

International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies

Volume 14, Number 1, 2021

(Not) forgotten: Settler colonial memory and Agamben's Camp in Indigenous Minnesota

Author

E. Ornelas

About the author

E. Ornelas (they/them) is a PhD candidate and Diversity Predoctoral Teaching Fellow at the University of Minnesota. As the descendant of a survivor of the Sherman Institute, a Native boarding school in Riverside, California—and therefore robbed of cultural, linguistic and tribal identity—E's research interests focus on the continued survivance and futurity of Indigenous peoples, particularly through the use of literature.

Abstract

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment was established in the summer of 2018, only to be forcibly terminated during the winter of 2019, then revived again in 2020. Also called the "Wall of Forgotten Natives" by its inhabitants, this cluster of tents was comprised of houseless residents of the Twin Cities, many of whom were Native American. Recognising the continued murder, dispossession, removal, forced assimilation, under-resourcing and invisibility of Indigenous peoples, the moniker "Wall of Forgotten Natives" seems apt. Considering Agamben's idea of the camp as a space of exclusion that is included within the purview of law, this essay argues that the camp is also a designation of what is forgotten, or what is excluded from settler memory, yet paradoxically included within the settler prerogative of elimination.

Keywords

Dakota, Ojibwe, Minnesota, Agamben, mnemonology, settler colonialism

Except where otherwise noted, content in this journal is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence. As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution.
ISSN 1837-0144

© The Author(s) 2021 <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcis.v14i1.1770>



In 2018, amidst a city-wide housing crisis signalling a lack of affordable and accessible options, houseless residents of the Twin Cities amassed along the Franklin-Hiawatha pedestrian and bike corridor in the hopes of creating a safe and sustainable encampment. By the late summer of 2018, the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment had already been established, and over the following months, rapidly expanded until its termination at the hands of state officials during the winter of 2018–2019. Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the ensuing uprisings also renewed this and other encampments in Minneapolis as a part of larger, ongoing movements for racial, decolonial, economic and housing justice.¹ In both instances this cluster of tents, dubbed the “Wall of Forgotten Natives” by its inhabitants, was comprised of houseless residents of the Twin Cities, many of whom were Native American, including (but not limited to) the traditional Dakota and Ojibwe peoples of Minnesota. This was undoubtedly a voluntary, if not determined, move—an act of resistance and (re)occupation on stolen Dakota land. In this way, one could think of the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment as created through the collective agency of Indigenous peoples and their allies. However, the relative “choice” of this resistance was constrained. The Franklin-Hiawatha encampment was not formally initiated or recognised by the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the State of Minnesota, or any other settler governing body. Yet it is clear that the conditions that necessitated such a camp were caused by centuries of willful forgetting—what I term *mnemonological ignorance*—at the behest of settler colonialism. This is not to dismiss the positive aspects of the formation and operations of the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment, particularly in light of the acts of autonomous self-governance² and mutual aid present. But the eventual erection of 24-hour Minneapolis Police Department surveillance and final forced disbanding substantiates this camp to be a place and space where Indigenous power, knowledge and collectivity were under the purview of the settler state while also the result of its perpetual forgetting.

Native people comprise a disproportionate number of the houseless population in Minneapolis and the United States as a result of ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.³ On one hand, U.S. government policies and practices have kept a close eye on Native communities, rendering them, in some ways, hypervisible (Goeman, 2013, p. 12). On the other hand, the continued murder, dispossession, removal, forced assimilation and under-resourcing of Native peoples has rendered them invisible and excluded from the dominant gaze of white settlers on Turtle Island (e.g. North America). Recognising this invisibility, the moniker “Wall of *Forgotten Natives*” seems apt. Considering Agamben’s (1998) idea of the camp as a space of exclusion that is included within the purview of law, I extend the camp as a designation of what is forgotten, or what is excluded from settler memory, yet paradoxically included within the settler prerogative of elimination. As Patrick Wolfe (2006, p. 387) relates, the settler colonial imperative is the elimination of the Native, and, as evinced herein, the elimination of the Native from memory. With Wolfe in mind, could not the ongoing structural elimination of the Native be a form of the Agambenian camp? In this specific context, the camp, although a sign of cultural and political resistance by houseless Indigenous peoples, was also constructed by longstanding settler imaginaries as a marginal site of “Forgotten Natives”.

To be clear, I am not claiming that the Wall of Forgotten Natives is a camp in Agamben’s sense, but rather that its namesake gestures toward an epistemological ignorance⁴ or, perhaps more accurately, *mnemonological ignorance* that exemplifies the inclusive exclusion of Native peoples within the U.S. settler state. However, unlike Agamben (1998), who claims that “the essence of the camp consists in the *materialization* of the state of exception and in the subsequent *creation of a space* in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction” (p. 174, emphasis added), I believe that for Native peoples like those in the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment, a camp is not just a material space but also a *mnemonological* one. This deliberate memory-craft based on ignoring, suppressing or forgetting information is precisely what I argue

Agamben's camp metaphorically represents. Although Agamben admits that camps are a colonial invention in which modernity was first experimented with, I wish to appropriate the definition of a structural camp as a more flexible, adaptable, immaterial logic as it pertains to Indigenous Minnesotans. While individuals and communities may be included under the exercise of settler colonial sovereign power, they have also been excluded in critical ways to more than just a physical space of a camp. Their very existence and lifeways have been construed as unknowable, unthinkable; in essence, forgotten.

