
Post-Traumatic Sexuality: Reclamation of Sexuality and Eroticism After Colonization

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Introduction

Since much of canonical American history focuses on white men, Native people and other traditionally marginalized groups are continually trying to rediscover and reclaim their history. This reclamation of history is not exclusive to traditionally oppressed racial or ethnic groups. Since American history is often both cisgender and heterosexual, the LGBTQ community also looks back to try to rediscover and reclaim a buried queer history. However, the place where these two issues combine is often ignored, causing the LGBTQ community to unintentionally reinforce whiteness and Native histories to internalize colonial ideas about gender and sexuality. It is important to incorporate gender and sexuality into any examination of Native history for a true reclamation of that history. In doing so, we not only reclaim our history but also disrupt a problematic history that has been written for us.

When rewriting our history, we examine not only our past but also our present. We write (and rewrite) in a way that redefines both temporal

and geographical relationships. This redefinition of temporal and physical space as part of decolonization and reclamation can incorporate queer theory and methods in ways that examine the intersection of indigenous and queer theory. Working with heterosexist portrayals of the land, we can redefine the land in a way that queers both the land and our relationship with it. In so doing, we may also anachronistically queer the relationship between the (often male) colonizers and the Americas. We may question colonized definitions of gender and gender roles, reimagining our history and the feminized land in Native terms both on a tribally specific and indigenous transnational level. By blurring temporal and physical lines, we gain access to a reclaimed and decolonized history that may subvert dominant, colonized ideas of history, a history that is inclusive of Native people who do not identify as cisgender or heterosexual.

The way Cheryl Savageau copes with historical trauma through her poetry suggests a way to decolonize Native lives utilizing literature. In her poetry, she offers a redefinition of temporal and physical space and a rewriting of Native history through creative work. Using this redefinition, her poetry then creates a more empowering future both on an individual level and a more communal, cultural level. Applying the colonial rhetoric of a feminized, colonizable body, I will connect historical and personal bodily trauma and demonstrate the importance of this connection in Savageau's work. Using the same framework, I will show how Savageau queers the relationship between individual and land, particularly relevant in *Mother/Land*, *Dirt Road Home* and her two quilts. Finally, after exploring these frameworks in her poetry, I will then discuss how Savageau works with, within, and in opposition to these traditional colonial frameworks to reclaim both her body and her sexuality as well as to put forth a more empowered Native present through a critical reexamination of the past.

Historical and Modern Colonization

Settler colonialism continues to impact modern Native¹ populations despite having initially occurred hundreds of years ago. Part of settler colonialism's ongoing impact is due to the specific nature of settler colonialism as opposed to traditional colonialism (which typically refers to the colonization of India or Africa). As Weaver writes in *That the People Might Live*, "by contrast [to classic colonialism, in] internal colonialism, the autochthonous [indigenous] population is swamped by a large colonizer group, which, after several generations, no longer has a *métropole* to which to return" (Weaver 10). In other words, Native populations are still suffering the effects of settler colonialism partially because our² land has become nearly inseparable from the colonized land. The distinction between our home and the colonizers' has become so blurred that it is almost nonexistent. Native people live in a homeland that is overlaid with reminders of colonization.

The reality of settler colonialism also contributes to the difficult definition of "home" or "homeland" for Native peoples. Because settler colonists invade an indigenous homeland and make it their own, the Native population finds that a homeland becomes both home and not home. Our homeland exists, but buried beneath markers of colonization and almost exclusively in the past or in the cultural memory of "those few who see beyond the road signs and beneath the concrete" (qtd. in Brooks, *Common* ix). However, geographically, the homeland does not move. Native people then have a strange spatial relationship to the Americas, living in a place

¹ I will be using the terms "Native," "indigenous," "Indian," and "Native American" interchangeably primarily to reflect the variety of terminology used by Native people to describe ourselves.

² I will use both the subjective "our" and the objective "their." As a Native woman, much of this research is personally relevant, and I doubt that integration of the personal diminishes the formality of academic writing.

that is geographically constant, but not recognizably so in many ways. Native people also have a unique temporal relationship with the Americas. Temporally, we still feel the effects of historical events perpetrated against our land and our ancestors while simultaneously remembering a homeland that is essentially no longer recognizable and apparently existing only in the past.

