

Oxford Handbooks Online

Decolonizing Indigenous Sexualities: Between Erasure and Resurgence

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The Oxford Handbook of Global LGBT and Sexual Diversity Politics

Edited by Michael Bosia, Sandra M. McEvoy, and Momin Rahman

Subject: Political Science, Political Theory Online Publication Date: Jun 2019

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190673741.013.23

Abstract and Keywords

Indigenous societies were never straight. Hundreds of languages across the Americas had words referring to same-sex practices and non-binary, fluid understandings of gender long before the emergence of international LGBT rights. The *muxes* in Juchitán are neither men nor women but a Zapotec gender hybridity. Across the Pacific in Hawaii, the *māhū* embrace both the feminine and masculine. Global sexual rights frameworks did not introduce referents to recognize alternative sexualities; Indigenous languages already had them, as their terminologies indicate. Indigenous sexualities both predate and defy contemporary LGBT and queer frameworks. It is not the idioms that are untranslatable but the cultural and political fabric they represent. This chapter shows the plurality of gender roles and sexual practices in Indigenous societies not to contribute sexual repertoires but to expand the imagination with new epistemologies. The analysis suggests that codes of heteronormativity were central tenets of the colonial project. Sexuality was a terrain to frame the Native as pervert and validate European violence against the non-Christian other, labeled as savage, heretic, and sodomite. The repression of sexual diversity shows how sexual control followed colonial logics of dispossession like the doctrine of discovery and why resisting heteronormative codification is a decolonial practice. This chapter recognizes the significance of the existence and resistance of Indigenous sexualities. It analyzes colonial processes of heterosexualization and approaches Native sexualities as sites of resurgence and self-determination to resist ongoing forms of dispossession.

Keywords: colonization, dispossession, doctrine of discovery, Indigenous peoples, queer, resurgence, sexuality, self-determination, sodomy, translation

The Florentine Codex, a sixteenth-century chronicle in Nahuatl, makes various references to non-heteronormative sexualities, which seem to have been lost in translation.¹ The figure called *xochihua*—attired as a woman and whose name’s literal meaning is “flower bearer” in Nahuatl—was translated as “pervert” (Sigal 2007, 21) and “sodomite” (Kimball

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1993, 11). Translations masked the positive meaning of the word, disregarding that the flower was a general symbol of life's dualities associated with philosophy, fertility, and poetry in Nahuatl worldviews. They replaced *xochihua* with "sin," transforming the vital metaphor into a negative notion of cross-dressing. The original meaning of *xochihua* remains available only to those who can read Nahuatl.

Was this a failure of translation? Or was the erasure of Indigenous sexualities intentional? In this chapter, I demonstrate how European colonization of the New World included the colonization of Indigenous sexualities, while the reclaiming of sexualities is a form of Indigenous resurgence to resist ongoing dispossession today.

Indigenous societies were never straight. Hundreds of languages across the Americas had words referring to same-sex practices and non-binary, fluid understandings of gender long before the emergence of international sexual rights frameworks. The *muxes* in Juchitán are neither men nor women but a Zapotec gender hybridity. Across the Pacific in Hawaii, the *māhū* embrace both the feminine and masculine. Aymara activist Julieta Paredes claims Indigenous languages in Bolivia comprise up to nine different gender categories. Varying forms of non-monogamy are still practiced among the Zo'é people in Amazonia as well as in the Tibetan Himalayas. Indigenous youth in Brazil defend LGBT rights and participate in gay pride celebrations. Indigenous sexualities are as diverse as the peoples who practice them, ranging from non-monogamous relations and cross-dressing to homo-affective families. Sexual diversity has historically been the norm, not the exception.

Indigenous queerness, in its own contextual realities, predates the global LGBT framework. This chapter tackles Indigenous sexualities not to illustrate Indigenous adaptation to sexual diversity—their own predates the LGBT framework—or to propose an Indigenous cosmopolitanism. Indigenous understandings of sexuality are culturally specific. International discourse on sexual rights did not introduce referents to recognize alternative sexualities; Indigenous languages already had them, as their terminologies indicate. The significance of this research lies in understanding not the diversity of Native sexualities per se but the role of heteronormativity in the colonial project at large. Estevão R. Fernandes and Barbara M. Arisi (2017) rightly assess that Indigenous sexualities matter because of what we can learn from them, not about them. The analysis of sexuality reveals how colonial sexual codes like heteronormativity were central tenets of the colonial project (Smith 2010). Sexuality was a terrain to frame the Native as pervert and validate European violence against the non-Christian other, labeled as savage, heretic, and sodomite.

Indigenous sexualities defy contemporary LGBT and queer frameworks. It is not the idioms that are untranslatable but the cultural and political fabric they represent. Indigenous experiences are valuable for the plurality of gender roles and sexual practices they encompass. But they do much more than simply expand sexual repertoires. They expand the imagination with new epistemologies. Their repression shows how sexual control was

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a central tenet in colonial logics of dispossession like the doctrine of discovery and why resisting heteronormative codification is a decolonial practice.