If the process of willfully forgetting an entire group of people while still attempting to control them appears, at first glance, to be counterintuitive, oxymoronic or even impossible, one need only look to scholarship by critical Indigenous theorists for confirmation that this is not only possible but the lived reality in colonised lands. Nettelbeck (2012) aptly summarises how "history-making in settler nations has always been predicated on a process of 'dis-remembering' or 'necessary forgetfulness'" (p. 41). Or, as Vadasaria (2015) puts it: "the ability to produce and renew settler mythologies of discovery and possession requires the persistent denial of Indigenous ties to land, memory and history" (p. 117). Gahman (2016) calls this the "negation of history" (p. 317), while Masalha (2015) deems it "memoricide" (p. 31). Conway (2003) delineates between "official" memory that trumps unofficial or "folk memory" (p. 306). For Townsend et al. (2020), the "erasure and rupture" of Ani-Kitu Hwagi (Cherokee) heritage is a "broken history" in the southeastern United States (p. 246). According to Lawson (2014), British accounts of the genocide they perpetuated against Indigenous Tasmanians are not so much absent or "amnesiac", as they are recorded in British history to be "utilized in the construction of a *particular version* of being *British*" (p. 458, emphasis added). In the face of settler colonialism, Mitchell and Burrelle (2016) discuss the performance of the Yaqui deer dance as a way to "repatriate memory", which implies a return of connections and community that have been moved, interrupted, or absconded from memory (p. 42). It is with all of this in mind that I assert the elimination of the Native takes place in intangible, mnemonological ways.

In order to substantiate this, I must first wade through the murky waters of adopting Agamben for the use of critical Indigenous scholarship. This is not an easy task, as it is rarely done, for a number of reasons outlined below. So, my overarching claim is not just to attend to the "Forgotten Native" in the camp, but also to insert more intervening Indigenous voices into conversations with Agamben's theories. Those who have evaluated Agamben before me should be credited, yet it should also be noted that the camp has never been a direct subject of their inquiry. Surely, these scholars too have faced dilemmas when reading Agamben for their purposes, a dilemma which for me is twofold: for one, there has been little to no engagement with the idea of the camp within critical Indigenous theory from which to begin my analysis, and at the same time, it is unclear whether this is even politically responsible. Edkins (2000) studied several physical manifestations of the camp that epitomise the exercise of sovereign power, and, in doing so, summarises my concerns:

I am not intending to equate the experience of the inhabitants of these different camps in general terms. I only wish to draw a parallel in one sense: in all these locations we find people who are produced as bare life, a form of life that can be killed but not sacrificed. (p. 11)

In what follows, I wish to draw similar parallels from *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (Agamben, 1998) by surveying how Agamben's work has been taken up by Indigenous studies, speculate on the dearth of literature on the camp specifically, and finally implement this, however cautiously, with regard to the experience of Minnesota's Indigenous Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. My hope is that this expands not only conceptions of the camp within discussions of sovereign power more broadly, but also aids in the appropriation of white, Western thinkers for the benefit of critical Indigenous scholarship.

Indigenising Agamben⁵

Within critical Indigenous theory, encounters with Agamben have been sparse and largely reproachful—and for good reason. The major critique from Indigenous scholars, postcolonial scholars and scholars of colour is that Agamben’s (1998) text *Homo Sacer* privileges white, Western ways of knowing and obscures settler colonialism. Gómez-Barris (2017) notes that Agamben’s explanations of sovereign power and bare life contain a “Eurocentric bias of world history [that] has been rightly criticized” (p. 75). For example, Agamben’s key term, “homo sacer”—the sacred human “who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (p. 8)—derives from ancient Roman law. Furthermore, for Agamben, Nazi concentration camps in Europe come to stand in for *the camp*. Motha (2012) reveals that these short-sighted theorisations on the ways in which “Europeans learned to govern themselves” emerged from “governing others during half a millennium of imperial expansion, violence and rule” (p. 128), which ultimately leads Motha to question how pertinent Agamben even is for postcolonial studies. Furthermore, Agamben largely ignores the Americas, a physical and political space that, post Columbian contact, exemplifies many of the phenomena in *Homo Sacer*. “The Native American experience is”, to quote Colatrella (2011), “arguably, the paradigmatic case of entire populations being dispossessed, killed with impunity, provided no protection legal or otherwise” (p. 105), yet Agamben does not reference Native Americans in *Homo Sacer*, save for a brief mention of the “New World” as it corresponds to Schmitt’s “‘free and juridically empty space’ in which the sovereign power no longer knows the limits fixed by the *nomos* as the territorial order” (p. 36).

When authors have embraced Agamben in their work around Indigeneity and colonialism, it has been related to sovereign power and inclusive exclusion rather than the camp explicitly. As much as sovereignty has been a contested term within Native American and Indigenous studies,⁶ Folch et al. (2016) as well as Lavinias Picq (2018) have elucidated the limitations of Agamben’s theorisations on it respectively. In “The Nature of Sovereignty in the Anthropocene”, Folch et al. trace Agamben’s use of the term back through Schmitt, who was in turn influenced by Spaniard Francisco de Vitoria’s 16th century rumination on the rights of Indigenous peoples in the New World. Problematically, Vitoria’s legacy consists of conceptualising sovereignty in terms of justified ownership and an “enlightened” form of governance, “but because the Indians failed to meet rational, universal standards, they were forever relegated to subaltern status and not permitted to exercise sovereignty” (Folch et al., p. 572). Similarly, Lavinias Picq critiques Westphalian sovereignty in the book *Vernacular Sovereignties*. If sovereignty, for Agamben, depends on the state of exception, then for Lavinias Picq, “Indigenous justice is a state of exception *outside* Ecuador’s sovereignty” (p. 168). Namely, Indigenous Kichwa women in Ecuador seeking accountability for gendered, racialised violence look beyond the Ecuadorian government as a legitimate arbitrator of justice, and thereby contend that internationally recognised nation states do not have a monopoly on sovereignty. In this way, Kichwa women in Ecuador reformulate and “disrupt established practices of sovereignty” (p. 157), creating what Lavinias Picq calls *vernacular sovereignty*—an ordinary, quotidian exercise of self-determination.

