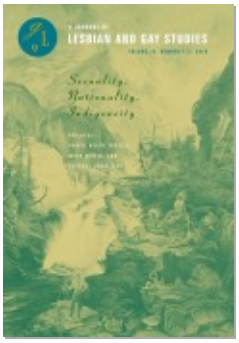
Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities



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Settler Colonialism and Queer Modernities

Modern sexuality arose in the United States as crucial to a colonial society of normalization. The violent sexual regulation of Native peoples became a proving ground for forming settler subjects as agents and beneficiaries of modern sexuality. Their subject positions arose relationally within the colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality and call for broad analysis in queer, American, and Native studies.[40] I now ask how colonial histories made settlement a primary condition of the formation of modern queer subjects and politics in the United States. I reexamine scholarship in queer studies that suggests this claim, and I mark how future queer scholarship can center the study of settler colonialism, including as a condition of homonationalism.

Settler colonialism is the open secret in most historical work in U.S. sexuality studies and queer studies. Settler colonialism conditioned every aspect of the history of sexuality in the United States, but only rarely has it been made a focus of study. My account has suggested a convergence between the sexual colonization of Native peoples and the growth in the United States of techniques of modern sexuality. These proliferated in the decades following the frontier's "closure," a time that in fact represented a heyday of state and religious efforts to institute a colonial education of desire, as in the events at the Crow Agency or during the 1879–1918 tenure of the Carlisle Indian School. Far from reflecting finality, this period witnessed tense negotiations of active and contested settlement. In such a time, any iteration of modern sexuality that placed Native people in the past knew itself to be a contingent claim that remained open to challenge. Thus scholars must recognize that modern sexuality is not a *product* of settler colonialism, as if it came into being in the United States after settlement transpired. Modern sexuality arose in the United States as a method to *produce* settler colonialism, and settler subjects, by facilitating ongoing conquest and naturalizing its effects. The normative function of settlement is to appear inevitable and final. It is naturalized again whenever sexuality or queer studies scholars inscribe it as an unexamined backdrop to the historical formation of modern U.S. sexual cultures and politics.

Scholars in Native and American studies have theorized settler colonialism as the social processes and narratives that displace Native people while granting settlers belonging to Native land and settler society. With Renée Bergland and

James Cox, I examine how this displacement is enabled by settler narratives of Native absence or disappearance.[41] Both terms share a quality of invoking the very thing being argued as not present. Stories of Native absence or disappearance thus precisely do not erase Native people but produce particular forms of knowledge about Native people, as already or inevitably gone. Cox argues that tales of Native disappearance should also be read as narratives of settlement. The very absence of Native people in a story is telling us a story about qualities of settler subjects, cultures, and social life.

Queer scholarship on race and sexuality has been effective at marking colonial relations and discourses and inviting the study of settlement. Scholars reveal that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexual sciences and civil institutions distinguished primitive from civilized sexuality in order to define queer margins for sexual normality. Eithne Luibhéid and Roderick Ferguson explain how Asian immigrants and conquered Mexicans after the mid-nineteenth century, and African Americans during slavery and the Jim Crow society, were produced as racial and sexual populations for national regulation.[42] Queers of color in such contexts were targeted for control, but as emblems of entire racial populations to be queered as the primitive margins of national whiteness and its civilizational sexuality.[43] In turn, Jennifer Terry and George Chauncey, among others, explain how sexual sciences classified perversions by documenting white subjects as degenerates who had regressed to prior stages of racial evolution.[44] In early activism, white sexual minorities reversed discourse on sexual primitivity in order to embrace it as a nature deserving recognition by modern citizenship. In the United States, Harry Hay organized the Mattachine Society by referencing stories of *berdache* as the primitive nature of sexual minorities and as a primitive model of acceptance that modern societies could emulate—themes that were sustained in homophile and gay and lesbian civil rights activism.[45]

Each such moment is illuminated by its relation to settlement. As Luibhéid's remarkable historical research suggests, the structural locations of non-Native people of color within the biopolitics of modern sexuality in the colonial and imperial United States align with those assigned to Native peoples by sexual colonization.[46] Their distinctive encounters with racial and sexual power thus may be examined as interrelated effects of the United States forming as a colonial power through processes of settlement. Yet studying their ties also will mark the many nonidentical locations occupied by non-Natives, including queers of color, in relation to Native people under colonial conditions of settlement. In turn, white U.S. sexual minorities who defended their sexual primitivity articulated normative practices of settler citizenship. Philip Deloria and Amy Kaplan have examined

settler citizenship as based on the conquest *and* incorporation of primitivity, so that primitivity becomes a resource to be drawn on when asserting the unique strengths of a settler civilization.[47] Modern sexuality discourses also taught white U.S. American men to tap and control their primitive roots, as when G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory of play or youth health movements in the YMCA invited white youth to explore primitive developmental stages so as to become civilized adults with virile sex and sexuality.[48] White U.S. sexual minorities thus organized in a political culture that already validated a journey to personhood and citizenship that translated primitive roots into settler modernity. Defending primitive sexual nature, which could include appropriating Native American culture as part of their history, translated their queer marginality into a normative assertion of settler citizenship.