I must start with two disclaimers. First, a scholarly text discussing Indigenous sexualities in English runs the permanent risk of anachronism and misrepresentation. The meanings of gender roles and sexual practices are cultural constructions that inevitably get lost when they are decontextualized in cultural (and linguistic) translation. The spectrum of Indigenous sexualities does not fit the confined Western registries of gender binaries, heterosexuality, or LGBT codification. Queer debates do not travel well (Ruvalcaba 2016; Cottet and Picq 2019). The idea that a person is homosexual, for instance, stems from contemporary assumptions of sexual identity and is only possible after the invention of homosexuality (Katz 2007). Mark Rifkin (2011) asks when Indians became straight because heterosexual vocabulary is as inappropriate as the binary imagination to understand Indigenous worlds. The problem is not only that the global sexual rights regime cannot account for the place of desire in precolonial societies. It is also that queering indigeneity risks assuming the form of settler homonationalism (Morgensen 2011). This text is embedded in the impossibilities and dangers of epistemological translation.

Second, I use various terms when referring to Indigenous peoples—"Indian," "Native," "First Nations," "Indigenous," and "originary" peoples. There are many words to refer to Indigenous peoples because their experiences are testimony to many colonial processes leading to state-making. The different terms express a plurality of power relations across colonial experiences. Indigenous peoples are 370 million individuals in ninety countries, over five thousand nations that speak thousands of languages in different cultural and spiritual systems. Official definitions have varied over time as states manipulate legislation, blood quantum, and census depending on their interest in erasing, regulating, or displacing Indigenous presence (Kauanui 2008). If Indigenous belonging is contested in the Americas, the concept is even fuzzier in regions that did not experience large European settler immigration, like Asia (Baird 2015). Many Asian states like China recognize Indigenous peoples with the understanding that they inhabit other regions. Indigenousness is a fluid concept, contested and heterogeneous because Indigenous peoples are as diverse as the processes of colonization they continue to endure.

What does it mean to be Indigenous? The term refers to a historical process rather than an essential nature. In the sixteenth century, "Indian" emerged as an all-encompassing category referring to non-European peoples from the Indies, East and West, constructed as Europe's homogenous other (Seth 2010). To conflate vastly distinct peoples in a homogenizing legal status was an act of colonial governance (Van Deusen 2015). Indigenousness refers less to a constitutive who/what than to the otherness implied by it. Mohawk and Cherokee scholars Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005) explain being Indigenous today as inhabiting lands in contrast to and in contention with the colonial states that spread out of Europe. They define Indigenousness as an oppositional identity linked to the consciousness of struggle against dispossession in the era of contemporary subtler forms of colonialism. It is a belonging fueled by contention with colonial states,

energized by the priorities of each new generation, and elaborated in a plurality of communities with local agendas.

Sexual colonization brutally repressed Native sexualities, regulating Indigenous sexual and gender experiences and supplanting them with Western sexual codes associated with modernity, at first Christian and now homonationalist (Morgensen 2011). Scholars have exposed the heteronormativity of colonialism (Smith 2010) and insisted on the value of decolonizing queer studies and queer decolonial studies (Driskill 2011; Morgensen 2011; Rifkin 2011). This chapter recognizes the significance of the existence and resistance of Indigenous sexualities. The first section looks at the vast diversity of Indigenous sexualities across time and borders, notably through language. The second section explains the strategic use of the notion of sodomy to legitimize the doctrine of discovery and the progressive colonization of Native sexualities—their heterosexualization. The last section recognizes how Native sexualities are becoming a site of resurgence and self-determination to resist ongoing forms of dispossession.

Lost in Colonial Translation

Indigenous sexualities defy LGBT categorization; they resist translation in the conceptual limits of LGBT categories. In Hawaii, the *māhū* define themselves as the ones in the middle (Hamer and Wilson 2014). Hawaiians see gender as a continuum, and from ancestral times Hawaiian culture recognized that some people are not simply female *or* male (Robertson 1989; Tengan 2008). The *māhū* embrace both feminine and masculine traits. They are historically valued and respected as caretakers and healers responsible for transmitting knowledge and traditions. Still valued today, they embody ancient Polynesian principles of spiritual duality and integration, the female/male synthesis in Hawaiian philosophy.

