Relational Co-Becoming of Humus, Horses, and Humans: A multispecies ethnography of Northern Plains political ecologies

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To “capture the meaning of group destruction one must begin to decolonize the Eurocentric assumptions of genocide studies”, Andrew Woolford contends (2014, p. 33). Taking up his admonition, my dissertation project reticulates from memorial rides which enact horse-human kinship and nationhood in Oceti Sakowinŋ territory and temporality. Through these circles and ceremonies, I enter and center an explicitly spatial “existence that focuses on ‘being in good relation’” — a Dakota alternative to what Kim Tallbear (2019) encapsulates as “progressive settler-colonial American Dreaming that is ever co-constituted with deadly hierarchies of life”. I attempt to engage diachronic political ecologies of the Northern Plains in the still-expanding colonial archive, with granular attention to reading how bonds of terrestrial kinship are made and maintained through horse, human, and humus interactions. In order to “become” into revitalizing relation, I bring my chosen institutional location at a land-grab institution, my disciplinary formation in American Anthropology, and all my relations to bear – upon this work that commits to solidarity with their struggles for Indigenous self-determination and accountability to their inherent sovereignty, proceeding from Oceti Sakowinŋ “grounded normativity” (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016).