Likewise, rather than dismiss the Italian theorist’s idea of inclusive exclusion, MacLellan (2018) and Walkiewicz (2016) have each developed it further. In the “Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy” or “White Paper” of 1969, the Canadian government declared that Indigenous peoples are Canadian (not First Nations) citizens without special rights and thereby *included*, an inclusion which MacLellan demonstrates is tantamount to cultural and legal genocide, or a form of *exclusion*. In other words, in contrast to Agamben’s sense that the juridico-political sphere includes the excluded human reduced to bare life, the “White Paper” excluded First Nations peoples of Canada through their “elevation” to and inclusion within Canadian citizenship.

Walkiewicz also insists on a more complex and gradient understanding of inclusion and exclusion in the essay “Affirmative Exclusions”. In the case of the Oklahoma Official Language Implementation Act of 2009, Indigeneity was marked “as an exception to the norm” (Walkiewicz, p. 30), namely through the ratification of legal loopholes for Indigenous languages. At the same time, the Indigenous exception is contrasted with “another sovereign exception—that of the immigrant”, the non-English-speaking foreigner “who poses a threat” (Walkiewicz, p. 30) and thereby inaugurates the Oklahoma legislature’s decision to erect protective linguistic barriers. As Walkiewicz states, “Native identity is made distinct from but beholden to hegemonic state power, situated as a *more acceptable or less distant* exception than that of the radical outsider immigrant” (p. 30, emphasis added). The author thus complicates Agamben’s notions by hinting that exceptions may operate more as a spectrum, with some nearer to (the promise of) inclusion.

Bare life and the figure of homo sacer have also been applied as a way to both explain and amend the narrative of Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Just as Folch et al. (2016), Lavinias Picq (2018), MacLellan (2018), and Walkiewicz (2016) add new complexities to Agambenian terms, Gómez-Barris (2017) attests that Indigenous life is more than mere bare life. The author’s monograph *The Extractive Zone* describes the Indigenous struggle over areas of the Bío Bío region in Chile that “have been increasingly legislated as zones of state terror, displacement, and bare life” (p. 69). However, Gómez-Barris concludes that relying on bare life as the sole attribute of Indigenous existence risks obscuring the forms of decolonial resistance taking place, and instead the author depicts the artistic expression and collective refusal of the Indigenous Mapuche people. Morgensen (2011) also rejects reading the homo sacer figure at face value, specifically commenting on the patrilineal descent embedded in Agamben’s definition as it relates to Native Americans. In Roman law, the power of life and death (*vitae necisque potestas*) arises in both the father and the magistrate, who have such an “essential affinity” that the registries of their power become “tightly intertwined” (Agamben, 1998, p. 88). Interpreting this right of fathers (*ius patrium*), Morgensen indicates that, from first contact, the determination of Native peoples’ genealogical humanity by a paternalistic European power measured “the degree to which Indigenous people become recognisable within the People of the settler nation, which in turn would condition their particular exposure to the state of exception” (p. 61). Therefore, it is not merely homo sacer that comes to stand in for Native Americans, but also the consanguineous power imbued within white settler colonists to decide who is truly human (*bios*) at all.

Although sparse in critical Indigenous studies, Agamben appears throughout postcolonial theory and refugee studies, especially in regard to the camp. There is at least one anthology, *Agamben and Colonialism* (2012), and numerous essays that link Agamben’s political concerns with those of scholars writing about colonised peoples and landscapes. In “Bare Life as a Development/ Postcolonial Problematic”, Sylvester (2006) recognises the camp as a place under colonial supervision, where

Bodies that seemed too “other” to fit on the approved colonized/development line could suffer assault and death through holocausts of the sort Australians conducted in Tasmania, the cavalry led in the US West, and the Spanish and Portuguese unleashed in the American colonies. (p. 68)

However, Thobani (2014) contests

Agamben’s identification of the [Nazi] camp as the exemplary site for the state of exception within modernity ignores the historical antecedents of the camp, the Indian reservation and the residential school in the settler societies, the plantations and slave labour camps, as well as the native medina in the “terror formation” that was the colony. (p. 289)

While Sylvester and Thobani focus on the colonised, racialised progenitors of the camp, Dunn (2017), in writing about exile and humanitarian aid to refugees, is wary of the use of *zoē* to describe camp residents because it “replicates the definition of displaced people as passive and powerless” (p. 16), which echoes Lavinias Picq’s (2018) reasoning that bare life occludes resistance to such conditions.