The *muxes* of Juchitán, Mexico, define themselves similarly: they are neither men nor women. They are something else. Juchitán, internationally depicted as a gay paradise, is known for having gender freedoms, in stark contrast with the rest of Mexico. Their Zapotec society is characterized by extraordinarily strong, autonomous women who hold political office and participate in a vibrant cultural life, to the point that many describe it as a matriarchal society that enjoys gender equality (Mirandé 2017, 15). They recognize *muxes* as a third gender. The *muxes* of Juchitán, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, are people who are biologically male but embody a third gender that is neither male nor female and refuse to be translated as men who dress as women (Mirandé 2017). *Muxes* were traditionally seen as a blessing from the gods; today they remain an integral part of society, socially accepted and fully active with family and community responsibilities.

The *muxes* cannot be reduced within an LGBT categorization, nor can their experience be exported or replicated elsewhere. They are better approached from queer understandings of sexuality as fluid, but again, the *muxe* exist in Zapotec. Elders say that in the ancient Zapotec language, there was no difference when referring to a man or a woman as there were no genders. In Zapotec, *la-ave* referred to people, *la-ame* to animals, and *la-ani*

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to inanimate beings. There was no “he” or “she” (Olita 2017). This changed with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, who introduced the feminine and masculine genders. How are we to translate *muxes* in languages that are structured around gender? The *muxes* are just one example of many sexual registries that were lost in colonial translation.

Celebrations of non-heteronormative sexualities abounded in precolonial times. Same-sex relationships were celebrated in Moche pottery (15–800 CE), along the northern Pacific coast of contemporary Peru. Moche stirrup spout vessels depict a variety of sexual acts but rarely vaginal penetration, emphasizing male genitalia and the movement of fluids between bodies as a form of communication (Weismantel 2004). In the Pacific islands, Māori carvings celebrated same-sex and multiple relationships (Te Awekotuku 2005). In the Andes, the Inkas summoned a queer figure called *chuqui chinchay* to mediate a political crisis in the late fifteenth century (Horswell 2005). The *chuqui chinchay*, a revered figure in Andean culture, was the mountain deity of the jaguars. It was also the patron of dual-gendered peoples, who acted as shamans in Andean ceremonies. These *quariwarmi* (man-woman) embodied both the male and the female to mediate the dualism of Andean cosmology, performing rituals that involved same-sex erotic practices. They embodied a third creative force between the masculine and the feminine in Andean philosophy.

Colonizers had a hard time recognizing Native sexualities for what they were. Colonial chronicles described non-binary sexualities, telling of genders they could not comprehend (or accept). Will Roscoe (1998, 12–15) gathered colonial documents reporting alternative genders. French expeditions in Florida described “hermaphrodites” among the Timucua Indians as early as 1564. Colonial engravings depict them as warriors, hunters, and weavers. In the Mississippi Valley, French colonizers reported a third gender called *ikoueta* in Algonkian language, males who adopted female gender roles. They went to war, sang in ceremonies, and participated in councils. According to colonial reports, they were holy, and nothing could be decided without their advice. Another French colonizer, Dumont de Montigny, described men who did women’s work and had sex with men among the Natchez in the lower Mississippi in the eighteenth century. In what is now Texas, the Spanish Cabeza de Vaca reported men who dressed and lived like women. Even Russian traders in the subarctic region documented gender diversity among Native communities in what is today Alaska. Despite Russian efforts to suppress third genders, the Chugach and Koniag celebrated those they called “two persons in one” and considered them lucky. Saladin d’Anglure described the extremely flexible gender systems of the central Arctic Inuit.

Many Indigenous languages approached gender as a complex, fluid affair. Amazon languages would be considered queer in today’s terms. Tikuna, an isolate language with no common ancestry or demonstrable genealogy with any other known language, is one of them. In Tikuna, *Kaigüwecü* is the word that describes a man who has sex with another man, and *Ngüe Tügümaêgüé* describes a woman who has sex with another woman (Tikuna and Picq 2016). Estevão R. Fernandes indicates wording signifying plural sexualities in other Amazonian languages. In Tupinambá, *tibira* is a man who has sex with men, and *çacoaimbeguira* is a woman who has sex with women. The documentary *Tibira Means Gay*

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shows the variety of sexual identities in Indigenous communities (Gallo 2007). Other languages have words for queer practices: *cudinhs* in Guaicurus, *guaxu* in Mbya, *cunin* in Krahò, *kudina* in Kadiwéu, *hawakyni* in Javaé. Not surprisingly, French anthropologists described homo-/bisexuality across Amazonia (Lévi-Strauss 1996; Clastres 1995).

Roscoe mapped third and fourth genders in North America. His linguistic index documents language for alternative genders in over 150 tribes. Alternative genders existed among the Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee. In Navajo language, *nádleehee* means “the changing one.” In the Osage, Omaha, Kansa, and Oto languages, the term *mixu’ga* literally means “moon-instructed,” referring to the distinct abilities and identity that the moon conferred them (Roscoe 1998, 13). In many cultures, alternative genders were associated with spiritual powers. The Potawatomi considered them extraordinary people. For the Lakota, *winkte* people had auspicious powers and could predict the future. Lakota warriors visited *winkte* before going to battle to increase their strength. The *he’emane’o* directed the important victory dance because they embodied the central principles of balance and synthesis in Cheyenne philosophy (Roscoe 1998, 14). The Mohave *hwame* were said to be powerful shamans, especially gifted for curing venereal disease (Blackwood 1984, 31).

