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► To cite this version:

Sandrine Baudry, Céline Planchou. A History of Shifting Settler-colonial Borders: Reading the Native/Non-Native Territorial Palimpsest in and around Rapid City, SD. *Borders in the English-Speaking World Negotiations, Subversions, Reconfigurations*, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2021. hal-03716952

HAL Id: hal-03716952

<https://hal.science/hal-03716952>

Submitted on 7 Jul 2022

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PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE STRASBOURG

A History of Shifting Settler-colonial Borders: Reading the Native/Non-Native Territorial Palimpsest in and around Rapid City, SD

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The strong relationship between space—its representations, uses, control—and forms of political or economic domination has been well demonstrated (Lefebvre 1974; Soja 2013). In the case of settler colonialism, which “describes a form of colonialism wherein non Indigenous or ‘settler populations’ implant themselves in new lands” (Barnd 2017, 9), it is not only a matter of domination, but also of gradual erasure. As Wolfe explains, “settler colonialism destroys to replace” (Wolfe 2006, 388). In other words, “settler presence is the core feature of this mode of domination, with the goal of establishing a new home to solidify territorial claims” (Barnd 9). This phenomenon is thus to be understood as a process, something which “cannot be localized within a specific period of removal or extermination and [which] persists as a determinative feature of national territoriality and identity” (Rifkin 2013, 324). If the erasure of Native geographies is a process, one needs to adopt a long-term perspective in order to fully grasp it. In other words, history is necessary to understand how geographies have progressively collided. Furthermore, one may ask if this process is complete. Reservations were indeed imposed spatially, historically construed by the

federal government to better prepare Native Americans for their integration within the U.S. society (Biolsi 1995). Yet, we may wonder if reservations have not today turned into a fundamental component of tribal sovereignty, as the territories on which modern tribal governments can exercise their remaining powers (Biolsi 2005, 240). As such, they would constitute a constant reminder of the enduring existence of Native American geographies and a testimony that the frontier is not complete. As Barnd says: “Indigenous geographies have quietly overlapped and coexisted in tension with the geographies of the settler colonial state. They have been submerged, but not eliminated” (Barnd 2017, 1). Hence, we should think of the U.S. territory as a “palimpsest” (Corboz 1983) of overlapping geographies and “alternative spatial imaginations” (Paasi 2012, 2304), the result of shifting borders, constantly reordering, reproducing and questioning issues of inclusion and exclusion.

In this chapter, we want to reflect on these shifting overlapping Native/non-Native geographies by focusing on and around Rapid City, South Dakota. This white settlement on the frontier, illegally built in 1876 on the then Great Sioux Reservation found itself willingly “excluded” from it as it was reduced and exploded into six smaller Lakota reservations. We contend that, historically and still today, Rapid City finds itself at the core of the maelstrom of shifting legal, administrative, cultural, imagined, mundane borders between—or across—Native and non-Native spaces. We will do so using history and geography literature, but also field work and archival research conducted since 2015.

We will first analyze the historical evolution of overlapping geographies in and around the city of Rapid City; then we will look at the modern resurgence of Lakota geographies in the city. Finally, our conclusion will propose some theoretical remarks on conceptualizing overlapping geographies and decolonizing scholarly minds.

I. THE HISTORY OF OVERLAPPING GEOGRAPHIES IN AND AROUND RAPID CITY

A. Submerging Native Geographies: the Reduction of the Great Sioux Reservation

In the middle of the 19th century, when the federal government launched its reservation policy, the United States had still not managed to explode the “Plains Indian Barrier” and to circumscribe Native nations in the area to fixed territories (Prucha 1984, 108–21). At a time when settlers needed to cross the territories of the Plains Indians to move further West, to Oregon and California, intertribal wars and the circular movements of these nations induced by semi-nomadism impeded linear colonization processes. All the more since intensified pressure from settlers crossing these territories had an impact on Native movements in the region. Wagon files, stretching across miles, altered ecosystems and disrupted buffalo herds which scattered around, pushing Native people to follow them in search of new hunting grounds. These movements reinforced intertribal tensions and threatened safe passage west for white settlers (Gillis 2017). In 1851, the Treaty of Fort Laramie was signed between the U.S. government and the Northern Plains Indians. It was a multilateral agreement with a threefold mission: demarcate fixed tribal boundaries, guarantee peace between the different signatory nations and the United States but also among Native nations, and further negotiate rights of way thus facilitating the crossing of the Plains (Treaty of Fort Laramie 1851). Yet, after the Civil War, pressure intensified to open Indian land in the region. For the federal government, it was not a matter of making crossings easier anymore but of organizing the settlement of the Plains. The tribal boundaries that had been imposed in 1851 were modified by the United States in 1868 with the second Treaty of Fort Laramie, a bilateral agreement which established the Great Sioux Reservation. While tribal boundaries were reduced, the Lakotas retained hunting rights on what was called “unceded territories” (Treaty of Fort Laramie 1868, art. 16). In other words, Lakota people had the right to circulate outside the limits of the Great Sioux Reservation in order to hunt on specific territories, not opened to white settlements. Still, waves of settlers

