CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

SETTLEMENT'S SECRET

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In the spirit of Orin Starn's piece for *Cultural Anthropology* "Here Come the Anthros (Again): The Strange Marriage of Anthropology and Native America," I offer the following response that orients to three periodizations within his review of the literature. These periodizations are marked by an anthropological (1) dependence on Native peoples, (2) estrangement from Native peoples, and (3) (tentative) rapprochement with Native peoples.

I depart from the premise of settler colonialism to meet Starn in the history he has mapped out for us. Settler colonialism is predicated on a territorial possession by some and, thus, a dispossession of others. In this model of colonialism, "the settler never leaves," so the possession of territory requires the disappearance of "the native" (Wolfe 1999, 2006). The condition of Indigeneity in North America is to have survived this acquisitive and genocidal process and thus to have called up the failure of the project itself. In my reading of Starn's piece and my admittedly particular rereading of the anthropological literature offered here, I respond to what I see as his central claims but do so with this reframing of the work of anthropology within the ongoing historical and political process of settlement. I organize my discussion in three parts that respond to the organization of Starn's article: (1) spectacle, (2) anthropology, and (3) sovereignty.

THE SPECTACLE

Starn starts with a discussion of James Cameron's blockbuster film *Avatar* (2009), a contemporary narrative caught up with desires and discourses that, as he

argues, once defined anthropological relationships with Indigenous peoples. *Avatar* conflates Indigeneity with an endangered cultural purity, one that is about to be sequestered, removed, and possibly annihilated for territorial possession. Because of Indigenous endangerment, there is a need for protection, preservation, and leadership by an outside force. The central protagonist—a white, injured (and disabled) American veteran—is offered the possibility of becoming in bodily form, the very people and culture under siege. When he assumes this new, improved self and bodily form (that of a Native) he no longer occupies Indigenous territory unjustly, and in this new form, leads the "Na'vi" in their resistance to dispossession, removal, and ecocide. This is the plot stripped bare. The film is so replete with the familiar that it is deeply tedious, recycled, and almost completely boring in spite of its stunning luminescence.¹

In Starn's words, while this narrativization "underscores the continuing power of very familiar images of indigeneity, it also indexes anthropology's changing relation to these go-to essentialisms and narrative structures." Indeed, it does. But to emphasize the film's analogous relationship to anthropology, the film offers a representative foil for the guilt, shame, horror, and hope that gets shuttled someplace else when the matters of settlement and genocide are contemplated. The film is a story of an averted ecocide and possible genocide. In line with Starn and his discussion of the "go-to essentialisms" of older forms of ethnography in Native North America genocide in the film is always present and yet never fully acknowledged, as this is undeniably a postgenocidal space. In spite of genocide's shadowy presence ("Where exactly did all those Indians go?'"), the practice of formal, state-sanctioned killing is never temporally or geographically imagined as immediate—it is the terrible thing (like colonialism) that happened elsewhere.² The place where those pre- or postgenocidal sentiments of sadness, melancholy, political outrage, and desire get routed to is the spectacle of the film itself. To extend this analogue of anthropology-Avatar and settlement, I want to argue here that understanding and working analytically from this geopolitical premise of Indigenous death and disappearance, whether at the point of a gun, disease, law, or blood quantum regulation, is anthropology's work, and its failure at times. Anthropology wanted, as Starn argues, a pure subject, not a disappearing one, and much of the literature reflects this desire and so possesses this double-blind sight of not seeing what is there and also seeing what is there as remnant or failure.

To return to Starn's point on *Avatar* alone, I wish to extend it to an argument regarding the political efficacy or work of the pure fetish and the work of spectacle as well. Spectacles do all sorts of political work in every society but are especially

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useful in settler societies because they continue to redirect emotions, histories, and possibilities away from the means of societal and historical production—Indigenous dispossession, disenfranchisement, and containment. As evidence I would like to point to the moment of *Avatar*, one that is coterminous with the violence in Gaza. The film was released on December 18, 2009, one day shy of the one-year anniversary of the end of the truce between Gaza and Israel. This near coevalness we can chalk up to coincidence, perhaps even to irony.

