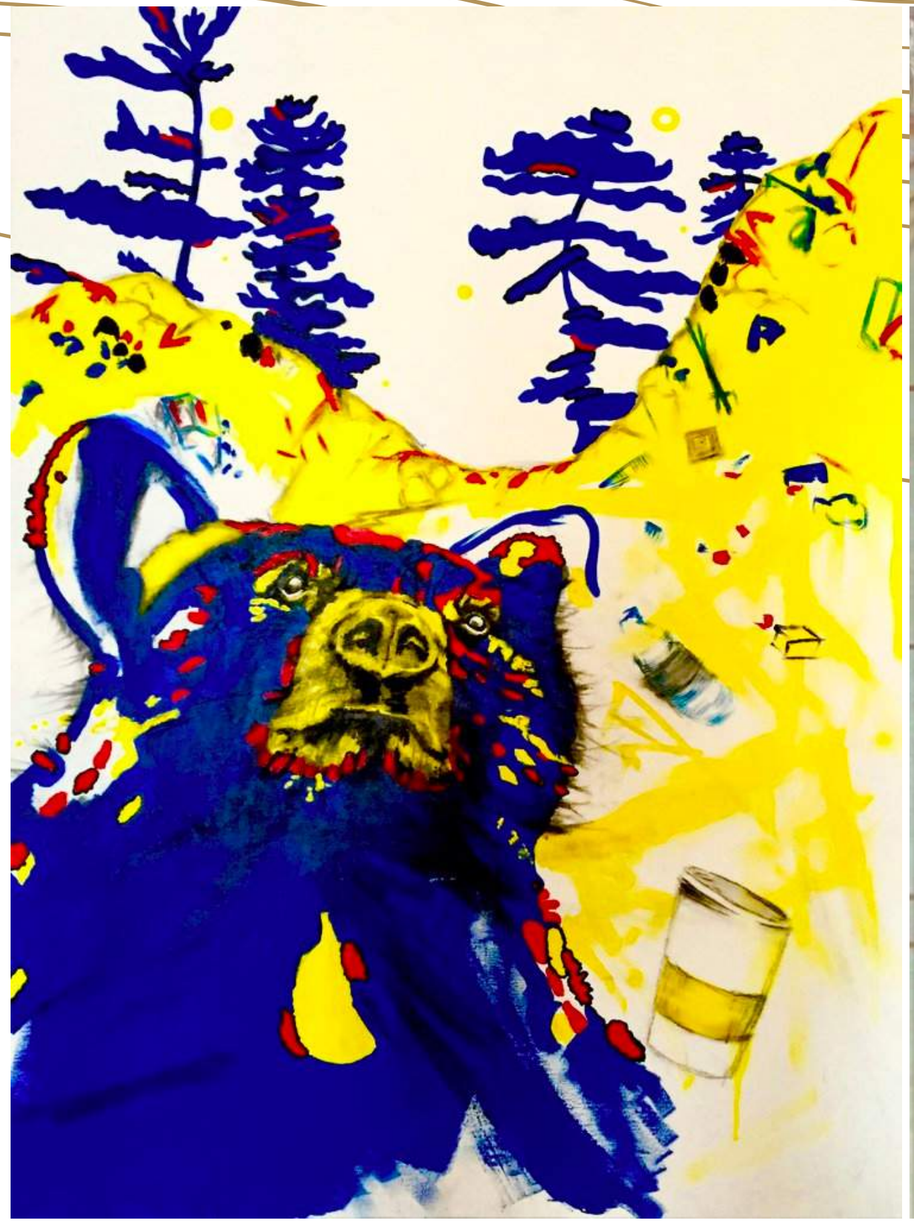
Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

