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Autochtonie, subalternité et résurgences territoriales lakotas. Mettre à mal l'ordre colonial urbain dans une bordertown

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Indigeneity, Subalternity and Lakota Territorial Resurgence: Disrupting Urban Settler Colonial Order in a US Bordertown

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- 1 At first glance, the concept of the subaltern seems to perfectly describe the position of Native Americans within contemporary US society, as colonized peoples, as socially, economically, and politically dominated groups, and as abused bodies. Yet, until recently, it was not commonly used by Indigenous studies scholars. This has changed partly due to the emergence of settler colonial studies, born of the dialogue between postcolonial and Indigenous studies. This special issue on the place of the subaltern in collective mobilizations in the Americas gives us the opportunity to revisit our case study, that of Rapid City, South Dakota, through the theoretical lens of this recent interdisciplinary trend.¹
- 2 Cities are important loci of settler domination, as they have been privileged spaces of assimilation and invisibilization, and still today “render Indigeneity profoundly out of place,”² which is a particularly salient manifestation of the settler colonial effort to “destroy to replace.”³ Thus, “*urbs nullius*”⁴ has become the ultimate version of *terra nullius*, and yet, as historian Coll Thrush points out, “urban and Indigenous histories [...] are intimately intertwined, and separating the two is an act of willful narrative violence.”⁵ Our work fits in the framework of urban settler colonial studies, born in the last decade as it became apparent that settler colonial dynamics had been largely overlooked by North American critical urban studies.⁶ In this framework, cities known as border towns due to their proximity to reservations have been recently conceptualized by Indigenous scholars as “bordertowns” which “give spatial form to the violence and exploitation that defines everyday Native life, past and present.”⁷ As

such, they are sites of territorial resurgence and continued resistance challenging settler patterns of dispossession, or of what Gerald Vizenor has theorized as “survivance,” the encounter of survival and resistance.⁸

- 3 As critical urban theorists have pointed out, cities are privileged spaces of resistance precisely because they embody the hegemonic capitalist (and, in our case, colonial) order.⁹ For Indigenous people, moving to the cities in the 1950s and 1960s gave them the opportunity to meet and organize in order to demand that their rights be respected. Thus, observing territorial resurgence practices in an urban setting, specifically a bordertown, is an apt methodological tool to unearth the inherently mythical nature of the settler imagined geographies, as they collide with the realities of lived territories.
- 4 This is why this article looks at contemporary practices, both mundane and militant, in such a bordertown, Rapid City, SD. These practices, observed during fieldwork from 2015 to 2017, as well as gathered more recently through online media and social media, will serve to illustrate the concepts developed in literature on settler colonial cities and Indigenous resurgence. Following Heather Dorries *et al.*, we will “[ground] our arguments in the actuality and materiality of a specific urban experience”¹⁰ to show how “Indigenous people are reconfiguring the social infrastructures and relations that constitute cities based on Indigenous epistemologies, relationalities, and geographies.”¹¹
- 5 We will first present the theoretical and conceptual framework we are basing our work on. Using the works of historians, geographers, urban geographers, and Indigenous studies scholars, both Native and non-Native, we will discuss the concept of subalternity within the settler colonial context as well as the relevance of a place-based approach and a focus on urban territories when analyzing contemporary Indigenous resistance. In the second part, we will focus on our case study, first presenting the history of Rapid City and its role in on-going patterns of dispossession (territorial, cultural, economic, or otherwise), then providing a few examples of the ways in which the persisting presence of Indigenous people in the city challenges, even sometimes undermines, the settler colonial efforts at dispossession, invisibilization, and erasure.

Theoretical Framework

Subalternity, Settler Colonialism and Indigeneity

- 6 The concept of the subaltern has not really been discussed by Native American studies and Indigenous studies scholars until quite recently. According to US scholars in Indigenous studies Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) and Michael Rothberg, despite “shar[ing] an interest in challenging the logics of colonialism,” subaltern and postcolonial studies, on the one hand, and Indigenous and Native American studies, on the other hand, have also expressed tensions which “derive from indigenous peoples’ sense of living under ongoing colonial projects – and not just colonial legacies – and from postcolonial studies’ over-reliance on models of colonialism in South Asia and Africa that do not necessarily speak to the settler colonies of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.”¹²
- 7 Apart from differences in colonial contexts and the temporality of domination, another issue stems from the “*space* of colonization.”¹³ Indeed, the subordination of the subaltern’s position is often conceived as located inside the space of modern nation-

states. Yet, as Byrd further explains: “the emphasis on the *in* as the necessary condition of subalternity presents fundamental problems when applied to understanding American Indian nations *vis-à-vis* the United States precisely because *in* reifies the United States as the overarching state authority and is always a colonial spatialization.”¹⁴ In other words, accepting the spatial boundaries of the modern United States as a given erases the fact that Indigenous geographies “not only precede but also exceed” US political space.¹⁵