swarmed towards the area after gold was found in the Black Hills in 1874. Illegal settlements soon appeared on the Great Sioux Reservation and on unceded Lakota territories such as Hay Camp, which was created in 1876 and would later become Rapid City. Ideally situated at the foot of the mountains, it quickly became a gateway to the Black Hills, turning into a local economic hub where wagons and settlers stopped before going further west to illegal mining camps like Deadwood or Lead.

The establishment of these illegal settlements transgressed frontiers that had been officially set up by the federal government itself through treaties, but it also denied pre-existing Native geographies. Indeed, it facilitated settlers' penetration into Paha Sapa (The Lakota name for the Black Hills), a highly culturally and spiritually relevant place for the Lakotas and other Native nations in the area. Paha Sapa held, and still holds, a central place in Lakota perception of territory. It is instrumental in Lakota cosmogony and is tied to creation myths and many traditional ceremonies (Albers 2003, Part Four; Goodman 1992). Moreover, the ideal location where Hay Camp was built, along Rapid Creek, had been used for generations by the Lakotas as a regular annual meeting place on their way to the Black Hills. Known as Mni Luzahan, it had already been construed by the Lakotas as a gateway, this time to a significant spiritual area. According to circular semi-nomadic patterns of spatial occupation, it participated in reinforcing social cohesion among people who, during the rest of the year, were scattered within smaller camps on the prairie. This old Native presence at the heart of what would become Rapid City is further corroborated by some petroglyphs that can still be found along the creek (Sundstrom and Wini 2009).

The influx of a population which illegally transgressed official boundaries while digging for natural resources in a highly sacred place increased tensions in the middle of the 1870s. The federal government sent the U.S. Army to try and enforce spatial arrangements sanctified through treaties, yet it proved inefficient. Tensions broke out in 1876 when General Custer was defeated by an alliance of Lakotas, Cheyennes and Arapahos at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. In retaliation, the Black Hills Agreement of 1877 further reduced the Great Sioux Reservation while opening the unceded territories to white settlement. As borders shifted again, the Black Hills

and the city of Rapid City ended up being de facto outside the limits of the Great Sioux Reservation. Transgressing the frontiers it had itself imposed, the U.S. government thus modified the contours of Native legitimate bodily presence in the area as it reduced the space on which Lakotas were contained. Indeed, the latter could not cross the newly established borders unless authorized by the BIA agents, the local representatives of the federal agency in charge of Indian Affairs within the U.S. Department of the Interior. Native presence in and around Rapid City was thus made illegitimate in the eye of white settlers while, conversely, the illegal origin of the city was silenced and normalized as U.S. spatial arrangements took precedence over Lakota geography. In this context, the Lakotas who remained, who kept circulating, hunting, practicing ceremonies on territories that had been excluded from the Great Sioux Reservation started to be considered as being “off-reservation”, thus transgressing newly imposed borders, and rated as “hostile”, as opposed to more “friendly Indians” who agreed to remain within constrained borders (Estes 2016).

The gradual erasure of Lakota geographies carried on as settler colonialism further unfolded. The Great Sioux Reservation kept on reducing, pushing further away the frontier separating Rapid City from the reservation while U.S. spatiality continued to mark itself on the territory as homesteads, towns, counties kept on developing. In 1889, the Dawes Act—also known as the General Allotment Act—was implemented on the Great Sioux Reservation. It divided Lakota territory into individual units, thus bringing it in line with U.S. patterns of territorial organization, while the “surplus land” (the land which remained once the allotment of the reservation to individuals was complete) was opened to settlement. It was the end of the Great Sioux Reservation as the latter was exploded into six smaller ones: Crow Creek, Lower Brule, Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Rosebud, and, closer to Rapid City, Pine Ridge. That same year, South Dakota reached statehood, completing its incorporation within the national territory and “solidifying settler claims to Lakota treaty territory” (Estes 2016) at a time when an “Indian scare” was being manufactured by local newspapers, and the Dakota Militia was being formed to protect Rapid City and other settlements from Lakotas who were getting too close (Hall 1991, 27, 83).

