

Re-imagining Boundaries: Standing Rock Protest and Native American Woman's Spatial Marginalization

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Abstract

Standing Rock Tribe protest against the North Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is one of the major resistance movements of contemporary Native American (NA) history. For the spatially marginalized NA women, this resistance movement is an opportunity to redefine her spatial location within the contemporary NA normative geography. The present study aims to appraise the historico-cultural context of the NA woman's double spatial marginalization and its implications on her contemporary spatial struggle. This study claims that the Euro-Americans through religious, educational, and legislative acts in the post-contact era institutionalized NA woman's double spatial marginalization. The present study offers a critique of the DAPL project as the United States government's effort to reconfigure the Normative Geographic structure of contemporary Native America and also explores contemporary NA woman's spatial marginalization, and her struggle for spatial emancipation at the anti-DAPL protest through Tim Cresswell's theoretical scaffoldings of normative geography, out-of-place actions, and transgression.

Key Words: Native American woman, spatial marginalization, normative geography, Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL),

Introduction

The North Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), known as the Black Snake, extends from North Dakota to Illinois. DAPL was launched in mid-2014 by Energy Transfer Partners and became operational in mid-2017. It became controversial when in early-2016 Standing Rock Sioux tribes launched a campaign against the project. The campaign further escalated into a legal battle when LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a NA woman of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, filed a motion at the District of Columbia District Court. The appeal defended the archeological, spiritual, historical, and cultural significance of the site to the Native Americas. Along with the legal battle, Allard also established an All Nations camp at the site of the DAPL. The present study offers a historico-cultural review of NA woman's double spatial marginalization within the normative geography of Native America in the post-contact era. The study also appraises DAPL project as the contemporary US government effort to reconfigure NA normative landscape and NA woman's contestation of this process. The present study asserts that NA woman became spatially double

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marginalized in the post-contact era. The United States government used religion, boarding schools, land treaties and acts as tool to extend the spatial marginalization of the NA woman.

Native American Woman's Double Spatial Marginalization

The monotheistic religious culture of Euro-Americans destabilized the polytheist religious beliefs of the Native Americans. Christianity established the social and spatial hierarchies, where the Euro-American occupied higher position and hence they would, by their religious superiority, be allowed to capture, occupy or take any part of the NA land, and the Native Americans made secondary or lower strata of the social fabric of America. Christianity propagated the "notion of a single, male deity who was superior to all other deities" (Paper 2007, 63). The notion destabilized the ambivalent gender relations of the NA society. In Addition, Christian teachings enforced the "patriarchalization of Native traditional cultures" (Paper 2007, 65). The religio-cultural marginalization of the NA woman, subsequently, resulted in her spatial marginalization as well. Christian missionaries imposed the Puritanic values upon the Native Americans, which would strictly confine the NA woman to the places of home and church. Christianity also reinforced the Euro-centric division of labor and gender roles by restructuring the NA society upon patriarchal standards. In different NA societies, patrilineal descent was recognized to discourage matrilineal social setups (Paper 2007, 90).

Furthermore, the Civilization Fund Act of 1819 also played a vital role in shaping the normative geographies of Native America in the nineteenth century. Firstly, it changed the means of production of sustenance where Native Americans were now coerced to abandon the pre-contact modes of food production like hunting and were asked to develop agriculture as a means for food production. With the abandoning of hunting and initiation of agriculture, the gender roles and spatial positioning of the Native Americans changed drastically. Hunting established the spatially superior position of the NA man. The abandonment of the hunting meant NA man's resignation from his spatially superior position. On the other hand, the NA woman who occupied the field spaces was delimited to home space which further compromised her spatial position.

The second part of the Civilization Fund Act of 1819 focused on education of the Native Americans in Bible, writing of English, and arithmetic. Church schools were remodeled upon the Carlisle Industrial Indian School. NA children were forcibly taken from their parents and were indoctrinated in the Euro-American ways of living (Reyhner, 2). These schools reinforced Euro-American gender roles and gendered

spatial allocation, which in later years became profoundly influential in reshaping the normative geographies of the NA society.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 jeopardized the overarching spatial organization of the NA society. The tribes were relocated in reservations that were established in the light of Indian appropriation bills, passed by the United States government. In addition, the Appropriation Bill for Indian Affairs of 1851 and the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871 displaced and relocated tribes that not only lost their lands but were also forced to adopt the Euro-American socio-econo-cultural patterns. Furthermore, the Dawes Act of 1887 or the General Allotment Act usurped an era of individual land ownership, completely unknown to the Native Americans and also aimed at the construction of Eurocentric gendered society by prioritizing NA men over women (Perdu, 2). The Act also caused huge disintegration in the tribal system, consequently, putting the NA woman more dependent upon the NA man. NA woman's socio-economic dependency compromised her spatiality regarding her roles and position in the NA society.