The colonial male gaze depicted mostly deviations from the masculine gender, probably both because it appalled them the most and because they judged women to be irrelevant. But women were also engaging in same-sex practices and alternative genders that marked lifelong identities. Nearly a third of the groups in Roscoe’s index had ways to refer specifically to women who undertook male roles. Evelyn Blackwood (1984) argues that the female cross-gender role in Native American contexts constituted an opportunity to assume male roles permanently and to marry women. A trader for the American Fur Company who traveled up the Missouri River reported that Woman Chief, a Crow woman who led men into battle, had four wives and was a respected authority who sat in Crow councils (Roscoe 1998, 78).

Blackwood (1984, 35) argues that Native American ideology among western tribes dissociated sexual behavior from concepts of male/female gender roles and was not concerned with gender identity. This means, for instance, that gender roles did not restrict sexual partners—individuals had a gender identity but not a corresponding sexual identity. In other words, sex was not entangled in gender ideology. Blackwood stresses the unimportance of biological sex for gender roles in Native worldviews for western tribes. There was much overlapping between masculine and feminine, and people who were once married and had kids would later in life pursue same-sex relationships. Roscoe (1998, 10) interprets this fluidity as a distinction between reproductive and non-reproductive sex rather than a distinction between heterosexual and same-sex sexuality. Interpretations vary. What is certain is that Indigenous cultures have long recognized non-heterosexual sexualities and alternative genders—socially respected, integrated, and often revered them.

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The historical and linguistic archives are important sources but defy translation: they refer to social fabrics that have been largely disrupted, repressed, and destroyed. Each language brought a singular understanding of gender. Indigenous genders cannot be reduced to homo- or trans-sexuality. It would be an anachronism to translate pre-conquest realities into contemporary frames. In pre-conquest societies, third genders were not an anomaly or difference but were constitutive of a whole. Debates on whether to approach Native sexualities as berdache, two-spirit, or third genders miss the point. Native sexualities are not relevant to add more genders to established sexual registries; they invoke complex social fabrics that are untranslatable in the limited framework of hetero-/homosexuality. They invoked Native epistemologies and worldviews beyond sexuality.

European colonizers could not recognize conceptualizations differing from their own. Vanita Seth (2010) explains the European difficulty in seeing (and representing) difference as stemming from a broader inability to translate the New World into familiar political language. Then as now, the capacity to recognize other ways of knowing is intertwined with formulations of the political self. "It is difficult to speak the language of otherness when the other is virtually absent from the discourse of the self" (Seth 2010, 38). The "discovery" was severely impaired by colonizers' inability to convert what they encountered in the New World into accessible language.

All Sodomites: Sex and the Doctrine of Discovery

Colonizers had difficulties in understanding the various gender systems they found across the New World. Generally, they associated Native sexualities with immoral, perverse, and unnatural sexualities. Chronicles frequently depicted sodomy, as did the *Historia General de las Indias* by Francisco Lopez de Gomora, who never actually traveled to America.² Accounts describe Natives as "great sodomites" who "engage in carnal acts with both men and women without shame" (Mirandé 2017, 53). Cabeza de Vaca describes in 1540 the Karankawa people in what is today's Texas as having "bestly customs, to wit, a man who was married to another, and ... impotent men whoe goe attired like women" (Roscoe 1998, 4). In North America, French colonizers reported that the *ikouetas* practiced "sodomy" (Roscoe 1998, 13), and Loskiel accused the Delaware of "unnatural crimes" (Roscoe 1998, 251). A similar language depicted queer figures in the Andes. Chronicles like the *Relación de Servicios en Indias* labeled Inca sacred figures like the *chuqui chinchay* as diabolical and described Natives as "ruinous people" who "are all sodomites" (Horswell 2005, 1-2). Spaniards saw Inka non-binary sexualities as abject; queer gods did not respect gender rules and blurred borders. Spaniards defined the *chuqui chinchay* as temple sodomites and called for their extermination.

Colonial tropes of sodomy echo the brutal repression of non-heteronormative practices across the continent. An infamous example is the 1513 massacre of sodomites by Spanish conquistador Vasco Nunez de Balboa in Panama. Balboa threw the brother of Chief Quaraca and forty of his companions to the dogs for being dressed as women. The brutal

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killings were engraved in Theodore de Bry's 1594 *Les Grands Voyages*. In another macabre episode, French colonizers tie a hermaphrodite to a cannon in northern Brazil. Capuchin priest Yves d'Evreux describes how the French chased the "poor Indian" who was "more man than a woman" and convicted him "to purify the land" (Fernandes and Arisi 2017, 7). The punishment consisted of tying the person's waist to the mouth of the cannon and making a Native chief lit the fuse that dismantled the body in parts in front of all of the other "savages." Labeling Native populations as sodomites justified violent repression in colonizers' views.

