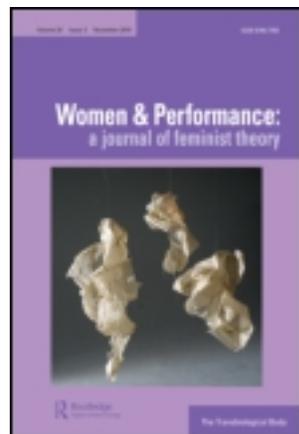


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### Rooting for queers: A politics of primitivity

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# ROOTING FOR QUEERS: A POLITICS OF PRIMITIVITY

Scott Morgensen

In the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1990's, cohorts that were exiled from forms of feminism during the sex wars gathered in the name of a new kinship, which they called "queer." Women who practiced transgressive sexualities—power play, role play, or sex for money—had been critiqued by radical and cultural feminist claims that the male domination invested in these or all forms of sexuality made their practices oppressive to women. Bisexuals, gay men and others who joined or were inspired by institutions for transgressive sex among men (including bathhouses, sex in public, and sex for money) had been read as reveling in male privileges while performing misogynist sex. Transsexuals and transgenderists who questioned the borders of binary sex found themselves cast as patriarchal agents—invading women's spaces in the case of transwomen, seduced from feminism in the case of transmen—and their actions read as violences against women.<sup>1</sup> Exile from forms of feminism during the 1980's enabled those targeted to form common cause across otherwise great differences. Their varied yet mutual destabilizations of binary sex and sexuality then informed emergent queer politics, and over time, they sufficiently altered the terms of belonging in women's communities to enable queer/feminist reconciliations.

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This paper examines how, during the 1990's, queers who were forming new communities and reconnecting to feminism racialized their organizing when they invoked primitivity as a natural ground for their sexual liberations. The larger ethnographic and historical project of which this paper is a part traces how claims on primitive gender and sexuality mobilized twentieth-century sexual minority organizing while naturalizing whiteness and a globalist purview within them. Emancipationists and liberationists linked primitive sexuality to metropolitan perversions in order to frame indigenous sexual cultures as signs of a global, transhistorical minority sexuality. This offered evidence for metropolitan claims on national or global citizenship. Such discursive legacies shaped new queer movements in the U.S. when queers reconciled with the feminisms that had exiled them and feminists sought out queers by naming shared primitivist stakes. Yet while subjects of primitivist reconciliations bridged differences and appeared to heal oppressions, they also fostered colonial discourses and racial and national normativity in their politics. The ethnographic and cultural analysis in this paper traces primitivist stakes in queer and feminist projects in order to explain their racial and national formation and to clarify their differences from the anti-racist sexual politics modeled within women-of-color feminisms and queer-of-color and two-spirit mobilizations.<sup>2</sup>

Queer politics of primitivity arise from a confluence of discursive legacies informing normative U.S. citizenship and metropolitan sexual minority formations. Philip Deloria argues that "playing Indian" has grounded normative formations of political dissent throughout U.S. history (1998). Wendy Rose called "whiteshamanism" and other appropriations of American Indian practices justifications of settler subjectivity which served, in Renato Rosaldo's terms, as an "imperialist nostalgia" (Rose 1992, Rosaldo 1989). Deloria reminds us that such actions specifically negotiate the terms of settler citizenship. Across distinct historical contexts, settler subjects in the U.S. have been able to claim proximity to savagery as a means to critique hegemony. Yet by impersonating colonial fantasies of indigeneity, settler subjects reinscribe their distance from their object, which revitalizes their civilizational authority and facilitates a new claim on national belonging. Thus in Deloria's formulation, far from rejecting modern subjectivity, "going primitive" appears to constitute it. I extend these insights to sexuality studies by showing that the constitution of the sexual margins by colonial discourses shapes sexual minority politics in primitivist terms. In the U.S.,

racialized theories of perversion have conflated metropolitan sexual margins with ancient practices and global hinterlands. Their political articulation has included asserting the racial and national status of an authentic culture or ethnic minority for white and class-privileged sexual minority formations. If sexual minority organizers frame their work as supportive or exemplary of cultural diversity, they can imagine themselves to be organizing against racism or ethnocentrism at the very moment that they naturalize racial, economic, and national power in their politics. In this sense, settler subjects in sexual minority organizing can claim kinship with indigeneity as a route to citizenship. But in doing so, they may resemble a normative politics more than a project that would undermine it.

The argument of this paper is inspired by, and speaks to, studies of feminist and queer complicities with white supremacy, imperial nationalism, and global capitalism. Feminist of color and queer of color scholarship has marked a naturalization of white and Northern agendas in varied national and global feminisms, and in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer movements, including the precursors to those examined here (Alarcón 1990, Mohanty 1991, Eng and Hom 1998, Alexander 1998). For instance, in the early 1980's when the sex wars began in earnest, sexuality was being newly racialized and nationalized by a synergy of conservative cultural politics. New Right mobilizations under Reagan and Thatcher directed neoliberal globalization through specific heteronormative projects. These projects framed a white, middle-class nuclear family as a bedrock of economic health at the same time that they pathologized family forms among immigrants, working people, and women of color (Gilroy 1987, Roberts 1997, Bhattacharjee 2002). The latter were mobilized in the same moment as an expanding base of a two-tier service and manufacturing economy in which unskilled, fragmented, and migratory labor precisely separated workers from conditions that would have enabled them to emulate the national family. Thus, in a circular logic, workers' failure to fulfill sexual standards produced them as deserving punishment and rehabilitation—explicitly so, in such contexts as “workfare” or prison labor—and destined them for an economic function that reinforced alienation from normative sex (Sassen 1998, Mink 1998, Davis and Shaylor 2001, Parreñas 2001). When certain radical feminists in the U.S. allied with agents of the New Right in order to criminalize pornography and prostitution, they reinforced conservative state political and economic agendas by promoting a sexual politics read in U.S./Third

World feminist criticism as hegemonic (Sandoval 2000, Gluck et al 1998). Universalizing feminism under the global and transhistorical category of "woman," which bespoke a fundamental relation of power to sex, failed to account for theories of multiple identities and "the simultaneity of oppressions" named in women of color feminisms (Combahee River Collective 1983, Anzaldúa 1990). Feminism became a regulatory project if it judged or punished women and other marginal sexual subjects who adapted sexual hegemony to survival work, or if the only options it offered were versions of hegemonic gender and sexuality embraced by economically- and educationally-privileged women (Chapkis 1997, Pendleton 1996, Kempadoo 1998). Theorizing women's problem as an essential male domination failed to explain the proliferating power relations of global capitalism which were mobilizing people of all gender identities as both agents and targets of control. (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, Mohanty 1997, Manalansan 2003). Global feminist movements then could extend the power of neoliberalism if they invested international regulatory bodies such as the U.N. with a moral authority that could have been met among people living creatively on the sexual margins (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998, Grewal and Kaplan 2001).

In the early 1990's in the San Francisco region, many exiles from the feminist sex wars became queer as a means to identify against both New Right politics and the feminisms that allied with them. Yet in so doing, the exiles did not necessarily identify with or as pro-sex feminists who were busily opposing radical and cultural feminist interests to define feminism for all (Vance 1984, Chapkis 1997). Instead, the exiles I met tended to gather precisely by having granted radical and cultural feminists the authority they sought, thereby accepting exile and naming feminism as that into which they could not fit, and so would not try to claim. New queer cohorts opposed masculinist and feminist sexual conservatism by nurturing the sense of difference exile granted, and seeking for it a logic. Many discovered that logic by embodying a threateningly primitive antagonist to normative sexual culture.