These “sorties” appeared as all the more necessary since, in the late 1880s, the Ghost Dance Movement spread among the Lakotas, amplifying tensions between settlers and Native people in the region and pushing some Lakota camps (such as Big Foot Camp) to transgress the borders of the newly established reduced reservations in order to perform the ceremony in places of instrumental spiritual significance like *mako sica* (the Badlands). Rated as hostiles, Big Foot followers were hunted down by the U.S. Army and massacred at Wounded Knee in December 1890, while they were moving towards Pine Ridge Agency to surrender. Yet can we talk about transgression when people continue to inhabit a territory which makes sense to them, that is to say continue to practice activities which “mak[e] meaning in relation to the land where [their] bodies are situated” (Barnd 2017, 5)?

B. How the City Built Itself as a Non-Native Space

At the turn of the 20th century, the inhabitants of Rapid City thought of the Lakotas as belonging to the reservations further East, whose borders had progressively shifted away, thus reinforcing the idea that this order of things was a given. The city built itself as a non-Native space, opened to the West, to the mining economy of the Black Hills, while turning its back on the East. Yet, despite this process of invisibilization, Native Americans were present in the city. This was especially the case after 1898, when the BIA, pursuing the assimilationist policy it had then developed, decided to open Rapid City Indian School, an off-reservation boarding school where children from the surrounding reservations were sent (Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1898). In order to set up the school, the BIA bought some land west of the city. In accordance with the trust responsibility the federal government had contracted through treaties in compensation for Indian land cessions, this land was to be used “for the benefit”¹ of the Indians. In other words, a few years after the reduction

1. The federal trust responsibility towards Native Americans, mainly articulated by the Supreme Court in *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832, derives from the idea that, in compensation for the loss of land and the reduction of tribal inherent political powers that

of the Great Sioux Reservation, the federal government ended up buying back some land which fell under its exclusive jurisdiction for the benefit of Native Americans, creating a sort of federal enclave west of Rapid City.

After 1898, some parents, authorized to do so by BIA agents, decided to leave their reservation and follow their children in Rapid City while some young Lakotas also preferred to stay in the city once they finished school. Both parents and former students usually established themselves close to the school or along Mni Luzahan, where their ancestors had regularly gathered before them. The pattern carried on when the school closed in 1933 and was turned into a tuberculosis center (Sioux Sanitorium or Sioux San). Once again, families followed patients, increasing the Native population in West Rapid and along Mni Luzahan, in what started to be known as Osh Kosh Camp (The American Indian Research Project 1973). It is worth mentioning that Native movement had been made easier at that point, after Congress adopted the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924.² Native Americans were now all U.S. citizens and as such, they could not be assigned to reservations and restricted in their movement anymore. The influx of Native people in Rapid City carried on during World War II. The creation of Ellsworth Air Force Base created job opportunities around the city while many families who were evicted by the federal government in order to build a military bombing range on Pine Ridge ended up going to Rapid City (Thompson 2017). Despite their growing presence in the first half of the 20th Century, Native Americans mostly remained at the margins of the city, whether in West Rapid, close to the federal enclave, or along Mni Luzahan. Indeed, although Hay Camp, the historical center of the city, had been established there, it had quickly been deserted by white residents, moving the economic heart of the city a

Native Americans signed away through treaties, the federal government contracted obligations to act in the best interest of Native Americans. For a discussion on the complexity and the different interpretations of the federal trust doctrine, see David Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima (2001).

2. Before 1924, only certain categories of Native people had obtained U.S. citizenship, for instance soldiers in the U.S. Army or individuals who had been rated as “competent” by the BIA. The degree of Indian blood, compliance with federal assimilationist policies, “hostility”, were among the different criteria that were taken into consideration to determine a person’s competency.