The narrative of conquest emphasized European ideals of gender that depicted the invaders as masculine, rational, and powerful and Indigenous populations as feminine, irrational, and sinful (Molina 2017; Sigal 2011; Trexler 1999). Notions of sodomites were intertwined in Spanish perceptions of manliness, and the two served to organize power in the colonial setting (Carvajal 2003). But colonizers did not simply feminize the enemy; they purposefully invoked sodomites. Indigenous sexualities were brutally disappeared.

With so many narratives denouncing sodomy and bestiality in the New World, one would expect that colonizers had a clear understanding of what accusations entailed. Yet sodomy was a confusing and abstract notion filled with contradictions and ambiguities that referred less to a specific act than to any practice considered outside Catholic codes of conduct (Horswell 2005, 15).

Mark Jordan (1998) traces sodomy to the eleventh century. He credits theologian Peter Damian for coining the word *sodomia* in analogy to *blasphemia*. In its first iteration, "sodomy" refers to the explicit sin of denying God in the Old Testament (Jordan 1998, 29). The story of Sodom is one of divine punishment for those who contest divine authority. Sodom is not associated with a specific sin, much less to same-sex copulation. It is about (dis)obedience, not (homo)sexuality. The word is first used for heresy: some of the first priests accused of idolatry were also accused of the crime of Sodom (Jordan 1998, 36). The first sodomites were heretics.

The association of sodomy with sins against nature emerges with Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, adopted as a preferred theologian by the papacy, became one of the moral teachers of Catholicism. His *Summa Theologiae* (circa 1270) was used by the Council of Trent for its doctrinal legislation. For Aquinas sins of *luxuria* are carnal sins that manifest in the excess of pleasure. He defines six kinds of sin: fornication, adultery, incest, deflowering, abduction, and vice against nature (Jordan 1998, 144). Aquinas did not single out sodomy as a sin worse than the other five kinds of sin in *luxuria*, nor did his writings associate sodomy with same sex. Yet his *Summa* was (ab)used to conceal the paradoxes of sodomy. The term started to be associated with sins of *luxuria*, often associated with genitals. Aquinas invented the idea of sin against nature, posing the order of nature as God defines it (Jordan 1998, 136).

By the sixteenth century, Aquinas' doctrine had permeated Catholic thought. His *Summa* was used as a quasi-legal system of moral theology. Sodomy evolved from *blasphemia* to be associated with unnatural acts among the sins of *luxuria*. The category now also in-

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voked bestiality and crimes against nature. Sodomy set the limit between the order of nature (as defined by God) and the savage other, making it a powerful tool for the European invasions across the New World. The reference to the biblical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah served to define the borders of Christian authority—and its outsiders. Sodomy was a careful word choice that invoked godly authority to justify European destruction of Indigenous worlds (Fernandes and Arisi 2017). Hawkins (2012) explains the notion of New World Sodom: a sixteenth-century Iberian representational strategy of conquest that likened the Natives of the New World to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah through such literary tools as intertextuality, allusion, imitation, and parody.

The evolution of the term indicates its foundational ambiguity. Confusion cannot be removed from the theological category of sodomy: it has historically shaped it. This intrinsic flaw has enabled the demagoguery attached to legislation on sodomy. Sodomy was a strategic tool of colonization precisely because it was ambiguous. It referred to anything contravening the codes of authority accepted by the church. Colonizers invoked it to repress any practice that did not align to their rule. This was clear during the 1550 Debate of Valladolid, as Spanish theologians debated whether Indians had a soul and whether they could be enslaved. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda argued that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas had no soul and equated their moral status to that of women to justify tutelage. Sepúlveda used the notion of sodomy to delegitimize Indigenous authority: “due to the sin of nefarious intercourse fell from heaven fire and brimstone and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah” (Hawkins 2012). Sepúlveda suggested that Europeans should fulfill the role of the Lord, making it lawful to subject them to Spanish dominion. It was not their sexual practices at stake but the appropriation of their lands. Sexual colonization was but one more tool of conquest.