Avatar was also released one day shy of the day when President Barack Obama signed an apology resolution to Native Americans: "To acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States."³ As noble as this resolution is in intent, it was passed through Congress, largely without public notice.⁴ The quiet of Obama's apology is amplified when considered alongside apologies of the Australian and Canadian states to Indigenous peoples in February 2008 and June 2008 respectively. Each apology directed toward the residential school survivors and their descendants was performed in Parliament and received extensive national and international coverage. The relative silence here forces us to ask after the efficacy of an apology by Congress if it is performed in private? The near simultaneity of these events and the spectacle that is Avatar itself do significant work. Here the narrative of the film, its form (3D), its the luminescence, its reorienting power, obscures the history of force, the recognition of that force, and the ongoing insurgency of force unfolding before us, the living history that is hidden in Obama's apology and the unfolding history of similar force elsewhere, in Gaza. Lives are lived there, as they were (and still are in some parts) here, within an ongoing violence over territory. There bodies are subject to techniques of force, containment, and subsequent resistances that characterized the Indian wars in what is now the United States, just 98 years ago.⁵ Avatar's attempt to narrate the logic of settler colonialism as a luminescent and utopic event, history perhaps as "it should have been" and in spectacular form, a form that detracted from the end of the peace truce there while also obscuring (and this, of course, was not difficult) Obama's apology made for that historical violence here. This near coevalness is cause for pause.

ANTHROPOLOGY

It is the anxiety of disappearance, the desire, then, for a pure subject, for pure difference defined according to a white, Western, and fundamentally "expansionist" ontological core that authorized U.S. anthropology. These desires, like the raw

materials that fuel capitalism, also removed and ignored, and engaged, and selected for the difference that mattered. The studied, colonial knowledge of Indigenous life fed into politics and governmental knowledge on "culture" and race relations (Baker 1998, 2010) and pressed into play the "parasitic" mode that Starn then speaks of. It is this parasitic mode that prompted Vine Deloria's seminal essay "Here Come the Anthros" (2003).

"The anthropology of Native North America" has found its legs as a documentary project, and those legs have moved through a very small, very circumscribed space. An exemplary case is the subfield of Iroquois studies—an ethnological backbone for U.S. anthropology and a model of the salvage and the (attempted) reconstruction project à la Morgan (Deloria 1999:71–94; Simpson 2003:103– 140). Although early anthropologists may have at times flirted with advocacy (no matter how misguided or damaging it was),⁶ their anthropologies were not critical projects, as they sought the timeless, the pure, the past-perfect, the thing (the people and their culture) that in its purity needed to be saved, to be recorded for the consumptive pleasure of (settler) science, memory, and a hopeful, shared (now liberal) future. In taking the disappearance of Indians as inevitable, as a premise and then, salvage as its raison d'être, that early work quite simply tried to secure a place for whiteness—and in so doing, kept a good part of the red out.

So Deloria and many others critiqued, quite productively. As a result of this process, the form of analysis, collaboration, and ethnographic writing is profound for all anthropological engagements today, but especially potent is the possibility of reorienting and revising received versions of truth with the broader case offered by Indigeneity. Indigeneity—Indigenous difference—is fundamentally the condition of "before," of cultural, philosophical, and political life that connect to specific territories and of the political exigencies of this relatedness in the present.⁷ This present is defined by the political projects of dispossession and settlement, and the difference that is Indigeneity is the maintenance of culture, treaty, history, and self within the historical and ongoing context of settlement. This settlement was wrought through violent and bloody dispossession and now maintains itself through the threat of military force and the force of law.⁸

It is there, in the context of settlement, that the anthropology of Native North America may call up and reveal the impermanence of political boundaries, the constructedness of nation-states, the fundamental issue of consent in modern political orders. As well, a deeply historicized and critical understanding of Indigeneity within settler contexts has much to offer understandings of the precariousness and the uses of "democracy" itself. The cornerstones of democratic governance consent, citizenship, rule by representation—are revealed to be precarious at best when the experiences of Indigenous peoples are brought to bear on democracy's own promises and tenets. Indians in the United States were not granted citizenship until 1924. Although enfranchised, most Indians in Canada are still effectively "wards of the state,"⁹ governed in part by elected councils that receive their authority from the Indian Act of 1876. Still, Indians on both side of the border contested the "gift" and trappings of democracy itself, arguing (and still arguing, as my work and the work of others has indicated) that they are members of their own first nations, first. And for some, only.