This paper opens in a political moment that emerged from the effects of New Right mobilizations, when primitivist politics became newly useful to claims on cultural citizenship in the U.S. In the 1990's, a post-Civil Rights era reshaped sexual minority organizing through the politics of multiculturalism. Analogies of sexual to racial marginality and white impersonations of racialized sexuality became

mainstream tactics when GLBT movements proclaimed their internal diversity or their belonging to a multicultural nation. In this time, sexual minority subjects could incorporate primitivity as a means to engage a newly inclusive state as well as those historically exclusive feminist projects. Yet if organizers did cultivate primitivity, their narratives let them imagine their actions to be radically disruptive, even as they reinforced the very universal logics of sexuality undergirding normative New Right and feminist claims.

The cases that follow trace the development of a politics of primitivity in a specific gay men's formation, the radical faeries, who informed sexual minority formations, state apparatuses, and feminist projects. The first section considers how a recent political moment incorporated extant faerie primitivist practices into sexual minority projects through racialized claims on cultural citizenship. The second section considers how queer and feminist organizers during the 1990's jointly engaged popular primitivist formations, including the modern primitive and mythopoetic men's movements. By tracing how overlapping queer and feminist networks created new communion around shared primitivist stakes, the section marks where unexamined investments made their work compatible with colonial and masculinist culture. The conclusion considers how the anti-oppressive intentions of the subjects under study might be tapped and transformed by engaging the discrepant anti-racist sexual politics of feminist and queer of color mobilizations.

### Celebrate Diversity

By the early 1990's in northern California, radical faeries appeared to have arrived as queers. Since their inception two decades earlier, radical faerie collectives fostered anti-assimilationist claims that named their practice an alternative culture, countering authoritarianism with anarchist collectivism, fundamentalism with gay-centered spirituality, and gay masculinism with femme- and drag-positive practices. Many faeries who organized politically in the 1980's brought an in-your-face style to ACT UP, Queer Nation, and related direct action projects. By the time a queer cultural moment emerged, faeries had gained a reputation as defiant critics of heteronormativity and binary sex and as allies to other such disruptors. Yet if faeries were embraced in queer spaces, their compatibility was due not only to their sexual politics. By promoting the global and transhistorical amalgam "gay spirituality," faerie cultural

practices questioned and crossed boundaries not only of gender and sexuality but also of race and nation. Faerie culture invited metropolitan subjects to frame their sexual marginality in terms of spatial and temporal movements between the modern and primitive. In this section, I examine how primitivist mediations of race and nation by faerie claims shaped both faerie practices and the sexual minority and state politics that included them.

The first Spiritual Gathering of Radical Faeries, convened in 1979 in rural Arizona, was organized by white gay men from California as a retreat for exploring gay male nature. The gathering adapted extant forms for rural gay men's gatherings across the U.S. During the 1970's, ephemeral gatherings and sustainable collectives emerged among rural working class and landowning gay men, with the aid of urban, mostly white and middle-class gay counterculturalists who sought country self-sufficiency. By 1974 such links were facilitated by the reader-written magazine *RFD*, whose title originated as a play on the USPS acronym for "rural free delivery." *RFD*'s editorial collective described the journal at its inception as "the expression of country faggot men" (RFD Collective 1974, 1). The first radical faeries included many men who had passed through such rural gay men's networks or had read of them in *RFD*, but who now directed them to form a new community.

Values espoused at the first radical faerie gathering mixed liberationist and separatist critiques of internalized oppression, by asserting space where gay men might escape homophobic culture and discover a healing nature (RFD Collective 1979, Thompson 1987). Many activities at the first gathering grew over time into community institutions. The work of running the gathering reflected anarchist and back-to-the-land commitments, with decisions made by consensus, meals prepared collectively, and food purchased or grown from local or sustainable sources. The gathering aura of backwoods summer camp mixed with wilderness adventure imagined a return to nature as a frame for exploring uninhibited sexuality. Everyday activities were infused with sexual possibilities, as aspects of public sex cultures were cultivated alongside intentional sexual rituals that encouraged connection beyond exclusive coupling. Gatherers' states of undress and dress became means for drag practice to encourage play with normative sexuality and gender. The high femme performativity of urban gay drag cultures was inflected by the "country" femme performativity of "trashy" drag, juxtapositions of gendered forms in "gender fuck" drag, and counterculturalist mixtures of

“ethnic” garments that attempted to color the gathering as a global village. Gathering days began with the practice of “heart circle,” which linked the consciousness-raising of men’s liberation work with counterculturalist imaginaries of indigenous community. Participants shared rare emotional truths while passing a “talking stick,” which they were told grounded their speech in an ancient indigenous American practice. Gatherings informed all such practices with a variety of rituals based in European neo-paganism and inflected by putatively American Indian spiritualities. Some rituals analogized American Indians to Europe’s original people in a “Vanishing Indian” narrative in order to frame white American neo-pagans as inheritors of indigenous lifeways, which they could adopt as acts of alliance or kinship rather than appropriation (Joanemariebarker and Teaiwa 1994). Many such activities first emerged at 1970’s-era rural gay men’s gatherings. But while earlier gatherings arose to foster support for isolated rural men, rural men’s participation at faerie gatherings was quickly outpaced by urban gay men, who could use gatherings as temporary rural retreats for the cultivation of new cultural identity and spiritual insight for transport back to urban life.

As gatherings grew in number during the 1980’s, their form and content remained open to participants’ anarchic inspirations, even as the theories of one influential cofounder, Harry Hay, began to define faerie culture for many participants and outsiders. At the 1979 gathering, Hay presented ideas from his recent publications in *RFD* that linked his studies of gay mysticism to European neo-paganism and anthropologies of sexuality among indigenous people. Hay argued that gay men naturally constitute an alternative or third gender, possessed of a “shamanic” capacity, whose purpose it is to balance the excesses of heteropatriarchal power by bringing healing into a violent world (Hay and Burnside 1979, Hay and Kilhefner 1979, Hay 1996). Like visionaries before him whom he echoed, including Magnus Hirschfeld, Edward Carpenter, and Arthur Evans, Hay invoked anthropology in order to claim that a gender-transitive male homosexual role tied to spiritual practice existed among indigenous people throughout the world and all time. This role was an object constructed in nineteenth century colonial ethnology and twentieth century metropolitan sexology and sexual minority politics. Yet for many faeries, it resembled claims by contemporary Native lesbians and gays just enough to secure a crucial belief: that gayness authorized even white gay men to identify with,

if not *as* the social roles practiced among certain indigenous people. Thus from the start, Hay and his followers racialized radical faerie culture as a normatively white imaginary of indigeneity, whose participants could become more like indigenous people than the inheritors of settlement most otherwise were destined to be. Such claims offered gay men and, in masculinist extrapolations, all lesbian, bi, and trans people authentic cultural roots as well as belonging to all nations born on stolen land. Participants in faerie gatherings never universally claimed third gender shaman stories—which remained under constant discussion—but their promotion by some soon cast faeries popularly as white gay men who adopted a version of indigenous culture as their sexual politics.

While faeries created culture that could appear alternative to modernist sexual minority politics, their practices fully overlapped with mainstream GLBT organizing. On entering ethnographic study I was reminded continually of this if, for example, I learned that a gay man I met at a regional rural gathering roomed in San Francisco with lesbian activists, or sat on the board of directors of a Bay Area GLBT service organization. Thus if in my travels or in suspicious gossip by outsiders, faeries appeared to be “out there,” wherever I looked in sexual minority politics I found faeries in here. As laborers and public servants in urban politics and economics, faeries caused the radical alterity they produced at rural gatherings to deliberate the terms of modern life while acting as a mobile fringe of urban sexual minority communities.