- 8 When applied to Native Americans, subalternity thus needs to be construed in the specific and ongoing context of settler colonialism. Settler colonial studies emerged in the middle of the 2000s at the intersection of postcolonial studies with Indigenous studies to reflect on the fact that settler colonialism “must be understood as a distinct form of imperial practice.”¹⁶ According to Australian historian Patrick Wolfe, a leading figure in establishing settler colonial studies, this imperial practice relies on the premise that “settlers have come to stay”¹⁷ and have thus constantly deployed a plethora of mechanisms intended to destroy and replace. In other words, settler colonialism should be apprehended as “a structure rather than an event.”¹⁸ Like the scholars whose work on Indigenous issues is informed by settler colonial studies, we consider that these structure and power dynamics “do not belong to a now concluded historical past,” but continually “transform in ways that allow them to continue to shape relationships in the present.”¹⁹
- 9 Robert Warrior, an Osage scholar in American and Native American studies, also explains that “the indigenous world of North America above the Rio Grande features two major forms of subalternity, one typified by extreme, abject poverty, the other more a matter of political non-viability and invisibility.”²⁰ The second form, on which we mainly focus in this article, clearly speaks to the settler colonial project of elimination and territorial dispossession, and places issues of land and space on the front line. Indeed, as Wolfe further points out, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element”²¹ or, to quote Natchee Blu Barnd, a US scholar in cultural geography and Indigenous studies, “settler colonialism is fundamentally defined by its spatial organization and outcomes.”²² Processes of domination and “imperial practice” through imposed colonial geographies may be less obvious than they used to be, but they are still at work especially through what Mark Rifkin, a US scholar in Native American studies, describes as “settler common sense.”²³ According to him, structures of settler colonialism (including settler geographies) have been internalized by non-Natives to the point of being felt as a given and being lived and reproduced every day as self-evident.
- 10 If invisibilization and territorial dispossession inform mechanisms of domination within the context of settler colonialism, processes of Indigenous resistance and self-definition must also be apprehended through this lens. Indeed, the concept of indigeneity is “deeply embedded within and defined by colonial contestations over land and geography.”²⁴ As a specific form of subalternity, tied to contemporary settler colonialism, it constantly “proclaim[s] ‘we are still here’” and eventually aims at “foil[ing] colonial completion.”²⁵ Before turning towards a few terms which have been used in the growing literature on Indigenous resistance and production of space, we would like to make a few further remarks about indigeneity. While the settler colonial approach is relevant when reflecting on subalternity and Native Americans, some scholars have recently warned against focusing too much on it “while ignoring or

underestimating the very real efforts of Indigenous actors to interrupt and reverse the effects” of settler colonial structures.²⁶ In the United States, indigeneity as a category of analysis started to be articulated by Indigenous scholars “as a counterpart analytic to settler colonialism,”²⁷ drawing attention to the fact that the replacement sought by any settler colonial project “is never fully achieved”²⁸ and exploring the ways Indigenous peoples “exist, resist, and persist.”²⁹ Our reflections on Native American resistance and resurgence in Rapid City align with this approach.