Within the field of Black studies, Weheliye’s (2014) *Habeas Viscus* is concerned with the shortcomings of theories of bare life, which largely occludes race. In critiquing a number of Agamben’s texts as well as other continental philosophers, Weheliye estimates that although Agamben has little to say about racism, colonialism or anything far beyond Europe, the creation of *homines sacri* is nevertheless the product of racialising assemblages. For example, German concentration camps were based on colonial experiments in Africa, though Weheliye notes that Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* only touches on this momentarily. Weheliye is worried that the concept of “bare life is not only a product of previously established distinctions but also ... aids in the perpetuation of hierarchical categorizations” (p. 43). Hence, Weheliye laments that “racial slavery, colonialism, and indigenous genocide as *nomoi* of modern politics” as well as “the sociopolitical texture of relation that establishes the camp ... languishes in Agamben’s universalization of the concentration camp” (p. 36). By both singularising the violence of Nazi death camps as well as universalising their effects under the seemingly colour-blind category of *homo sacer*, Agamben eradicates social, political and racial differences that are integral to discussions of debasement and subjugation.

In this literature, the camp largely becomes a physical space, but at least a space derived from cases beyond Europe.⁷ Taken together, this brief review should give a sense that, although Agamben omits major pieces of (settler) colonialism in *Homo Sacer*, nevertheless there are ways to advantageously adapt this text (without completely endorsing it) within critical Indigenous studies, postcolonial studies and critical race studies. Below, I hope to make one such contribution to the expansion of Agamben’s ideas, specifically to that of the camp.

De-spatialising the camp

Although Indigenous theorists have not as yet shown considerable interest in the camp, I wish to ameliorate this through my own explication and application of Agamben’s term to the specific iteration of the “Forgotten Native”. First, to define the camp, I take up Agamben’s (1998) explanation in *Homo Sacer*:

The camp is the space that is opened up when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order. (p. 169)

From this, I understand the camp to be the manifestation of the state of exception, in which sovereign power suspends laws in order to exclude—indeed, physically corral—certain individuals and groups in the name of the public good.

Agamben (1998) particularly depends on language such as “outside,” “land”, “structure” and “space”, which implies a sense of dimensionality and geographical location. For instance, Agamben states that “the camp is a piece of land placed outside the normal juridical order” (pp. 169–170). This description conjures up images of *literal* separation and removal of populations from the “rest” of the “normal” legal citizen subjects. And to some degree, this is what the camp entails: an exclusion or being “*taken outside*” (Agamben, p. 170), as necessitated by the state of

exception. Agamben continues: “it [the camp] is nevertheless *not simply an external space*” (p. 170, emphasis added). What Agamben denotes by this qualifying clause—“not simply an external space”—becomes apparent in the remainder of the paragraph. Here, the author resolves that the camp is not anomalous or *external* to the “normal juridical order,” and is in fact constitutive of it. That is to say, “the norm becomes indistinguishable from the exception” (Agamben, p. 170).

However, the phrase “not simply an external space” could also be read as an alternative to delineating the camp solely as an externalised and spatialised model of marginalisation. In the succeeding pages of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben (1998) expounds on how “the horrors committed *in* the camps” (p. 171, emphasis added) are sanctioned, which in one sense reinforces the idea that the camp is a physical space of illegalised violence that one can be *in* (p. 171). Beyond the classification of the camp as a brick-and-mortar expression of inclusive exclusion under the state of exception, how else can it be understood? Is it possible that it could be an immaterial expression of inclusive exclusion? Agamben does not demand a singularly narrow characterisation, or at least does not foreclose the possibility that the camp could also take a noncorporeal shape. Ultimately, the camp comes to stand in for a larger investigation that the author undertakes surrounding “the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (Agamben, p. 171). If this is Agamben’s primary drive for delimiting the camp, then I believe it is possible to envision *other*, more expansive iterations of communities “so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (p. 171). To this end, I will return in a moment.

For now, I concede that there is certainly cause for comparing the camp in *Homo Sacer* when thinking about the material dispossession of colonised people on Turtle Island. Even Agamben (1998) admits that some of the first concentration camps existed in colonial contexts such as Cuba and South Africa; and, moreover, were borne from “a state of emergency linked to a colonial war [and] extended to an entire civil population” (p. 166). Additionally, the state of exception relies on the act of “excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order” those bodies—whether tracts of reservation land or the individuals relegated to live there—which are included under the scope of law, yet excluded from legal rights (Agamben, p. 9). Goeman (2013), a Seneca Nation scholar, communicates that the geographies of Indigeneity are akin to this inclusive exclusion: “Native space is delegated to exist *outside* national settler terrains, even while it is *controlled and manipulated* by settler governance” (p. 33, emphasis added). Closer to the context in and of which I write, Weheliye, Chamorro scholar Diaz (2019), and Dakota scholar Waziyatawin (2008) all deem Fort Snelling to have been a concentration camp during Dakota internment. These examples (and countless more) testify to the fact that the inclusive exclusion of the camp, brought on by the state of exception, is undoubtedly relevant as a literal reading for Indigenous studies.