Focusing on settlement also marks the way that theories of degeneration assigned to modern queers in the early-twentieth-century United States presumed Native disappearance. As degenerates, modern queers appeared as failed subjects, incapable of representing either white civilization or authentic primitivity. Yet this framing also naturalized them across racial differences as non-Native, in that it presumed that authentic Native people had already disappeared from the modern and settled spaces where queer degenerates would be found. If living Native people ever did appear in those spaces, they tended to present as out of place. For instance, Nayan Shah's compelling history of sexuality and migration cites a California police report from 1918, which criminalized a relationship between a South Asian migrant man and an American Indian youth by narrating it as sexual predation. This regulatory moment occurred amid recent histories of scalp bounties and massacres targeting Native peoples across Northern California, including only two years after the death of Ishi, famed survivor of the Yahi tribe. How might popular narratives of lost Native authenticity have shaped the police description of the youth only by his town of origin (Truckee) and his assimilation into a multiracial underclass? How, still, might tales of sexual primitivity persist, as his framing as the passive object of his racialized partner's desire suggests (without naming) the logic of *berdache*?[49]

In turn, Siobhan Somerville and Kevin Mumford have shown how popular stories and social practices in the early twentieth century linked homosexuality to miscegenation, including representing it as emblematic of white "slumming" for sexual adventure in African American districts of New York City and Chicago.[50] Yet in the Northeast, blackness already connoted historical miscegenation with Indianness. Amy den Ouden has explained how in the wake of normative associations of Native people with blackness in New England, Native communities with

black family lines could be marked by white authorities as racially inauthentic, thereby delegitimating their Native identities and land claims. In light of this, by the early twentieth century, how did discourses on sexual perversion tie Indianness *and* blackness to homosexuality, and how did they interlink? Did the histories of black-Indian communities and of their regulation shape modern racial theories of homosexuality? What would a queer history of homosexuality and miscegenation look like if Indianness — as an identity, or an object of colonial discourse — were crucial to analysis?[51]

Queer studies must center settler colonialism and processes of settlement in order to pursue these directions in scholarship. Settler colonialism appears in the relational of colonial and modern sexual regimes; in narratives of sexuality and gender based on Native absence and disappearance, despite evidence of Native survival and resistance; and in the normative formation of settler sexual subjects, cultures, and politics. I argue that queer accounts of settler colonialism will be supported by studying the colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality. The frame of colonial biopolitics makes the discursive and institutional relationality of Native and settler subject positions relevant to any account of modern sexuality in the United States. While such accounts have tended to exclude Native people, biopolitics marks erasure as meaningful to narrating settlement, even as that move can be investigated for evidence of the irruption of Native people amid stories of their demise. The frame of colonial biopolitics will also mark how the power relations structuring "Native" and "settler" articulate diverse people, cultures, and politics across differences of race, nation, class, disability, gender, and sexuality that exceed these two terms and their opposition. Yet the normativity of the terms within colonial biopolitics will still inform every U.S. formation of modern sexuality. Studying their relationality can recall that the locations they define for Native people always are exceeded by the discrepant histories and epistemologies of Native people's interdependent and resistant lives. In turn, the term *non-Native* can help mark how subjects outside Native communities incompletely fit the term *settler* — whether excluded from it categorically or asked to pass through or appeal to it — as they negotiate varied non-Native lives in a settler society. Differences among non-Native people of color, or between them and white people, thus will not be erased by marking their shared inheritance of settler colonialism; indeed, doing so will *mark* those differences, even as their distinctive relationships to settler colonialism and its naturalization become relevant to study.[52] In the process, analyzing the colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality will focus queer studies on the work of denaturalizing settlement. I mean here not just that settler colonialism will be marked as a condition of all modern sexual power in the United States

but also that the meaningfulness of its naturalization will become a major area of study. We need many more, and more detailed accounts of the subjects, institutions, and power relations that form whenever settler colonialism is naturalized within modern queer projects in the United States.