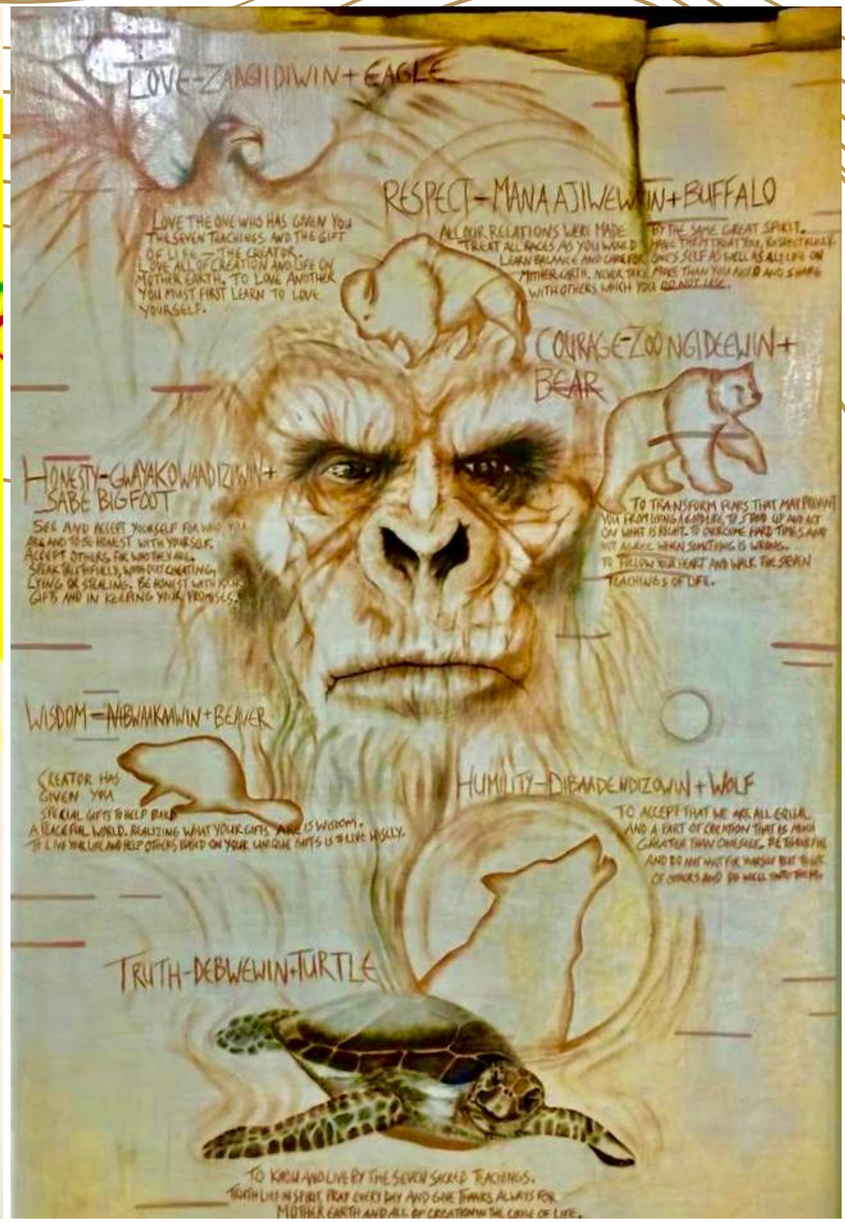
OLLI, SPRING 2 2022

Agenda

Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

Week 1 – Keywords: Indigeneity/Indigenous, Native
Week 2 – Keyword: Land
Week 3 – Keyword: Sovereignty
Week 4 – Keywords: Nation, nationhood
Week 5 – Keywords: blood, tradition
Week 6 – Keywords: colonialism, decolonization
Week 7 – Keyword: Survivance
Week 8 – Keyword: Knowledge
Week 9 – Keywords: Literature, Art
Week 10 – Keywords: Queer, 2-Spirit or, previously (derogatory), berdache
Week 11 – Keyword: Resistance
Week 12 – Keyword: Race