Resurgence, Place-Based Relational Continuities, and Movement

- 11 Specialists in Indigenous governance and sovereignty Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) have described Indigenous peoples’ position as subalterns in North America in terms of “disconnection.”³⁰ In order to counter the effects of settler colonialism, they need to rebuild “[their] relationship to [their] land, relatives, language, and ceremonial life” in which their “true power as Indigenous people ultimately lies.”³¹ Everyday interactions based on relations with the land actually participate in producing Indigenous space and thus help maintain “oppositional, place-based existence.”³² These everyday embodied practices of “Indigenous relationality in action” are what the two scholars define as Indigenous resurgence. Drawing on this concept, Heather Dorries *et al.* thus consider that indigeneity must be approached by scholars “as a dynamic and fluid formation that is defined by relationships to place and kin.”³³ Others have also used the expression “relational place-making” to express the way Indigenous people produce space through acts of resurgence.³⁴
- 12 The idea of resurgence echoes Barnd’s proposition that Indigenous geographies must not simply be analyzed as contesting settler colonialism but also as “continuations,” as the result of “choices, understandings, and actions [which have been] continually practiced and reaffirmed in order [...] to continue to exist.”³⁵ He further explains that:
- Indigenous geographies have quietly overlapped and coexisted in tension with the geographies of the settler colonial state. They have been submerged, but not eliminated. While they have changed to survive the violences directed at eliminating this overlap and coexistence, indigenous peoples have sustained Native spaces. [...] I argue that indigenous geographies can never be just a response to settler colonialism if they signal the continuation (however adaptive or appropriative) of precolonial epistemologies, ontologies, and practices.³⁶
- 13 In order to describe these “continuing” or “sustained” Indigenous geographies, Barnd relies on the concept of “inhabiting,” which, in the context of spatial production, refers to “the process of making meaning in relation to the land where bodies are situated.”³⁷ Indigenous place-making thus relates to grounded and embodied practices which, intentionally or not, disturb imposed geographies.
- 14 Mark Rifkin also explores the disturbance produced by Indigenous “alternative mappings,” which, according to him, creates “eruption[s] of difference within national space” and thus “challenge[s] the obviousness of imperial categories” and geographies.³⁸ Also reflecting on the category of the subaltern, he considers that “with respect to the United States, subaltern studies can aid in plotting the alternative political and territorial configurations hidden in the ‘cracks’ of US legal geography.”³⁹ In other words, “the subaltern is that which cannot be incorporated into hegemony.”⁴⁰ Our article thus proposes to follow Rifkin’s invitation to read “for remainders and traces of

nonidentity,”⁴¹ signs of Indigenous geographies that have been marginalized yet not eliminated, as Barnd also suggested.

- 15 According to Canadian scholar in Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies Kevin Bruyneel, the constant tension between these “remainders” and US-imposed boundaries is characteristic of Indigenous peoples’ experience. Relations between the latter and the United States are “a battle between an American effort to solidify inherently contingent boundaries and an indigenous effort to work on, across,” and sometimes against them.⁴² Indeed, as other scholars have also shown, the logics of elimination at the core of settler colonialism rely heavily on mechanisms of constraint and containment of Indigenous movement and mobilities.⁴³ Indigenous resistance and resurgence are thus profoundly dynamic and antistatic, “generat[ing their] power by moving back and forth across the institutional and discursive boundaries”⁴⁴ of the settler-state, and refusing the “imperial binary,” i.e., the “dualistic distinctions that explicitly or implicitly serve to mark out hierarchies between groups” in a settler colonial context.⁴⁵ In other words, when producing space, Indigenous people are constantly navigating around dualisms which have been invoked by the United States, such as the internal/external dichotomy. One of the most enduring dualisms is the opposition between the reservation and the city.

Being Indigenous in an Urban Context

- 16 The reservation and the city have been ideologically constructed as historically and geographically excluding one another, as being “antithetical.”⁴⁶ The former were indeed imposed spatialities construed to contain Indigenous movement and were always thought of as being reminiscent of the “wilderness,” “cast as places of poverty/stagnation,”⁴⁷ whereas the latter has been “synonymous with ‘development’ and ‘progress’ in the colonialist endeavor.”⁴⁸ This duality actually “worked to render the urban as a place *not Indigenous*, profoundly spatially and temporally disconnected from Indigenous histories and geographies.”⁴⁹ In this respect, cities appear as a perfect tool of subalternization where the logics of elimination make Indigenous presence appear out of place. A recently emerging dialogue between urban studies, Indigenous studies, and settler colonial studies has led to the development of urban settler colonial studies. As David Huggill, a Canadian geographer, puts it, efforts have grown to “explicitly urbanize the insights of settler colonial theory.”⁵⁰ Expressions such as the “settler colonial city” or “settler colonial urbanism/ization” have been articulated, testifying to attempts to “rethink historical and contemporary processes of city-making and related contestations over urban space,” and insist on the fact that Indigenous dispossession is actually still “an ongoing condition of city-making.”⁵¹ An important input of these interactions is to question the disconnection between urban space and reservation space, the latter being thought of as inherently Indigenous. In alignment with these scholars, we argue that “urban and reservation geographies have never existed in isolation from one another.”⁵²
- 17 This disconnection has indeed created several blind spots which need to be addressed. Historically speaking, the city has always appeared as a creation of the settlers. As French geographer Bastien Sepúlveda explains, “as an enclave of colonial power, symbolizing its imposition in the New World, the city erected itself as a fortress from which Indigenous people were excluded.”⁵³ Native Americans were progressively