Yet I also maintain that the camp can be read metaphorically, “not simply an external space”, but a willed epistemic and mnemonological inclusive exclusion. In their ethnographic research on Indigenous Australians and Italian Romani peoples, Armillei and Lobo (2017) clarify how camps “became over the years not only the symbol of the negative stereotypes regarding the Romani and Aboriginal peoples..., but also a space where sovereign control is exerted upon them” (p. 570). This outsider status, although still relying on spatialisation and physical control, is also what the authors state is a “symbol” of dominant societal perceptions and epistemes. Furthermore if, as Weber (2012) identifies, “Agamben’s main point is that the decisive quality defining the camps is that their inmates, or residents, are stripped of all legal protection and thereby accorded the status of ‘bare life’” (p. 10), then it is apparent that the “decisive quality” of stripped legal protection is in

part intangible and extra-spatial and that, thus, the violence of the camp can be as well. Again, I wish to build upon a strictly spatial understanding to one that encompasses the colonial production of Indigenous peoples as forgettable and forgetting, as *forgotten*. So, how is the forgetting of Native roots—on the active part of settlers as well as forced upon Indigenous peoples, through both physical removal and mental hegemony—an mnemonological iteration of the camp?

“Forgotten Natives”

While an exhaustive historical account of the Indigenous peoples of the Minneapolis, Minnesota area prior to the establishment of the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment is beyond the scope of this article, I briefly illustrate the foundation on which I assert the nature of the camp as it relates to Native peoples. From first contact with wašiču⁸ settlers until the present day, Indigenous communities of Minnesota, such as the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, like other Indigenous groups across the globe, have experienced not just physical devastation reminiscent of the Agambenian camp, but also the violent inclusive exclusion of being “Forgotten Natives”.

After waves of explorers, trappers and traders occupied the area, in 1819 Dakota peoples (in what is now the Twin Cities) were confronted with army soldiers building Fort Snelling on the sacred Bdote site.⁹ What would follow was 200 years of “extermination, ethnic cleansing, dispossession, and cultural eradication” (Waziyatawin, 2008, p. 97). During the winter of 1862–1863, Indigenous women and children were held in this “moniker of imperialism” while 38 Indigenous men were hanged for their participation in the U.S. Dakota War (Waziyatawin, 2008, p. 98). Dakota people, relates Diaz (2019), “after the War of 1862 were rounded up and imprisoned in a particularly brutal winter, and then exiled from the state” (p. 17). Soon after, in 1863, the United States federal government broke all treaties with the Dakota, allowing for the forcible removal of Native inhabitants and the seizure of their ancestral lands. However, “in the late 19th century, Dakota began to return and now comprise four state-recognized tribal nations” (Diaz, p. 14).

Unfortunately, both the Dawes Act of 1887 and the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 perpetuated spatial and cultural divisions. Both Acts sought to assimilate Native Americans into settler law and culture by reallocating their land and “urbanising” them as people. Additionally, boarding schools, often overseen by Catholic missionaries or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, were a tool for forced removal and indoctrination of Indigenous youth. These legal mandates operated at multiple registers, or as Pascua Yaqui scholar Duarte (2017) avers in *Network Sovereignty*, “programs that took Native children from their families and forced them into boarding schools and missionary homes is representative of the mechanisms of population classification, articulation of church and state institutions, and epistemological redistribution” (pp. 19–20). In Minnesota, there were several assimilative residential institutions, such as the Pipestone Indian Training School and the Morris Industrial School for Indians.

While these examples are indicative of the ways in which Indigenous peoples in Minnesota—and Indigenous peoples more broadly—have been, in Duarte’s (2017) words, “redistributed” through tangible tactics, there is also evidence that settler colonial logics operate through the intangible eliminating, erasing or obscuring of Native peoples. Employing the camp in the case of German colonialism in Southwest Africa during the turn of the 20th century, Weber (2012) remarks that “military operations against indigenous peoples systematically disregarded international rules of war and often deliberately *aimed at annihilation* of the enemy rather than at *mere conquest*” (pp. 13–14, emphasis added). In the eyes of the German Empire, the “enemy”—Indigenous peoples (e.g. Herero, Ovambo and Nama)—were not merely to be *conquered* (technically, “allowed” to keep living), but were in fact to be completely *annihilated*. But if Germans were attempting to seize

lands for mining and farming, then how is this more than just spatial eradication? Annihilation in the colonial German camp, in this sense, is a form of *forgetting* Indigenous peoples' existence, not only for the sake of clearing out space, but also for clearing from memory in order to make way for "superior" peoples and uses of the land. What is more, Weber warns that "the constitution of 'the camp' *cannot be reduced to the act of killing* and hence to the organized extermination practiced in the Nazi (and other) death camps" (p. 12, emphasis added) and that the constitution of the camp must also be understood as what the aims of the killing are, which is mnemonological in nature. These mechanisms of mnemonological annihilation, or forgetting, operate in several respects.

Settler narratives perpetuate their own forgetting of Indigenous presence on Turtle Island through ongoing revisions to practices, histories, cultures and knowledges that preceded settler occupation. An example of this is the replacement of Indigenous toponyms by European ones. In Minneapolis, Bde Maka Ska was called Lake Calhoun for years until being rightfully renamed.¹⁰ As Duarte (2017) points out, the creation of "maps and surveys that show no trace of Indigenous territory or terrain is representative of the mechanisms of spatial and epistemological redistribution" (pp. 19–20). Clearly, removing the traces of Indigenous presence is not just a physical act but also a reproduction of epistemological ignorance and mnemonological forgetting. History books and museums also tell a very different story than the one that Native Americans experience/d. Waziyatawin (2008, pp. 100–101) observes the egregiously missing analyses around Fort Snelling's past within its own interpretive centre as well as in contemporary public discourse. Settler states maintain their power not only through the tangible policies and practices of removal, but also by "simultaneously erasing their histories and knowledges or even such policies' effects on Native people's everyday reality" (Goeman, 2013, p. 203).