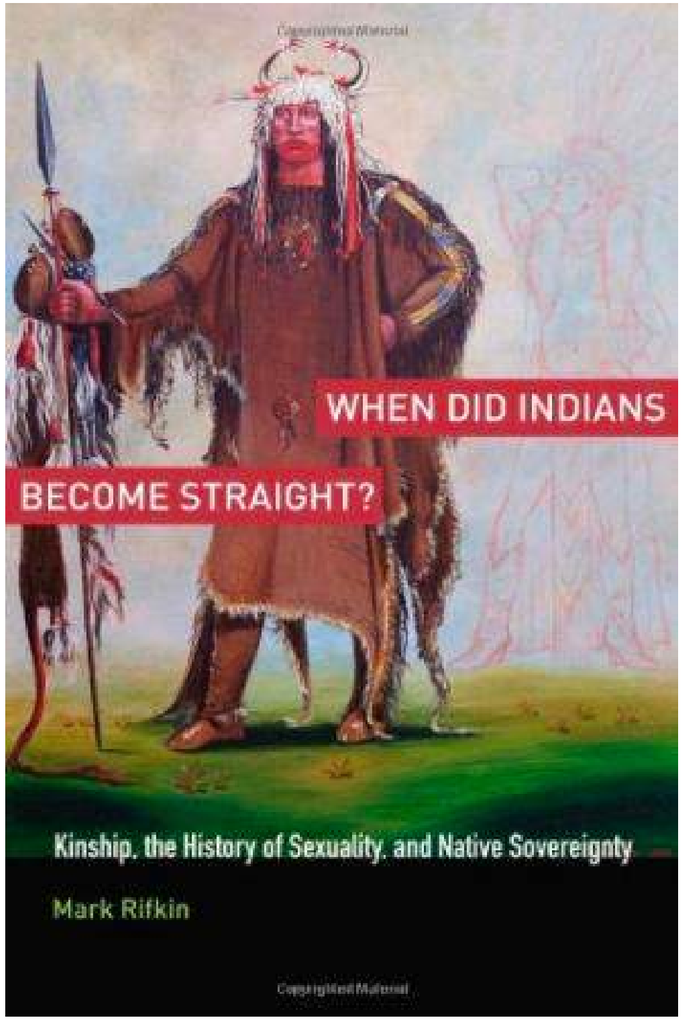
The Filmmaker (left); ***Dump Bears*** (center)

Brian Solomon
Anishnaabe/Irish

When Did Indians Become Straight?

Mark Rifkin

In articulating his critique of legal recognition for same-sex unions in the United States, then-senator Rick Santorum suggested that the failure to specify “marriage” as “between a man and a woman” constitutes an assault on “civilization” itself. 1 While I do not want to rehearse the debates for and against same-sex marriage, including the argument for the latter position made by queer folks themselves, 2 I was struck at the time, and still am, by the sheer scope of his comments. Rather than appealing to particular religious traditions or the merely personal beliefs of a large chunk of the U.S. populace, he argues that officially defining conjugality in other than hetero terms will plunge the nation into barbarity. To be more precise, though, he actually offers a more positively universalizing claim—that “every civilization in the history of man” has acknowledged the connubial tie between a single man and woman as “unique.” Th is phrasing seems to indicate that humanity from time immemorial has had an unchanging conception of the marital “bond.” Or does it? Th e phrase “every civilization” could be read simply as a rhetorical flourish that possesses the same content as “history of man,” the one providing a grandiose gloss to the other. Yet one also can understand “civilization” as qualifying “history,” as specifying which aspects of the latter count as relevant in addressing the future and fate of the United States. If “every civilization” has acknowledged the “unique bond” of heteroconjugality, what about those parts of history, and peoples, that have not been characterized as having “civilization,” that have provided the savage counterpoint against which to define the civilized and that have been made the object of a mission to bring to them the saving grace of enlightenment?