The repression of Indigenous sexualities was not mere evangelization. It served political dispossession. Framing Indigenous peoples as sodomites legitimized the land grab under the doctrine of discovery. This Christian doctrine was based on the notion of *terra nullius*, or no one’s land, established in a papal bull in 1095 by Pope Urban II. The eleventh-century bull legitimized the crusades into Palestine: it considered lands occupied by “barbarous nations” as empty wastelands and encouraged Christian crusaders to invade them and dominate its people to bring those territories under the Christian faith (Newcomb 2008). In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued four bulls establishing a Christian “law of nations” that encouraged the invasion of the New World (Miller 2011). The Inter Caetera bulls “granted” Spain and Portugal the right to conquer discovered lands in the Americas if they were occupied by barbarians who were not under the Christian faith. Like Palestine, the Americas could be “justly” invaded if their inhabitants did not obey the Christian order. The notion of *terra nullius* established the Christian faith as the sole source of legitimate political authority, defining non-Christian territories as land up for grabs.

This colonial principle of European superiority became a foundation of international law (Anghie 2007). Yet this doctrine could only work if Indigenous peoples were framed as “barbarians” or “savages” who needed to “be brought to faith.”³ Sodomy laid the foundations for the invasion of the New World, defining land grabbing as discovery and non-Eu-

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European populations as incompetent (uncivilized) occupants in need of a benevolent guardian. Put differently, tropes of sodomites were “what Vine Deloria (2006) has called” conquest masqueraded as law.

Colonial dispatches to European monarchs repeatedly included sodomites because they were overdetermined with territorial interests. They were intended not to describe actual sexual practices but to frame the just war against sinners outside the Christian faith. European invaders gained from reporting sodomites in the lands they conquered. Reports were marked by excesses and extrapolations, making abundant use of the most ambiguous terms like “sodomy,” “unnatural crimes,” and “abominable sins.” Colonizers were framing their narratives within the legal framework of the doctrine of discovery to justify the invasion. Indigenous sodomites were the rationale of conquest; they constituted the discourse of empire (Carvajal 2003; Fernandes and Arisi 2017).

Narratives of bestiality that dehumanized the peoples of the New World simultaneously located them outside the Christian faith and in its past. In 1690, John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* articulated this notion of temporal difference: “In the beginning, all the world was America.” Indigenous peoples of the Americas were conceptualized outside the temporality of Europe, in a permanent state of nature outside political modernity (Hindess 2007). Indians were peoples without history (Wolf 1982). Narratives of the noble savage displaced non-Western people out of Europe’s political present, creating a subaltern temporality that is condemned to lag behind the modern colonizer. Indeed, a fundamental trait of colonial projects is to bring the uncivilized into the present time. British rule over India was tied to British time because to civilize meant, among other things, to bring *others* into European time (Ogle 2015). This Western practice of temporalizing difference continues to shape international politics, especially narratives of development that seek to export democracy as sexual modernity, locating non-Western peoples in the sexual past.

The heterosexualization of Indians was one such modernizing project. Estevão Fernandes and Barbara Arisi (2017) explain how the colonization of Native sexualities imposed a foreign configuration of family and intimate relations in Brazil. The state created bureaucratic structures to civilize the Indians. In the 1750s, the *Directory of Indians* established administrative control of intimacy and domesticity that restructured sex and gender in daily life. Bureaucratic interventions centered on compulsory heterosexuality, decrying the “incivility” of Indigenous homes where “several families ... live as beasts not following the laws of honesty ... due to the diversity of the sexes” (Fernandes and Arisi 2017, 32). Indigenous households were subject to the monogamous “laws of honesty,” and Indigenous heterosexualization initiated the process of civilization. Rifkin (2011, 9) refers to a similar process in Native North America as “heterohomemaking.” Heteronormativity made it impossible for any other sexuality, gender, or family organizing to exist. The framing of Native sexualities as queer or straight imposes the colonial state as the axiomatic unit of political collectivity. Indigenous peoples were forced to translate themselves in terms consistent with the state, its jurisdiction. Sexual codification related to racial

boundaries defined access to or exclusion from citizenship and property rights (McClintock 1995).

As narratives of sodomy were used to dispossess and kill Native populations, Indigenous peoples conformed to compulsory heterosexuality to survive. The heterosexualization served as a tool of political homogenization and subjugation. Spanish tropes of sodomy did more than obfuscate complex Indigenous sexualities; they constituted an attempt to destroy the Indigenous ontologies and understanding of the cosmos. Indigenous sexualities were not lost; they were brutally repressed. Allegations of sodomy were a tool of conquest, a strategic signifier to frame the invasion as a just war under the Christian doctrine of discovery.

Sexual Resurgence

Sexual colonization did not end with declarations of independence. It continues to shape the intimacies of colonized subjects. What Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) calls a colonizing of the mind is embedded in a colonizing of desire. It is precisely because sexuality was such an important locus of colonization that it becomes an axis of decolonial practice.