This complex relationship to both land and time can be understood as a form of post-traumatic stress disorder, or as a response to trauma. Although the events that caused this cultural trauma were inflicted upon our ancestors, those events continue to affect contemporary Native people, creating a culture collectively affected by trauma. Hałas, in her essay on time and memory, writes that, “the meaning of ‘trauma’ has become broader ... extended to the collective experience of traumatized communities ... or—as in the concept of cultural trauma—beyond the borders of directly affected participants” (Hałas 315). Understanding and treating Native cultural trauma requires “taking the broad cultural perspective ... viewing trauma and loss across time and place” (B.H. Stamm et al. 93). Similarly, to respond to cultural trauma that transcends time and place, broader ideas of temporality and place must exist. Healing must come from the understanding that one can be traumatized both from personal, recent events and from seemingly distant, indirect events. There must be an understanding that indigenous relationships to land often cross state boundaries, historical and generational time, and modern locations. Therefore, indigenous peoples have a relationship with multiple homelands including pre-contact tribal locations, current reservations, and urban Native sites, all of which impact lives and the healing processes.

For Native people, historical trauma has many forms as do Native responses to those traumatic experiences. In a study of historical trauma among Native communities, B.H. Stamm and associates found that:

the attacks [of continued colonization] may include the prohibition of language, spiritual/healing practices, or access to public spaces. There may be the creation of a “new” history or a “new” enemy. There may be rape or interpersonal violence to destroy families, the elimination of traditional authority figures within a community, or elevation of an authority or outside agency to bypass the traditional systems of authority. (95)

These colonial attacks can be interpreted historically, referring to the colonization that already happened as well as part of the on-going modern colonization of Native people. This can be seen through the elders in Stamm’s psychological study. The study was focused on defining cultural trauma, examining the ways in which a culture is affected when invaded by another, and how to help heal these cultural wounds. For the elders in the study, “loss of land, and language, breakdown in familial relationships, and lack of respect for elders” were cited as examples of grief or bereavement that the respondents experienced (B.H. Stamm et al. 95). The elders with the most attachment to their history, place, and tradition experienced the lowest overall health (B.H. Stamm et al. 96). This study reveals the direct correlation between historical or spatial attachment and Native people’s health, and the physical effects of colonialism. Thus, in addition to the mental impact of colonization, Native people also experience measurable physical effects as a result of colonization.

Native people have also experienced, and continue to experience, trauma in part because of the temporal restriction placed on Native identity. Given that the idea of colonization is often historicized, the Native person affected by that colonization is historicized as well, leading to the idea of the disappearing Indian. Additionally, historicization of colonization erases the effects that both historical and modern colonization continues to have on Native people. Identity becomes complicated in that “the racialization of Native peoples relies on viewing them as ‘living’ only

in dead archival sources and as past victims of progress” (Finley 192). Not only did colonization physically kill Native people in the past, but the rhetoric of colonization and the discursive paradigms of progress and civilization created a definition of Native identity that killed Native people who “progressed” or “modernized.” Simultaneously, the pressures of colonization make it impossible for Native people to continue existing if they did not assimilate. Native people faced either physical death through resistance or metaphorical death by assimilation. Native people face the same issues today because Native cultures are still defined in similar ways. As Craig Womack writes, “Indian cultures are the only cultures where it is assumed that if they change they are no longer a culture” (qtd. in Brooks, *Common* xxxii). Even today, change for Native people often means a metaphorical death. By assimilating to modern culture, Native people seem to lose their identity as Indians in the dominant definition of Indianness and sometimes in their own communities, perpetuating the idea that Native people are slowly disappearing.