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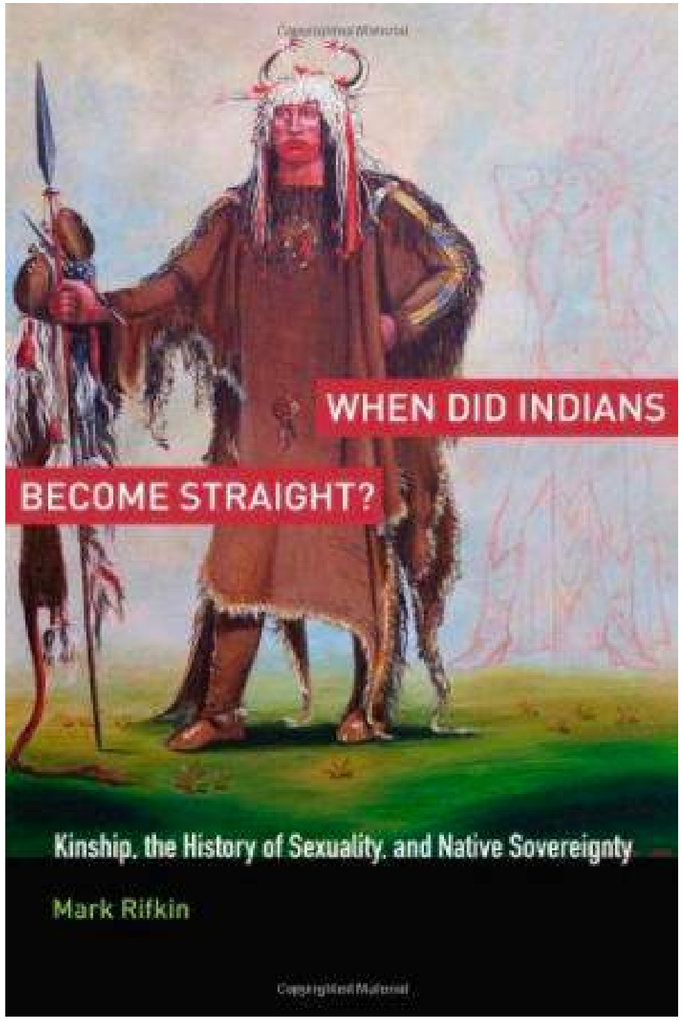
Th e attempt here to naturalize a certain version of marriage as selfevidently necessary to the continuation of the species—“children” are the “reason for” it—remains haunted by the vexed history of eff orts to defi ne which kinds of persons, practices, and principles get to count as paradigmatically “human.” In other words, the assertion of a necessary relation between “marriage” and reproduction is supplemented, and intriguingly also undercut, by the normative citation of “civilization” as a set of ideal relations that matrimony is supposed to embody and transfer to the next generation. If marriage “further[s] civilization in our society,” as opposed to simply facilitating procreation per se, what is the content of “civilization”? If “society” and “civilization” are not coextensive, instead the one providing the context for “further[ing]” the other, what lies at the boundaries of “civilization”? Santorum suggests a possible answer, noting that if “love” were made the primary criterion, “lots of diff erent people and lots of diff erent combinations could be, quote, ‘married.’ ” At the edge of “civilization” lies the possibility of uncoupling aff ect and intimacy, eroticism, lifelong commitment, reproduction, child care, and homemaking from each other, instead seeing “lots of diff erent combinations” of these various elements of social life as potentially viable ways of being human. However, a “society” in which such permutations are lived, defying the obvious value of bourgeois homemaking to the health and welfare of the people, is not “civilization” but instead something else, an unnamed absence that provides the unspoken comparative referent in Santorum’s intimations of impending disaster.