These everyday realities are routinely called into question when Native peoples themselves are not even trusted to provide accurate accounts. Traditional knowledges, perceptions and ways of understanding are often deemed "primitive" and "backwards", and therefore in need of correction or abandonment. In the case of Ojibwe peoples' wild rice harvests in northwestern Minnesota, University of Minnesota researchers in the early to mid 20th century espoused an ethnocentric rhetoric that both disparaged the "unproductive" Indigenous agricultural methods and simultaneously elevated Western techniques (LaDuke, 2005, p. 170). These settlers' goal was that Ojibwe peoples internalise the process of forgetting and forego their ancestral ways of being in relation to the land, in favour of detached and extractive monocropping. This apparatus of settler colonial epistemological control has also taken the form of distancing and denying Native peoples' access to information about their kinship, languages and cultures. Duarte (2017) speaks about these technologies of forgetting at length:

Colonial church authorities forbade and denigrated Indigenous philosophical, religious, and spiritual practices, marking these as idolatrous and blasphemous against the Roman Catholic order. Colonial schools challenged Indigenous philosophies, conscripting Indigenous scribes and translators to codify languages for the purpose of eventually using languages as tools for Christianizing and Westernizing the Indigenous intellect... Spanish authorities prohibited gatherings of Indigenous leaders in public baths, public markets, and other places where provocative ideas spoken in tribal tongues might cohere and take root, threatening the colonial arrangement. (p. 19)

Supposedly, the effect of Westernising the intellect is a more "civilised" human who has forgotten their Native roots, and concurrently a safer, more secure nation that has forgotten its colonial subjects.

This alleged safety requires dominant U.S. discourses, policies and practices of exceptionalism and expansionism that are “predicated on the erasure and disavowal of indigeneity both on the continent and across the ocean, and around the world” (Diaz, 2019, p. 22). Certainly, erasure serves as a model for the camp when utilised tangibly, and also when thought of as what is required of the settler imagination in order to enact the state of exception. Insofar as the “temporary suspension of the rule of law [rests] on the basis of a factual state of danger” (Agamben, 1998, p. 169), this “basis” can easily be validated through a lens that views Indigeneity just as Prussian law viewed criminal behaviour, as a “danger to the security of the state” (Agamben, 1998, p. 167), as that which must be contained. When Dakota peoples exist on land where soldiers want to erect a fort, they are deemed a threat, removable, replaceable, forgettable. When Native children are seen as the next generation of “savages”, they are kidnapped, confined and brainwashed, made to forget. When Ojibwe traditional ecological knowledges jeopardise capitalist and scientific expansion, institutions discourage and dismantle these practices. In *The White Possessive*, Moreton-Robinson (2015), a Goenpul scholar, provides a compelling summary of this:

Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States have a long history of detaining Indigenous people, denying their rights, and controlling behavior through and beyond the law. From the late nineteenth century, reserves, privately owned pastoral stations, and missions were the places where the majority of Indigenous people in Australia lived under the control of white managers and missionaries appointed by government. Indigenous people, while living in poverty, were treated differently than white Australian citizens and were subject to “special” laws, regulations, and policies that were racist. (pp. 153–154)

Forgetting is deemed necessary in order to enact “special” laws that intend to expunge the threat from lands and minds, and in this way the justification for the state of exception and the camp is similar to Agamben’s cogitation.

Through these considerations, the camp may be glossed as both a literal and figurative form of inclusive exclusion, resonating beyond Agamben’s explanation. In its figurative form, the camp, for Indigenous peoples, is also a location of being excluded from historic or recent memory; that is to say, forgotten. Yet, at the same time, to be Indigenous is, conversely, to be included in the grasp of settler sovereign power, namely, to be conceived of as “excess” and as killable. Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Simpson’s (2016) essay, “The State is a Man”, is insightful in its analysis of the means by which Indigenous women’s—in fact, *all* Indigenous—bodies come to be ensnared in what I determine to be the camp. With what Simpson describes as “violent indifference” (p. 4) and “abandonment” (p. 8), the Canadian government seeks to “eliminate, contain, hide and in other ways ‘disappear’ what fundamentally challenges its legitimacy: Indigenous political orders” (p. 3). The word “forget” could easily be added to the list of literal and figurative state violences in the preceding quote. For Simpson is directly connecting the settler state’s desire to exclude that which challenges its authority—Indigenous individuals’ bodily sovereignty as well as Indigenous nations’ sovereignty. Although speaking specifically about missing and murdered First Nations women and girls in Canada, Simpson’s provocation that “they have been legally mandated to disappear, in various forms” (p. 8) is indicative of the camp. Hence, the exclusion of Indigenous peoples is achieved through legal mandate, and thereby *included*.

And this inclusive exclusion occurs through the mnemonological mandate of forgetting. Simpson’s answer to the question of why these sanctioned disappearances and dispossessions are not more (inter)nationally recognised, cared about and acted upon is particularly illuminating in its reflection of Agamben’s (1998) idea of the “norm” that is “indistinguishable from the exception” made possible by the camp (Agamben, p. 170). Simpson emphasises that “this disappearance *keeps*

things in its place, the narratives, the politics, the distributions in power that allow for land to still be taken, for Indigenous identities as well to be violated and stolen” (pp. 24–25, emphasis added). Forgetting and disappearing Native peoples is that which “keeps things in its place” and reinforces that Indigenous death, like the state of exception, is normalised. Just as the state of exception reveals the jurisdiction of sovereign power—and the *normalcy rather than the anomaly* of its reach—the reduction of First Nation peoples and land to disappeared and forgotten reveals the jurisdiction of the Canadian government. It is the state of exception, the camp that it produces, the violence of both, and the seemingly extreme or anomalous nature of this violence that, in fact, upholds the norm, the quotidian and the mundane, and “keeps things in its place.” As Kānaka Maoli scholar Trask (2006) succinctly puts it: “Violence is thus normal” (p. 83) for Indigenous women and girls.