Many aspects of faerie sociality directly addressed dilemmas of modern subjectivity for gay men. Investing everyday life with gay spirit could speak to a malaise among some participants that even whiteness, manhood, and economic mobility did not guarantee full cultural citizenship. But other participants sought the faeries in order to counter multiple experiences of marginalization. Faerie culture promised a safe haven for those targeted by gay masculinism’s femme-phobia and trans-phobia, and invited explorations past the strictures of gender binaries. The everyday exploitations of working class, poor, and homeless gay men by the normalized commercialism of urban gay districts drew some to rural gatherings for respite, to rural collectives for retreat, or to urban collectives for mutual aid. Faerie culture also mediated white gay racism for that proportional handful of participants of color. Faerie space offered men of color a problematic arena for self-discovery—yet, some argued to me, one no more problematic than the many other white-

washed GLBT and queer spaces available to them. Some even joined the faeries in order to initiate a process of decolonization. Since faerie practices not only acknowledged but celebrated the sexual and spiritual histories of indigenous people and people of color, men of color could adapt faerie stories to the work of remapping ancestral history and memory, or of imagining alliance with indigenous people against colonial violence and forgetting. Such practices placed men of color in an awkward position if they, too, discovered gay truth in an ancient, static past that essentialized indigenous people or obviated creative responses to colonialism. Yet faeries of color mediated their positions by engaging white faeries in critical dialogues about racism and cultural appropriation, and so echoed conversations in the larger sexual communities to which they returned.

One thread linking practitioners across their varied stakes was the intervention faerie sociality made in the everyday effects of HIV/AIDS. Arising close in time to the epidemic, faerie communities grew partly as a counter to hegemonic religions' rejection of gay men as people deserving death. Third gender shaman stories became particularly useful: presenting gay men as spiritually and socially central figures argued not only for their acceptance but also for attending to their insights into dying and living. As the epidemic progressed, the rural lands that faeries inherited for gatherings became infused with memories of the generations of gay men who had lived, played, and died there. Construction of permanent memorials to lost faeries reinforced the lands as sites of pilgrimage, where gay men might reconnect to an imagined community between the past and present, and the material and spiritual worlds. Politicized faeries' investments in gay men's sexuality and spirituality became marked in sexual minority organizing when, for instance, mid-1990's federal and state HIV/AIDS funds targeted community-based organizing. In one small city in the San Francisco region where I conducted long-term ethnographic research, regional service providers claimed faeries as a resource after HIV prevention models sought to alter low self-esteem among men who have sex with men. A set of local radical faeries coordinated as a 501c3 affiliate of the city's GLBT community center in order to be contracted to host a summer camp for queer youth. Among other themes the event emphasized fun in nature, bonding across social differences, and learning the spiritual roots of being gay. Such projects confirmed a regard for faeries in local sexual minority organizing, which

not only included but accentuated their differences in order to accomplish tasks of interest to all.

Let me tell you a story which suggests how the racialization of faerie culture informed not only sexual minority politics, but also the state apparatuses to which they claimed to belong. In the city noted above, whose historically "progressive" politics leaned left of the Democratic Party, civic politics of race, class, and nationality became hot topics of debate in 1999. A city council majority led by a progressive slate of white, educationally-privileged men had come under public critique for their proposed solution to an impending fiscal crisis. Their support for a lucrative local industry's plans for expansion entailed agreeing to raze and redevelop a historically Chicano/Latino working class neighborhood. Opposition by Chicano and Latino political organizations placed under debate the councilmen's self-promotion as inclusive representatives for those historically marginalized from politics. At the same time, the city's GLBT community center faced a weakening volunteer base, even as dialogues were emerging between past and present organizers and regional GLBT and queer activists of color. Discussions began to question a historical lack of leadership or participation in the center by people of color, as well as a focus of the center's past organizing on sexuality and gender in ways that backgrounded racial or economic justice issues, or engaged them in terms comfortable to white people. In June of 1999, the center sponsored its largest volunteer-organized event of the year, the Pride parade, with the theme "Celebrate Diversity." The parade brought together regional GLBT and queer community-based and advocacy organizations in a march down the city's main street, leading to a party in a public park near the county government building. That year, members of the city council were to be fêted as the parade's grand marshals for having supported major issues in local GLBT politics. As usual, the parade included a radical faerie contingent, but in a way that suggested how normatively white politics of cultural citizenship could be mediated by faerie primitivity.

From my vantage at the center of downtown, shadowed by trees in front of the local gay bar and opposite an upscale natural foods supermarket, I watched contingents in their casual Friday- or Saturday-wear march with long banners and hand-held signs. I heard the echoes of drumming long before being able to see their players. But maybe visual markers weren't needed, for after queries around me of, "What is that?" word spread, "It's the faeries!" Behind the

orderly walkers we soon saw a circle of twenty to thirty people weaving around and up the street towards us. They appeared to be a circle of men, most bare-chested, and a colorful few in skirts and festooned with scarves, jewelry, headdresses, face paint, body paint, or bells. To the beat of djembes and tablas played behind them they skipped and held hands, while as speed built they punctuated their rhythm with ululations. Here was the only contingent eschewing the seeming transparency of spoken or written slogans in favor of a nonverbal performance, which invited interpretation. As I asked people near me how the folks read, one remarked that they were communicating "the joy of being gay." Earlier, another had commented spontaneously, "They sure know how to have fun!" Later that day I ran into an old friend, a young white woman professional active in local lesbian and bisexual community organizing. On rushing to see me, her years of honoring faeries as men who critique heterosexism echoed in her excited first words: "Weren't the faeries fabulous?" Here, her words echoed a marching chant heard at a generation of ACT-UP marches and Pride parades, with syllables punctuated by staccato claps: "fâe rîes-are fâb-u lous...fâe-ries-are fâb-u lous!"

I agree, the faeries were fabulous, if their actions were meant to be read by spectators in a precise way. For these faeries were not fabulous like the playful yet passing-serious invocations of civility by the Empress and Emperor of the local transgenderist Empire, who had joined Pride festivities in the next big city down the valley. Nor were they identically fabulous to the trans-American pop femme performances by drag queens at a locally-famous Latino club in the agricultural district across the freeway. The faeries dancing down this material center of civic life performatively disinvested in the drag of modernity in order to proclaim a specifically primitive fabulousness that made gayness both fun and original. By appearing amidst marching lines, business dress, and English-language placards, the ancient times and far-off places faeries wordlessly invoked and incorporated became another potential point of connection for witnesses, including the government from which organizers sought and gained a degree of recognition.

Participation by faeries in this scene reflects one way in which politics of race shaped claims on U.S. citizenship in the 1990's, including ways specific to sexual minority organizing. Scholars have marked this decade as the ascendance of a post-Civil Rights era, when movement-won measures for restructuring state and economic

power weakened in the face of anti-immigrant, anti-union, and anti-affirmative action agendas (Omi and Winant 1994, Crenshaw 1998). Multiculturalism became useful in this time within both liberal and conservative responses to charges of marginalization: normative institutions could invoke a politics of appreciation and inclusion in order to diversify their constituents, while sustaining or elaborating business-as-usual (Alarcón 1996, Cohen 1999). Chela Sandoval has examined how even as a newly inclusive social contract seemed to redress past inequities, the appeal of marginality as a political standpoint grew. She argues that as liberation movement legacies and economic globalization destabilized modernist foundations of political identity, “first world citizen-subjects” in a “democratization of oppression” claimed the political currency of the social margins in order to advance their interests while preserving past privileges (Sandoval 2000, 34). Under such conditions, if otherwise normative political actors argued sufficiently for their own marginality, a multicultural state could reinforce normativity by adopting them as the signs of its own diversity.