It is in these complicated relationships to the past, to territory, and to governance that Indigeneity is quite simply a key to critical analysis, not as a model of an alternative theoretical project or method (as interesting and valuable as this is) but simply as a case that, when considered robustly, fundamentally interrupts what is received, what is ordered, what is supposed to be settled.

SOVEREIGNTY

It is in this context that sovereignty is the uncitable thing, and Starn indeed has difficulty citing it. In its stead, he turns to a discussion of Indigenous jurisdiction and governmental authority to the project of identity, identification, the morass of misidentification in the academy. Not many anthropologists are comfortable with Indigenous sovereignty-it is passé at best (a violence of Western political organization or order that is also best left, "then")—and now, thanks to readings of Agamben (reading Schmitt and Aristotle), it is narrowly focused on the biopolitical, rather than the geopolitical, where Indigenous sovereignty necessarily resides, as Mark Rifkin points out (2009). Attention is paid elsewhere to the force that exerts itself on selves shorn of their own modes of differentiation, as state power works on them as one would perhaps tend to raw material, to slaughtered meat, or to administratable populations. Perhaps this analytic attention to sovereign power in the bios does occur at the analytical expense of the geopolitical—and settlement is in part very, very much about the geopolitical. Indian sovereignty moves precariously among these modes of comprehension as it is inherent, is itself "prior to" or "preconstitutional," prior to settlement (Biolsi 2005:243; Macklem 1993), and is recognized as such in law-if only then to be ignored. Indian sovereignty is simultaneously tied to governmental forms, charters, and philosophical systems that are both prior to and embedded within settler systems, states, and imaginaries. The complicated valences to these embedded political orders, claims, and jurisdictional

assertions may make the analyst dizzy—if not nostalgic; thus perhaps the earlier turn to pure form.

In the literature, one must range within and also well beyond anthropology for models of cultural and political analysis that take settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty as their departure points. These works may be found in Indigenous studies and anthropology, governance studies and political theory. Aileen Moreton-Robinson's edited collection Sovereign Subjects (2007) takes as its analytic frame white settler patriarchy and from there stages a vigorous critique of the ongoing work of settlement within Australia. Joanne Barker's edited collection Sovereignty Matters offers a deep and critical history of sovereignty within the United States, including chapters that trouble the territorially uniform notion of sovereignty (2005).¹⁰ Recent works by political scientists, theorists, and legal scholars examine the simultaneously bestowed, contracted, and challenged forms of sovereignty that Indigenous peoples maintain and assert within the United States (Bruyneel 2007; Corntassel et al. 2008; Rosen 2007), and others have examined the logic and limitations of (political) recognition within specific settler societies (Coulthard 2007; Cramer 2005; Povinelli 2002) and more globally (Miller 2003). Gail Landsman (1988) and Tom Biolsi (2007) are notable for centering sovereignty in their analyses of multisited contestation in Iroquois land reclamation and Lakota sociability and governance in their communities. Jessica Cattelino's ethnography High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty (2008) looks to Seminoles in what is now the state of Florida for an analysis of money, its attributes, and the durative possibilities of culture under conditions of wealth. In spite of its long history in law and policy studies in "American Indian studies," rarely do we see sovereignty centered within contemporary anthropological analyses of Indigeneity.

Sovereignty is, however, merely gestured to—and in some instances vilified. In other analyses, it is the thing that makes people not get along, the thing that makes Indigenous peoples act in excluding and illiberal ways, and in Michael Brown's (2007) recent genealogy, which achieves the astonishing feat of completely ignoring the exigencies of land loss, death, and the costs of settler sovereignty on the lives of Indigenous peoples, it is treated with a skepticism that dwells in its absolute moral untenability with liberal values that are assumed to be shared. Such articulations are found also in the "citizens' groups" that collect around Indian land claim areas, representing a sturdy white fear: Indians reacquiring their own land, governing themselves, accumulating capital, doing so under the sign of nationhood and sovereignty, and making decisions regarding their land and property. Most uncomfortably for non-Indians (and some Indians) are matters such as political membership—the absolute unit of sovereign assertions of power. Indigenous jurisdiction and authority are complex. They get dirty and reside partially within a Western theory of force, which resides in the exclusive power of the sovereign to kill. However, Indian sovereignty is real; it is not a moral language game or a matter to be debated in ahistorical terms. It is what they have; it is what, in the case of the United States, they have left; and thus it should be upheld and understood robustly—especially as Indians work within, against, and beyond these existing frameworks.¹¹ Indians continue to exercise their sovereignty through the moment of empire and within an empire that is of such hyberbolic force and self-definition that it can imagine itself as deterritorialized, global, all the while retrenching its territorial force within borders. They do this within the geopolitical borders of nation-states that cut through their land and across which they must now ask permission to traverse.¹²