Native people do not just face erasure in history books and in misguided definitions of Indianness that require cultural stagnancy. Through blood quantum restrictions and tribal enrollment requirements, Native people are often disappearing on a “numerical” level. Beginning with the Indian Removal Act in 1830 in which Native people were forcibly relocated west of the Mississippi, laws and regulations continued to target indigenous people. These laws ranged from land regulation and redistribution to ideological attacks on Native people. For instance, legal precedent set by the Dawes Act and judicial precedent in cases such as *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia* led to the idea of federally recognized tribes for which blood quantum was necessary. The Indian Reorganization Act also addressed blood quantum levels, using rather arbitrary blood quantum levels to determine who qualified as Native American and thus,

who was eligible for federal recognition and government benefits. Both blood quantum laws and the Indian Reorganization Act defined Indianness in colonized terms. Additionally, blood quantum laws furthered colonial heteropatriarchy through encouraging heterosexual pairings in order to maintain status as Native people and retain “Native blood.”

The destruction of colonization specifically affected and continues to affect Native women and people who do not fit within heteropatriarchal gender binaries. Before contact, many Native people had a long, much more accepting history that provided more equality for women as well as a variety of other gender and sexuality roles. However, owing to the heteropatriarchal nature of colonialism, and because “patriarchy ... rests on a binary gender system ... it is not a coincidence that colonizers also targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary model” (Smith, “American” 312). As part of the colonial process and ongoing violence toward the land and its inhabitants, colonialism waged an ideological war against the indigenous populations found in the Americas. Native people were forced into a gender binary to protect and further the patriarchal goals of the colonizers as well as to try to protect themselves. Additionally, “Native people need[ed] to be represented as feminized in order to justify the presence of the white masculine heteropatriarchal nation-state instituting the ‘normalizing’ presence of heteropatriarchy in Native America” (Finley 192). Just as colonization of the land was essential for the establishment of the colonizers’ eventual nation-state, the ideological war against Native cultures was essential for the establishment of the Europeans’ patriarchal, hierarchical, and heterosexist forms of government, power, and control of both the land and Native people.

Violence perpetrated by colonizers against indigenous populations included sexual violence in addition to the environmental, physical, and ideological violence already discussed. Consequently, Native women

experienced unbelievable rates of sexual violence. As Andrea Smith argues, “it is through sexual violence that a colonizing group attempts to render a colonized peoples as inherently rapable, their lands inherently invadable, and their resources inherently extractable” (Smith, “American” 312). Thus, sexual violence against Native women can be linked to colonization’s environmental and ideological impact as well. Furthermore, the colonization of land and women becomes conflated through the rhetoric of colonization itself. In this rhetoric, “images of Native women equate the Native female body with the conquest of land in the European view of the New World. In other words, the conflation of the New World with the Native women’s bodies presents Native women’s heterosexual desire for white male settlers as justifying conquest and the settlement of the land by non-Natives” (Finley 34). In this way, women are particularly targeted not just as victims of colonization, but as subjects whose sexuality is used to justify their own colonization and abuse. Their sexual desire becomes justification for colonial violence, despite the violence perpetrated against them.

Just as environmental and ideological violence of colonization continues to impact modern Native communities, sexual violence perpetrated against Native women continues to impact their experiences and consciousness. For Native women who have experienced sexual assault either directly—“the average rate of rape and sexual assault among American Indians is 3.5 times higher than for all races” (Natl Sexual Violence Resource Center 4)—or indirectly because, given a history of cultural and sexual trauma in particular, embracing one’s sexuality or any kind of eroticism can be a difficult process. Historically, “European iconography of the ‘New World’ imagined the Americas as an exotic, erotic brown-skinned woman, open and yielding to the penetrating thrust of European imperialism. Invasion depended as much upon the subjugation of

indigenous women and their frequent positions of authority as it depended on the erosion of affirming sexual pleasure and diversity of gender roles and identities” (Justice 161). Thus, for Native women who have been perceived as perpetually “open” to justify imperialism and to justify sexual violence perpetrated against them, reclaiming sexuality can be not only difficult but frightening because the reclamation of sexuality may be equated with potentially betraying the community or reinforcing colonial ideals by others within the Native community. Because of both historical sexual assault and modern rates of sexual violence, Native sexuality is often still marked by this trauma. As Lee Maracle writes, for Native American women, “our bodies become vessels for male gratification, not the means by which we experience our own sexual wonderment” (Maracle 24). Native women occupy a societal space then, marked by both cultural and sexual trauma.