The Re-configuration of NA Normative Geography

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard's action of the establishment of a camp and filing of an appeal against the DAPL project are nonconformists. The actions are nonconformist because the notions of out of place action and transgression are not only spatial but also subversive in essence. This suggests, hypothetically, that there exists a geographical space that is a space of conformity to set rules and patterns that governs an individual's behavior with reference to space. This space constitutes what Cresswell calls, "normative geography" (10). This normative geography is established upon what is considered as "natural and commonsense" behavior within a particular space in any culture (Cresswell, 10). These normative geographies are "always already existing", and thus influence an individual's sense of place within a socio-cultural pattern (Cresswell, 10). Within a cultural paradigm, forces that hold "power", do the demarcation of the normative geographies of society and based on that an act is considered either in place or out of place (Cresswell, 10). In other words, there is always a powerful agency that customizes normative geography according to its ulterior motives. This suggests that there is an unwritten code developed by some powerful agency that designates actions as appropriate and inappropriate concerning particular spaces. It is this powerful agency which the NA woman challenges in the anti-DAPL protests.

In the DAPL context, the Energy Transfer Partners, with the backing of the US government, uses geographic space for its capitalist

agenda. The Energy Transfer Partners encroachments on the Standing Rock territory are in violation of not only the United States government treaties but also the United States Supreme Courts' jurisprudence. The Act of March 2, 1889, and 1944 Flood Control Act give protection to the Standing Rock Tribe reservation geographical sovereignty. Therefore, the Standing Rock Tribe maintains its claims upon the unceded lands and the Lake Oahe (Rome, 2018), and thus rejects the DAPL project. The oil-transport project is an effort to reconfigure the normative geographic structure of the Standing Rock Tribe and hence put the lives of Native tribes into a constant threat. The US government plans to construct the DAPL on the NA lands is a clear attempt to stamping her spatial authority and thus severely destabilize the NA socio-spatial structures. The re-routing of the DAPL through Native lands is the US government's effort to use space and place to bring an end to the sovereign status of the Standing Rock territory. The project is not only environmentally hazardous but attempts at disrupting the socio-spatial organization of the Standing Rock Tribe.

The DAPL is not the first attack on the Native lands, rather the entire history of Native America is filled with such episodes of spatial conflict with the United States government. Native American Tribes consider the project as an exemplum of racio-spatial discrimination that would result in complex socio-cultural ambivalences. One of the demands of the Standing Rock protesters is to reconsider the original route of the DAPL. The original plan of DAPL proposed the construction of an underground pipeline ten miles north of Bismarck across the Missouri River (Philips, 734). Bismarck is the capital city of North Dakota and mostly populated by white Americans. Therefore, in order to save the White community from the hazards of a potential oil spill or any other catastrophe, the route was directed to pass through the Lake Oahe. The revised plan was not acceptable to the Standing Rock Tribe, as it was considered at putting the lives of Natives in danger. The idea of saving the white community on one hand, and jeopardizing Native Americans' lives and lands with the constant threat of a catastrophe in itself is racist and spatially discriminative. The US government through DAPL tries to maintain the colonial legacy of protecting White communities, however, they lack any consideration of the lives of the Native Americans.

Apart from environmental issues that would be caused by the project, the Standing Rock Tribe attributes cultural and historical significance to the location. The US governments reconfigure the normative landscape of Native America by devaluing and ripping off the meaning of space and place. The Standing Rock territory holds

extraordinary cultural, historical value and spiritual meaning for the NA Tribe. The territory is an ancestral burial ground of the Standing Rock Tribe, and the Tribe deems its excavation for the DAPL as a desecration of the souls of ancestors and the spirit of the land. Thus through her spatial encroachments into the NA lands, the US government tries to destabilize the value and meaning of the Standing Rock Tribe territory. These territorial encroachments from the United States government were not accepted to the NA people in general, and NA women in particular. Hence a massive anti-DAPL movement was launched by the NA women back in 2016.

Transgression of NA Women

An individual establishes bonds with the spaces and places in multiple ways with the ultimate result of experiencing a sense of place and corresponding identity with the spaces it inhabits. However, at times when the normative spaces become too oppressive a sense of loss of place may surge. The sense of loss of space in a particular spatial structure engenders an ambivalent identity. When a particular space ceases to provide a sense of in placeness or the existence of that space seems endangered, a resistance starts in the shape of actions that Cresswell calls out of place actions. Since these actions are targeted at challenging the normative structures set by entities that hold sociocultural powers, they are labeled as out of place actions by those who establish the normative landscape. Consequently, an individual's emotional attachment to the place becomes ambivalent, and thus fails to establish any sort of connection with this space of conformity. Such an individual develops a nonconformist attitude towards the normative geography that is either constructed or being imposed upon, and the out of place actions further culminates in the transgressive act, where the individual crosses the established spatial boundaries. It is at this cross-section where the shift from in placeness to out of placeness occurs (Cresswell, 10)

The historical survey reveals the significance of the NA woman's participation in the Standing Rock anti-DAPL project. I claim that her participation in the protest should not be viewed only as a protest to save the land, but it is a revolt against the centuries-old spatial marginalization. The events at the Standing Rock protest display NA woman's rising to contest her spatially marginalized location not only within the NA socio-spatial paradigm but also within the White American socio-spatial complex of the contemporary era. The moments mark NA woman defiance of the normative geographic structure by her indulgence in the protestation and creation of spaces of resistance.

