colonial and Indigenous Masculinities in Historical and Contemporary Representation about Apache Men," *Wicazo Sa Review* 29, no. 2 (2014): 41.
19. Kathleen Glenister Roberts, "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans," in *Global Masculinities and Manhood*, ed. Ronald Jackson and Balaji Murali (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 141–160. This text is in the tradition of the warrior-to-soldier narrative, as previously expressed in, for example, Tom Holm, *Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Viola and Campbell, *Warriors in Uniform*; Robinson and Lucas, *From Warriors to Soldiers*; and Steven Clevenger, *America's First Warriors: Native Americans and Iraq* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2010).

20. Winona LaDuke, *The Militarization of Indian Country* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 9.
21. I have complicated our understanding of the local memorializing practices at Wounded Knee and the ways in which this event and its memory are intertwined with the historiography of a settler state whose nationalist project continues to rest on stolen land in Sonja John, "Das nicht-existierende Museum in Wounded Knee: Eine Bestandsaufnahme (Teil 2)," *Magazin für Amerikanistik* 1 (2013): 14–20.
22. Personal interview with Ivan Starr, January 27, 2012; all quotes by him are from this interview.
23. See <http://www.marines.com/faq> (accessed September 9, 2017).
24. Karl-Markus Kreis, "Indians Playing, Indians Praying: Native Americans in Wild West Shows and Catholic Missions," in *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, ed. Colin Calloway, Gerd Gemuenden, and Susanne Zantop (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 195–212.
25. Personal interview with Gerald Ice, March 1, 2015; all quotes by him are from this interview.
26. Roberts, "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans," 141, 148.
27. He received the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, two Bronze Stars, two Army Commendation Medals, a Gallantry Cross, and the Air Medal.
28. Personal interview with Bryan Charging Cloud, March 3, 2015; all quotes by him are from this interview.
29. Personal interview with Bryan Kelly Charging Cloud, March 1, 2015; all quotes by him are from this interview.
30. Roberts, "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans," 158, 141.
31. Personal interview with Ivan Star Comes Out, March 7, 2015; all quotes by him are from this interview.
32. Lawrence W. Gross, "Assisting American Indian Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Cope with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Lessons from Vietnam Veterans and the Writings of Jim Northrup," *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2007): 377.
33. LaDuke, *Militarization of Indian Country*, 20.
34. Roberts, "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans," 143, 144, 155, 156.
35. Tom Holm, "The National Survey of Indian Vietnam Veterans," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 6, no. 1 (1994): 24.
36. Tom Holm, "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11 no. 2 (1995): 84.
37. Tom Holm, "Culture, Ceremonials, and Stress: American Indian Veterans and the Vietnam War," *Armed Forces and Society* 12, no. 2 (1986): 247; Tom Holm, "American Indian Veterans and the Vietnam War: Restoring Harmony through Tribal Ceremony," *Four Winds* 3, no. 10 (1982): 34; Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 192.
38. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2014), 95.
39. Gross, "Assisting American Indian Veterans," 383.
40. Severt Young Bear and Ronnie D. Theiss, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1994).
41. Roberts, "War, Masculinity, and Native Americans," 145, 156.
42. *Ibid.*, 152, 154.
43. *Ibid.*, 144.

44. Gross, "Assisting American Indian Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Cope with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder," 373–409.
45. John P. Wilson, Alice J. Walker, and Bruce Webster, "Reconnecting: Stress Recovery in the Wilderness," in *Trauma, Transformation, and Healing: An Integrative Approach to Theory, Research, and Post-Traumatic Therapy*, ed. John P. Wilson (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 1989): 159.
46. Raymond M. Scurfield, "Healing the Warrior: Admission of Two American Indian War-Veteran Cohort Groups to a Specialized Inpatient PTSD Unit," *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 6, no. 3 (1995): 18.
47. Later, Lakota people also used the self-referential term of the "white man," *ska wicasa*.
48. Gross, "Assisting American Indian Veterans," 373. For an exploration of why the military locates potentially dangerous military test facilities in or close to Native American reservations, see LaDuke, *Militarization of Indian Country*.
49. Gross, "Assisting American Indian Veterans," 400.
50. *Ibid.*, 401.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Praised as a continuation of Indigenous story-telling and connectedness to the reservation, I view miliblogs as purely strategic public relations measures. See Frank Usbeck, "The Power of the Story," 313–333.