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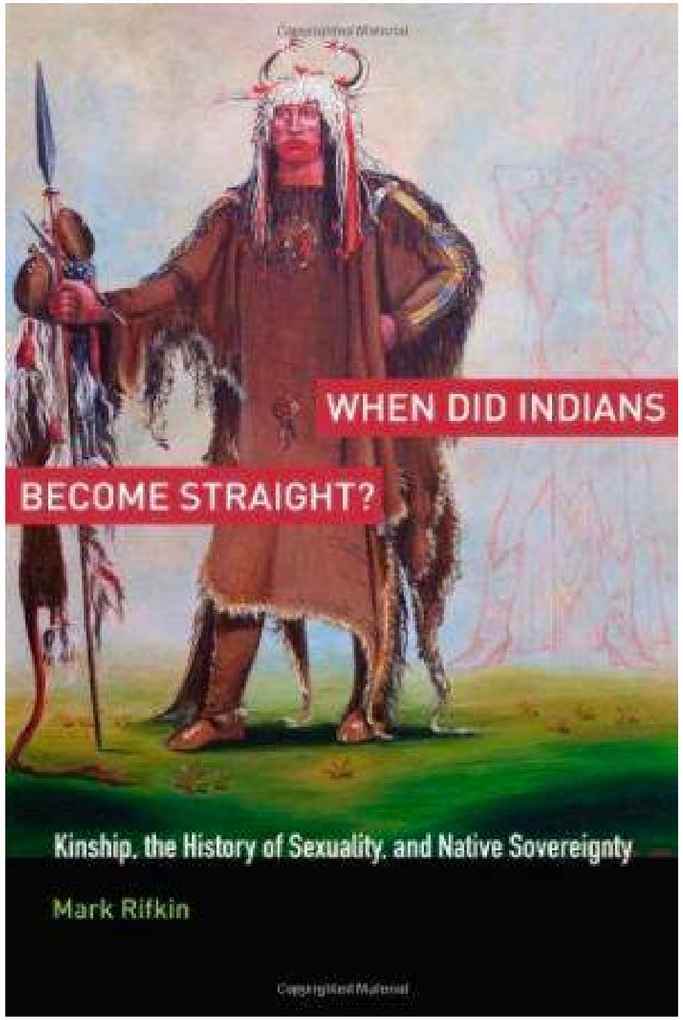
In addition to demonstrating the hyperbolic and largely hysterical rhetoric that accompanies discussion of the place of homoeroticism in U.S. policy, this quotation by a prominent U.S. offi cial points toward a largely unaddressed dimension of the public and political debate over things queer, namely, its embeddedness in an imperial imaginary that provides the organizing framework in which heterosexuality signifi es. More than linking same-sex pleasure and romantic partnership to degeneration into savagery, the statement indicates that forms of sociality that do not carve out a "unique" status for the reproductively directed marital unit can be treated not simply as inferior within the scope of human history but as threatening to retard, or reverse, the progress of those that do. Th e invocation of "civilization" appears less as a residue of an outmoded nineteenth-century language of Euroconquest than a trace of the ongoing enmeshment of discourses of sexuality in the project of fortifying the United States against incursions by uncivilized formations that jeopardize the "common sense" of national life. While homosexuality may serve as the most prominent foil to the vision of depoliticized privatization Santorum embraces, his comments gesture toward a more multivalent history of heteronormativity in which alternative confi gurations of home, family, and political collectivity are represented as endangering the state and in which conjugal domesticity provides the condition of possibility for intelligibility within U.S. institutions.