It is indeed not surprising that NA women led the anti-DAPL movement. They not only led the protest but also led the spiritual gatherings, prayers circles, and oral history recitals at the protest camps. According to Liz Randol, the NA women "maintained a climate of peace and nonviolence" (2017) at the Standing Rock protest. "As we speak, they are taking our footprint off this earth. As we speak they are violating our ancestors" (Allard, 2016). These are LaDonna Brave Bull Allard's words when she talked to CBC Radio anchor Erica Daniels in 2016 at the Sacred Stone camp. Allard is the first NA who launched the protest campaign by establishing the Sacred Stone Camp at the site of DAPL and initiated the legal battle against the construction of the DAPL in 2014. Allard is a direct descendent of the great NA Chief Sitting Bull and has worked as a Historic Preservation officer for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. For Allard, the movement is not only for the protection of water but that of self-empowerment. Self-empowerment is spatial empowerment within the NA spatiality. She is an enlightened NA woman who believes that the power they had given to the entity, in this case, the United States government, needs to be taken back for the reason that the entity is "destroying" her world (Allard, 2019).

Similarly, Winona LaDuke, contests the spatial marginalization of the Native Americans at DAPL protest. She argues that the US government resolution to build the DAPL is "not the way to go" (LaDuke 2016). She proposes that there should be an end to fossil fuel infrastructure since her people lack adequate infrastructures for houses, energy, and highways. According to LaDuke, the DAPL only "help" the oil companies not the Native Americans who are running the risk of their lives and the destruction of their sacred spaces (LaDuke 2016).

Joye Braun of Cheyenne River Sioux and a member of Indigenous Environmental Network challenges the capitalist intrusions into the sacred lands. She claims that the territory is "un-seceded" and hence the United States government should honor indigenous people right for protecting their lands against projects like DAPL that are hazardous to the Native people (Braun 2016). Jennifer Weston from Standing Rock Sioux defends the "local ecosystem" and urges to establish "connection" with the places that ancestors called "home" (Weston 2016). Jaslyn Charger, the young Standing Rock tribe girl who laid the foundation of the International Indigenous Youth Council, was the first NA woman to launch a campaign against the DAPL project. Charger sees the project as the destruction of Mother Earth and she "can feel her pain" (2016). Furthermore, NA women like Faith Spotted Eagle, Champa Seyboye, Osprey Orielle Lake, Kandi Mossett, Phyllis Young, Lauren Howland, and Shrise Wadsworth are the

frontline protectors of NA lands. These NA women have crossed the spatial boundaries of the normative geographies set by the NA patriarchy and the US government.

NA woman's out of place actions at DAPL protest constitutes her transgression. She has stepped out of the marginalized space and defied the authority of the NA patriarchy and the White American spatial supremacy. With her participation and leadership in the protest movement, she has reestablished her own space of resistance within the Native and White American spatiality. This transgression is not an ordinary event, rather it exposes NA woman's potential for not only initiating a spatial movement but also leading it and alters the NA history for the coming decades.

NA women's struggle at the Standing Rock is not just against a pipeline, but it is for the spatio-cultural emancipation of all the Native Americans. This struggle is shaped into a movement that on one hand aims at maintaining the sovereignty of NA nations while on the other hand pledge of an era of NA woman spatial emancipation. They consider the construction of DAPL is not only an intrusion into their lands, but most importantly it is an attack on the sovereign status of the tribes. For NA women, the notion of tribal sovereignty is associated with tribal and personal identity within the overarching cultural paradigm of the United States.

The Euro-American spatio-cultural invasion further reified the already ambivalent pre-contact NA normative geographies. In efforts to impose the Eurocentric spatio-cultural values upon the Native Americans, the Euro-Americans further exacerbated the spatial crisis for the NA woman. The anti-DAPL became an opportunity for the NA woman to contest her double marginalization and create space for herself. The DAPL project became functional in mid-2017, Native Americans did not get the relief that they had claimed since the beginning of the protest in 2014. However, it commences an era where NA women saw the possibilities of spatial emancipation and ending the historical spatial marginalization.

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