few miles away to Main Street. The original location was soon forgotten by the city. Referred to as “Injun camp” by local residents, Osh Kosh Camp turned into a small ghetto (Kota TV 2018). Yet, the historical presence of Native people along the creek, the vicinity of drinking water and of a lumber company that hired Native people while the latter “could not find employment elsewhere”, added to the fact that few landlords “would rent houses to Native Americans” in the city (Bonner 2003, 5) still made Osh Kosh Camp the heart of Lakota presence in Rapid City.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Black Hills economy moved away from mining while the industry of tourism developed. The region first became a touristic location for local residents as its “mountain climate offered relief to visitors who endured heat and draught in their own locales,” in the surrounding plains (Barta Julin 2005, 291). It then gained national visibility with the highly covered visit of President Coolidge in 1927 and the beginning of the Mount Rushmore project. As King suggests, the “spiritual landscape of the Lakotas” in the area was “remapped” as, after having been transformed by the mining industry, it was now “produced as a tourist site” (King 1996, 146). Thermal waters in Hot Springs led to the development of the spa industry, roads were built in the Black Hills to make sightseeing easier, Mount Rushmore was carved, and Frontier attractions flourished (Albers 2003, 611). Whether celebrating the life of local hardy pioneers, thus participating in the frontier myth, or U.S. democracy, with the carving of the presidents' faces in the landscape, tourism inscribed the region in the heart of an imaginary national space. Rapid City quickly took advantage of the touristic boom in the Black Hills. Its strategic location proved once more valuable. As a gateway to the West, it soon emerged as a tourist venue, where visitors stopped before moving into the Black Hills thanks to the new road network. Furthermore, new city developments sprang up along these roads, most of which spread out from Rapid City. Within this context, Native Americans found themselves once more “on the way.” As West Rapid became more attractive, the federal enclave impeded the growth of the city. In the same way, Osh Kosh Camp came to be construed as a problem. According to Cook-Lynn, people there were “liv[ing] in substandard housing” and “news reports of the time said they were 'unsightly' and

ought to be moved away from the tourist traffic.” (2012) Pressure intensified and in 1948, an Act of Congress authorized the Secretary of the Interior to “convey [federal] lands [...] to the city of Rapid City for municipal purposes, to any public-school district for educational purposes, [...] to the State of South Dakota for the use of the South Dakota National Guard [...] [and] to any church organization for religious purposes” (Public Law 543 1948). While lands were distributed, opening the federal enclave, what would happen to the federal trust responsibility, contracted through treaty, to use these lands for the benefit of Native Americans? The question was not settled at the time. The Department of the Interior still chose to place \$15,000 “under the jurisdiction of the [newly established] Mayor's Committee on Human Relations [of Rapid City] to [...] assist needy Indians through loans, acquisition of land for homes etc.” (Department of the Interior 1959). The Native population decided to ask that the federal money be used to build housing near Sioux San (Thompson 2017), yet, in 1954, the city preferred to buy 20 acres of land outside the northern city limits, in what came to be known as Sioux Addition thus pushing Native Americans off the city, in Pennington County.

Ironically, while the touristic development pushed for the removal of Native bodies north of Rapid City, out of the way, it also highly depended on the exploitation of the image of Native Americans. Many tourist attractions played on the frontier myth and the ideological geography of the West, in which the figure of “the Indian” is instrumental. He is the “noble” adversary valued and celebrated as America's past making way for progress. This image could be all the more exploited by the city as Plains peoples, and especially the Lakotas, being historically part of the last nations to have “surrendered,” came to incarnate this generic “Indian.” “Authentic” artifacts, photographs were exhibited, images of “real Indians” were widely used on the numerous billboards which “dr[ew] motoring travelers off the road” (Barta Julin 2015, 313) and in tourist guides. It is also in Rapid City that the Duhamel, who managed a hardware and mercantile business downtown, decided to launch a show which staged local Native American dances and ceremonies for tourists. The Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant relied heavily on the tradition of historical pageantry and wild west shows which, as

Scarangella explains, “blurred the lines between education and entertainment in the display of Others” (Scarangella 2015, 22). The show represented an important source of income for some Lakotas, such as Nicholas Black Elk, while the presence of “real Plains Indians” certainly “added lure for tourists” (Barta Julin 2015, 298). It also testifies to the tension that, in the city, has always been at play between exploiting the power of attraction of the reified Indian for economic purposes while, on the other hand, marginalizing living Native people through, for instance, the “arrangement of low-income neighborhoods” (Estes 2016) such as Sioux Addition. In this context, Native visibility was tolerated for those who remained within the contours of Native legitimate bodily presence as defined here by tourism. Native performers and those who agreed to play a role in the emerging industry gave a new face to the “friendly Indian” while the majority of the Lakotas was kept at the margins of the city.

In 1962, an article in the *New York Times* still described Sioux Addition as “one of the worst slums in the Middle-West [...] with no electricity, water, plumbing or garbage disposal facilities” (Jansen 1962). The different levels of government having to some extent jurisdiction over the land on which Sioux Addition was built kept on offloading the burden to each other, leaving the Lakotas residing there in a legal limbo. Given that the neighborhood was outside the city limits, Rapid City considered their well-being was not its responsibility. Pennington County, for its part, thought that the federal government had to be more involved given its trust responsibility, whereas the latter pushed for more county involvement. Eventually, the county chose to apprehend Lakotas in Sioux Addition as “people in transit”, delivering them “certificates of nonresidency to prevent them from becoming eligible for welfare aid” (Jansen 1962). The legal maze and the bad sanitary conditions led many Native American families to remain along Rapid Creek, even after the building of a second low-income neighborhood—Lakota Homes—in 1970, right next to Sioux Addition. This explains why Native Americans highly suffered from the flood which, in 1972, destroyed everything along Rapid Creek.