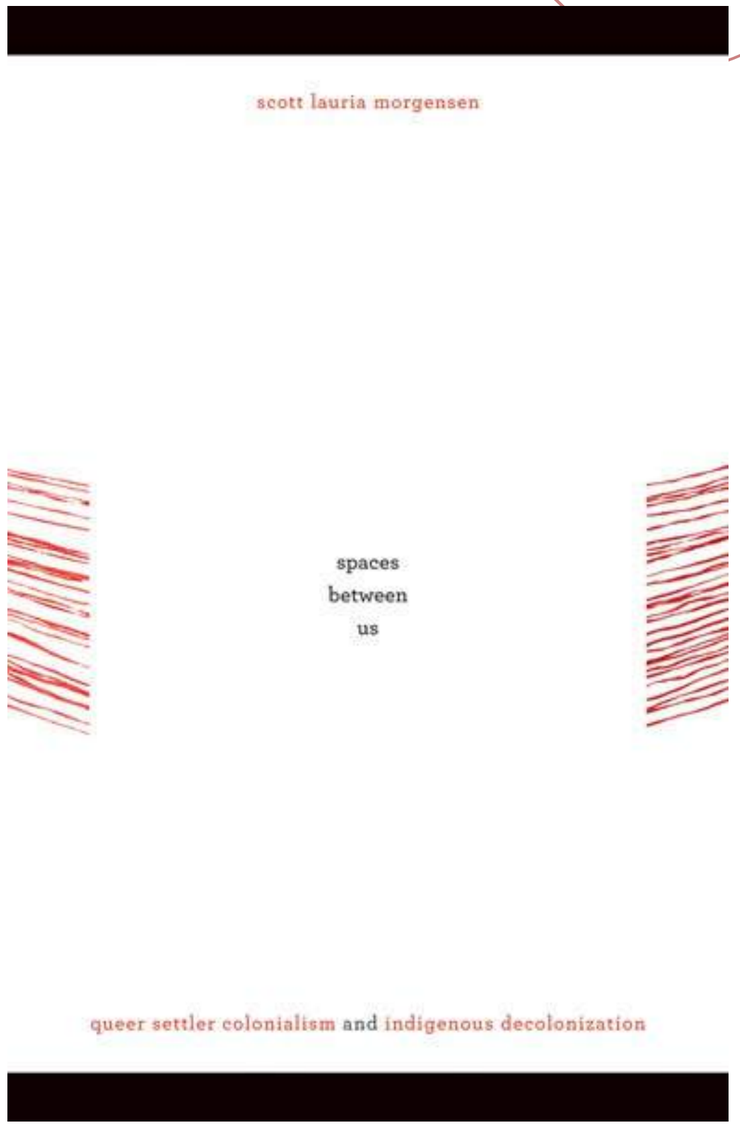
The Erotics of Sovereignty

Mark Rifkin

- while rejecting the use of Euramerican sexological vocabularies in understanding native sex/gender systems, this scholarship only minimally develops what seems to me a crucial corollary— that heterosexuality is an equally inappropriate concept through which to consider traditional native family organization, land tenure, eroticism, and divisions of labor. From this perspective, heterosexuality refers less to attraction between men and women or the conditions of reproductive intercourse per se than to a kind of social formation in which coupling, procreation, and homemaking take on a particular normative shape exemplifi ed by the nuclear family. Th e heterosexual imaginary, therefore, is equally inappropriate and obfuscating when considering native marriage, family, and procreation as it is when addressing more "queer" topics such as transvestism and homoeroticism. Following this logic, what would a queer critique of U.S. imperialism against native peoples look like if divorced from the search for statuses that would signify as aberrant within Euramerican notions of normality? Moreover, how does the construction and contestation of sexual normality by non-natives provide an important institutional and ideological context for eff orts to conceptualize native sovereignty?
- Indigenous nationhood can be read through the lens of aff ect and, particularly, through Raymond Williams's concept of a "structure of feeling." As one such aff ective structure, the "embodied sensations and sensitivities" of erotics provide "a diff erent perspective on— a new metaphor for— practices and histories of peoplehood" (34). Rifk in suggests that this lens extends current understandings of Indigenous nationhood, contending: "By making erotics a way of exploring the contours and dynamics of indigeneity, the authors I address foreground interdependence and vulnerability as positive principles of peoplehood" (35).
- Th is kind of queer critique, tracing the unacknowledged genealogies and lineaments of heteronormativity, also builds on recent work in Native Studies that seeks to reconstruct traditional forms of gender diversity.

Spaces Between Us

- This book examines how settler colonial power relations among Native and non-Native people define the status "queer." It argues that modern queer subjects, cultures, and politics have developed among Natives and non-Natives in linked, yet distinct, ways. The imposition of colonial heteropatriarchy relegates Native people and all non-Native people of color to queered statuses as racialized populations amid colonial efforts to eliminate Native nationality and settle Native lands. Modern sexuality comes into existence when the heteropatriarchal advancement of white settlers appears to vanquish sexual primitivity, which white settlers nevertheless adopt as their own history. When modern sexuality queers white settlers, their effort to reclaim a place within settler society produces white and non-Native queer politics for recognition by the state. Yet memories and practices of discrepant sexual cultures among Indigenous peoples and peoples of color persistently trouble the white settler logics of sexual modernity.
- A methodological shift in Native studies heralded by such scholars as Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Robert Warrior theorizes settler colonialism by tracing the "intellectual histories" (Warrior) and methods of Native peoples practicing survival, resistance, and decolonization. Scholarship in settler colonial studies must support this turn.