written out of the history of the urban phenomenon, ontologically separated from these outposts of “civilization.” Canadian scholars in Native American studies and anthropology Nathalie Kermoal and Carole Lévesque further contend that “Indigenous people do not exist in the urban narrative before the middle of the twentieth century: before that, in the collective national imaginary, the presence of Indigenous people fell under the supernatural. They haunted the city [...] but they never inhabited it.”⁵⁴

- 18 Even when Native American presence started to be taken into consideration, it was only apprehended as a result of new migration patterns which, in the United States, were accelerated by the federal relocation policy of the 1950s. In other words, this “new” presence is often perceived as originally external to the urban phenomenon and necessarily involving a break from the reservation community. Recently, some urban historians have insisted on the necessity to rewrite the history of North American cities by incorporating the past and present layers of Indigenous place-making in/of those urban spaces. Reflecting upon the Blackfoot in Alberta, Kermoal and Lévesque note for example that “traditional stories associated with sites [in cities like Calgary or Lethbridge] are still vivid in Blackfoot collective memory” and that they “enrich the urban landscape and enable the Indigenous people to understand the city less as a rupture than as being part of who they are.”⁵⁵
- 19 This reconnection also brings back issues of collective Indigenous territorial rights inside the contemporary city. Because of the traditional dualism between the reservation and the city, questions surrounding the exercise of treaty rights or the extent of tribal sovereignty were thought of as being intrinsically attached to the reservation, as if Indigenous claimed lands could not expand beyond its limits. As a result, “cities are exempted from the long history of settler-Indigenous spatial relations that is invariably at their root; they are discursively rendered as places that exist outside of the messy negotiation of colonial contestation.”⁵⁶ Yet a lot of urban Indigenous mobilizations, as our case study will show, insist on cities being contested territories, claiming for instance certain sites within city limits as treaty land. These efforts, which intend to unsettle what seemed settled, expose “the instability of settler colonial power”⁵⁷ and as such often lead to violent reactions.
- 20 The ongoing violence of urban settler colonialism becomes apparent in such instances, but is usually hidden, made invisible by the urban/Indigenous dichotomy. For Canadian scholar in Indigenous and urban studies Julie Tomiak (Anishinaabe), “settler states continue to pursue the violent transformation of Indigenous land into settler property and to police Indigenous place-making and self-determination particularly aggressively in relation to cities.”⁵⁸ It is also important to remember that the settler colonial framework should not be the only lens through which we reflect upon power dynamics and mechanisms of exclusion, lest we transform it into a “reified framework.”⁵⁹ When studying Native American place-making in the city, settler colonial dynamics must then be apprehended in “relat[ion] to other racialized structures of dispossession, displacement, and domination” such as racial capitalism.⁶⁰ Furthermore, mechanisms of domination and elimination in urban context must not overshadow questions of Indigenous agency. These mechanisms are indeed constantly transformed, as layers of settler colonial urbanism which “fram[e] and refram[e]” the urban space are dialectically reshaped by “the uninterrupted response from the Indigenous community.”⁶¹ Keeping in mind concepts of “inhabiting” or “relational place-making,” this article will explore this uninterrupted response in alignment with Sepúlveda’s

statement that Indigenous urban resurgence is marked by “movements of interpenetration/permeation” between the city and the reservation. This testifies to an “expansion of Indigeneity” according to which “the content has literally spilled over its container.”⁶²

- 21 These interactions between indigeneity and urbanity are particularly salient in border towns. The expression “border town” is a “common phrase for Native people.”⁶³ It refers to “white-dominated settlements that ring Indian reservations, where persistent patterns of anti-Indian exploitation, discrimination, violence, and criminalization define everyday life.”⁶⁴ In demographic terms, they usually have an important Native population that regularly navigates between the city and the reservation.⁶⁵ Historically speaking, they were “carved out of traditional lands”⁶⁶ which were then reduced, and became an instrument to contain “off the reservation Indians” away from “settled” space. In this way, the “material and ideological production of border towns [...] fortif[ies] the space between a white ‘civil society’ and an abject ‘savage society’.”⁶⁷ On the contrary, using the term *bordertown* insists on the fact that it “is not just a place. It is a relation where the contradictions of settler colonialism emerge and show themselves to all.”⁶⁸ While focusing on the production of Indigenous space in Rapid City, we will draw on the phenomenon of the *bordertown*. The latter magnifies and intensifies patterns of settler colonial urbanism, as well as the continued Indigenous resurgence which challenges these patterns.