Returning to the Wall of Forgotten Natives, while its physical manifestation is not necessarily a camp in Agamben’s sense, its namesake reminds us that Indigenous peoples the world over—and specifically in Minnesota, Dakota and Ojibwe peoples—have been the subjects of colonial attempts at forgetting. To be *forgotten* as a Native person at the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment arises through deliberate tangible as well as intangible acts that mirror the formation of the camp. As I have distinguished throughout this essay, there is an undoubted physical presence to the camp that can be mapped onto the exclusion of Native peoples, whether as internment at Fort Snelling, broken treaties resulting in land theft, or pushing houseless Minneapolitans to the periphery through continued disinvestment in affordable living for Indigenous communities. While all of these tactics anticipate the elimination (à la Wolfe) or forgetting of the Native, they are also an articulation of Native Americans as “wards of the state” included under settler control. With few to no other options and literally living at the margins, encamped at the edge of a highway, the Wall of Forgotten Natives, while it existed, was still bounded by the city limits and local governmental jurisdiction. At the same time, there is an extra-spatial element to this exclusion, a manner by which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island are made to be ignorant. Hence, the creation of “Forgotten Natives” is a sort of mnemonological camp, in which Indigenous peoples are *excluded* (not only placed “outside” physically, but also foregone from memory) and yet *included* (made to be killable, disappearable, forgettable, and so forth, through the “legitimate” power of settler colonialism).

With the help of Indigenous scholarship, I have explored the extent to which Agamben’s theory of the camp illuminates the (forgotten) experience of Dakota and Ojibwe peoples under settler colonialism. On the one hand, Agamben’s notion of the camp is helpful in contemplating this epistemological ignorance and mnemonological forgetting, yet the limitations of *Homo Sacer* must be acknowledged. From critiques within Indigenous, postcolonial and critical race studies, Agamben’s text does not adequately address the workings of sovereign power beyond Europe and leans heavily on Western understandings of what it means to be human when pondering bare life and the figure of homo sacer. Mine is just a cursory meditation, so I suggest that other critical Indigenous scholars theorise the idea of the camp further. Certainly, more speculation could be done around reservations as a camp, a demarcated physical space of inclusive exclusion, as well as the “domestic dependent” status that Native Americans are consigned to in relation to the U.S. federal government. If there is any hope to be had from continuing to engage with continental philosophy, it is to assert that we as Indigenous peoples are not gone, and certainly not to be forgotten.

References

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (D. Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1995)
- Armillei, R., & Lobo, M. (2017). "Parallel Emergencies" in Italy and Australia: Marginalised and racialised Romani and Aboriginal "camp dwellers". *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 38(5), 560–575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2017.1363164>
- Colatrella, S. (2001). Nothing exceptional: Against Agamben. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 9(1), 96–125. <http://www.jceps.com/archives/660>
- Conway, B. (2003). Active remembering, selective forgetting, and collective identity: The case of Bloody Sunday. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 3(4), 305–323. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532706XID0304_01
- Diaz, V. (2019, April). *Oceania in the plains: The cultural & political possibilities of Pacific Islander voyaging of Dakota lands, waters, and skies in the eastern US plains* [Distinguished lecture]. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society, Memphis, TN.
- Duarte, M.E. (2017). *Network sovereignty: Building the internet across Indian country*. University of Washington.
- Dunn, E. (2017). *No path home: Humanitarian camps and the grief of displacement*. Cornell University Press.
- Edkins, J. (2000). Sovereign power, zones of indistinction, and the camp. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 25(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540002500102>
- Folch, C., Cattelino, J. R., Kahn, J. S., Niezen, R., Stanford, M. L., & Stepputat, F. (2016). The nature of sovereignty in the Anthropocene. *Current Anthropology*, 57(5), 565–585.
- Gahman, L. (2016). White settler society as monster: Rural southeast Kansas, ancestral Osage (Wah-Zha-Zhi) territories, and the violence of forgetting. *Antipode*, 48(2), 314–335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12177>
- Goeman, M. (2013). *Mark my words: Native women mapping our nations*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gómez-Barris, M. (2017). *The extractive zone: Social ecologies and decolonial perspectives*. Duke University Press.
- LaDuke, W. (2005). *Recovering the sacred: The power of naming and claiming*. South End Press.
- Lavinas Picq, M. (2018). *Vernacular sovereignties: Indigenous women challenging world politics*. University of Arizona Press.
- Lawson, T. (2014). Memorializing colonial genocide in Britain: The case of Tasmania. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16(4), 441–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.975946>
- MacLellan, M. (2018). Indigenous infopolitics: Biopolitics as resistance to White Paper liberalism in Canada. *Theory & Event*, 21(4), 914–936.
- Masalha, N. (2015). Settler-colonialism, memoricide and Indigenous toponymic memory: The appropriation of Palestinian place names by the Israeli state. *The Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 14(1), 3–57. <https://doi.org/10.3366/hlps.2015.0103>
- Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors. (n.d.). A brief history. Franklin/Hiawatha encampment: Wall of Forgotten Natives. <https://www.franklinhiawathacamp.org>