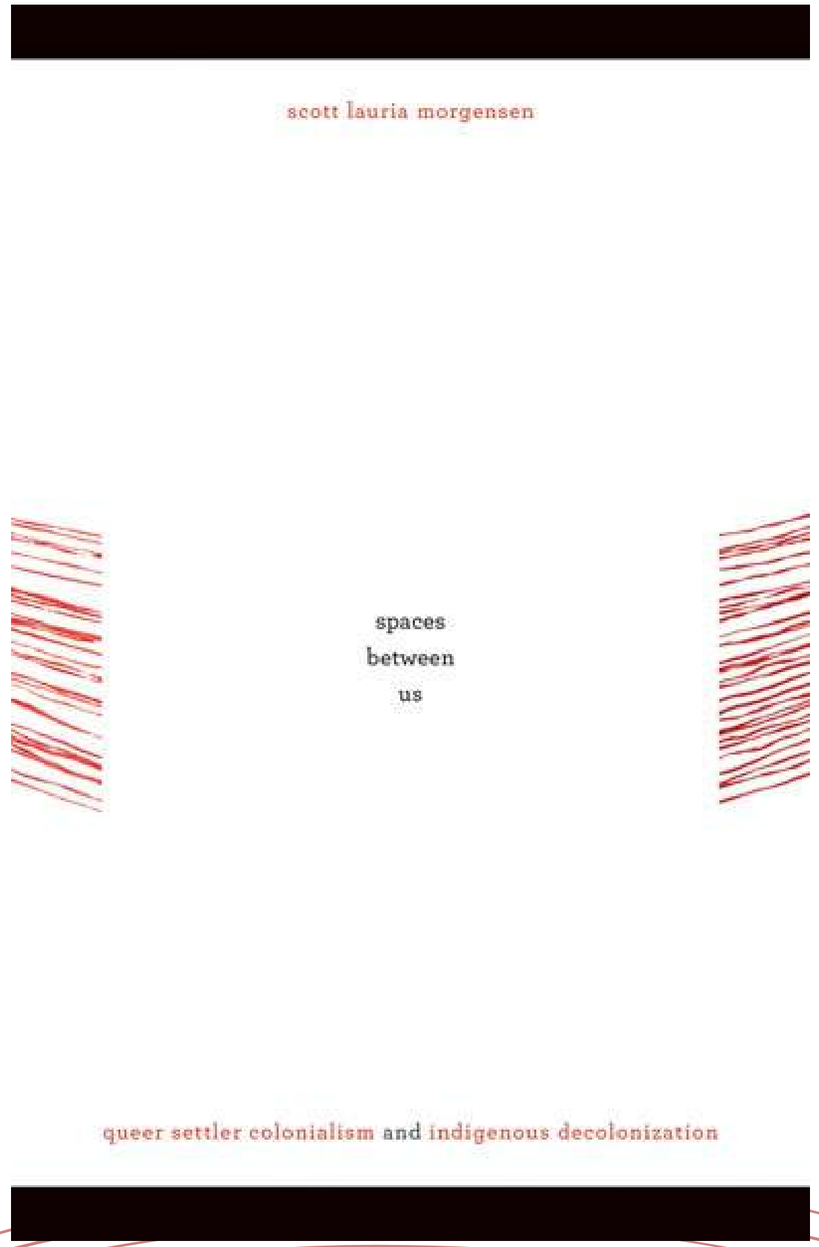


"Berdache" - that term that shall not be used

- *berdache*, which actually comes into the English from the Arabic word for ‘kept boy’ or ‘sex captive’ (*bardaj*). The French used the term to describe Native American biological males who wore the traditional clothing of women and/or were effeminate and known to engage in sodomy. Later, anthropologists started using the term in disciplinary scholarship and research. In actuality, most indigenous cultures did/do not have strict correlations between biological sex and gender the way Europeans do, and the term *berdache* has long been seen as highly offensive. In 1990, at the third annual First Nations/Native American conference for lesbians and gays, the term *two-spirit* was chosen as the preferred designation, the English translation of the Ojibwe word *niizh manidoowag*. Despite on-going intertribal debates about the efficacy of the term *two-spirit*, especially among tribes who already had different names for queer or gender non-conforming individuals, the term has remained in the discipline as a much less offensive catchall.
- AMID THE MANY TALES OF INDIGENEITY animating queer modernities in the United States, one became iconic: the colonial object berdache. While appearing to describe Native Americans, berdache presented a primordial mirror to the civilizational modernity of colonial and settler subjects. It cohered an object of knowledge that described a gender-transitive and homosexual subject, defined by male embodiment, who received social recognition in Native American societies. Over time, the object projected a uniformity of sex, gender, sexuality, and indigeneity that let it represent principles of human nature and culture. Disagreement over its definition regularly called its qualities into question, but that very deliberation promulgated berdache as a key object of colonial desire for Indigenous and sexual truth.