Rapid City, SD: A Case Study

- 22 Lakota historian Nick Estes has documented the history of violence and fear in this small Midwestern *bordertown*, where he observes what he calls “anti-Indian common sense,” a concept he built by combining “Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s theory of anti-Indianism and Marxist revolutionary Antonio Gramsci’s theory of common sense.”⁶⁹ One corollary of such a history is the persistence and resurgence of forms of resistance to invisibility, dispossession, and domination, which exemplify what Barnd called “inhabiting,” as well as in more openly political statements.

A History of Dispossession and Resistance

- 23 Rapid City is a particularly salient example of a *bordertown* because of the history of the surrounding territory. The Oceti Sakowin⁷⁰ territory has been the locus of two major events at the end of the nineteenth century which have largely shaped the national narrative regarding Native Americans. In 1876, the Battle of Greasy Grass, also known as Custer’s Last Stand, resulted from the Lakotas’ failed attempts at protecting their treaty rights. The victory over the US Army contributed to the image of Native Americans as violent and justified their repression, but also led to a change in the US government’s tactics, which focused on encouraging settlers to encroach on treaty land,⁷¹ accelerating the dispossession process. The second event was the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, which has been considered to mark the end of the so-called Indian Wars and the frontier. As Ojibwe anthropologist David Treuer put it: “[i]t neatly symbolized the accepted version of reality – of an Indian past and an American present, begun in barbarism but realized as a state of democratic idealism.”⁷² These two events are thought of in the national narrative as the epitome of Native savagery, on the one

hand, and the ultimate victory of the United States over said savagery, on the other. As such, they have justified the invisibilization of Indigenous people in both the national and local historical imaginary, even as they were still portrayed as inherently threatening.

- 24 Set at the foot of He Sapa⁷³ (the Black hills), “the heart of the moral, political, and cosmological universe of the Oceti Sakowin,”⁷⁴ Rapid City was established in 1876 as Hay Camp, an outpost meant to accommodate and protect gold miners on their way to illegal settlements in the hills. The camp’s establishment along Mni Luzahan (Rapid Creek), a traditional gathering ground for tribes of the region, violated the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaties, which had delineated the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation. Over time, as the town grew, so did tensions between US settlers and the surrounding Indigenous Nations. The growing demand for land and for the construction of a railroad led the Federal government to break down the Lakota treaty territory into six separate reservations in 1889. Rapid City was then *de facto* taken out of the reservation and kept growing unrestrained, its economy focused on the mining industry in He Sapa, while its inhabitants built a historical narrative which denies both its illegal and violent origins and the continued presence of Native Americans within its boundaries.
- 25 Despite the active role Rapid City’s Cowboy Militia played in hunting down and punishing Native Americans who dared defy the ban on leaving reservations,⁷⁵ Indigenous people have always been present in or near the city, sometimes against their will. As early as 1898, the Rapid City Indian School was opened on federal land west of the city, bringing children from reservations to strip them of their culture.⁷⁶ Many parents followed and set up camp near the school, along Mni Luzahan.⁷⁷ As the school became a sanatorium for Native tuberculosis patients in the 1930s, the institution kept playing its relocating role, as well as ensuring that Native presence in the city was spatially controlled, as contact with the outside and opportunities to leave the grounds remained limited.⁷⁸ During the relocation period of the 1950s, men were sent from the surrounding reservations to work in Rapid City, often bringing their families along, in what Native American studies scholar Richmond L. Clow called “a calamitous reallocation of both reservation resources and problems,”⁷⁹ which caused a difficult transition from reservation to city, as well as tensions with the local non-Native population.
- 26 While the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century saw relocations and land dispossession at the scale of the treaty territory, both trends endured in the following decades within the city limits, where “[t]he physical frontiers between civilization and savagery are zealously enforced.”⁸⁰ After the Indian School closed, the federal land it sat on was given away to non-Native businesses, developers, and churches, while the Indigenous parents of school children were relocated to Sioux Addition, a low-income neighborhood north of the city, which further marginalized Indigenous residents. The same type of relocation happened after the 1972 flood, which took many lives and destroyed the Native encampments along Mni Luzahan, opening the way for urban renewal. This renewal caused further marginalization of poor Native residents as they moved to Lakota Homes, next to Sioux Addition.⁸¹ Thus was formed the “Red ghetto,” outside of which any Native would be seen as suspect, as used to be the case for those who left the reservation.⁸² This ongoing dispossession led Nick Estes to observe:

