

86. Jennifer David, *Story Keepers: Conversations with Aboriginal Writers* (Owen Sound, ON: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2004), 36.
87. Scofield, *Native Canadians*, 72.
88. *Ibid.*, 71.
89. Scofield, "You Can Count," 167.
90. Cariou, "Introduction," vii.

## 12

**The Revolution Is for Everyone****Imagining an Emancipatory Future through Queer Indigenous Critical Theories**

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Queer Indigenous peoples boldly choose to love and be true to our desires, dreaming for moments of emancipation from colonial rule. We look into a horizon of death to make a life for ourselves, despite the overwhelming hopelessness that can be part of our lived experiences. Colonialism, poverty, homophobia, displacement, suicide, and rejection by our families and communities are parts of our lives. This is not said to perpetuate notions of tragic victimry that so often haunt writing about Indigenous peoples. Instead, it is said to point out the material and political conditions that Native GLBQT<sub>2</sub> people experience under colonization, including colonization's accompanying systems of heteropatriarchy, gender regimes, capitalism, ableism, ageism, and religious oppression. Indigenous queer critiques offer a mode of analysis that more complexly facilitates an understanding of these entwined systems so that they can be interrupted.

Colonial oppression is a multibinding system that puts queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous lives deeply at risk. According to the Centers for Disease Control, for instance, even though the numbers of HIV and AIDS diagnoses for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States represent less than 1 percent of the total number of HIV/AIDS cases reported to CDC's HIV/AIDS Reporting System, "[w]hen population size is taken into account, American Indians and Alaska Natives in 2005 ranked third in rates of HIV/AIDS diagnosis."<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1989 report on youth suicide, "Gay and Lesbian" youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than other youth, and suicide is the leading cause of death for GLBT youth.<sup>2</sup> The CDC tracks suicide as the second leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaskan Native people from ages

were victims of violent crime at about twice the rate of blacks, whites or Asians during 1998," and that Native women have the highest rates of experiencing violence from an intimate partner in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Prison Justice, a Canadian activist organization, highlights stark statistics from 2005–2006: while Aboriginal people make up approximately 4 percent of the Canadian population, they make up 24 percent of admissions into provincial/territorial prison custody, and 18 percent of admissions into federal custody. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where Aboriginal people constitute approximately 15–16 percent of the overall population, Aboriginal people make up 71 percent of the Manitoba prison population and 79 percent of the prison population in Saskatchewan.<sup>5</sup>

The story that begins to emerge from these statistics, as limited and problematic as such data might be, is not surprising: queer Indigenous people experience multilayered oppression that profoundly impacts our safety, health, and survival. What also emerges is the reality that our activism and scholarship can't pretend that there are easy fixes. While it is important to engage in activism that interrupts moments of marginalization and oppression, the lived experiences of queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous people show us that we—as Indigenous people, as GLBTQ+ people, as feminists, and as allies in numerous struggles—must engage in long-term, multifaceted, decolonial activism and scholarship that centralize analyses of, and resistance to, heteropatriarchal colonial systems in all of their manifestations.

### Implications for Decolonial Activism

Queer Native people do not have the space of a closet to hide our sexualities, since we have been physically, culturally, mentally, and spiritually pathologized and forced into modern representation by the scientific and philosophical discourses of anthropology, history, psychoanalysis, sociology, and medicine. Queer Indigenous people have been under the surveillance of white colonial heteropatriarchy since contact. Since many of the communities we come from are small, the space we have to hide our sexual and political desires is the space of a cupboard, not a closet. The metaphor of the cupboard refers to the marginal spaces allotted to queer Native peoples and the theft of Native lands through the continued occupation of our lands. Declaring "We're here and we're queer" does not mean we get our land back. It does not mean that we are part of queer communities. The queer movement does

not represent all of what queer Indigenous people desire. Many times coming out means making a choice between being Indigenous—and remaining a part of our communities without discussing or disclosing our queer and/or Two-Spirit identities—and being queer—without a community of other Indigenous people and exoticized by non-Indigenous queer people. Queer indigeneity challenges the very idea of civil rights and exclusionary complaints that grounds the mainstream GLBT movement. Instead, queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous people are going after colonial nation-states and challenging the racist and heterosexist foundation of theft and genocide they support and reproduce. Queer Indigenous critiques do not look for recognition from the nation-state for our pain and suffering because of identities, but seek to imagine other queerness possibilities for emancipation and freedom for all peoples. These possibilities are not limited to one vision. As contributors to this collection make clear, there is not a singular queer Indigenous critique.