"Berdache" - that term that shall not be used

- Native activists did not just displace the category "berdache," they also destabilized institutional practices of anthropology in relation to Native peoples as a key condition of the term's continued circulation. Native commentators in Two-Spirit People affirmed that they worked to decolonize the epistemologies and methodologies structuring knowledge about Native people. Terry Tafoya (Taos/Warm Springs) opposed a model of anthropology that presents Native people as in need of being "reminded by the anthropological Keeper of Knowledge" of the truth of their lives. Beverly Little Thunder insisted that "anthropologists write about those of us who are alive now. And they must listen to us, hear us, and use our own words, not just their special anthropological language." Here Little Thunder opposes both authenticating desires for Native history and cursory engagements with contemporary Native people and their differences from non Native expectations. Anguksuar Richard LaFortune (Yup'ik) emphasized t h a t the observations offered by Native people "cannot represent any monolithic Native culture."



"Berdache" - that term that shall not be used

- Native activist displacements of berdache promoted new bases for knowledge production in Native people's "own words." Their views hinged on a difference between berdache or any non-Native category and the function of Two-Spirit, which presented a distinctive logic and method for defining relations among gender, sexuality, and nationality for Native people. Nevertheless, non-Natives could fail to recognize that, rather than being synonymous with all that berdache once named, the category Two-Spirit displaced the logic of berdache and opened all claims made through it to question.
  - First, Two-Spirit held knowledge production accountable to anticolonialism, by rejecting the colonial conditions that made it possible to write at a distance from Native queer people's stakes in knowledge production. If non-Native scholars continued to do this, they remained part of the problem activists critiqued.
  - Second, Two-Spirit challenged attempts to define a primordial role existing outside the time of settler modernity. Despite invoking tradition, Two-Spirit fails to suggest the cultural authenticity proposed by colonial discourse, given that any such use confronts its purpose to name a link among diverse traditions and contemporary identities and activisms.
  - Third, and interrelatedly, the definition of Two-Spirit within border-crossing networks evinces a transnationalism that displaces timeless uniformity and generic panindigenism.
- Two-Spirit recalls diverse Native national histories as being potentially interconnected across differences that must be examined in the dialogic space Two-Spirit creates for Native queer people. None of these effects can be produced by a synonym of berdache, nor are they proposed to satisfy desires for primordial and universal Indigenous truth. These distinctions are reinforced when Two-Spirit activists address nonNatives by critiquing the power of settler colonialism.

"Berdache" - that term that shall not be used

- Two-Spirit activism fundamentally transformed conversations on berdache. The Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists (SOLGA) responded to critiques of anthropology's colonial legacies by shifting study of cultures as social units to processes of meaning making in histories of colonization, nationalism, migration, and economic and political globalization. Simultaneously, queer studies challenged lesbian/ gay logics by focusing on the genealogical study of power relations producing sexual and gender marginality and normativity, including colonialism.
- These changes led to SOLGA changing its name in 2010 to the Association for Queer Anthropology and committing itself to examine sexuality and gender as relational to race, class, nationality, and disability within histories of colonization and globalization.
- Two-Spirit activism did not reduce the popularization of Native culture as a resource for non-Native gender and sexual liberations, but more critiques appeared of this practice, such as Towle and Morgan's critique of the citation of "third genders" in U.S. transgender politics. Gay men's and, more broadly, queer counterculturisms grew in this time precisely by adapting Two-Spirit identity and a resurgence of traditional knowledge to the Indigenous nature they sought.
- But Two-Spirit's redefinition of tradition as part of decolonial activism also lenta new and direct accountability to Native queer activists. In the process, non-Native queers became more adept at answering Native queer critiques by not doing what they once egregiously had done-projecting colonial discourse through berdache. However, they did not necessarily become any more adept at what few had done before: recognizing settler colonialism as a condition of their existence and of their relation to Native peoples and Native queer critiques.

Next week…

Keyword: Resistance

- TBA