My argument invites scholars to return to homonationalism and explain it as one crucial effect of the settler histories of modern sexuality in the United States. We will see that if non-Native queers become sexual subjects of life, they will do so by joining a colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality that functions to produce modern queers as settler subjects in relation to Native peoples. Normatively white and national queer politics will arise here by naturalizing settler colonialism, notably when appeals to the settler state fail to trouble its colonial relation to Native peoples and its enforcement of a settler society.[53] To invoke Puar, the settler formation of U.S. queer projects will make them "queer as regulatory" over Native peoples, whose social lives will appear distant in time and space despite the continued existence of collective and allied Native activisms for decolonization and calls to non-Natives to join. Homonationalism will arise here, where the historical and contemporary activity of settler colonialism conditions queer modernities in the United States.[54]

Destabilizing Settler Homonationalism

What would it mean for U.S. queers to confront their settler formation? What would resistance to settler homonationalism look like? While I cannot foresee an end to these questions, I begin with the deceptively simple argument that queers must denaturalize settler colonialism in all its forms. Queers naturalize settler colonialism whenever conquest and the displacement of Native peoples are ignored or appear inevitable. They also do so whenever they produce sexuality and gender from the desires of settler subjects for a home on Native land and relationship to Native histories and culture. Settler colonialism thus must be challenged not only in social and political spaces but also in the definition or experience of subjectivity. For instance, non-Natives may think that as queer subjects, they inherit ties to Native histories of gender or sexual diversity that grant them a kind of kinship with Native peoples. Identifying this way, non-Native queers may think that the terrors of sexual colonization visited on Native peoples were caused by persons unrelated to them or that those same violences were visited on themselves, either of which may obscure their specific non-Native relation to Native peoples and settler colonialism. At its extreme, non-Native queer longing for Native histories of sexuality or gender can seem to invite alliance when it performs a racial or national "pass-

ing" that appropriates Native culture in order to indigenize non-Native queers. Native queer and Two-Spirit activists critique such practices, including offers of alliance that try to absorb them or Native histories into non-Native politics. While Two-Spirit activists have sought recognition in U.S. queer spaces, they have done so less to join them than to hold them responsible to the distinctions of Native histories, which remind non-Natives that colonization continues to shape contemporary life.

Non-Native queers can learn from Native activists how to focus their identities and politics on challenging settler colonialism. What does it mean for non-Natives, located differently as they are by race and nationality, to study their formation in a settler society: knowing one's home is not one's own; knowing one feels at home only to the degree that others remain dispossessed; being accountable to histories of Native displacement by questioning one's sense of place? One site where these questions have been asked has been in queer of color coalitions that form intimately with Native queer activism. Such projects have noted that non-Native queers of color can inherit the power of settlers despite their antiracism or anticolonialism, and they have theorized the varied colonial histories that shape non-Native queers of color and Native queers from within new and decolonial queer theories and activisms.[55] How can non-Native queers of color in the United States continue to theorize histories of forced migration, slavery, occupation, and globalized labor as effects of white supremacist colonization, and the ancestral histories notably linking Chicana/o, Latina/o, and African American communities to Native Americans, while still vigilantly challenging wherever they may sustain or benefit from settler colonialism? Such critical reckonings with settler colonialism rarely have arisen in normatively white U.S. queer spaces, where the need for them is dire. White queers still must recognize race and nation as intrinsic to their formation by sexuality and gender. How then can they mark settler colonialism as a primary context of their racial and national formation? How can they then trace the histories that sought to merge Anglo colonists, Euro-ethnic immigrants, and hosts of persons marked by whiteness into the normative status of settler subjects—a persistent status, like whiteness, that cannot be dismissed but must be perpetually interrogated?

Denaturalizing settler colonialism will mark it as not a fait accompli but a process open to change. While settlement suggests the appropriation of land, that history was never fixed: even the violence of allotment failed to erase collective Native land claims, just as land expropriation is being countered by tribal governments reacquiring sovereign land. In turn, as Thomas King and Paul Carter suggest, settlement narrates the land, and, as storytelling, it remains open to debate,

such as in Native activisms that sustain Indigenous narratives of land or tell new stories to denaturalize settler landscapes.[56] The processes of settler colonialism produce contradictions, as settlers try to contain or erase Native difference in order that they may inhabit Native land as if it were their own. Doing so produces the contortions described by Deloria, as settler subjects argue that Native people or their land claims never existed, no longer exist, or if they do are trumped by the priority of settler claims. Yet at the same time settler subjects study Native history so that they may absorb it as their own and legitimate their place on stolen land.[57] These contradictions are informed by the knowledge, constantly displaced, of the genocidal histories of occupation. Working to stabilize settler subjectivity produces the bizarre result of people admitting to histories of terrorizing violence while basing their moral systems on continuing to benefit from them. The difference between conservative and liberal positions on settlement often breaks between whether non-Natives feel morally justified or conscionably implicated in a society based on violence. But while the first position embraces the status quo, the second does nothing necessarily to change it. As Smith pointedly argues, "It is a consistent practice among progressives to bemoan the genocide of Native peoples, but in the interest of political expediency, implicitly sanction it by refusing to question the illegitimacy of the settler nation responsible for this genocide."[58] In writing with Kehaulani Kauanui, Smith argues that this complicity continues, as progressives