At the turn of the 1970s, Rapid City embodied the concept of a border town, having built itself as a non-Native space, marginalizing and removing

Native bodies from what were perceived to be “Settled” urban geographies” (Estes 2016). Recurring violent hate crimes at the time were reminiscent of this frontier mentality. They are also part of the reasons why the American Indian Movement (AIM-created in Minneapolis in 1968) became active in the region. The development of demonstrations and actions putting forward tribal treaty rights (in the Black Hills for instance) reminded the city that it stood in the middle of treaty land and announced that Native geographies would resurface.

II. THE MODERN RESURGENCE OF LAKOTA GEOGRAPHIES IN THE CITY

A. The 1970s, a Turning Point in City Planning and Race Relations

The 1972 flash flood, while tragic and widely remembered as such because, as a New York Times journalist put it at the time, “[i]t swept away the homes, possessions and bodies of the affluent and poor, Indian and white, old and young, Catholic and Protestant, Democrat and Republican” (Kentfield 1973, 81), also marked a turning point in the history of Rapid City’s planning and thus a shift in boundaries and space perception. Indeed, in the aftermath of the tragedy, millions of dollars in Federal funds were granted to the City to rebuild and compensate the victims. This represented a veritable manna for a city of that size, that allowed it to implement a major renewal program on the disaster area, including an urban park—a project designed prior to the flood, but for which funding lacked (Fell 1972). This had a number of consequences in terms of planning and policy, as it shifted the boundaries of spatial and racial segregation, as well as the perceived center of the city; the Lakotas who lived along the creek prior to the flood, having lost everything, either returned to the reservations or were moved North towards Lakota Homes and Sioux Addition, away from the new, “clean” and green heart of the city, the way they had been historically pushed away from downtown.

This renewed displacement of Native bodies went hand in hand with rising bitter feelings among the Native population, which felt largely left out of the redistribution of federal wealth, although the Lakotas had been

particularly hit since at the time many of them lived along the creek in shoddy shelters of which nothing remained. This kind of double standard was of course nothing new, but because it happened at a time of Pan-Indian mobilization and tribal empowerment, it did attract attention. In particular, the newly-born AIM spent time in Rapid City helping the flood victims, demanding justice for them and apparently “terrorizing” the non-Native residents, according to the same New York Times journalist, quoting then-Mayor Don Barnett:

The flood was bad, hard work—dropping down at night and starting again first thing in the morning. But the Indian thing was worse, a trauma, the psychological pressure was terrible. Townspeople came to me, and cowboys, saying if we don’t get out there and kill ’em, they’d take the law into their own hands. Well, s--- I’m not going to kill anybody! (Kentfield 1973, 81)

Despite the City’s best efforts, Native Americans were becoming clearly visible, thus re-locating Rapid City within the Lakota territory. As Nick Estes puts it, “Native bodies ‘off the reservation’ in places like Rapid City are loaded with meaning. They are the nightmarish reminder of settler precarity, the living proof of a counter and prior claim to the land” (Estes 2016). Still, outright race riots were avoided, largely thanks to the Mayor’s efforts to reconcile both communities (Giago 2013). He did accept a dialogue with AIM members which led to the approval of a “racial problems paper” outlining solutions to alleviate inequalities, which the council president claimed “had not been called to the council’s attention” until then (*Rapid City Journal* 1973).

The election of Arthur Lacroix as Mayor in 1975 may seem surprising in such a tense climate, since he was part Santee Sioux and still holds the record for longest-lasting Mayor, with four terms, but it is in fact reminiscent of the dichotomy between assimilated and hostile Indians. Indeed, as a successful local businessman since 1956, Lacroix represented the “good Indian”, well-integrated into settler society, as opposed to the “bad Indians” of AIM who were vocally reclaiming their right to the land and their culture. During his tenure, he did start the Indian-White Relations Committee, but also worked on many planning and architectural projects that validated the settler-colonial space of the city.