The sovereignty that cannot be spoken of is also what remains secret; it is the sign that is attached to robust Indigeneities that move through reservations and urban locales, persistent and insistent "survivals" (descendants of treaty signatories, descendants of the historically recognized, as well as the unrecognized, in collective or individual form) that are nightmarish for the settler state, as they call up both the impermanence of state boundaries and the precarious claims to sovereignty enjoyed by liberal democracies such as the United States.¹³

It is here that Starn's genealogic of anthropological work with and in Indigenous communities becomes liberal, and especially so in its optimism. I characterize this as liberal because it is predicated on a market distribution of a good that is responding to an injustice predicated on scarcity, one of Indigenous people and voices within early anthropological analysis, a characterization of a moment. This injustice is then remedied through the "rapprochement" with those who belong unambiguously to the prior, to the space before, those who are clearly in possession of the "gold standard" of recognition, federally recognized Indigenous anthropologists. In Starn's optimistic read of the literature, the answer to all the losses then becomes the representative function of the few. In this, it is those who are taken to represent the former, the worked on, the scarce resource of Indigenous peoples in the profession today, who signal rapprochement. This statistical moment form Indigenous peoples.

I appreciate this gesture of inclusion and concomitant excitement. But I am not sure that this is cause for enduring cheer. Here I invite Starn and others to move beyond the statistical premise for historical remedy. The statistical premise is a way of acknowledging the genocidal origins of North America, whereby a few "survivors," representing "survivals" (and thence, representatives) of an earlier order or an experience, perhaps may be incorporated into discipline and institutions and thence make the space better, or more just. Their incorporation is meant to heal the violence that made their numbers thin and therefore their presence significant. However, statistical, representative forms of justice are never enough and are never going to be enough in the normative order of things, which, I have argued, is structured on disavowal of dispossession, on spectacles that obscure those genocidal origins, and on the deep force that is now structured through law. What is needed is, yes, more people, more Native people in all disciplinary locations, of course, but paired with structures, peoples, and institutions that labor for a radically different historical consciousness, one that is deeply cognizant of the means of its own societal production so that it may afford Indigeneity (and the conditions of many others) a robust present as well as a vigorous, variegated past and future.

What I find hopeful are anthropological and related works of theoretical verve, historical acuity, and ethnographic rigor that center Indigeneity in their analysis and offer critiques of state power, force, and occupation. I have mentioned a few that are notable; there are many other works in Indigenous studies (an absolutely flourishing field) that do this and much more. And in this, I am most excited to think with and teach with the works (and with the peoples attached to those works, whether they be Indigenous or non-Indigenous) that take critical analysis seriously and in doing so position readers as witnesses to the painful and spectacular life of U.S. (and Canadian) settler colonialism. This, some would hope, is a political formation that is not a given—indeed, it is a formation that has been constructed and is one whose construction is revealed and demystified through the ongoing life and actions of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples did not lay down and die; they persist, and in so doing, they defy all expectations—working resolutely to assert their nationhood and their sovereignty against a settler political formation that would have them disappear or integrate or assimilate. It is that very desire and that political formation that some may hope will instead die—or, at the very least, be subject to deep revision.

NOTES

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1.

Cameron's surprise is to attempt to reimagine this story by focusing on the familiar period in U.S. history known as "the Indian Wars" and rendering it a uniform, calculated, organized resistance to (white) settlement that was, in this blue version of things, a success. In this hyperbolic, fictionalized account of things, the defense of territory commences a "new world" that is inaugurated by a repulsion of settlers, not an occupation by them. It is in this shift of the existing script where *Avatar* is not tedious and very surprising. It is optimistic, uplifting, and perhaps absolving. On the popularity of this filmic experience, see the Twentieth Century Fox website, "The Oscar[®] and Golden Globe[®] winning epic is the highest grossing film of all time, taking in over \$2.7 billion in worldwide box office. It is also the top-selling Blu-ray disc of all time" (n.d.).