Decolonization through Poetry

How then, do Native people reclaim their bodies, histories, and sexualities? Reclamation must empower Native people without repeating colonial ideas and perpetuating the type of intracommunity violence those ideas authorize. It must come with an understanding of the difficulty of reclamation for Native women and those in particular whose life experiences do not neatly fit into the binary models mentioned above. Deborah Miranda addresses the complexity of sexual reclamation and empowerment when writing about Native women’s love poetry, stating that “we accept being made invisible as a kind of novocain rather than endure the constant grinding of historical traumas that directly targeted Native women’s bodies and our ability to express ourselves in language and literacy” (Miranda, “Dildos” 138). For Native people who have experienced both the extreme historical violence perpetrated against them

as well as specific, sexual, gendered violence, it becomes much easier and safer to accept an almost complete lack of sexuality and eroticism as a defense against further violence than to reassert their sexuality and sensuality.

Despite this difficulty, reclaiming Native eroticism and the variety of Native gender and sexuality expressions is key to advancing any decolonizing agenda. Native people may be fully, bodily present despite sexual and historical trauma “whether through erotic expression, through fishing a stream walked by our fathers for generations, participating in tribal deliberation and dance, or picking ripened high bush blueberries in the marsh—these acts, their interpretation and representation, their transformation through thought, and then the written word can be an incredibly powerful political act” (Brooks, “Locating,” 257). Just the act of reclaiming bodily autonomy and empowerment can be an extremely political action, instrumental to the overall goal of decolonization. Doing so on autonomous and Native terms is particularly important, fighting against the hypersexualization of Native women’s bodies. Decolonization efforts that ignore the sexuality of Native bodies or, worse, continue to hypersexualize them, reinforce colonized ideas rather than fight against them.

For some indigenous people this may mean reclamation of the erotic self; for others, the ability to remain celibate or non-sexual. Creating a space in which the full range of human sexual expression is both possible and accepted for Native people is key to moving forward with decolonization. The reclamation of one’s body does not always have to occur physically. Reclamation of bodily autonomy can also happen verbally or through the written word. In fact, literature is an important tool of decolonization for Native people. Writing after colonization, whether in English or in indigenous languages, allows for the autonomous rewriting

of one's history. Lisa Brooks, writing about Abenaki history specifically, argues that

there are multiple ways to think about re-memberment ... the idea of "memory," which can take place in the individual or communal body and is stored in the cavity of the mind. In the Abenaki language, the words for memory, mikwaldamwôgan and mikwaldigan, suggest that, like writing, it can be both an activity and a powerful instrument for finding something stored in one's mind. (Brooks, *Common*, 66)

In Abenaki specifically, language suggests that the process of remembering, like the process of writing, is an active rather than passive activity. Therefore poetry, and the written word of all kinds, is a critical part of the decolonization process. Cheryl Savageau, an Abenaki poet, allows for an examination of these ideas. As a mixed-race, French and Abenaki woman who grew up in the Abenaki homeland in New England, Savageau offers unique insight into the reclamation of the body and of the land. Additionally, as one of the first tribes to interact with settlers, the Abenaki tribe has one of the longest relationships with colonization. When settlers first arrived, Abenaki leaders first attempted to negotiate with the colonizing forces until those Abenaki leaders realized that a peaceful, equal relationship with the land they referred to "as a bowl with a beaver tail from which they all might eat" was impossible (Brooks, *Common* 32). This realization gives Abenaki people a particular relationship with their land and the colonizers that involved both negotiation and revolt, which makes the modern day occupation of Abenaki land all the more painful.