Sexual minority organizers were informed by this political moment when they promoted racial analogies, or what Janet Halley has called “like race” arguments (Halley 2001, Bérubé 2001). Organizers in predominantly white sexual minority politics have been able to claim a sense of absolute marginality by drawing analogies between their status and normative tales of the absolute racial marginality of people of color. Racial analogies can appear to their proponents to be a responsible means to address racism. Yet coding communities of color as “race” in comparison to a “sexuality” necessarily located elsewhere naturalizes whiteness in sexual minority politics, and—as Crenshaw said of Black women’s place in feminist and anti-racist discourses—consigns queers of color “to a location that resists telling” (Crenshaw 1997, 179). If multicultural logics then frame normatively white sexual minority projects as a form of cultural diversity, those projects become equivalent to groups targeted by racism at the very moment that they evade examining their own racial formation. Such framings also affirm state multiculturalism as a proper medium for political redress, which may reinforce any state interest to absorb forms of diversity that least threaten its normative agendas. If such things occur, then what Lisa Duggan has called “homonormativity” places GLBT and queer organizing closer to the democratization of oppression, and further from the

critical interrogations of sex, race, and nation within feminist and queer of color mobilizations (Duggan 2003).

At Pride 1999, the local GLBT community center's appeals to diversity acted as racial analogies in their resonance with concurrent local racial politics. By encouraging witnesses to celebrate diversity, organizers announced their support for multiculturalism in society and their community, even as they asked that their version of sexual minority culture count as a form of diversity in itself. Such claims had varied racial implications for their proponents. Throughout the 1990's, the center had been defined by efforts to represent a conflictual array of sexualities and genders. By 1999, I understood most white proponents of the category "diversity" to mean by it the manifest differences of trans, bi, lesbian, and gay people gathered under one banner at the center. Yet if their differences were described as differences of culture, they could inhabit an ontology of bounded groups normatively assigned to race and so could set conditions for posing analogies. Such a claim linked to another, when the center's communities named their multiracial make-up as evidence that the center promoted racial diversity, even though their white participants vastly predominated despite having gathered in a much more racially and ethnically mixed region. Claims of internal racial diversity could reflect a coding of sexual minority formations by stories of their cross-cultural purview, which authorize them to speak on behalf of a wide range of sexual subjects even while noting their local absence. When either such claim on diversity informed Pride 1999, whiteness in the center or its communities was naturalized at the moment that they appeared to speak against racism. If either claim arose without addressing emergent critiques of how the center engaged people of color and working people, center communities could be framed as allies of projects to which they were not accountable. When such claims then focalized the center's public assertion of citizenship at Pride, they informed a city council whose multicultural values were in need of reinforcement. The council accepted adoration from a normatively white political project, and so helped celebrate diversity in a way that would be unlikely to increase public challenge to its economic policies.

When the faeries contributed to Pride 1999, community leaders in this small city would likely have recognized many dancers from other contexts. Some were staff in city, county, and non-profit social services, while some others worked as career or volunteer organizers in GLBT and queer community-based and advocate projects,

where they devised and implemented local community and government policies. That so many civic workers should depart wildly from an orderly march demonstrated their knowledge that belonging was available to claim through more than modernist performativity. The tiny proportion of men of color in their contingent might have put the lie to their own diversity, if the contingent did not also recall a historically crucial radical faerie message: diverse gay people may be dispersed worldwide, but an essential nature connects them, and any invocation of it is liberating for all—here, even for absent local people of color. In this light, I read faeries less as a margin or alternative to sexual minority politics, and more as a point of cathexis for other subjects' desires to discover global and transhistorical belonging. Faeries perform for themselves and all who listen an original sexuality, which suggests the elements of cultural diversity required for minority claims on citizenship. In this scene, the particular performance faeries offered allowed center communities and council members to set aside their lack of an answer for their own racial and economic formation in the momentary joy of realizing the old gay liberation adage, "we are everywhere." Rooting for queers appears here as a mode of knowledge production and a pedagogy: celebrating queers invites witnesses to excavate deep pasts and cross distant borders in the hope of discovering and cultivating a sexual root truth that will elicit present and future belonging.

### Reconciliations

Primitivist practices in late 1990's sexual minority politics developed during a decade in which queers had cultivated ancient liberations, with some connection to the feminisms that had exiled them. Many forms of emergent queer culture synergized queer and feminist primitivist stakes. Queer cultural workers realized their historic connections to primitivist feminisms, even as some marked their potential to fulfill feminist desires. Feminists challenged by racism in their movements or by masculinist backlash found in queer primitivist practices some hope for resolving difficulties. The following section characterizes the culture of this period by reading moments in which queer and feminist practices became linked through claims on ancient roots and utopian futures. While their practices seemed to transcend or heal divisions caused by the sex wars, the politically radical culture they hoped to create also naturalized colonial masculinist discourses in their projects.

Queer primitivist practices in northern California emerged during a period of expanding regional primitivist cultural production. In the late 1980s, commentators recalled San Francisco's history of fostering Orientalist and naturist countercultures when they dubbed a set of dynamic new formations a "modern primitive" movement (Vale and Juno 1989). Institutions burgeoned across the Bay Area in support of piercing, tattooing, and other body modifications, as well as new communities of practice. While the term "modern primitive" projected uniformity onto disparate activities, the energy of proclaiming a movement renewed extant countercultures and inspired new ones (Rosenblatt 1997). Regional institutions supporting neo-paganism grew—among them feminist institutions such as Reclaiming Collective, under Starhawk's leadership (Starhawk 1987). New practices also emerged, as from humble beginnings at a small 1986 San Francisco beach gathering, cultural workers over the following fifteen years built Burning Man into an annual Nevada gathering of 30,000 for bohemian- and pagan-inspired revelry (Kreuter 2002). Across their many differences, attendees' linked practices circulated utopian claims that renewing primitive culture would counter the depredations of modernity and foster a new age of global communion.

Modern primitive culture intersects Philip Deloria's genealogy of Indian impersonation at a point when modernist claims on civilizational belonging were altered by postmodern conditions and produced contemporary countercultures. I wish to read Deloria's argument in conversation with Chela Sandoval, in order to argue that in the U.S., New Age cultivations of indigeneity gained political utility during racialized shifts from national to global citizenship. Sandoval argued that as legacies of liberation movements and contemporary globalization destabilized the discursive power of colonial modernism, including the policing of racial and national essence, first world citizen-subjects newly democratized oppression in the interests of sustaining privileges. New Age practices emerged as a response to these conditions by freeing cultural differences, including their racial or national bounds, into a circulation that undermined their exclusivity while promising belonging to a newly globally interconnected world. In the New Age marketplace of culture, a postmodern economy releases indigeneity from any necessary reference to indigenous people, and fashions it as an aspect of metropolitan subjects to be transacted within their self-help consumerism. New Age culture both sustains and disavows its authority over

indigenous identity through the language of human liberation, so that first world citizen-subjects can imagine themselves to be redeemers of the very colonial relations that they extend. Modern primitive practices inherit these dynamics when they extrapolate loosely analogized imaginaries of primitivity onto the bodies of metropolitan consumers. Tattoos, piercings, and other modifications become evidence of an ideal indigeneity whose recombinations exceed what any specific indigenous practice could represent. Modern primitives then embody crucial agents for transforming modern power, as well as for carrying otherwise forgotten truths into a future utopia when indigeneity will be remembered by all.