The 1970s also witnessed a shift at a broader scale. Indeed, in the months following their stay in Rapid City, AIM members were involved in various protests in the Black Hills, but maybe most notably in the nearby reservation of Pine Ridge, with the internationally-broadcast siege in Wounded Knee which raised awareness about “treaty rights, the boundaries that spatially defined those rights, and the claims of sovereignty for which they stood” (D’Arcus 2003). It is significant that at no other time in 20th history can as many mentions of Native Americans be found in the *Rapid City Journal*, most of them focusing on violence—reminiscent of the press’s efforts to drum up an “Indian Scare” at the end of the 19th century. This forced the city and its inhabitants to look East and acknowledge the territorial relationship with the reservations, and thus the larger Sioux territory.³ In 1980, the decades-long Black Hills Claim culminated in the Supreme Court decision to award the Sioux \$106 million in compensation for the illegal taking of that land (Lazarus 1999, 408). Even though the tribes refused the money, stating they wanted the land back instead, this landmark decision officially recognized the illegal dispossession of the Lakotas and their rights over a territory whose exploitation for gold was the sole reason for the existence of Rapid City.

Those boundaries between Native and non-Native spaces were also questioned at that time of heightened environmental awareness, which sparked “unlikely alliances” (Grossman 2005) between Natives and rural non-Natives all over the country. In South Dakota, the Black Hills Alliance successfully stopped uranium mining in 1981, and the Cowboy and Indian alliance did the same in 1987 with a new project for a bombing range (31). While these alliances did not overcome historic divisions, they did “challenge the common assumptions about the inevitability of interethnic conflict” (36), as well as validate the Lakota perception of the Black Hills as a site that should be protected from exploitation. Since then, Lakota geographies have also slowly started being acknowledged, more or less openly, within Rapid City itself.

3. It is also relevant to note that many hearings and negotiations concerning the reservations and their territories, including during the Wounded Knee siege (Woster 1973), actually took place in Rapid City, again placing it at the center of Native space (Biolsi 2001).

B. 21st Century Planning and Native Space Resurgence

In 1985, Rapid City annexed, among other territories, Sioux Addition and Lakota Homes (Rapid City Local Library 1985). Once again, the Lakotas then had to submit to a shift in boundaries, this time placing them within the city limits; from outsiders, they then became marginal residents, as North Rapid remained stigmatized as a poor, unsafe neighborhood, a Native space cut-off from the rest of the city by the railroad tracks and the broad and busy Omaha Street.

1. *Public Art and Public Space*

This stigmatization is all the more striking, and all the more telling, in light of the recent developments in planning and economic policies. A look at the changes that have occurred in Rapid City in the 21st century will help illustrate and understand the lasting tensions between Native and settler geographies, and the relationship between spatiality, settler colonial policies of removal and replacement, and the persistence of Native bodies.⁴ As Bell and Jayne-Small (2006) have shown, in order to survive and prosper small cities like this one need to create a distinctive identity for themselves in order to find their “unique selling point” (2). In the case of Rapid City, we saw that its identity as a frontier town has long been at the basis of its tourism economy, although it was mostly turned West towards the Black Hills’ historic mining towns and of course Mount Rushmore. Today, the city itself is developing tourist attractions so as to be more than a simple Gateway to the West, and bolster local economy. The statues of US Presidents erected on every downtown street corner are a prominent example of the rebranding of the city, capitalizing on the success of Mount Rushmore, which places the region at the heart of the national myth. Their permanent presence in the streets is significant in that they embody a fantasized settler history in contemporary settler space. But Native culture and bodies have

4. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2018 American Indians and Alaska Natives represented 11.4% of the population—compared for instance to Black or African Americans, who represented 1.2%.

also recently been re-invited in the city center as markers of this border town brand. For instance, two Lakota-themed sculptures have also found their place on street corners—although they are conspicuously absent from the tourist downtown map of the “City of Presidents”.

But the most striking development in recent planning history is the building of Main Street Square, initiated, paid for and maintained by downtown business owners working together as a group named Destination Rapid City, whose mission, according to its website, is “to create, sustain, and maintain a vibrant city center which provides a cultural and recreational space for the enjoyment and use of the community and its visitors.” (Downtown Rapid City n.d.) This not only effectively revitalized downtown by offering its only usable open space, but also gave pre-eminence to businesses over elected officials, not only in the design of the city center, but in the choices governing its use, including the choice of “suitable” public events and users. It is well-documented that city centers renewal and revitalization inevitably go hand in hand with the exclusion of the undesirable, often meaning the marginal, disenfranchised residents of the city—panhandlers, drunks, drug users, youths, etc. (Smith 2001; Davis 2006). Rapid City is no exception, and as it happens, the disenfranchised are, in the vast majority, Native. This only emphasizes the tensions and contradictions in the relationship between Natives and non-Natives as the former are welcome downtown during specific, well-circumscribed, events such as Native Pop—an annual art fair—or weekly traditional dance demonstrations in the summer, but pushed out of sight when they are seen as loitering bodies suspected of homelessness, drunkenness and other “vices” threatening the comfort of residents and tourists alike.