> have critiqued the seeming erosion of civil liberties and democracy under the Bush regime. How is this critique affected if we understand the Bush regime not as the erosion of U.S. democracy but as its fulfillment? If we understand American democracy as predicated on the genocide of indigenous people? . . . Even scholars critical of the nation-state often tend to presume that the United States will always exist, and thus they overlook indigenous feminist articulations of alternative forms of governance beyond the United States in particular and the nation-state in general.[59]

Smith and Kauanui remind us here that Indigenous feminists crucially theorize life beyond settler colonialism, including by fostering terms for national community that exceed the heteropatriarchal nation-state form.[60] Non-Natives who seek accountable alliance with Native people may align themselves with these stakes if they wish to commit to denaturalizing settler colonialism. But as noted, their more frequent effort to stabilize their identities follows less from a belief that settlement *is* natural than from a compulsion to foreclose the Pandora's box of contradictions

they know will open by calling it into question. In U.S. queer politics, this includes the implications of my essay: queers will invoke and repeat the terrorizing histories of settler colonialism if these remain obscured behind normatively white and national desires for Native roots and settler citizenship. A first step for non-Native queers thus can be to examine critically and challenge how settler colonialism conditions their lives, as a step toward imagining new and decolonial sexual subjectivities, cultures, and politics. This work can be inspired by historical coalition politics formed by queers of color in accountable relationship to Native queer activists. Yet this work invites even more forms, particularly when Native queers choose to organize apart. White queers challenging racism and colonialism can join queers of color to create new queer politics marked explicitly as non-Native, in that they will form by answering Native queer critiques. As part of that work, non-Native queers can study the colonial histories they differently yet mutually inherit, and can trouble the colonial institutions in which they have sought their freedom, as steps toward shifting non-Native queer politics in decolonizing directions.

With these intentions, I end by returning to the contemporary moment of Puar's work to invite further reflection on a settler analysis of homonationalism. After 9/11, patriotic narratives of national vulnerability led to the U.S. projecting overwhelming power against Afghani and Iraqi people who had no role in the destruction of the World Trade Center. How did historical calls for military mobilization compare, for instance, in the wake of Little Big Horn and in the subsequent massacre at Wounded Knee? We can ask how narratives of protecting U.S. citizens motivated or justified projecting military power for the wholesale containment of subject populations and their land for U.S. economic and political control. In turn, scholars can join Puar and Rai and Indigenous feminists by investigating how "terrorists" are imagined in relation to "savages," as dangerously mobile or uncontained objects of U.S. colonial and imperial control. The imagining of savages and terrorists as monstrously raced and sexed produces counterparts for imagining U.S. military manhood as conquering and U.S. settler womanhood as civilizing in both settler and imperial projects of sexual normalization.

Puar argues that U.S. queers become complicit with putatively protective state violence through homonationalist participation in the war on terror, as they are promised citizenship for supporting homeland defense, military service, or educating subject populations at home or abroad in new national values. Homonationalism aligns queers with the biopolitical work of containing "terrorist" populations, which works to impose qualities of a new moral order of national gender and sexuality in Afghanistan and Iraq through disciplinary education. How does

this relationship compare with the colonial education of desire institutionalized in the frontier society that first consolidated the United States as an imperial power? How does that history currently contextualize homonationalist politics in the United States, the sexual politics of Native Nations today, and their relationship? These lines of comparison also can lead to considering how homonationalism in global contexts of human rights and movement activism projects settler histories of sexuality along global scales. Inderpal Grewal examines the complicities of women's movements in U.S. promotions of international human rights, including when they justified war in Afghanistan as a battle for gender justice.[61] Puar in kind explains how homonationalist demonization of Islam as a promulgator of homophobia could justify U.S. or allied military intervention as a defense of sexual rights. How have efforts in U.S. queer politics to define sexual rights promoted the United States as arbiter of a global human rights regime? How, then, do U.S. queers imagine their work rests on embracing traditional sexualities worldwide as their prehistory, and when is such work informed by tales of kinship with Native Americans? The global aspirations of U.S. queers can be situated and challenged by marking where they derive from or project queer forms of settler sexuality, as is occurring in Native queer activisms today.

Theorizing settler homonationalism indicates how U.S. queer claims on national belonging stabilize settlement and participate in reinventing its lessons within new imperial projects. The sexual terror of colonial discipline that conditioned Native people and settler subjects within a settler society remains an absented history within U.S. queer modernities. Yet the protean context of settlement remains, as its contradictions continue to open its integrity to question while requiring constant recuperation by settler nationalism. Centering scholarship on how settlement shapes queer formations and the state will create spaces where the powers of sexuality and settlement together can be interrogated and transformed.