

We are a Warlike Nation

A brief moment of strangeness. On the back of my grandmother's dinner plates, as you can see, there is a confusing geography of porcelain: *Dresden, China, Made in Occupied Japan*. Well, sure. We kicked their ass in a long war, overthrew the domestic government, and set up MacArthur instead. That's called an occupation, no doubt, and the label on the plates is something of a boast.

But it's a dated boast. I am fairly sure that there is no plate, no dish, no barrel of oil, nothing at all being produced that says “made in occupied Iraq.” Of course, it's less clear-cut that we do occupy Iraq. The conflict is ongoing, despite the Mission Accomplished banner. While the Iraqi government is obviously a U.S. puppet show, the show seems to be put on largely for our own benefit. We are not trying to convince the Iraqis that they are in charge—with about a sixth of a million troops on the ground, that would be a lost cause. We are trying to convince ourselves.

An extreme case of this occurs in the transcript below, which my sister sent me back at the beginning of '04. Dan Murphy, a correspondent for the CSM, is on a talk show with conservative host John Dipetro and Paul (who had, I think, called in). They were discussing the Jill Carroll case, which now seems like ancient history. Anyway, Murphy made the mistake of using the verb “invade,” a near cousin of “occupy.” What follows would be priceless if it weren't so incredibly tragic:

Dan: Well, first of all, remember the United States invaded Iraq because it said its sympathies were with the Middle East and the Iraqi people. The United States government...

Paul: That's baloney!

Dan: ... is very concerned with Iraqis so to suggest there's something dubious about somebody [Carroll] who's sympathetic to a culture she covers and then cast aspersions upon them on that basis is frankly ignorant at best and something else at worst.

John: Dan you feel....

Dan: Now I just finished explaining

John: ...Hey Dan you feel we invaded Iraq?

[Long pause]

Dan: Didn't we invade Iraq?



John: (sort of laughing) I mean, you feel that we were invaders going in, I mean what about the [unclear]

Dan: We invaded Iraq, I think that's a simple statement in English. However, let me address Paul. Let me finish addressing paul.

John: But, ok, but this you know the UN...

Paul: No! Why don't we go back to our invading Iraq?

John: ... the UN sanctions and everything, Saddam Hussein...

Paul: Our belligerent policies.

John: ...I mean Dan, we didn't just invade a country, we had...

Dan: I'm not saying it was the wrong thing to do! I'm not judging it. I'm saying America said it cared about Iraq...

Paul: Yes you are! You said we invaded Iraq! That is a belligerent act of an oppressive nation....

Dan: I didn't say that.

Paul: Are we or are we not an oppressive nation?

Dan: Sir, I didn't say that! Sir, I said we invaded Iraq. I did not say that [unclear]

Paul: We are an oppressive nation, then. We are a warlike nation.

John: But Dan...

Paul: We invaded innocent people. Why don't you just say it?

Dan: John....

John: ...Dan...

Paul: ...Your sympathies are with the Middle east...

Dan: I need the chance to answer this guys very serious allegations of treason against Jill Carroll.

Paul: ...No! You made a statement: 'We invaded Iraq.' Then you stood by it and said it's a simple statement...

John: Dan, we didn't invade.

Paul: You, sir, are an Al Qaeda sympathizer.

Dan: What is, what would you, how would you describe, I mean the US government itself called it “the invasion.”

John: What, I...

Dan: ...What word would you prefer I use?

John: We were not invaders. I mean, Saddam Hussein...

Dan: ...I didn't say invaders, I said “we invaded.” My word...

John: ...of the invasion...

Dan: ... if you want to address my words, if you want to parse in a semantic sense, I said: “We invaded Iraq.”

John: Ok...

Dan: ... now you explain to me how you would describe...

John: Well, uh uh...

Dan: ... when the 1st Infantry Division went over the berm into Iraq. What, what would be the correct and politically appropriate term for that?

John: Well, it's it's more, I mean, we were at war with Saddam Hussein and his military, not the Iraqi people.

Dan: I didn't say we were.

John: Ok.

Dan: I said we cared deeply about the Iraqi people, that's what our government said. Your caller called in and said there's something suspicious about her sympathy for middle eastern culture. You can go back and see enormous amounts of comments from everybody in the current administration and in fact bipartisanly in congress and the senate where people say they care deeply about Iraq and Iraqis and I think that's a wonderful thing.