Rapid City is thrice-stolen land—first, in the illegal seizure of the Black Hills; second, in the theft of remaining Indian trust lands from the Rapid City Indian School; and third, in the taking of Native and poor communities by the flood and the subsequent imposition of exploitative housing policies.⁸³

- 27 But Estes also points out the long history of resistance and “anti-colonial common sense,” defined as “the refusal to go away, to disappear, or to sell the land.”⁸⁴ The American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in Minneapolis, MN, in 1968, became very active in Rapid City in the 1970s in the wake of the flood, after which Native victims could not get compensation, or around the 1973 occupation at nearby Wounded Knee. It is thus not surprising that while racism and inequalities endure to this day, so do forms of resistance, from the everyday to the militant.⁸⁵

Contemporary Territorial Resurgence

- 28 Following Barnd’s advice not to think of Indigenous presence and resistance “as just a response to settler colonialism,” but as a form of continuation, we choose to focus on some of the practices that show that “[w]ith each layer of colonial efforts marked by dispossession, erasure or displacement, there is also Indigenous resistance to it, which deepens Indigenous presence and appropriation of urban space.”⁸⁶
- 29 Territorial dispossession is addressed by the sheer continued presence of Native Americans in the city, but also by forms of engagement that proclaim, as do graffiti visible downtown, “We are Still Here.” For example, NDN Collective was founded in 2018 to “[b]uild the collective power of Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations to exercise [their] inherent right to self-determination.”⁸⁷ One of the collective’s major campaigns is #Landback, directly targeting the issue of land dispossession because “[a]s Indigenous peoples, [they] acknowledge that [their] symptoms of oppression, for example, suicide, poverty, and diabetes are all rooted in [their] loss of land.”⁸⁸ These efforts predate the Collective itself, one major victory being the 1980 Supreme Court decision that acknowledged the Federal Government had taken the Black Hills illegally from the Lakotas. Still, this landmark decision did not give the land back to those it had been stolen from, but offered a money settlement instead, which the tribes refused,⁸⁹ so that there is still a need for the “meta narrative” proposed by NDN Collective to make “decolonization work operational, real, and tangible for all Indigenous peoples.”⁹⁰
- 30 This challenging of land dispossession has also taken on more specific forms, such as protesting Donald Trump’s visit to Mount Rushmore on July 4, 2020, and calling for the monument’s closure, not only because it is set in the sacred He Sapa, but also because “[e]very president whose likeness is carved into the sacred Black Hills at Mount Rushmore have [sic] legacies of white supremacy, anti-Indian policies, and colonization.”⁹¹ Prior to this, several research projects had produced in-depth knowledge on the history and current status of treaty land within the city. In 2003, Associate Professor at the Oglala Lakota College, Hazel P. Bonner, supervised a class paper on the status of the Sioux Addition land,⁹² while in 2017, the results of a study led by lawyer Heather Dawn Thompson on the history of the Rapid City Indian School and Sioux Addition were made public.⁹³ Such research challenges settler spatial common sense by unearthing the deeply unjust processes that underlie the development of the city, but they also “normalise cities as land,”⁹⁴ thus challenging the reservation/city dichotomy denounced by urban settler colonial studies scholars. The research on the

Indian School even led to historic land claims within the city limits, which have a credible chance of being recognized.⁹⁵

