Decolonizing Indigenous Sexualities: Between Erasure and Resurgence

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The Oxford Handbook of Global LGBT and Sexual Diversity Politics

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

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

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