Considering queer desire as an organizing principle can be very useful to queer Native peoples, because it means we can "get into bed" with many different ideas, peoples, and political ideologies and not just focus on a singular identity politics. This goes along with Denise da Silva's critique of race scholars' focus on exclusionary politics.<sup>6</sup> As she argues, proving people of color have been excluded from being a transparent subject does not challenge the Enlightenment thinking that makes subaltern subjects inferior, inhuman, and subject to violence. This anthology hopes to work along these lines by exposing both the violence and the hope in being an affectable subject that can be transformed, changed, and loved by the world.

Gay marriage is an important queer issue, but as many chapters in this book show, the right for queer Native peoples to be married is only one of many issues facing queer Native peoples today. Debates surrounding gay marriage in Native American nations can provide critiques of Native nationality that mirrors the U.S. nation-state. Usually, tribes who are quick to adopt anti-gay marriage laws—such as the Cherokee Nation and the Navajo Nation—are Native nations that have adopted the heteropatriarchal nation-state model of the settler state. These national formations, while maintaining tribal sovereignty, do not challenge colonialism or the legitimacy of nation-state interference in tribal governance. And while the banning of same-sex marriage in both the Cherokee Nation and the Navajo Nation under the rhetoric of sovereignty is deeply troubling, the mainstream media and conversations within academia have often

focused on these cases as examples of homophobia within Indian Country without any mention of the numerous Native nations who have *not* banned same-sex marriage, nor the Coquille Indian Tribe's 2008 law that specifically includes same-sex marriage.<sup>7</sup> Decolonial queer Indigenous activism challenges the authority of the nation-state and the internalized colonization of Indigenous nations, and pushes us to more radical possibilities for decolonial activism that can transform all of our lives.

### The Work of Allies

This book creates space for conversations among queer Indigenous peoples to be centered in scholarship. This was the basis on which allies—non-GLBTQ, and non-Indigenous—participated accountably. Much of what contributors write troubles the idea that we can count on identity to be stable, to give us our politics, or to be above critical analysis. This book shows that queer Indigenous critiques remain tied intimately to the lives of people identified as Indigenous and GLBTQ2, but also that they exceed any particular experience to offer a broad critique of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy to which all people must respond. That said, in context of a politics of alliance, this book's purpose is to call all people linked by the border-crossing potential of queer Indigenous critiques to study their locations in the power relations that these critiques disrupt.

The important work of building alliances is not one that only non-Native and non-GLBTQ2 people must engage in. Within Indigenous GLBTQ2 communities, we must build alliances across differences in order to build stronger decolonial movements. Partially because of the history of Two-Spirit organizations funded by government projects working to reduce HIV transmission rates among Native men who have sex with men, much of the community organizing in the last decade has had an unbalanced focus on men and male-embodied Two-Spirit people. While this is certainly in the process of shifting because of women and female-embodied Two-Spirit people leading organizing and holding women-centered events, much work needs to be done to rebalance gender within our organizations and movements. A decolonial agenda for Indigenous GLBTQ2 people must place the project of interrupting sexism at the center of our work. This means that men within our movements must deeply engage what it means to be anti-sexist allies and activists as part of the work of being Two-Spirit.

Our movements must also recenter ourselves to place transgender and gender non-conforming people and issues at the center of Two-Spirit organizing. While many of us understand that many of the "roles" currently being called "Two-Spirit" are not about sexuality, but about relationships with gender, much of our work ends up conflating *Two-Spirit* with *gay* in ways that often ignore those who should be at the center of our movements: those whose gender identities and expressions fall outside of rigid colonial dichotomies. Further, we must be cautious not to internalize the colonial politics of GLBTQ organizing by understanding that sexuality, like gender, does not exist in rigid binaries. It should come as no surprise to us in our gatherings and organizations that there are people who identify as Two-Spirit and/or queer who have relationships with people of another gender.

Any decolonial movement must work to dismantle the rigid ways of thinking about gender and sexuality that have been imposed upon us, even within Two-Spirit and queer movements, by constantly decolonizing our paradigms. While individuals may choose the term *Two-Spirit* and reject the term *gay*, or choose the term *queer* and reject the term *Two-Spirit*, there is no reason to see any of these identities as in opposition. Individuals may have personal reasons for taking on or rejecting particular identity labels, but identity labels are just that: labels. It is the choice of individuals to embrace or reject any labels that they choose. What we should share in common, however, is a commitment to our communities and to larger decolonial struggles, understanding that colonial heteropatriarchy injures all of us. Decolonial movements of Indigenous GLBTQ2 people that replicate sexism, transphobia, and biphobia in our communities are—in fact—not decolonial at all. We must realize that in order for our projects to be successful in intervening and interrupting oppression, we must become allies to one another in our struggles.