Centuries of sexual colonizing displaced Indigenous understandings of sexuality. Heteronormative structures spread homophobia within Indigenous contexts. In these contexts, Indigenous peoples increasingly utilize the international sexual rights framework for self-representation and rights claims. They are framing claims as LGBT and pushing for the recognition of same-sex marriage. In 2013, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States heard the testimonies of elected officials at the panel "Situation of the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Indigenous Persons in the Americas." In the United States, at least three tribes have formally recognized marriage equality for same-sex couples. In Brazil, the National Meeting of Indigenous Students raised the question of LGBT rights in 2017. The group discussed self-determination through issues ranging from land demarcation to LGBT issues. Indigenous youth want educators to tackle same sex issues: Tipuici Manoki said it is taboo within Indian communities, "but it exists" (Amaral 2018). Indigenous youth want to raise awareness about LGBT issues within their territories so that people respect sexual rights.

The adoption of international sexual rights is tangible in Indigenous areas like Amazonia (Tikuna and Picq 2016). Manaus, the largest city in the Brazilian Amazon, started celebrating gay pride in 2000. Iquitos, the largest in the Peruvian Amazon, has been celebrating gay pride since 2005 and elects the Miss Amazonia Gay. Over ten small Brazilian towns along the Amazon River have held such celebrations: Tabatinga, Mancapurú, Itaquatiara, Rio Preto da Eva, and Presidente Figueiredo each held multiple celebrations. The infamous mining town Madre de Dios (Peru) also had celebrations of its own. The old Peruvian rubber-boom town of Cavallucocha holds annual drag queen contests that at-

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tract international participants. In Islandia, where Brazil, Peru, and Colombia meet, openly transwomen watch the Sunday soccer side by side with Catholic priests.

In the Javari River valley, the region with the most Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, a town held its own gay pride celebration under the anthem of Lady Gaga's "Born This Way." Benjamin Constant is a quintessentially Amazonian town on the Javari River accessible only by boat at Brazil's border with Peru and Colombia. The town has had a gay soccer team since 2002 and a gay carnival block called "As Marias." In 2011, Benjamin Constant held its first gay pride, with transwomen dancing to the gay anthem "I Will Survive" in sexy glittering outfits. One of the participants was the transgender high school math teacher of neighboring town Atalaia do Norte. Silvana lives her personal life as a woman but works as a man. She shares a home with her husband and is accepted as Silvana by neighbors; every morning she switches back into a masculine self to teach as a man.

The fact that LGBT politics are tangible in isolated corners of Amazonia points to the extent to which the "local" and the "global" permanently interact with and redefine each other. The adoption of LGBT discourse in the form of gay pride in Amazonia or same-sex marriage among North American tribes indicates the influence of global frameworks using an international language of sexual rights. Indigenous peoples are engaging in the emerging international grammar of sexual rights, even if they have experienced diverse sexualities long before globalization gave them the political language to say so. They are using the international legitimacy of LGBT norms to reclaim sexual rights and visibility in their own terms.

Indigenous peoples are blending political registries. They are combining ancestral worldviews with current LGBT referents to defend sexual autonomy in their local contexts. In doing so, they are using sexual politics toward Indigenous resurgence. This is tangible in Māori contexts. Traditional Māori concepts of sexuality were vastly different from what they are today in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Te Awēkotuku 1996). They approached sexuality as a flexible part of one's identity, one that can evolve with age, location, and political involvement (Khayatt 2002). Yet sexual colonization permeated Māori lifeways, which often replicate colonial norms of gender binaries. Today homophobia exists within the communities, and the connection between same-sex attraction and suicide is a tragic example of the effects that homophobia can have among Māori communities (Fergusson et al. 2005).

Yet Māori lifeways resist.⁴ The Māori Sexuality Project tackled sex from a Māori perspective using culturally appropriate research methods like *kaupapa*, a uniquely Māori way of looking at the world (Aspin and Hutchings 2007). Collecting a broad range of Māori views on sexuality, from both a contemporary and a historical perspective, the project provided evidence that the acceptance of sexual diversity that existed within pre-European Māori society continues to exist in many sectors of the Māori community today.

The Māori term *takatāpui* describes same-sex intimate friendships. Since the 1980s, *takatāpui* is increasingly used alongside English terms like "gay" and "queer." In fact, the Māori term is proliferating. David Murray (2003) links the growing popularity of the term

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to the combined influence of three movements during that time period: LGBT activism, HIV/AIDS, and the Māori political and cultural renaissance. He argues that the mutuality of these three factors made the emergence of *takatāpui* possible, emphasizing the historical contingency and politics leading to linguistic and cultural production. Gay activism marked a new era, but many Māori individuals were more preoccupied with battling social injustices within their Indigenous communities. The HIV/AIDS crisis hit Māori people particularly hard and galvanized a Māori organization parallel to the national AIDS foundation. The Māori organization Te Ropu Tautoko relied on regional groups that focused on *takatāpui*, signaling the term's newfound instrumentality. The passing of the Māori Language Act in 1987 was crucial to making te Reo Māori an official living language used in courts and government spheres. The resurgence of *takatāpui* is the result of complex relations between sexuality, language, and Māori Indigenous identity. Sexual subjectivities are linked to language, and language is connected to historical contingencies.

