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spaces between us: queer settler colonialism and indigenous decolonization

Scott Lauria Morgensen, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2011, 336pp., ISBN: 978-0-8166-5632-5, \$25 (Pbk)/\$75 (Hbk)

This book represents a brilliant example of a political anthropology of decolonial queerness that builds on transnational 'Native and non-Native of colour' feminist analysis of settler colonialism. It consists of a mapping of the ways subjects' colonial privileges are produced and reproduced by the social and historical processes that constitute settler colonial experiences. Taking shape from an international debate on settler colonialism's power over life and death, and the logics of the elimination of indigenous people, which builds on theorisations from Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and colonial and postcolonial critique, its aim is to contextualise decolonising practices within settler colonialism. The author conceives settler colonialism as that particular form of colonial experience that, differently from indirect rule, is based on a transfer of sovereignty from the colonising nation to the community of colonisers. Consequently, the latter is not a community of rulers but a 'body politic' governed by 'sovereign subjects' (examples of this particular constituency are the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa). This body politic, according to Morgensen, is structured on a fundamental binarism: the opposition between all the people landed voluntarily or involuntarily in North America (identified as non-Natives) and indigenous people (Natives). The case at the core of the book is that of the USA. Its foundational ideas of body politic, sovereign subject, constitution and society are here read through the lens of theorisations from indigenous, feminist, GLBT and queer movements: Morgensen's assumption is, in fact, that a proper decolonisation is not possible without a parallel struggle against (hetero)patriarchy that could undermine the very foundational nature of settler colonial power: dispossession, racism, heterosexism and patriarchy.

The book is composed of two main parts. In the first part, 'Genealogies', the author articulates his political positioning. First of all, Morgensen positions himself within the Association of Queer Anthropology (AQA). The AQA is 'committed to studying sexuality and gender in context of studies of race, class, nationality, colonization, and globalization' (p. 5). He then situates himself within the political legacy of groups and practices like those of Cairo's Collective, WeWah, BarCheeAmpe, Indigenous AIDS activism and Two Spirit People, whose Indigenous leadership, anti-patriarchal and anti-AIDS activisms

were grounded in decolonial premises. This intellectual and political positioning originates as a critique of the problematic alliance with indigenous groups and cultures established by 1990s non-Native queer groups: instead of facing and respecting Native American history and culture, the non-Native queer groups of the 1990s extrapolated them into a much more controllable and unchallenging imagining and abstracted (worldwide) indigeneity. Morgensen states that through that alliance non-Native queer groups and organisations have mitigated their too striking whiteness and middle-class belonging, and avoided accusations of racism made against them by anti-racist and decolonial activists.

At that time rejected by, or not yet absorbed in, a neo-liberal consumerist model of gayness, white gay/straight Americans, in many cases, associated marginality and resistance against settler society's racism and (hetero)patriarchy with the Native. Alliances and solidarity with such a naturalised Native drove gay and lesbian anti-racist groups first to erase Native people's situated experience and their different positioning within the power-laden intimacies constructed by settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy, and second to impersonate indigeneity when launching social critiques that reconcile themselves to settler society.

In the second part of the book, 'Movements', Morgensen discusses the idea, articulated by Katie King, of 'conversations' as opposed to 'debates'. He borrows this concept and uses it to argue for 'non-Native and Native queer projects in conversation' aimed at both inspiring a new theory of settler colonialism's reproduction of dispossession, racisms, sexism and heteropatriarchy, and envisioning new forms of resistance against it. As he claims in the statement that opens the book, 'settler colonialism and its conditioning of modern sexuality produce an intimate relationship between non-Native and Native queer modernities that I interpret as [...] power-laden conversations that nevertheless remained open to creative transformation'. In this part, the author takes into account a number of radical movements for decolonisation along which—or in opposition to which—he articulates his radical position.

The latter corresponds precisely to a decolonial, antipatriarchal agenda. Morgensen argues that alternative ideas of sovereignty and nation can be forged and enacted through a conversation grounded in transnational decolonial, antipatriarchal, non-appropriative models of organising knowledge, that is: models that contest the naturalisation of settler colonialism and locate all non-Natives in accountable relationship; mark the Native people's experiences of colonial governance over sexuality and health; identify colonial heteropatriarchy as a danger to Indigenous health; criticise settler colonial biopolitics in State and global health governance; and pursue 'health sovereignty'. 'Health sovereignty' is the promotion of the 'decolonization of consciousness and social life among Native people as a basis for asserting cultural, economic, and political control over the conditions and methods of health' (p. 197)—in line with 1980s and 1990s practices of the already

mentioned Cairo's Collective, WeWah, BarCheeAmpe, Indigenous AIDS activism and Two Spirit People. This same conversation could be assumed to be at the origin of a subjective 'common' that could contest the very fundamentals of settler societies, that is, the material and symbolic primitive accumulation of the Native land by settlers, and its ongoing racism and heteropatriarchy.

In order to articulate his claim, Morgensen criticises, in line with Nandita Sharma and Cinthya Wright's position, the statement—claimed by some Indigenous activists and philosophers—that all non-Natives are settlers. In his opinion, this statement fails to acknowledge the many efforts made by migrants and citizens of a migrant background to link Native, diaspora and critical race studies in defending Native decolonisation. At the same time, the author disagrees with Sharma and Wright's theoretical argument that 'colonial legacies can be disrupted by cosmopolitan subjects forming multiracial, transnational "common" in the local and global space we inhabit' (p. 19). In his opinion, this position is unable to explain how settler subjectivity is obtained through possessive appropriations/incorporations of nativeness: 'settlers'—meaning the collective sovereign subject born from settler colonisation—'preserve Native authenticity as a history they must possess in order to transcend' (p. 177). Settlers, he argues, naturalise and dehistoricise indigeneity, in order to both 'transcend' the history of colonial violence at the base of the settler colonial body politic, and appropriate it, eventually becoming 'native' themselves.

Notwithstanding the crystal-clear urgency of such a statement, the only weakness of Morgensen's theoretical frame is that the fundamental binary of non-Native versus Native seems sometimes naturalised as the only axis along which settler modes of subject construction could be understood and criticised. In fact, the existing tension between settlers (indentured, enslaved, forced and voluntary), migrants and Natives in what has been defined as 'settler colonial triple political anthropology' (that sees settler colonialism as constituted by the unequal interplay of three subjects: colonisers, natives and migrants) is never just binary (the colonisers vs. the colonised).

In any case, as Morgensen seems to assume, Native and non-Native cannot be crystallised or even taken as monolithic, as they are crossed by intersecting identity axes and different degrees of complicity with settler colonial logics and power relations.

Gaia Giuliani

University of Bologna, member of InterGRRace, University of Padua

doi:10.1057/fr.2014.47