- 2. There is a slim but significant literature that counters this. Russell Thornton's population history provides the demographics of loss (1987). David Stannard's book American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World (1992) focuses exclusively on the genocidal history of the United States. Ben Kiernan's Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur (2007) is an exhaustive comparative history of genocide campaigns that devotes three chapters to what is now the "New World" (ch. 2) and the United States (ch. 6, 8). For the gendered valences to genocide in the United States, please see Andrea Smith's Conquest: Sexual Violence and Native American Genocide (2005). These books are complemented by Ned Blackhawk's meticulous reading of 18th- and 19th-century texts in what is now the U.S. Southwest, a reading that places force at the center of exchange and barter of Indigenous people, Violence over the Land (2008).
- 3. See U.S. Congress (2009).
- 4. Before December 19, 2009, there was one mainstream article on the resolution: "A Symbolic Apology to Indians" was printed in the *New York Times* (2009). Since December 19, 2010, there has been one piece on the resolution, a *Wall Street Journal* blog post (Mckinnon 2009) and four *Indian Country Today* articles (indexed in *McClatchy-Tribune Business News*) on the apology (Capriccioso 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Toensing 2010). The official ceremony marking the resolution was held on May 20, 2010, in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C., where representatives from Cherokee, Choctaw, Pawnee, and Sisseton–Wahpeton Oyate were in attendance. There has been one article on this, published in the *Topeka Capital-Journal* (Evans 2010).
- 5. The last armed resistance to white encroachment onto Indian land was actually 1990, during the "Oka Crisis" in what is now Quebec. This saw the largest military deployment of force by a settler state since the "Indian Wars" in what is now the United States. The Indian Wars are generally thought to begin with the Powhatan Wars in 1632 and to end 98 years ago with cross-border Yaquis fighting the U.S. Border Patrol in Arizona. This 1918 skirmish is known as the Battle of Bear Valley.
- For a useful illustration of this misguided form of "advocacy" (one that directed policy and law toward termination), see Ned Blackhawk's (1997) work on Julian Steward and in particular the theory of cultural ecology that guided his analysis.
- For an excellent summary and definition of Indigeneity, see Macklem (1993) and de La Cadena and Starn (2007:1–30).
- 8. For an excellent case study of this use and the force of law in upstate New York (which exposes both its arbitrariness and protection of property interests), see Alyosha Goldstein's "Where the Nation Takes Place" (2008).
- 9. There are three agreements in Canada that evidence a move away from the wardship status of the Indian Act into other forms of Indigenous self-government or complete reterritorialization: the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975, the creation of the Nunavut territory (1993), and the Nishga'a Final Agreement (2000) within British Columbia.
- Please consult Barker's excellent introduction "For Those Whom Sovereignty Matters" (2006:1–32).
- 11. For a critique of sovereignty, see Alfred (2005). For the reworking of sovereignty within Native American studies as viewing strategy, see Raheja's analysis of Inuit (2007) and U.S. film (2011). For reading strategy with native texts and histories, see Warrior (1995). For the notion of "sovereign interdependency," see Jessica Cattelino (2010). For an extended meditation and analysis grounded in Anishnaabe literature that extends beyond the culture and offers vigorous critique, see Scott Lyons's *X Marks* (2010).

- 12. For an example of the ongoing concern over borders in North America, see the recent Senate Bill 1070 in Arizona that proposes to enforce federal immigration law by the state and so empowers police officers to act as immigration officers and detain those suspected of being illegal. The irony of a settler society's concern over the terms of legality cannot be overstated, as their very position here is not one of invitation. For a case from abroad on undefined borders, see David Newman's "Drawing the Line" (1996), on Israel and Palestine. I am grateful to Jasmin Habib for calling this work to my attention.
- 13. For a rare example of the attention to this circuitousness and authoritative attempt for intracommunity recognition and citizenship in urban locale, see Renya Ramirez's ethnography *Native Hubs* (2008). Her critique of settler sovereignty is not foregrounded, but she does an excellent job at mapping out constraints to Indigenous self-fashioning through a history of force in what is now California; Starn also cites her work. Ramirez's work can also help to think about the portability of Indigenous sovereignty. For work on the precariousness of settler boundaries and the invitation to think squarely on the notion of boundary within and across the United States and Canada, see Kevin Bruyneel's *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Post Colonial Politics of US-Indigenous Relations* (2007) and my work on the work of law and Mohawk mobility and trade across the U.S.–Canadian border (2008).

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