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ABSTRACT: In a Greek universe of movement, 'stasis' named moments of tensional standing-still generated by counterbalancing forces: material, sociopolitical, and argumentative. These intertwined senses inform understanding of arguments over U.S. colonial history that materialize at famous memory places. Since 2003, an Indian Memorial at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument – long a shrine to George Armstrong Custer and the 7th U.S. Cavalry – has contested settler memories not through subaltern critique or reconciliation but through sustained stasiastic opposition.

KEY WORDS: Custer, Greasy Grass, Indian Memorial, Little Bighorn, multi-modal, stasis

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to consider the relevance of argumentation to an understanding of material spaces, that is, to treat physical places as literal sites of multi- modal argument. More specifically, we're interested in what have been called "memory places," sites that recall and commemorate past events (Dickinson, Blair & Ott, 2010, p. 2). Memory places are well-suited to study from an argumentation standpoint because they often are sites of controversy: people disagree over what happened, what should be remembered, and how it should be remembered. As sites of actual armed conflict, battlefields are especially rich sites at which to explore conflicts of memory.

This paper examines one such battlefield: the site on which occurred what U.S. American settlers known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn and Native peoples know as the Battle of Greasy Grass. This site is particularly interesting because settler memories were almost exclusively memorialized for about 130 years; only in the past 20 years, with the dedication of an Indian Memorial (IM), has the longstanding settler version of what happened been destabilized. Previous scholarship has treated the IM as constituting a form of oppositional argument that contests the site's historical claim that only settler lives are worth remembering (McGeough et al., 2015). This paper elaborates and refines the nature of this opposition. Considering multiple plausible interpretations of the site as now constituted, we argue that it resists a unified, nonoppositional interpretation and, further, that its oppositional character is best understood as stasiastic.

2. BACKGROUND

Interstate 90 is an east-west transcontinental highway and the longest interstate highway in the United States, stretching from Boston, Massachusetts, through Chicago, Illinois, to Seattle, Washington. Its shorter cousin, Interstate 94, which originates near Detroit, Michigan, is the northernmost east-west interstate highway in the country, linking the Great Lakes with the northern Great Plains and Intermountain West. Both are major arteries through Wisconsin and Minnesota (even sharing a roadbed for some distance in the former) that we have traveled often between our home states and our current home in California. The routes present one simple, if Hobbesian, choice: North or South Dakota?

Eastbound, this choice must be made a few miles past Billings, in southeastern Montana, where I-94 originates (or, westbound, terminates) at I-90. Here on the arid high plains, the undulating terrain of muted gold/grey/brown extends to the far horizon, interrupted by occasional threads of green along creeks and coulees. Particularly at the glance afforded by a speeding automobile (Dickinson, 1997, p. 11), a sense of vast, undifferentiated space prevails; Big Sky Country, indeed. Road signs–both official highway signs and commercial billboards–are key in marking places within space, that is, sites of activity that travelers will find here but not there. Whether one travels east or west, on I-90 or I-94, one cannot miss the signs directing travelers to a site of significant *historical* activity 50 miles from their junction, along the Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn River.

The bare facts regarding the battle are these: During what was called the Great Sioux War of 1876, the U.S. Army conducted a military campaign to subdue recalcitrant Lakota (Sioux) and Tsistsistas (Northern Cheyenne) peoples who refused confinement on their reservations. Twelve companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, were part of a planned three-pronged pincer movement. On June 25, the 7th was the first unit to encounter an enormous Native village, gathered along the Greasy Grass for the summer buffalo hunt. Estimated to contain 1,800 lodges, 10,000 inhabitants, and thousands of ponies, one of Custer's scouts called it "the largest village I have ever heard of" (MacNab, 2003, p. 45; Nevin, 1973, p. 216). A lack of reconnaissance, erroneous assumptions, and miscalculation–by Custer and other commanders–contributed to a disastrous armed engagement–over two days and roughly 3.5 miles of complex terrain–in which 268 U.S. personnel were killed and 55 severely injured (Scott et al., 2013, p. 244). Most memorably, Custer and the five companies that remained under his direct command, who undertook a final defensive stand from a hilltop, were wiped out in only "as long as it takes a hungry man to eat a meal" (*Battle*, n.d.). For this reason, schoolchildren also learn that the battle is called 'Custer's Last Stand' and that the hilltop is called 'Last Stand Hill.'