Just as differences among queer Indigenous people must be addressed, so also must those of non-Indigenous and non-GLBTQ people. Our work across these differences as coeditors and contributors has upped the stakes for allies to queer Indigenous criticism. No longer should it be assumed that "empathic" knowledge production will serve to emancipate GLBTQ2 Indigenous people. Rather, the future of scholarship, as mapped in this volume, requires allies to view social, economic, and political realities through the variegated experiences of queer indigeneity. The theories and methodologies we propose interrupt

in current power inequalities but also in assumptions that collapse the experiences of Indigenous GLBTQ2 people and allies. The future of alliance work requires monumental self-reflexivity and a rejection of the universality in liberal knowledge production if we are to work together to challenge the power relations of settler colonialism.

The stakes in allied criticism are well positioned by the methodological shift in Indigenous studies, which centers Indigenous knowledges and anticolonial critiques as a basis for making our claims. In this volume, we centered the histories and knowledges of Indigenous people who are marked or identified as queer and/or Two-Spirit as a basis for what and how we will know. This move calls "straight" Indigenous people to both witness and contribute to work that centers Indigenous queer people and critiques, and to recognize those critiques as a key challenge to sexual colonization. It also calls all non-Indigenous people across gender or sexual identities to center Indigenous knowledges in allied anticolonial work. In this case, it notably calls non-Indigenous queers to challenge how queer friendships or solidarities have elided how colonization still shapes their relationships with Indigenous queer people.

This shift, we hope, decisively displaces non-Native anthropology as a primary basis of knowledge about queer Indigenous lives. We deeply respect efforts by anthropologists to change the discipline by engaging queer Indigenous people as knowledge producers. For instance, Wesley Thomas, a Diné Two-Spirit anthropologist, and Sue-Ellen Jacobs and Sabine Lang as allied non-Native anthropologists, shifted the dominant frame of non-Native anthropology by engaging Two-Spirit organizers. The legacies of that moment of activism by Two-Spirit people inform our work. For instance, Brian Joseph Gilley and Scott Lauria Morgensen responded to their anthropological training as non-GLBTQ2 (Gilley) and non-Indigenous (Morgensen) scholars by centering the self-determined knowledges of queer Indigenous people as a basis for theory: for Gilley, by examining the "sexual survivance" of Two-Spirit men amid the sexual politics of Native communities, and for Morgensen by engaging Two-Spirit organizers' critiques of settler colonialism, notably, in non-Native queer politics. In the future, we argue, non-Indigenous anthropologists and queer studies scholars must recognize that texts on queer indigeneity written by and for non-Indigenous people have been displaced by queer Indigenous critiques. Here, this volume joins other recent collections in which Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda, James Cox, and Bethany Schneider joined Qwo-Li Driskill, Mark Rifkin, and Lisa Tattonetti in

allying across differences to help in changing the terms of scholarship.<sup>8</sup> While many of us have been living this moment for years, academic publications appear, finally, to be catching up. Academic work on queer indigeneity must start in conversation with queer Indigenous criticism, where allies can and must participate by articulating their work through the distinctive theories that arise here.

There are, then, some conversations we hope never to have again; and if we do, we expect them to be accountable to the arguments named here and in other cited texts. For instance, we hope that this collection enables scholars to no longer have to rehearse an intellectual history of the term *Two-Spirit* before beginning any conversation about Two-Spirit and/or queer Indigenous scholarship. We want future conversations to start from different places. As an example, in queer scholarship and activism, a common suggestion has been that *Two-Spirit* is a dichotomous term that reinforces heteronormative binary sex/gender in Native societies, meaning that it cannot perform queer critique and must be subjected to it. In response, we offer an array of scholarship that shows that queer criticism itself is conditioned by the history of settler colonialism and must account for this. We are uninterested in queer scholars critiquing work based in Two-Spirit or any other Indigenous identity category prior to having centered critiques of settler colonialism in the world and in their lives and claims.

The essays performing queer Indigenous criticism in this volume show that settler colonialism is the historical, institutional, and discursive root of heteronormative binary sex/gender systems on stolen land. In this reading, to interrogate heteronormativity is to critique colonial power, which then necessarily intersects the work of decolonization pursued by queer Indigenous people. Our contributors further argue that both subject-focused and subjectless critiques work in queer Indigenous criticism to shatter colonial heteropatriarchy as a basis for Indigenous people's lives. The critique of colonial heteropatriarchy occurs when reclaiming traditions through *asegi*, *takatapii*, *fa'afafine*, Two-Spirit, or other identities, just as it does when scholars do not seek out identities but instead investigate how Indigenous peoples were queered by colonization, so that all Indigenous people today are called to question heteronormativity as part of decolonization. These subject-focused and subjectless critiques are not the same, but they also are not in opposition to one another in queer Indigenous criticism. Each informs queer Indigenous critiques in denaturalizing and challenging heteronormativity as a

colonial project. Thus, like "subjectless" queer Indigenous critiques, any Two-Spirit or other Indigenous critique that reclaims traditional gender and sexuality also is critically queer, for unlike normative queer theory, each marks and disrupts colonial power as a condition of *all* heteronormative *and* queer claims on stolen land, and challenges other queer critiques to offer a decolonial response.