This defense of past knowledge to negotiate current politics permits Māori peoples to define their world for themselves. They are, as Aspin and Hutchings (2007) suggest, reclaiming the past to shape their futures.

This is exactly what Tikuna women are doing in a different context. The Tikuna are one of the largest Indigenous groups in Amazonia. They speak an isolate language and consider themselves direct descendants of the Amazon rivers. Tikuna unions are legitimized along clan lines, not sex (Tikuna and Picq 2016). Tikuna society is based on the “rule of nations,” which organizes marriage among clans in rules of exogamy. In Tikuna philosophy, to marry well is to marry people from different clans: a member from the clan of the bird (*ewi*) can marry with a member from the clan of the jaguar (*ai*) but not one of the member's own clan. Unions within a clan are considered incestuous and therefore unforgiving. But things started to change with the recent arrival of evangelical groups. New Neo-Pentecostal churches introduced different expectations about marriage. Rather than worrying about clans, they are concerned with regulating sexuality. These churches framed homo-affective relationships as sinful, when what were uneventful couples under clan lines became abnormal “lesbian” couples in religious rhetoric. Forbidden love was displaced from within the clan to within one's gender.

Sexual discrimination is a new concept in Tikuna communities. Tikuna women associate new perceptions of “forbidden love” with religious intervention. “It cannot be wrong, if it were it should have been since the beginning and not something new... . Our ancestors experienced people living homo-affective lives but never interpreted it as something malicious, it is religion that came to interfere with our culture trying to evangelize us” (Tikuna and Picq 2016). So Tikuna women are invoking the rule of nations to defend the autonomy to love in Tikuna terms. They defend homo-affective relationship as consistent with clan rules of exogamy. For them, there is little doubt that sexual diversity is intrinsically Indigenous; sexual discrimination was brought in by a vogue of evangelical religions. Churches introduced lesbianism as a forbidden love, permeating the Tikuna cosmology with exogenous moralities that signal the power of religion over Indigenous peoples. What is detrimental to Tikuna culture is the foreign imposition of religions by non-

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Indigenous missionaries. Homoaffective ties, they claim, respect the rule of nations and therefore reinforce Tikuna self-determination.

Tikuna women are invoking ancestrality to battle new waves of homophobia. Their homoaffective families raise their children in accordance with ancestral clan lines. Women claim that same-sex relationships give continuity to the Tikuna rule of nations, insisting on clan lines to secure sexual freedoms. They are building families of their own to show that homoaffective relationships do not interfere in any way with Tikuna culture. To the contrary, culture and sexual autonomy complement one another. Like the Māori, they are claiming the past to shape their future. Their experiences show how Indigenous self-determination and sexualities are intertwined.

Conclusion

Whether through language, pottery, or ceremony, examples of sexual diversity can be found across Indigenous societies, from precolonial times to contemporary gay pride celebrations. Same-sex practices and non-gender-normative dress have been largely documented in different historical moments and across cultures. The social and political meanings attached to these practices differed profoundly according to context, most often defying translation. The question is not whether sexual diversity exists among Indigenous peoples but how it resists.

For Indigenous peoples, diverse sexualities and multiple genders are not Western concepts. Heteronormativity is. Sexual colonization was a tool of disciplining to control heterosexual Indians as much as it was a tool of conquest to justify European invasion under the doctrine of discovery. Indigenous intimacies were repressed, pathologized, and erased by violent processes of colonial dispossession. The resistance of Native sexualities challenges the assumption that sexual diversity is an indicator of Western modernity.

Indigenous sexualities are important sites of resistance and resurgence. They resist heteronormative colonialism; they embody the possibility of radical resurgence. Indigenous sexualities matter beyond sexual politics because they expand the political imagination, not sexual vocabularies. It is not the decolonization of Indigenous lifeways alone that is at stake. Sexual colonization expanded beyond borders, so should resistance against it.

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Notes:

(1.) The Florentine Codex was directed by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún using ethnographic research and interviews collected in the communities of Tepeapulco, Tenochtitlán, and Tlatelolco between 1558 and 1569. The codex is a twelve-volume text with parallel Nahuatl and Spanish columns (Sigal 2007).

(2.) Lopez de Gomora was Hernán Cortés' secretary, and his writings are based on Cortes' oral narratives (Mirandé 2017, 53).

(3.) Deloria's seminal book *God Is Red* (1972) tackled the language used by Pope Alexander VI in the 1493 bull. Newcomb (2008) argues that the chosen people doctrine is at the core of US federal Indian law.

(4.) The Māori still constitute 15 percent of New Zealand's population despite ongoing forms of colonial dispossession and violence (Te Awakotoku 1996).

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