3. MEMORY WORK AT THE GREASY GRASS/LTTLE BIGHORN

Settler memory work began almost immediately after the battle. The initial public reaction to the shocking news from Montana Territory was mixed. At an Army inquiry, some officers blamed Custer's actions. But the Army, already facing Congressional restructuring proposals that would reduce its officer corps, had a vested interest in

deflecting criticism. Moreover, Custer's widow, Libbie, worked tirelessly to burnish her husband's reputation. Over time, the story of the Battle of Little Bighorn that came to predominate in settler society was a heroic narrative of courage and sacrifice in the face of overwhelming odds.

Immediately following the battle, soldiers were buried in shallow graves where they fell, hastening decomposition and human and animal depredation and making identification of remains difficult. This quickly was deemed insufficiently dignified. Custer himself was reinterred at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point a year later. In 1879, the Secretary of War declared the site a national cemetery in order the preserve the graves, and the 11th Infantry constructed the first memorial: a log structure roughly 10' x 10' and 11' feet high, within which were buried the horse and human bones that could be found. In 1881, a 12'-tall granite pillar inscribed with the names of 220 cavalrymen replaced the wooden structure on top of Last Stand Hill; remains were reinterred near the new memorial but stakes were placed in the ground to mark where soldiers had fallen. In 1886, the site was named, after its tragic hero, *National Cemetery of Custer's Battlefield Reservation* and expanded to include the dead from other campaigns and wars. In 1890, the stakes were replaced with marble markers. In 1946, the site was renamed but retained its eponym: *Custer Battlefield National Monument*. The cemetery proper is still called *Custer National Cemetery*.

To call this site a 'memory place' is to beg an obvious question: Whose memories? Of course, Native participants in and eyewitnesses to the Battle of Greasy Grass had their own memories, stories, and memorial practices. Shortly afterward, family members removed the bodies of their loved ones from the field and marked with rock cairns the spots where they had died. In 1925, Mrs. Thomas Beaverheart wrote its superintendent seeking inclusion: She requested that a marker be placed on the field to indicate where her father, Lame White Man, a Tsistsistas warrior, had fallen (Greene, 2008, p. 170). The superintendent did not respond. Although the forces of change– numerous, varied, and complex–accelerated after 1940, when the National Park Service assumed jurisdiction from the War Department (see Greene, 2008, Ch. 5), it is fair to say that settler memories went largely unchallenged for a century. In 1972, the superintendent denied a request by members of the American Indian Movement to erect a cast-iron plaque reading: "In memory of our heroic warriors who defended our homes and laws against the hostile aggression of the United States government" (Greene, 2008, p. 228; Linenthal, 1993, p. 159). Not until 1976 did indigenous memories gain traction, when 100 AIM members "escalated symbolic guerilla warfare" by interrupting the Monument's centennial commemoration, singing "Custer Died for Your Sins" while carrying the U.S. flag upside down as an "international signal of distress, because the red man of the Western Hemisphere is in distress" (Linenthal, 1993, pp. 143, 159). AIM returned on the 112th anniversary of the battle to cement into the grassy area adjacent to the pillar, in which enlisted soldiers are buried, a crude steel plaque (subsequently removed) reading: "In honor of our Indian Patriots who fought and defeated the U.S. calvary [sic] In order to save our women and children from mass-murder. In doing so, preserving rights to our Homelands, Treaties and Sovereignty" (del Olmo, 1988; Greene, 2008, p. 228; a photograph of the plaque appears in Linenthal, 1993, n.p.).

The most dramatic expansion of memory began in 1991: The site was renamed Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LBBNM, a name that, Natives noted

wryly, no longer celebrates the loser) and Congress authorized construction of an Indian Memorial. The competitively selected design consists of a circular sandstone and earthen structure with concave exterior walls, resembling a hillock. The interior walls feature marble slabs that tell the stories of the Native nations involved. There are four openings in these walls, the largest of which displays an open bronze sculpture of 'Spirit Warriors,' executed by Oglala Lakota artist, Colleen Cutschall. The IM is located on a 'shoulder' of Last Stand Hill, separated from the 7th Cavalry pillar by 75 yards and by the road that takes visitors from the Visitors' Center to the far end of the battlefield, approximately three miles away. In addition, red granite markers have been added to indicate those locations where Native warriors are known to have died.