One notable partial exception is Art Alley, dedicated to graffiti and murals—a form of art usually extolled for the freedom it provides and for its potential as a tool of resistance (Marche 2012)—and where Native and non-Native artists co-habit, but even that space, which is now prominently featured on every tourist website mentioning Rapid City, has become increasingly policed and a permit now needs to be obtained in order to paint there (Read 2016). Yet, it still provides the opportunity to leave a trace, sometimes an explicitly political one—such as a mural in support of the Dakota Access

Pipeline protesters or a “We are still here” graffiti. It is also a space where the Native body painting, dancing, playing music, can be seen as positive. Other spaces such as Prairie Edge or Dakota Drums Co., two stores selling Lakota arts and crafts, or Racing Magpie, an art gallery/studio space mostly occupied by Native artists, prove that the boundary between Native and non-Native spaces is indeed porous, but very selectively so, as only those who produce art, beauty, culture, representing today’s version of the “good Indian”, are willingly let in.⁵ But the mundane presence of Native bodies, the one that truly disqualifies the hegemony of colonial boundaries, is still considered as disruptive, as exemplified not only by the exclusion of the homeless, but by the on-going discrimination, racism and violence (Estes 2012), the actual killing and battery, but also the more quotidian occurrences such as bartenders refusing to serve liquor to Lakota customers or the idea that all Natives present in Rapid City should “go home”—a perception often voiced and which clearly negates any relationship between Rapid City and Lakota territory.⁶

It is also interesting to look at those artistic traces outside of Downtown proper. For instance, despite still being largely ghettoized in North Rapid, the Lakotas have reclaimed that particular space by marking its border with a mural painted by high-school students and representing Lakota culture as well as diversity, right under a “Welcome to North Rapid” sign.⁷ Art and artists also form networks that go beyond the city limits and emphasize the continuous relationship between Rapid City and the Lakota and Dakota

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5. An in-depth study of the places listed here would be valuable in complexifying the issue, as in all cases both Natives and non-Natives are involved and play a role in defining Lakota art and culture (interestingly, there is no word meaning “art” in the Lakota language), and thus what and who deserves to be visible in the city.
 6. The authors witnessed such an occurrence in July 2015, when a delegation of Native Americans, supported by AIM members, marched across Downtown to demand justice after 57 children from the Pine Ridge Reservation were insulted at a ball game in Rapid City. It is relevant here to note that the protesters laughed at the man telling them to “go home,” a response that expressed in a nutshell the conflicting relationships to the territory and its borders.
 7. North Rapid is the only neighborhood identified with such a sign, underlying its particular status in the geographic imagination of Rapid City residents.

reservations: Red Can Jam, a murals program and event developed in the Cheyenne River reservation, took partly place in Art Alley in 2015 (Garreau 2017); the Rolling Rez van circulates between Rapid City and the Pine Ridge reservation to bring art supplies and activities to children; many art exhibits are shown in several key venues between Rapid City and Chamberlain, situated at the easternmost end of the former Great Sioux Reservation; the artists themselves circulate between these spaces.

2. Resurgence Through Legal and Political Territorial Claims

In the last decade, other efforts have been made to better race relations, such as organizing Community Conversations and various events to foster mutual communication and understanding, creating signs for businesses to advertise their willingness to cater to Native customers, painting one police car with Lakota cultural elements, etc. More relevant to our study, there is also a significant recent trend of explicit reclaiming of city land as rightfully belonging to Lakota tribes. These public claims, if they do not necessarily hope to achieve a retrocession of said land, at least ensure a public discussion through forums, open letters, newspaper articles, which reconfigure the “geopolitics of memory” (Kolossov and Scott 2013, 11); they highlight the contested history of the city’s territory by replacing it on Lakota treaty land and thus invalidate the official invisibilization of Native Americans from the city’s historical narrative.

Two projects are primarily concerned here. First, lawyer Heather Dawn Thompson has been leading an in-depth investigation on the history of the Rapid City Indian School and Sioux Addition, publicizing the results with maps and pictures online (Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi), in a special report published in 2017 by the Rapid City Journal, and during multiple public forums held that year and overcrowded by Rapid City residents, both Native and non-Native. The study brings to light the fate of treaty land as the city expanded Westward and through it the treatment of Native Americans as they were dispossessed and displaced. Before that, in 2003, Associate Professor at the Oglala Lakota College, Hazel P. Bonner, had supervised a class paper questioning the status of the Sioux Addition land, arguing that since the City had bought it with money earned from the sale

of Federal trust land, Sioux Addition should carry that same status. That is important not only in terms of recognition of Native rights, but because this would mean that the land should never have been taxed by the city. This shows that the boundaries between Native and settler spaces are not only symbolic, but have very concrete consequences on the daily lives of those inhabiting these spaces.