- 31 As mentioned before, land dispossession is tightly linked to one of the many contradictions in the settler/Indigenous relationship, by which “[t]he reproach of nomadism renders the native removable.”⁹⁶ Historically, Native mobility has been in turn criminalized, when going “off-reservation” was considered as an act of war, or strongly encouraged, as during the relocation period.⁹⁷ At the scale of Rapid City, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Lakotas who had settled along the creek were forced to move to North Rapid, while those who came from the reservations were issued certificates of non-residency, thus labeling them as forever on the move, so that the municipal government would not have to pay for welfare.⁹⁸ Today, this double bind around mobility is being doubly challenged, as the Indigenous community not only makes its presence known in the city, including downtown, from which it has long been excluded,⁹⁹ but also makes its “mobility sovereignty”¹⁰⁰ visible. Cars with license plates adorned with tribal flags can be seen in town, while the Rolling Rez van, decorated with red, yellow, white, and black running buffalo, shuttles between the city and the reservations, bringing both artistic training and banking services, and in the process reestablishing the long-denied functional and historical relationship between urban center and reservations as “Native space spills out past reservation lines.”¹⁰¹
- 32 As for Indigenous presence in town, it is made visible with signs ranging from t-shirts that claim “Indigenous Lives Matter” or exhibit other references to Indigenous artists, tropes, etc., to Indigenous-run businesses and organizations with names such as Bird Cage Books, Tusweca (dragonfly) Gallery, First Nations Fund, or Racing Magpie. Art plays a major role in rooting Native presence in urban space, as its power of resistance and visibilization has been largely demonstrated.¹⁰² Murals and graffiti are particularly efficient in that regard. They can be found in Art Alley, a space dedicated to street art in the heart of Downtown, which has become a major tourist attraction while still providing a forum to comment on the relationship between the city and its Indigenous history, referring to continuous Lakota presence, mentioning that this is Indigenous land, or calling attention to Indigenous homelessness, for instance. They can also be found at more specific sites, such as outside Racing Magpie or on the front of the NDN Collective headquarters.
- 33 These murals represent counternarratives to settler urbanism and its erasure of Indigenous presence, but also to traditional representations of the very un-urban “savage”. Other projects do so even more explicitly. For instance, due to its proximity to Mount Rushmore, Rapid City has dubbed itself “The City of Presidents,” and statues of every single US president – many of them instrumental in Westward expansion and Native dispossession – have been erected on street corners downtown. As a counterpoint, the First Nation Sculpture Garden showcases busts of important twentieth-century Lakota and Dakota figures as well as their contributions in fields ranging from the arts to medicine. The sculptures are set in Haley Park, a federally-owned plot whose status is reminiscent of treaty rights, and put Indigenous people back at the center of local history and space building, including after their supposed eradication at the end of the nineteenth century. At Racing Magpie, an exhibition/studio space, “Winter Camps” are organized on a regular basis, giving Lakota artists or researchers the opportunity to talk at length about their experience in Rapid City and the surrounding territory. Since the pandemic, the talks have been broadcast live and

are available as podcasts, again challenging the idea that Indigenous people live outside of modernity.¹⁰³ Craig Howe, at the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies (CAIRNS), has done much to develop counternarratives through the annual exhibits in which he showcases, all over the State, the works of contemporary Lakota artists around traditional story-telling as well as moments in US history, such as the Fort Laramie Treaties.¹⁰⁴ Tusweca gallery, whose name refers to the resurgence that dragonflies symbolize for the Lakotas, opened recently along Main Street in the very building that used to house the “City of Presidents” tourist center. But perhaps more strikingly, the building’s facade still boasts, over the windows displaying Indigenous contemporary art, the name of its first occupant, First National Bank, which played a crucial role in the exploitation of Black Hills resources. Inside the gallery itself, most of the art was created by Joe Pulliam, Oglala Lakota, who uses local maps as background for his Indigenous representations to comment on land dispossession and colonial territorial narratives.