4. STASIS ON THE GREASY GRASS/LITTLE BIGHORN

We believe that, in its current form, LBBNM constitutes a memory place characterized by opposition and, in particular, stasiastic opposition. In this section, we elaborate this characterization; in the next, we will argue for its superiority.

In a universe of movement, 'stasis' for the Greeks named those moments of tensional equilibrium created by counterbalancing forces, in at least three senses. Reflecting broader Greek interest in 'phusis' (or 'physis,' roughly translated as 'nature'), including principles of physical motion, the first sense was material: the point of rest created when movement in one direction is halted by countermovement in the opposite direction (Dieter, 1950). Reflecting an equal concern with 'nomos' (referring to law, custom, convention), the second sense was sociopolitical: internal strife and civil war, not only in the city-states but also within Greek colonies in Italy, Sicily, and elsewhere (Berger, 1992; Gehrke, 1985). Reflecting speculation about 'logos,' the third sense—and the most familiar—was rhetorical: a theory of opposition that identifies the essential (potential) point(s) of clash in an argumentative exchange, particularly in a forensic context in which disputes are focused on the past and concerned with judging justice and injustice (Hohmann, 2001). These intertwined senses generate an analytical construct ripe for application to a memory place like LBBNM, at which distinct material structures evoke and convey differing memories regarding the United States's own colonial history and implicitly judge differently the (in)justice of this history.

Indeed, the four traditional points of forensic stasis–conjecturing about a fact, definition, quality, and objection– comprise a useful interpretive heuristic. Two caveats are in order, though. First, because the site is presentational and multi-modal, not strictly discursive, the four points cannot be applied in linear fashion. Features of the site do not correspond one-to-one to each point, discretely and exclusively. Instead, these features reflect multiple points simultaneously and nonhierarchically. Second, many facts about the battle remain unknown while others are disputed. Even archaeological study has not answered all questions or settled all disagreements, which are beyond our scope.

Nevertheless, consider the following three material aspects of this memory place. First, presence. The sheer existence of the IM materializes a Native presence in terms parallel (although not equal) to the Army's presence. This demands reconsideration of the facts, of what happened. It also influences the quality of these events by, at minimum, expanding the scope of lives deemed worthy of grieving, that is, memorializing loss of

life more widely than the loss of soldier lives exclusively (McGeough et al, 2015).

Next, location. The IM could have been constructed in any number of places; indeed, four locations were considered (Greene, 2008, p. 229). But its position on a shoulder of Last Stand Hill is factually fitting inasmuch as it gestures toward the eventual relative positions of Native warriors and U.S. troops. Location also implicates quality: On one hand, its comparative proximity to the 7th Cavalry pillar suggests the equal worth of the lives lost (but see below). On the other hand, just as Native warriors threatened the Army, many 'Custer buffs' (Greene, 2008, p. 221) saw the IM as a threat to settler memory and opposed its construction, at least at this location, on the grounds that it would desecrate a sacred memorial space.

Third, design. The IM's exterior is circular, built of earth and stone; its four openings occur at the four cardinal directions; the Spirit Warriors are spectral, their bodies seemingly made of earth and sky; indeed, the entire structure seems a part of the land. Each of these elements reflects Native spirituality and literally grounds the IM in nature. This contrasts starkly with the 7th Cavalry pillar, which is made of visually alien gray granite and seems to be trying to escape the earth. These design differences define the battle, and modify its quality, from a strictly military engagement to a cultural one as well. Moreover, the IM's groundedness suggests what (who) belongs and what (who) is alien to the scene, which implicitly (re)defines the battle more particularly as an invasion.

The interior plaques that present Native memories of the battle introduce what for most visitors is probably a new fact: that two other tribes—the Crow and Arikara— scouted for the Army. Historically, the Army was present that day, in part, because the Crow had sought the government's help in preventing incursions into their homeland by the Lakota, who were being pushed west, out of their traditional lands, by settlement in the Dakotas, particularly the Black Hills. Inscriptions on the red granite markers reflect this history. They remember warriors who died defending their "way of life," not their homeland, because this was and still is Crow land and contemporary Crow insisted on this terminological distinction. This new fact means that the battle can no longer be defined simply as settler vs. Native. It also defines the battle not as *an* invasion but as invasion*s*–plural.