Emergent queer communities were informed by a modern primitive moment. The communities had been influenced by exiles from the sex wars whose practices could encourage blurring, recombining, or erasing boundaries of binary gender and sexuality. Queers gathered in primitivist form if those crossing sexual borders also invited or required transcending borders of culture, race, or nation towards original sexual liberations. In northern California, a variety of queer networks came to constitute linked regional economies of cultural difference in which production and consumption of the sexual wisdom of authentic cultures could serve as a means to realize queer selfhood. For instance, women responding to the sexual censoring of New Right or feminist projects could adopt primitivist logics as a frame for discovering lost sexual agency. In the Bay Area and across the U.S. Annie Sprinkle portrayed liberated sexuality in her popular performances, which named her identity or intimacy with sex workers, transsexuals, and other sexual outlaws as part of asserting her empowerment in queer form. Her "Sluts and Goddesses" workshops narrated sexual and spiritual possibilities from across societies and eras as an offering to audience members for "exploring the different sexual personalities inside yourself, and accepting them" (Vale and Juno 1991, 34; see also Sprinkle 1998). Gay men who innovated safe sexual culture in the age of HIV were inspired by women's and radical faeries' globalist visions of empowered sexuality. Joseph Kramer's Oakland-based Body Electric School of Massage combined formal massage and sex party culture in its workshops, offering erotic therapy, in which composite tales of sexual and spiritual knowledge from around the world invited gay men to realize their sexual nature, as well as an array of women- and trans-friendly workshops. Offerings such as Sprinkle's and Kramer's passed through marketplaces such as San Francisco's

Good Vibrations, a woman-centered sex toy and erotica store, whose local workshop series grew to reflect the varied gendered and sexual insights a queer moment enabled. Over time, circulating ideas and practices inspired collectives to form and codify what they read as an emergent queer spirituality. During the late 1990's, the annual northern California rural retreat Queer Spirit inspired trans and non-trans straight, lesbian, and gay neo-paganists to gather and interpret their varied practices as a conjoined queer spiritual culture. Participants shared stories of their original sexual purposes and destinies, and imagined how their differing powers could mesh to heal one another and humanity from oppressions. Gathering participants included some inspired by a scholarly project recently completed by their Bay Area friends, and published as *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit* (Conner et al 1997). With the mix of detail and brevity of an armchair anthropological catalogue, the text argued for a queer compatibility among the lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and feminist spiritual practices it claimed to have discovered and correlated among authentic cultures from throughout the world and all time. As such knowledges and practices circulated among consumers and practitioners, primitivist desires interwove them across what only recently had been deep divisions in the interests of mutually inspiring liberations.

I wish to read a document of these times, *The Cosmic Tribe Tarot*, for its reflection of what queer primitivist networks produced, as well as for its role as a site facilitating their growth. The tarot deck's cards are based on full-body photographs, many of which portray faerie, feminist, neo-pagan, modern primitive, drag queen, and other countercultural allies of the artist, a San Francisco-based radical faerie. Each card's photograph is enhanced by dramatic digital imagery, which overlays archetypal powers on the model's everyday performativity. A handful of brown and black models among the deck's seventy-eight cards reflects rather well the proportion of participants of color in the networks being photographed. Some models of color have a racial location imputed by their card's narrative, while the apparent preponderance of white models fills sequences of cards that narrate general principles of the cosmic tribe, including skill at crossing and melding cultures. At mid-1990's rural faerie gatherings, I recall the artist periodically bringing his latest image proofs, around which groups would gather. The cards' technical artistry often elicited expressions of amazement, which could reflect faeries' modern primitive interests, as if computer-generated images

invoked a spiritual essence they came to the woods to tap. But conversations about an image always sparked friendly or catty chats about the model, who regularly was named as someone's friend, lover, or ally, if not present in the group itself. In moments of recognizing relationship or identity, I heard witnesses speak of their investments in the cards as a welcome record of otherwise ephemeral networks, or as a testament to their insights which, through the cards' circulation, might soon benefit a wider world. That most models were photographed nude also caused the cards' travels to index gendered and sexual tensions in a queer era. When debate emerged among northern California faeries about the wishes of some to fulfill Harry Hay's early interest in "faggot-only" space, other faeries' queer embrace of fluid identities and desires with women and trans people was echoed in the deck's portrayal of female and ambiguously-sexed bodies as archetypes for gay male self-development. After the deck's publication in 1997, I recall conversations among women patrons of a Bay Area feminist bookstore that marketed the deck, who argued its importance as a woman-positive tarot that also portrayed the queer practices they claimed. They marked in particular the deck's interspersing of cultural feminist icons of women's empowerment with female and male nudes whose myriad body modifications and fluid gender performance read queerly. In doing so, the deck put the lie to radical or cultural feminist claims of an incompatibility of queer practices with feminism, and affirmed the interests of some to embody a next feminist generation.

A set of images that narrate possible or actual queer/feminist intimacies through mutual primitivist stakes appears in the face cards of the suit of disks, representing the foundational element earth. In defiance of heteropatriarchal tarot imagery, the deck offers as its suits' sole sovereign a Queen, who is complemented by a Knight, Princess, and Prince. In the suit of disks, the models portraying the Queen and Princess code as feminist versions of the European neopagan earth mother, Gaia (Eisler 1988). The Queen is a full-bodied, ebullient goddess in solid stance, whose tanned limbs and long blonde tresses generate digitally-enhanced grasses and thick branches of trees. The pale Princess sits contemplatively while gently exhorted by the deck's narrative to reject a self-image fostered by a patriarchal, fat-phobic culture, so that she might claim her body's beauty as a mirror of Gaian power. While these images invite appreciation by a particular audience of women readers, they

are paired with the Knight and Prince who are framed for a particular audience of men via faerie theories of third gender shamanism. The pale skin of their slender bodies is darkened by the coppery hues of caked mud, while the Prince dances in primitivist body paint as a shaman-in-training, and the Knight stands commandingly atop a boulder, in which a tiny door opens to his shamanic journeys into spiritual realms.

These four cards' juxtaposition announces cultural feminists and radical faeries, in the apparent form of white women and white gay men, as mutually foundational guides to their own and their readers' liberations. The cards recall Hay's vision of the faeries' complementarity with cultural feminists, many of whom sought rural retreat from capitalist heteropatriarchy as a means to discover women's nature. Dialogue on such links was interrupted early: faerie communities arose amidst the distancing of cultural feminists from gay male culture, while faerie AIDS activists defended public sex and sex work to the chagrin of feminists who critiqued them. Yet in a queer moment, faeries have invited cultural feminists to partner in the interests of greater liberations than either can accomplish alone. For beyond healing the sex wars, *The Cosmic Tribe Tarot* proposes universal healing through a return to original sexual and spiritual truth. The deck's narrative suggests that amidst disasters caused by modern technology and economic globalization run amok, the cards promote a "technopaganism," which adapts their infrastructure to image and promote an alternative globalization (Ganter 1998, 4). Indigenous truths taken up by queers and feminists on behalf of the Vanished will be offered to all, in hope of realizing relationships among all people and the non-human world while creating a newly cosmic tribe. In this frame, the queer communities that the deck transforms into living archetypes facilitate healing the ills of economic globalization, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy amongst themselves and all who engage them. Queer/feminist divisions are reconciled by granting those who join a privileged place in the cosmic tribe and its promise of human freedom.

If primitivist practices linked feminism to faeries and other queers, including queer feminist women, women in historically feminist projects found their own inspiration in the primitivist route to manhood that faeries embodied. During the 1990's men's movements and transmen were challenging women's communities to grapple with questions of men and feminism. In turn, conversations about racism

had complicated universal claims by hegemonic feminisms, but not necessarily by undoing their primitivist foundations. Amidst deliberations of the sexual, racial, and global terms of women's organizing, faeries appeared to offer a manhood compatible with both queer transformations and feminist desires, but in ways that despite intentions could affirm colonial masculinist discourses.