- 34 More broadly, the issue of education, also fundamental in the history of dispossession through assimilation, has been tackled in Rapid City in order to regain knowledge and agency. Education is at the core of all Indigenous resistance, as exemplified by the creation of schools in encampments such as the one in Standing Rock, where the fight against a pipeline became an opportunity to engage with Indigenous knowledge, narratives, geographies, and imaginaries. In the 1960s and 1970s, AIM founded several survival schools in Minnesota and South Dakota. Female activists founded the We Will Remember Survival School in Rapid City – later transferred to Pine Ridge Reservation – in 1974, refusing government funding on the grounds that true sovereignty required total control over education.¹⁰⁵ In 2022, NDN Collective opened the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy to teach young children the Lakota language and culture, so that they could “see themselves in what they’re learning.”¹⁰⁶
- 35 As Julie Tomiak also argues, “Indigenous practices that [...] centre care across multiple scales are subverting settler urbanism.”¹⁰⁷ This is visible in the attention paid to particularly disenfranchised groups such as Indigenous women or the Indigenous homeless community, who face intersecting forms of discrimination and violence. In 2019, as part of the broader “WHY campaign” to raise awareness about “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Children and Two-Spirited of Turtle Island,” the Red Ribbon Skirt Society of the Black Hills hung seventy red dresses outside the Journey Museum. The dresses were positioned specifically to be seen from Omaha Street, the main road crossing the city, so as to make visible an ongoing and too-often hidden phenomenon.¹⁰⁸ Marches have also been organized to remember these women, as well as the children who died at the Indian School,¹⁰⁹ for whom a memorial will soon be erected, one of those “remainders” mentioned by Rifkin and Bruyneel.¹¹⁰ The homeless population has also been marginalized, invisibilized, and criminalized, as has been largely documented by urban studies scholars.¹¹¹ The Indigenous homeless have been particularly stigmatized through the trope of the “drunk Indian” and have been the targets of brutal attacks in all bordertowns,¹¹² as embodiments of the alleged incompatibility between indigeneity and urbanity. In 2020, the Mni Luzahan Creek Patrol started walking up and down the homeless encampments near the river to protect the mostly Indigenous unhoused who had fled the unsafe shelters, and cater to their basic needs.¹¹³ To further care for this community on a longer-term basis, in 2022,

NDN Collective launched a tiny home community project to provide “necessary security and stability” for their “houseless relatives.”¹¹⁴

Conclusion

- 36 This look at contemporary Indigenous practices in Rapid City confirms what many scholars have theorized: despite the damages caused by the settler colonial project of erasure and the pervasive nature of settler colonial common sense, geographies, and imaginaries, Indigenous practices endure and challenge the colonial order. This is true all over North America, but because of the role they played in the colonial project as military and governmental outposts, bordertowns – and cities in general – have been construed as antitheses to indigeneity. Thus, any Indigenous practice, as mundane as it may be, may be regarded as a challenge to their very existence. Rapid City is a telling example of how colonial patterns of domination and dispossession, colonial historical narratives, and colonial violence are faced with counternarratives, acts of care and solidarity, and claims to the land.
- 37 While the examples analyzed here are very much place-based and related to a specific political history, we argue that they participate in, and contribute to, broader resistance and protest movements. For instance, homelessness and violence against women are not specific to Indigenous communities. Beyond that, since colonialism and capitalism have grown hand in hand, challenging the settler colonial city fits into broader challenges to the capitalist city, enacted in the strategies of Indigenous people as well as other minorities and subordinated social groups. Thus practices such as graffiti, research, education, or simply inhabiting, can challenge the dominant historical narrative, and therefore question the role of all minorities in US history.

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ABSTRACTS

At first glance, the concept of the subaltern seems to perfectly describe the position of Native Americans within contemporary US society, yet, until recently, it was not commonly used by Indigenous studies scholars. This has changed partly due to the emergence of the field of settler colonial studies, born of the dialogue between postcolonial and Indigenous studies. In particular, scholars have looked at the historical and contemporary role cities are playing in highlighting patterns of dispossession and resistance. In the article, we look at the contributions of this new

theoretical framework, then focus on the case of Rapid City, SD, presenting its history of dispossession and violence, and showing how Indigenous resurgence challenges that history.

La notion de « subalterne » semble à première vue définir parfaitement la position des Amérindiens dans la société états-unienne contemporaine, et pourtant, jusqu'à récemment, elle était peu utilisée dans le domaine des études autochtones. Ceci a changé en partie du fait de l'émergence des *settler colonial studies*, nées du dialogue entre études postcoloniales et études autochtones. Les chercheurs se sont en particulier penchés sur le rôle historique et contemporain des villes pour souligner aussi bien les mécanismes de dépossession que de résistance. Dans cet article, nous examinons les apports de ce nouveau cadre théorique, avant de nous pencher sur le cas de Rapid City, dans le Dakota du Sud, pour présenter son histoire de dépossession et de violence, et montrer la manière dont les résurgences autochtones défient cette histoire.

INDEX

Keywords: subalternity, settler colonial studies, Indigenous studies, urban studies, resurgence, Rapid City, SD

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