- Mitchell, S., & Burelle, J. (2016). Dee(a)r spine: Dance, dramaturgy, and the repatriation of Indigenous memory. *Dance Research Journal*, 48(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767715000546>
- Morgensen, S. L. (2011). The biopolitics of settler colonialism: Right here, right now. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1(1), 52–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648801>
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015). *The white possessive: Property, power, and Indigenous sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Motha, S. (2012). Colonial sovereignty, forms of life and liminal beings in South Africa. In M. Svirsky and S. Bignall (Eds.), *Agamben and colonialism* (pp. 128–151). Edinburgh University Press.
- Nettelbeck, A. (2012). Remembering Indigenous dispossession in the national museum: The National Museum of Australia and the Canadian Museum of Civilization. *Time & Society*, 21(1), 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X11431335>
- Rifkin, M. (2009). Indigenizing Agamben: Rethinking sovereignty in light of the ‘peculiar’ status of Native peoples. *Cultural Critique*, 73(1), 88–124. doi:10.1353/CUL.0.0049
- Simpson, A. (2016). The state is a man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the gender of settler sovereignty. *Theory & Event*, 19(4), 1–30. <https://nycstandwithstandingrock.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/simpson-2016.pdf>
- Sylvester, C. (2006). Bare life as a development/postcolonial problematic. *The Geographical Journal*, 172(1), 66–77. <https://courses.helsinki.fi/sites/default/files/course-material/4594732/Sylvester.pdf>
- Thobani, S. (2014). Race, sovereignty, and empire: Theorizing the camp, theorizing postmodernity. In A. B. Bakan and E. Dua (Eds.), *Theorizing anti-racism: Linkages in Marxism and critical race theories* (pp. 280–310). University of Toronto Press.
- Townsend, R., Griffin, J., & Sampeck, K. (2020). Archaeology, historical ruptures, and Ani-Kitu Hwagi memory and knowledge. *American Indian Quarterly*, 44(2), 243–268.
- Trask, H. K. (2006). The color of violence. In INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Eds.), *Color of violence: The INCITE! anthology* (pp. 81–87). Duke University Press.
- Tuana, N. (2004). Coming to understand: Orgasm and the epistemology of ignorance. *Hypatia*, 19(1), 194–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01275.x>
- United States Department of Commerce. (2019, July 1). Minneapolis city, Minnesota. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/minneapoliscityminnesota>
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2012, September 27). *Report on homelessness among American Indians, Alaska Natives, and native Hawaiians*. United States Interagency Council of Homelessness. <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/report-on-homelessness-among-american-indians-alaska-natives>
- Vadasaria, S. (2015). Necronationalism: Managing race, death and the nation’s skeletons. *Social Identities*, 21(2), 117–131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2015.1041014>
- Walkiewicz, K. (2016). Affirmative exclusions: The Indigenous exception in Oklahoma’s official English. *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, 3(2), 25–44.
- Waziyatawin. (2008). *What does justice look like? The struggle for liberation in Dakota homeland*. Living Justice Press.

Weber, S. (2012). Bare life and life in general. *Grey Room*, 46, 7–24.
doi:10.1162/GREY_a_00058.

Weheliye, A. G. (2014). *Habeas viscus: Racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human*. Duke University Press.

Wolfe, P. (2006). *Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native*. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>

¹ As of September 2020, the Franklin-Hiawatha encampment was once again forcibly evacuated. See Appendix, Figures 1 and 2 for photographs of the 2020 encampment.

² See Figure 1 for “rules” posted at the north gate of the camp that affirmed “RESPECT [for] our [Native] cultures, traditions, and teachings”.

³ See Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors (n.d.). Despite the fact that American Indians and Alaska Natives comprise only 1.2% of the Minneapolis population (United States Department of Commerce, 2019) as well as the U.S. population as a whole, “4.0 percent of all sheltered homeless persons” (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012, p. 5) in the U.S. are American Indian or Alaska Native.

⁴ See Tuana, 2004, p. 195.

⁵ Borrowed from Rifkin’s (2009) essay of the same name.

⁶ Rifkin (2009) has even asserted that sovereignty itself is an empty category, “a topological place holder through which to displace, or contain, the paradox of asserting ‘domestic’ authority over populations whose existence as peoples precedes the existence of the state” (p. 108).

⁷ If nothing else, this at least allays some of my lingering fears about the political implications of extrapolating Agamben’s concept.

⁸ In Dakota, *wašiču* refers to non-Indigenous peoples, specifically, white Europeans.

⁹ Translated as “where the two waters come together”, the Bdote is central to Dakota origin.

¹⁰ Although this has not been without its contentions, until as recently as May 2020 when the Minnesota Supreme Court finally ruled that the Department of Natural Resources was authorised to make the name change.

Appendix



Figure 1. Franklin-Hiawatha encampment north gate. At the southeast corner of Franklin Avenue and 16th Avenue South in Minneapolis, Minnesota, MNDOT erected a fence to first contain and then displace the camp. Photo courtesy of the author, October 1, 2020.



Figure 2. Franklin/Hiawatha encampment sign. Along Franklin Avenue, an official MNDOT sign was repurposed to acknowledge Native land. Photo courtesy of the author, October 1, 2020.