In the Bay Area city of which I wrote above, stories circulating in predominantly white lesbian and bi women's networks cast faeries as not only fabulous, but also sweet and loving men, among those with whom women could work, or the ones some women wished all men could emulate. I recall one such story over dinner in 1998, as I sat with a local faerie community organizer as well as two women volunteers in a GLBT media collective he co-facilitated. Both women were also active in local lesbian and queer organizing. Conversation turned to a high-school student new to queer activism whom all three knew through their work. As we wondered aloud how this young man would find support for his femme practices and sensitive emotionality, one woman announced forthrightly, "Get that kid taken by the faeries!" and the rest agreed. Her phrase echoed the title of a play, *Taken By the Faeries*, that had passed through town a few years prior. In it two gay men performed a shamanic map of gay male consciousness by invoking gendered and sexual insights they had gained at faerie gatherings (Baum 1994).

Such sentiments echoed in my interactions with employees and patrons of a women's bookstore and café that supported a local lesbian and women's community. The proprietor of the bookstore often remarked that faeries were men whom she appreciated deeply as supporters of her enterprise, and as collaborators in producing positive culture for women and queer folk. Her words spoke to a late 1990's moment when the shop and its clientele had grown with the times. After years in which riot grrrl and femme/butch patrons and employees had increasingly defined a space that also honored cultural feminist forms, some were beginning to identify as gender-queer, or as men moving towards sex reassignment. Friends of the bookstore were among the lesbian and bi women in town who supported one another in this time, as their partners or friends practiced gender more fluidly or transitioned. As local women's spaces became increasingly queered, many women advocated that they facilitate sustained connection with transmen who had transitioned after first being part of the community. The proprietor spoke to these conversations in 1997 by celebrating the publication of Loren

Cameron's collection of FTM transsexual photographs, *Body Alchemy* (1996), with a bookstore-sponsored lecture and slideshow by Cameron. The packed event drew crowds of local transmen and gender-queers, most in their teens or twenties, alongside many younger and older feminist and queer women. Amidst them all mixed contingents of local radical faeries, who were present as queer friends and supporters of all concerned. I read the proprietor's reciprocations with faeries in context of such a moment, when feminist women worked hard to create collective space that celebrated men, or produced new men, who would be compatible with extant and transforming women's communities.

The question of how to make men for feminism had shaped U.S. feminist conversations long before the challenges presented by queerness. Tracing the asking and answering of the question indexes part of the racial and national formation of U.S. feminisms. Kay Leigh Hagan considered the question in an essay in the anthology *Feminism and Men* (1998). She explained her relatively recent interest in fashioning men for feminism by analogy to her learning to confront racism in white women's movements. While for many years her lesbian feminist commitments had kept her from perceiving men as anything but problematic, Hagan noted that she had learned to recognize some as "good men" due to their having struggled to understand the relationship between privilege and oppression in their lives. Hagan described how critiques of white women's racism by feminists of color had led her to recognize privilege in her own life: while her prior lesbian feminist identity as a woman admitted no privilege, her new identity as a white woman immediately did. As a result, Hagan argued, she had learned to appreciate the oppressions faced by men whom she knew, such as homophobia or class oppression, even as she had learned to sympathize with their struggles against male privilege, given her work to understand and challenge her own white privilege.

Hagan's text narrates a white anti-racist awakening in context of white women's movements, even as it attempts an intersectional proposal for feminist alliance between women and men. Yet in announcing a path by which good men might be produced for feminism, Hagan did not disrupt her core question, "can men be good?" That question still proposes an originary status, "bad men," whom her argument suggests will become good once a means has been found to make them so. Hagan's argument for feminist men thus sustains a belief in men's essential danger to women, even as she echoes past

feminist calls that men be mobilized separately once they begin work for women's liberation. Such formulations presume two feminist positions that have been marked as hegemonic in Black and women of color feminist critiques: that a movement of women necessarily works in women's interests, and, that the only or best way for men to be feminist is for them to organize apart. Scholars and activists had demonstrated by the time of Hagan's writing that feminist movements will act against women if they protect some women's interests in whiteness, capital, or empire (Davis 1981, Smith 1990, Crenshaw 1997). "The Combahee River Collective Statement," alongside other texts, specifically marked separatism in U.S. feminist organizing as a white women's strategy, which suggested the only significant power differential facing women was gender. In contrast, commitments by women of color to organize coalitionally did not preclude organizing against racism alongside men of color, including holding men of color accountable to anti-heteropatriarchal action in their lives and in anti-racist movements (Combahee River Collective 1983, Smith 1983, Davis and Martinez 1994, hooks 1998). Such positions echoed in Black feminist challenges to renewed masculinity in anti-racist projects during the 1990's. An increasing range of Black politics suggested that failures of patriarchal leadership called for Black communities to be saved by new organizing among men of color. For supporters of the Million Man March, Angela Davis described the contradiction inherent in suggesting that Black men could build an anti-oppressive, and particularly anti-sexist community without working alongside Black women (1998). Davis' work reminds us that such suggestions dismiss legacies of Black collective resistance that were enacted precisely by tactical collaborations of Black women with men. Given such arguments, white feminist calls for a separate movement to make good men could claim anti-racist inspiration, but they betrayed a distance from feminist of color conversations by missing crucial claims. Women of color feminist theories of intersectionality already presumed that sexual essentialism will not save women from the multiple powers shaping their lives, for even feminist invocations of sexual essentialism can facilitate reinscribing those powers.

In this light, I read white women's framings of faeries as a movement to make good men as a reflection on their ongoing struggles with men in hegemonic feminism. During the early 1990's, normatively white and national women's movements faced one of their worst nightmares, and not in the form of new racial nationalism gal-

vanizing Black men. Two decades of calls for a movement of men to support women finally seemed answered, with betrayal by the very people to whom invitations were first sent. The mythopoetic men's movement began promoting a reinvigoration of natural manhood in the interests of its core constituency of straight, white, and class-privileged men. Robert Bly and other leaders suggested that men drawn to their movement had been emasculated by feminism, by which they invoked that range of hegemonic projects that claimed universal representation of women in liberal, Marxist, radical, or cultural feminist terms. The popularity of mythopoetics indicates how it tapped a powerful method for forming political subjectivity through a primitivist claim on manhood. Yet when feminists failed to mark that method as part of the mythopoetic movement's problem, or promoted faeries as an alternative, they revealed that all concerned inherited deep discursive legacies that proposed that authentic gender under modern conditions will be found through a return to primitive roots.

Historiographers and cultural critics have traced how reconsolidations of hegemonic manhood among the white ruling classes of the U.S. have linked civilized men's salvation to incorporating primitive origins. Under certain historical conditions, colonial masculinist claims on the difference of modern gender have invented, disavowed, and reclaimed a dangerously primitive manhood in order to complete white ruling class men's journey to supremacy. Philip Deloria suggested that revolutionary and early Republican manhood initiated a definition of citizenship in terms of oscillations between primitive rebellion and civilizational advancement. Gail Bederman has argued that in a late-nineteenth century moment of Darwinian evolutionism and imperialism—including threats posed by Euro-ethnic immigration, worker organizing, and decolonizing movements at home and abroad—U.S. white ruling class definitions of manhood began shifting from superceding primitivity, to strategically incorporating it as part of claims on civilized authority (Bederman 1994). In these contexts, primitivist practices—from protesters' charades and fraternal initiations, to Boy Scout survivalism and U.S. imperial ventures—enabled reconnecting to primitive roots through retreat from the space and time of modernity. Crossing urban-rural and metropolitan-colonial divides served as physical, mental, and spiritual pedagogies that sought to virilize modern manhood.

