

Book Review: *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics and Literature* edited by Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen

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In *Queer Indigenous Studies*, an anthology edited by Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, the contributors move to disrupt and dismantle the impact of settler colonialism on how gender and sexuality are conceptualized and operationalized among Indigenous people particularly in North America and the Pacific (Specifically New Zealand and Samoa). This anthology, while echoing views espoused by contributors of an earlier anthology- *Two-Spirit People* - on, for example, the discursive violence of western episteme, how identity categories such as *berdache* foreclose essential elements of two-spiritness and collapse important distinctions between trans* identified, gay and two-spirit people - *Queer Indigenous Studies* goes further to “bring indigenous-specific critiques of colonial heteropatriarchal gender/sexuality into broader conversations within queer and indigenous studies” (3). Driskill et. al. invite Indigenous people to talk back to western scholarship and to invent their histories as a way to displace western academe; to pull together splints from other disciplines to weave a sustainable decolonial practice.

The editors are attentive to how geopolitical/gender/sexual/racial/disciplinary divides operate to uphold coloniality and are therefore intentional about bringing a range of fields, locations, texts, genres and contributors with multiple intersecting identities into dialogue “to

articulate and theorize specifically Indigenous GLBTQ2 critiques” (19). Thus the book draws on the grounded knowledge of activists, artists and academics and crosses anthropology, ethnic studies, legal studies, cultural studies, political science, indigenous studies, queer studies, sociology, Black and Third-World Feminist critique. While I speak to methodology here, the theoretical move that informs this does not escape me- throughout the book, contributors gesture to re-memory which I rewrite as (re)member- a move to pull seemingly disjointed schools of thought together allowing indigenous people to powerfully “invent and account for themselves” (19).

Divided into three sections, the book deals in turn with, *Performing Queer Indigenous Critiques*, *Situating Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous Movements*, and *Reading Queer Indigenous Writing*. Among other things, Section One asks us to bring “sexy back” and to queer Native studies. Section Two walks us through ethnographic accounts of political activism in LGBTQ2 communities and Section Three, through a close reading of several literary pieces exemplifies how one might re-narrate, reinvent, and queer ‘history’.

Beyond expanding (and in some instances problematizing) our collective vocabulary for gender and sexual diversity, this anthology makes two critical interventions that I want to focus on here. First, the contributors offer an analysis/critique of the relationship between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy. Here, they generally engage in an intersectional analysis that shows how Indigenous people experience multilayered oppression affecting their safety, health, and survival. Several examples and statistics are used to show Indigenous peoples’ increased vulnerability to displacement and dislocation, HIV infection, Sexual Violence etcetera. Further, through frameworks including the erotic and desire (See, Driskill, Gilly, Tatonetti & Rifkin),

they discuss how US nation-building projects entail the policing of the domestic sphere as well as how the bodies of the subaltern have always been seen as a stand-in for land/capital. Thus re-imagining possibilities, re-imagining sovereignty necessarily entails interrogation of how settler colonialism is tied to sexuality and how coloniality has been reabsorbed into the very frameworks seeking to wrestle against it.

Second, and as a cross-cutting theme, the anthology focuses on methodology- a destabilization of western epistemology and centering of what Robert Warrior in Andrea Smith's essay calls "intellectual sovereignty". A number of the contributors argue commensurate with the views of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and other Indigenous thinkers engaged in the praxis of decolonial scholarship that "Native Studies could potentially have diverse objects of study that might be approached through distinct methodologies and theoretical formations that are necessarily interdisciplinary [and perhaps undisciplined] in nature" (45). This view is toward the critique of the field of anthropology, specifically the use of ethnography which Johannes Fabian has argued is entrenched in western ideologically biased qualifications. Thus they argue, that if and when Indigenous people have been brought into the discourse by non-native scholars it has often been in ways that are disempowering and disavows Indigenous ways of knowing. This centering goes beyond visibility through granting of subjecthood (that still relies on western epistemologies) but the creation of space, like this anthology and citational practices that rely on different genres that open pathways for Indigenous people to imagine and re-create their histories and lives beyond coloniality.

While I agree with the contributors on the import of decentering western epistemologies and prioritizing Indigenous knowledge especially toward what Goulet *in Two-Spirit People*

referred to as social *practices in context*, I wonder if this anthology could benefit from a more thorough engagement of what Da Silva Calls “ethnographic entrapment” that bears similarly to what Johannes Fabian referred to as the “denial of coevalness”. Such an engagement could work to show for example, how the temporal devices which they claim western anthropologists use to fix Indigenous people in the past (against which civilization is assessed) cannot be untied from anthropology- that it is a political, rhetorical device that is the very heart of the field. In doing so, their call to center Indigenous knowledge is less vulnerable to the critique (which I have) that they are suggesting that Indigenous epistemologies are infallible. Rather than focus on how Indigenous epistemologies might fall short, I am suggesting that the further engagement of the ‘ethnographic entrapment’ cements the scale at which western epistemologies vis-a-vis anthropology, work to uphold coloniality. Given that Indigenous methodologies are being offered as a counter to western episteme (and rightfully so), and especially since, at least on the face of it, the field is still ‘disciplined’ perhaps further space can be opened up to theorize the politics of knowledge production in these spaces.