Consider lastly and especially the opening to the south, which intentionally is oriented toward Last Stand Hill. Standing in the IM's center and looking to the south, the 7th Cavalry pillar is framed in this 'Spirit Window,' inviting the spirits of the soldiers to enter. More than any other element, this window alters the quality of the site and redefines the form of engagement between Army and warrior, settler and Native, as something other than opposition, pure and simple. In doing so, it argues most strongly against several other, otherwise plausible, interpretations of the site.

5. IMPLICATONS

In two contradictory ways, one might essentially deny that the site is oppositional at all. On one hand, one might claim that the IM and 7th Cavalry monuments are autonomous, having nothing to do with one another. Although proximate, the IM also is peripheral to the Visitor Center, Last Stand Hill, and the other features of the site; from a distance, it might not even be noticed. In any event, it certainly is possible to visit one and not the

other. Although we haven't systematically observed circulation patterns, some tangible evidence suggests that different people make use of the site differently: Almost certainly, the visitors who leave coins on soldiers' marble markers are not the visitors who leave offerings of sweetgrass and eagle feathers at the feet of the Spirit Warriors. Nonetheless, the entire history of the IM, not to mention its design features, suggests engagement with the memorials to the Army and settler memories.

On the other hand, by including Native memories, the IM might seem essentially to complete the site, rendering it a unified whole. The visual cue that most encourages this reading is a quotation in both Lakota and English on an exterior wall of the Visitor Center, attributed to Oglala holy man Black Elk: "Know the Power that is Peace." This quotation articulates superficially with the IM's theme of "Peace through Unity" to generate a plausible impression of reconciliation and comity between settler and Native. In one way, this impression is bolstered by the fact that this theme was revised from the original, "Power through Unity"—meant as an appeal to Native peoples to stop fighting *amongst themselves*—in order to appeal more to white Americans (Greene, 2008, p. 315). However, this gesture has not been reciprocated by Custerphiles, who have campaigned to have the Black Elk quotation removed on the grounds that it is too 'pro-Indian' (Greene, 2008, pp. 183, 222-223).

In short, the IM materializes a kind of opposition to but also a kind of engagement with the 7th Cavalry monuments. Of what kind? A third, more tenable interpretation would find that settler memories still dominate the scene while the IM constitutes counterhegemonic resistance. Indeed, in terms of location and sheer volume, settler memories do dominate: The national cemetery and Last Stand Hill are larger, visually more prominent, and closer to the Visitor Center parking lot where guests arrive, while the IM lies on the periphery, physically separated and symbolically marginalized by a ribbon of asphalt. Indeed, some Natives object that its location on land lower than Last Stand Hill "makes it appear that the soldiers are still more important than our fallen warriors" (Greene, 2008, p. 316). Similarly, soldier markers greatly outnumber (quantitatively) warrior markers, which might suggest to some that settler loss is much more (qualitatively) to be mourned.

In our view, however, the Indian Memorial refuses subalterity. Most prominently, the Spirit Window's invitation to soldier spirits is a challenge to engage Native spirits and Native memories literally on Native grounds. In this sense, Native memories both oppose and set the terms of engagement with settler memories.

6. CONCLUSION

This is why, to conclude, we are attracted to stasis as an interpretive lens. If points of stasis are moments of rest generated when movement meets countermovement, rest implies tensional equilibrium. Opposition between hegemon and subaltern may be (much?) more common, and moments of equilibrium may be fleeting. But stasis imagines that such moments are possible and that the outcome of opposition is not predestined and cannot be foretold. We believe that the IM has created such a moment at LBBNM, a moment lasting 20 years—and counting. In fact, we would suggest, although the IM disputes settler memories of the Greasy Grass on factual, definitional, and qualitative

grounds, it ultimately deploys the fourth point of forensic stasis by *objecting* to those memories on jurisdictional grounds. The IM materializes Native 'sovereignty,' the word that appeared on that AIM plaque in 1988 and the word, demand, and condition that best articulates indigenous peoples' objection to more than five centuries of colonization and their refusal to cede jurisdiction to settlers to judge the past, dominate the present, or dictate the future.

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