Scholars of contemporary culture have argued that such legacies inform claims on citizenship in recent political mobilizations of men. Susan Jeffords and Linda Boose have noted how cultural work and community organizing after the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam articulated defensive responses by straight white men to a loss of stable manhood based on military heroism. Men blamed this loss not on military leadership but on certain vagaries of modern life, such as disruptions of industrial and Cold War economies by globalization, or a generation of anti-war, civil rights, feminist, and lesbian and gay movements, including critiques of U.S. military racism in east, southeast, and west Asia. Thus across all their discrepancies, Vietnam War media, the mythopoetic men's movement, and the Gulf War can be read to have converged as projects to reinvigorate modern men by engaging, controlling, and incorporating the violent potency of savage Others (Jeffords 1989, Boose 1993). Certainly we need to clarify the great differences between post-Vietnam War agendas for military conquest and Bly's poetic smothering of the imagination in a global and transhistorical "deep masculine" (1991). Yet we also need explanation for the unhappy convergence of Bly's early anti-war and feminist stakes with a mood that sent *Iron John* to the top of *The New York Times* bestseller lists even as U.S. troops marched from Kuwait into the killing fields of southern Iraq. Within quite distinct projects, a related logic moved: return to the space and time of primitivity invigorates manhood for modern men and reconstitutes their social position in face of threat.

Initial feminist readings of mythopoetic movements tended either to critique their lack of participation by men of color, working class men, and queer men, or to challenge the men within them to become feminist allies (Clatterbaugh 1990, Hagan 1992, Ruether 1992, Kimmell and Kaufman 1995).<sup>3</sup> But such readings could sustain a dangerous notion that mythopoetic movements deserved critique because they did a poor job producing men, rather than consider that joining their project might be bad for anybody, or that the entire idea of producing men through movement might be the heart of the problem. R. W. Connell recalled historical mobilizations of men when he defined "hegemonic masculinity" as a simultaneously racial, economic, national, and sexual production of manhood that has served the expansion of European imperial capital (Connell 1993, 1995). Many feminist critics in the 1990's missed Connell's contribution—perhaps most egregiously, Susan Faludi in *Stiffed* (1999)—if they bought a colonial masculinist story that men's

ills in the U.S. today are caused by the enervations of modernity. Instead, they can be read as effects of recent (re)constitutions of essential sex, which mobilized men as racialized agents of U.S. national, economic, and imperial hegemony. Historically and today, men marginalized by nationality, class, race, or sexuality have encountered such mobilizations as sites of assimilation and counter-hegemonic potential, even if using them in their own interests opens them to extending hegemony.<sup>4</sup> As I have indicated, feminist women may inherit such legacies as readily as any men. In *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, Starhawk's cogent critique of mythopoetic contradictions—especially their complicity with imperial warfare—concludes with an invitation to men to reclaim a pre-patriarchal pagan manhood as a basis for communion with women. Here, her counter-hegemonic politics revealed others' compatibility with hegemonic agendas, but left her questioning which reinvigoration of natural manhood we will choose (Starhawk 1992). As long as modernity appears to be the source of men's ills, primitivist retreat might seem to be a direct route to better manhood. Yet if feminists were to mark how they inherit such discursive legacies, their potential for complicity with the powers they wish to oppose could be opened for discussion.

In this context, appeals to faeries as friends to women suggest that better men might be produced by cultivating better origins. In fact, many faeries testify that retreat to their gatherings' time-outside-time fosters peaceful and loving modes of manhood, in which rigidity, competition, and the alienations of urban capitalist life are replaced by natural emplacement, collectivism, and gender fluidity. Yet in 1997, when journalist Wendy Martino offered a rare feature story on faeries outside GLBT media, her ironic characterization of them as "a kinder, gentler men's movement" suggested one way that remaking men's return to roots still productively echoed national reconfigurations of American manhood (Martino 1997). Steve Niva has described how the emergence of the U.S. as a sole superpower meshed Bush Sr.'s "kinder, gentler" conservatism with the gendering of the Gulf War to produce what he called a "New World Order masculinity." Sensitive and inclusive manhood became the new face of the state at the very moment of the technological elaboration and unchallenged deployment of American military power. Hegemonic masculinity here incorporated qualities feminists once argued men should adopt—crying in public, letting women serve their country, caring for the conditions of women

abroad—as proof that expanding empire and renewed conservatism could rescue American men from an emasculating “Vietnam syndrome” while standing as an answer to feminism (Niva 1998). In this case, a kinder, gentler mobilization of men does not necessarily make it anything other than part of feminism’s problem. Martino actually argued that faeries do not inherit mythopoetic or other men’s movement models, citing faerie stories of roots in gay liberation and indigenous cultures (Martino 1997, 24). Yet despite their opposition to conservative politics, her and the faeries’ plays on words did not point out that even inviting kindness and gentleness into movements of men can, in fact, extend hegemony.

Faeries and feminists who adapted primitivist practices demonstrably resisted heteropatriarchal power and fostered oppositional subjectivities. Yet normativity reasserted itself if subjects failed to question their desire to occupy primitivity, which in a commoditization of indigeneity and naturalization of conquest grants them authority over past and future worlds of sexual essence and authentic culture. Moments of new alliance led queer and feminist practitioners to imagine that they offered healing to one another, or to all people in a globalizing world, even as their normative investments remained in force.

### Conclusion

This paper described how queer appeals to cultural citizenship and feminist communion promoted a racialized return to original sexuality. While cultivating colonial imaginaries of indigeneity as a basis for sexual subjectivity, practitioners sought to transcend normative hierarchies even while affirming them in their own and related politics. The very activity that linked queers to feminists and the state precisely reinforced divisions of all of them from subjects already alienated by their politics. Colonial discourses constitute sexual minority formations within discourses of race and nation, meaning those formations’ normative politics may follow not from an ignorance or denial of, but rather a constitutive investment in racial and national power. This argument suggests that participants in sexual minority formations will be compatible with, if not agents of, normativity unless their living colonial legacies are marked and challenged.

Queer subjectivity formed for the subjects of this paper by causing primitivity to mediate their belonging to whiteness, U.S. citizenship,

and a globalizing world. These queers—some of whom became newly feminist queers—invested in stories of a global and transhistorical minority sexuality which linked metropolitan sexual margins to spatially and temporally distant authentic cultures. They then adopted indigenous roles as their own history, reflecting and promoting a classic anthropological claim on the truth of Others to inform a world-traveling Self. They thought to oppose legacies of colonialism, but those legacies were left intact if they buttressed a metropolitan positionality that granted purview over a world of cultural differences. Thus they became authorized to define and promote indigeneity outside an accountable relationship with indigenous people. These practices of subject-formation occurred in a moment of reconnection among queers, including queer feminists, and those women whose feminist commitments once held them apart. A new frame of alliance across old divisions let them imagine they healed one another or all humanity through their shared primitivist stakes, even while they reinforced racial and national normativity in their sexual politics.

While most primitivist queers and feminists arguably have not investigated their historical and cultural conditions of possibility, my research would not have begun had I not met practitioners who wished to involve me in ongoing conversations about colonialism and racism within their communities. Spaces for such dialogue arise recurrently among radical faeries and neo-pagan feminists in the U.S., and those present today are sites to which I offer this paper's analysis for further deliberation. For instance, in the first years of the millennium radical faeries at regional gatherings in Tennessee generated a new affinity group called "Faeries of All Colors Together." The group discussed the dearth of participants of color and relations among white men and men of color in faerie communities, including how they are shaped by racism or appropriation. In a climate of military and capital expansion, radical faeries and neo-pagan feminists newly theorized links among heteropatriarchy, globalization, and war. Starhawk acted as a prominent organizer of and commentator on anti-globalization actions, including by proposing strategies for disrupting and transforming institutions that facilitate global capital's spread (Starhawk 2001, 2003). In the winter of 2001 faeries and friends produced an *RFD* issue entitled "WAR," in which articles offered vibrant opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan, while exposing contradictions in U.S. military policy and complicities with imperialism in gay men's culture and politics

(*RFD* 2001). While not all radical faeries and neo-pagan feminists claim anti-globalization or anti-war stakes, the fact that some so prominently do centers such discussions in their communities.