The second project which exemplifies the link between land, history, culture and power relations is that of the First Nations Sculpture Garden in Halley Park. Initiated by Dakota writer and scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynne, the project, which took several years to break ground, consists in exhibiting busts of prominent Native Americans in order “for an appropriate native history to be re-established as a symbol of native contributions to the community” (Cook-Lynne 2012). What is at stake here and sparked a vivid controversy between Cook-Lynne and the City Council is not only the Sculpture Garden itself, but its location in front of what is currently the Parks Department building and used to be the Sioux Museum. Indeed, while actually not very accessible for pedestrians and somewhat outside of the downtown area—and thus considered as not profitable from a touristic-economic viewpoint—“this park which was once considered part of the ‘trust’ lands enclave can symbolize the thousands of years of occupancy by native people in the area” (*ibid.*). The idea once again, far from building a tourist site, is to publicize the issues of land dispossession and educate non-Natives about the settler-colonial process, in hopes of helping them rethink the imposed geographies of the place they inhabit.

There is still much work to be done in that regard, but there have been recent glimpses of progress. For instance, the 2017 project for the extension of Founders Park north of the creek proposes to include panels on Native history, whereas the current exhibit on the history of the city, on the south bank, focuses on the lives of the “hardy pioneers” who built their camp on that site in 1876, with no mention of the Lakotas, despite the importance of the spot in their history and culture and the nearby petroglyphs attesting to their presence prior to the arrival of the settlers.

CONCLUSION:**NOTES ON THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF OVERLAPPING GEOGRAPHIES**

Disentangling the historical processes and geographical layers of a given territory proves to be complex and to require a reflection on our own position as white scholars coming from a settler colonial culture. Much has been written about the necessity to decolonize methodologies when looking at Indigenous issues (Smith 2013; Lincoln et al. 2008; Simpson 2014), but we argue that, since the patterns of domination and control inherent to spatiality and its representations are particularly taken as a given, “coding the imperial assertion of dominance as the maintenance of neutrality” (Rifkin 2009, 96), we have to be especially careful about the concepts we use in analyzing our object. For instance, even though we can be tempted to think of the crossing of imposed borders (e.g. those of the reservations) only in terms of transgression, which we feel is a way to highlight the agency and resisting potential of the oppressed, it also means that we, as scholars, implicitly validate the geographies as well as the categories produced by the dominant society when in fact, those crossing the borders may also simply be continuing to inhabit a territory that makes sense to them. Likewise, given the power of naming places, it is clear that using the colonial toponymy imposed both on the land and its inhabitants has to be questioned. This is why we decided to use both English and Lakota place names here, without distinguishing either with italics or quotation marks, which would identify one of them as the norm and the other as “foreign.”

Studying the historical overlapping geographies and the modern resurgence of a supposedly erased territoriality helps complexify our understanding of the current power balance around spatiality. Our historical and multi-scalar approach has enabled us to see that, despite the original settler colonial intent of submerging and erasing Native space, the continuing presence of Native bodies in that space induces us to look at the geographies of the territory in terms of synchronic layers rather than uniquely in terms of diachronically shifting borders—an interpretation usually offered by the standard cartographic representation based on a succession of maps showing the reduction of the Great Sioux Reservation through time, suggesting an

inevitable and completed redrawing of spaces and boundaries, and thus of social and political relationships. This representation ignores the fact that present-day Lakota space “spills out past reservation lines” (Barnd 2017, 37), including visually—for instance with the use of tribal flags on license plates, t-shirts, hats, public art, in conjunction with those Native bodies that successive federal, state and local policies of extermination, termination, assimilation tried in vain to do away with. This re-visibility of Native American presence re-places Rapid City within the borders of the Lakota territory, forcing it to look East, in contradiction with its own imagined history as a gateway to the West and a crucial point of the national territorial expansion.

It is true that the dominant geographic layer is continuously validated (even as it evolves) by official maps, school manuals and “settler common sense”, which Mark Rifkin defines as “the ways the legal and political structures that enable non-Native access to Indigenous territories come to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood” (2013, 322–323). But, through mundane practices as well as increasingly publicized legal and political land claims, the underlying layers of the palimpsest can and do emerge at different points in time, what we may call conjunctural resurgence. As Henry Lefebvre pointed out, “Les différences jamais n’ont dit leur dernier mot. Vaincues, elles survivent” (1974, 32). We contend that these coexisting geographies testify to the failure of the settler colonial agenda.



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