### Implications for Our Futures

In Native studies, "the community" is often a privileged and idealized site of study or place to return to our mythic and unsullied histories. Yet the construction of the idea of "community" often creates a false binary between activist and academic discourses. Activist scholarship can remain rooted in grassroots political movements and simultaneously recognize that academia *is* a community in which activist work should take place. We should not devalue the importance of having an academic intellectual community where we organize and debate the importance of Foucault, Da Silva, Butler, and Puar to our work. We should not be ashamed of our participation in academia or our desire to be part of this community. As Malea Powell and Andrea Smith argue, this work is part of building intellectual alliances as activism.<sup>9</sup> The building of scholarship and activism in academic communities does not foreclose participation in nonacademic communities, nor does it exclude nonacademics from participating in this community. Our political and familial commitments can lead us to better scholarship and support for our academic work. Intellectual activism in the academy makes an important contribution to political change. Placing ourselves in an academic community also means we have to be ethically, socially, and politically accountable to one another. An anthology is a community in itself. As editors, we learned much from working together as well as from working with the contributors and the University of Arizona Press. We produced the intellectual work of this anthology as a community and political organizing tool. We hope activists, scholars, Native community members, and tribal government workers and officers read this book and deeply engage the ideas presented here.

The work of belonging to, challenging, and transforming "the community" long has been modeled by Indigenous women activists, who include Indigenous feminist theorists linking activist and academic work. Kim Anderson and Joanne Barker argue that in Canada, marking patriarchy as a colonial effect of the Indian Act led Aboriginal Women's

Movement activists to critique Indigenous communities for adopting patriarchy as a stand-in for "tradition."<sup>10</sup> Such work joined the efforts of Indigenous women to reassert traditional women's leadership, as when Haudenosaunee women such as Patricia Monture-Angus called for change in their nations as a method of collective empowerment.<sup>11</sup> The recent publication of Native feminist collections in *Wicazo sa Review* and *American Quarterly* announces a new moment in Native studies, when Indigenous feminists are making the field a more critical site for the study of colonialism by centering gender and sexuality in its theories and methodologies.<sup>12</sup> Our hope as a collective is that Indigenous feminist critiques will guide emerging work in queer Indigenous studies. Critically studying heteropatriarchy and colonization bridges their intertwined histories with the ways that we inherit them in everyday life. In the process we learn both how power defines us and how we engage power creatively in resistance. We take inspiration from Indigenous feminism in assisting the renewed participation and leadership in Indigenous communities of people of all gender identities, who work daily to shift colonization's heteropatriarchal legacies while changing minds and building solidarities for new action.

Our future, as this volume's introduction argues, is an imagining. What are the possibilities for the future of queer/Two-Spirit Indigenous activism? What kind of world do we want to live in? What do we have to say about Indigenous issues often not considered "queer," such as language revitalization, land redress, environmental justice, and prison abolition? How can these issues be rearticulated through Indigenous queer critiques? Certainly, this isn't just part of imagining a future. GLBTQ2 Indigenous people are already engaged in these struggles. Many Two-Spirit people see their participation in activism or their work as teachers, counselors, caregivers, and community health activists as part of fulfilling their "traditional" roles in their communities. What would it mean for non-GLBTQ2 Indigenous people to acknowledge this, and to see GLBTQ2 people and critiques of colonial heteropatriarchy as central to decolonization and community well-being? What would it mean for Indigenous communities to not simply tolerate GLBTQ2 people, but to see our concerns, our activism, and our work as integral to the survival and resistance of Indigenous communities? What does a queer decolonization of our homelands, bodies, and psyches look like?

At least some of the answers are located in the imagining of GLBTQ2 Indigenous artists. Queer Native art, literature, and film have been, for several decades, theorizing queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous critiques

and building places for us through their imaginings. As demonstrated in *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literatures*, the sister book of creative writing accompanying this anthology of critical scholarship, queer artistic expression is an important method of survival for queer Native peoples and of engagement with peoples outside their experience. The Métis resistance leader Louis Riel is credited with saying, "My people will sleep for one hundred years; when they awake it will be the artists who give them their spirit back." We should engage these artists, both to support their livelihoods and to critically interpret the maps they produce of their versions of queer indigeneity. Artists are the visionaries leading us to a bright future, to mourning the past in productive ways, and to sensuously stunning us in the present. Through this artistic activism, Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit people can reclaim our spirits. And through an unapologetic critique of colonial heteropatriarchy, we can continue to commit revolutionary acts in our scholarship, our practices, our activism, and our imaginings.

#### Notes

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