Yet if, as this paper argues, primitivist queer and feminist projects can think to oppose colonialism and still enforce its legacies, a question remains of what must occur if participants wish to effect change. I offer no pat answer, but I will reiterate that this paper does not suggest that movements shaped by colonial discourses are bad, while movements shaped otherwise may be good. All claims on late modern sexual minority politics are informed by colonial discourses; to my knowledge, none have escaped them. Thus normative sexual minority projects actually share a status with queer of color mobilizations, as counter-hegemonic formations that must find their way between colonial normativity and anti-colonial practice. What distinguishes queer of color mobilizations is a possibility enabled by their initial formation. Normative sexual minority projects constitute a reverse discourse when they adopt metropolitan knowledges of sex as their foundation, including by naturalizing colonial fantasies of original sexual truth. They will reinforce any normative power relations that do not interrupt, if not specifically promote their sexual liberations. In contrast, queer of color mobilizations have arisen amidst an at least potential recognition that the normative powers of sex and race fail them and require interrogation. Queer of color mobilizations can be said to disidentify (Munoz 1999) or to act differentially (Sandoval 2000) in relation to hegemonic sexual minority formations. If they create identity from a commitment to interrogating the colonial genealogies of sexual power, they may make conquest, racial formation, nation formation, imperialism, and global capitalism key contexts in which sexuality and gender are understood, and so denaturalize the foundations of sexual minority politics. Thus while in name alone, queer of color projects may appear to be slices of broader queer communities, in practice their ontologies can produce subjectivity and collectivity that do not translate into normative sexual minority politics. My point is not that all queer of color mobilizations fulfill this potential; perhaps most sustain complicities that only some manage to undermine. But when some are undermined, a discrepant politics emerges. Through such discrepancy, normative sexual minority projects could enter into an alliance towards producing accountability and linked transformations. Remember, interrogating belief in original sex or sexuality questions all commitments to metropolitan knowledge, including all globalist or evolutionary theories

of culture, and all their claims on sexual essence. Such questions may be too challenging to accept for the queer and feminist communities I examined, yet I offer them on principle. While primitivist practices can be empowering reconfigurations of colonial discourses for contemporary conditions, it is important to acknowledge that in asserting their agency, participants are remaking discourses that nonetheless retain echoes of hegemonic authority. This awareness should encourage all parties to engage in further critical and transformative conversations.

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## Notes

1. These themes became clear in retrospect, after debates emerged around particular sexual and gendered practices. Feminist debates on pornography are anthologized in Drucilla Cornell's *Feminism and Pornography* (2000). The text includes writings on sexuality by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, while immediate feminist engagements with their and related claims appeared in *Pleasure and Danger* (Vance 1984) and *Powers of Desire* (Snitow et al., 1983). Concurrent debates about women's S/M practices were reflected in *Against Sadomasochism* (Linden 1982) and the three editions of Samois' *Coming to Power* from 1981 to 1987; *Unleashing*

*Feminism* updated anti-S/M feminist positions in the early 1990's (Reti 1993). Pat Califia's *Public Sex* (1994) and the anthology *The Persistent Desire* (Nestle 1992) include essays written to debunk critiques of femme-butcht, transsexualism, radical sex, gay men's sexual cultures, and sex work, while Wendy Chapkis' *Live Sex Acts* (1997) evaluates such critiques and their debates in a sociological study of sex workers in California and the Netherlands. Radical feminist critiques of male sexuality as a force constituting female sexuality were articulated in each conflict noted above, which lead some defenders of women practicing sex work, radical sex, or femme-butcht to argue for an empowering masculine sexuality, including through inspiration by gay male sexual cultures (see, for instance, Rubin 1991, Gomez et al 1998). In the early 1980's radical feminist men contributed to a variety of men's liberation tracts and men's journals, including *RFD*, while John Stoltenberg's *Refusing to Be a Man* (1990) offers an extended account of how critiques of straight and gay male sexuality could be internalized. By contrast, Allan Bérubé's defense of gay bathhouses in 1984 reflects an early reading by a gay man of gay men's sexual culture adapting a feminist historical analysis of the social construction of sexuality (Bérubé 1996). Its reprinting by Dangerous Bedfellows in *Policing Public Sex* (1996) reflects how their project inherited pro-sex feminist and AIDS activist stakes in a queer response to the crackdown on New York City public sex institutions, which Pendleton (1996) places in context of the sex wars. Anti-transsexual feminist claims were galvanized by Janice Raymond in *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), while their premises and legacies were upturned by Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back" (1991). The cultural effects of nascent transgender movements on echoing feminist critiques were reviewed by Zachary Nataf in *Lesbians Talk Transgender* (1996), while Emi Koyama (2000) directly addresses the normative whiteness of anti-transsexual feminist claims on universal womanhood.

2. Among many potential referents for the terms "queer" and "feminist", this paper limits them to key meanings they held for the primary subjects of study. Queer will refer to persons who claimed marginalized sexuality or gender practices, and who on that account understood themselves or their predecessors to have been exiled from radical or cultural feminisms. Feminist will refer to persons who knew themselves to be practitioners or potential allies of the cultural or radical feminist projects that practiced exile. These limited definitions reinforce the paper's ethnographic premises:

both “queer” and “feminist” are folk terms, which carry the meanings of their local contexts of production; and both arise as contested terms, so that debate over their meaning indexes the discrepant locations of participants in a field of conversation. These definitions help me contrast all such projects with feminist and queer of color mobilizations, which I name discrepantly to remind of their marginality in relation to the normative queer and feminist projects under study.

I use the term “queer of color mobilizations” to invoke anti-heteronormative projects that foster racialized sexualities in coalitions across differences, while destabilizing nationalism and critically engaging the interdependence of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Eng and Hom 1998, Muñoz 1999, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002, Rodriguez 2003, Ferguson 2004). This framing emphasizes links between critical commentaries on queers of color and varied grass-roots mobilizations, including those examined in the texts noted above. Among the critical theories informing my discussion, I am most indebted to Roderick Ferguson’s words in *Aberrations in Black* on “queer of color analysis,” which he says

interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices. Queer of color analysis is a heterogeneous enterprise made up of women of color feminism, materialist analysis, poststructuralist theory, and queer critique. (Ferguson 2004, 2n1)

3. Michael Kimmel (1995) notably marked mythopoetic practice of primitivist retreat as a topic for historical research.

4. Counter-hegemonic claims on hegemonic masculinity by marginalized men form a productive area of current research, particularly by rereading historical scholarship in ethnic studies or labor studies that previously ignored gender as an analytic category. The particular thread my discussion invoked concerns feminist and queer of color evaluations of the agentive action and normative complexities of nationalist projects that adapt hegemonic masculinity. Many documentary and analytical renderings of the histories of racial/ethnic nationalist movements are instructive here, but I wish to note that vital debates and theoretical advances are being stimu-

lated by the interplay of a set of recent works including Hazel Carby's *Race Men* (1998), Craig Womack's *Red on Red* (1999), David Eng's *Racial Castration* (2001), Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's *The Revolutionary Imagination in Latin America and the Age of Development* (2003), Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* (2004), and Marlon Ross' *Manning the Race* (2004).

5. Negotiations of sexual, racial, and national subjectivity by queers of color in primitivist projects call for distinct and extended discussion. Their actions are instructive for explaining primitivist projects' formation and for clarifying their counter-hegemonic possibilities. I reference them briefly in this paper when sexual minority formations met critiques of normative power by queers of color who were participating within them, not observing from outside. This paper has not explained the fraught complicities, and their potential resolutions, that attend on queers of color who join primitivist projects—except by reminding that queer of color mobilizations make complicity productive if they destabilize normative discourses to the point of destabilizing the movements they created or claim.

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