Savageau creates work that first specifically acknowledges the full extent of cultural trauma caused by colonization and its effects on the Abenaki homeland, then responds to that cultural trauma in her

reclamation of sexuality and eroticism. While doing so she often rejects linear temporalities, conflating modern and historical colonization and blurring the easy distinction between these two forms of oppression. Her portrayal of trauma blurs lines between sexuality, gender, and eroticism with a response to the past and her relationship to a traumatized physical land. Although *Dirt Road Home* is predominantly concerned with trauma, history, and the location of a Native homeland, Savageau's integration of erotic poetry into the collection questions the distinction between bodily and geographical colonization. *Mother/Land*, which is more focused on sexuality, gender, and kinship relations, includes poems deeply interested in history and trauma, drawing a connection between reclamation of personal and kinship relations and reclamation of both land and history.

Spatial and Temporal Redefinition

Beginning with the poem "Smallpox" in *Mother/Land*, Savageau directly addresses historical biological attacks on Native people. Through conflating tenses, the poem disrupts conventional narratives that place colonization in the past, confronting modern Native experiences with both past and present colonization. The poem opens with the italicized line "*some of us did not die*" (1) that sets the temporal space for the rest of the poem. By asserting that some Native people "did not die," it simultaneously acknowledges the past and looks toward the present and future. The use of the term "us," which includes the author, creates the idea of the present, because for there to be an us writing the line, people must still exist in the present. These people will continue to exist in the present and continue to create and decolonize the Native future. Weaver, in her book, *That the People Might Live*, also addresses the idea of past, present, and future in her discussion of the Dene Nation. She writes that "George Erasmus... states, 'Our old people, when they talk about how the [traditional] ways should be kept by young people, they are not looking

back, they are looking forward. They are looking as far ahead into the future as they possibly can” (qtd. in Weaver 164).

Savageau’s conflation of past and present can also be seen throughout the rest of the poem. While the subject matter of the poem is predominantly the introduction of diseases into the Americas by settlers, in the second stanza, there is a clarification:

it is not the big pox
syphilis
which they also got from sheep
we don’t have it here. (6-10)

By using the present tense, Savageau retemporalizes colonization not as a historical event that happened in the past but as a continuing process extending into the present. In doing so, she removes it from its usually historical place into the present. For Native people who are often seen as historical objects rather than living beings, the retemporalization of traumatic events is important for the decolonization process. Although the infection of Native people with smallpox happened years ago, it is merely one instance of biological warfare perpetrated against indigenous populations. Thus, by bringing this historical event into the present, Savageau draws attention to the ongoing attacks against Native people, both biological and non-biological.

These lines also address the idea of sexuality and the influence and importance of sexual colonization. Since syphilis is the “big pox” as opposed to smallpox, this places more importance on syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease. This focuses attention more particularly on the sexual colonization and abuse of Native people, a topic often ignored in the canonical narrative of colonization. Drawing attention to the infection of indigenous populations with sexually transmitted diseases also draws attention to the active intent of colonizers. Although the infection of

smallpox may have been accidental, nothing is accidental about the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. This likely contributes to syphilis being described as “big” rather than “small,” larger, more threatening than smallpox despite much higher rates of death from smallpox than from syphilis.

The following stanza further emphasizes the difference between syphilis and smallpox. Despite not being the “big pox,” there is “nothing small about it [smallpox]” and it includes a variety of horrific symptoms in which “the back aches,/the head hurts,/the body burns,/the skin erupts” (11-17). Despite these awful symptoms, syphilis is still worse than smallpox. Perhaps syphilis gains importance because of the sexual nature of the disease. Thus, syphilis is more threatening because, rather than being transmitted through spatial proximity, someone must have engaged in sexual contact with a colonizer for transmission, consensually or not. Thus, syphilis gains importance as an STI that instantly marks the victim more viscerally than smallpox. Unlike smallpox, as an STI, a victim of syphilis may be blamed for the sexual intercourse required to contract the disease regardless of the consent present in the sexual experience. Thus, syphilis draws attention both to the sexual colonization of indigenous people and their potential ostracism from the community for quite literally “sleeping with the enemy,” whether consensually or not. Thus, like Native women whose sexuality has been used to justify violence perpetrated against them, for victims of syphilis and other STIs, their life-threatening infection is used to justify further alienation and oppression.

Continuing with the present tense, Savageau writes that “none of us have mild cases ... we bleed beneath our skin/that sloughs off our living flesh” (48-54). Using the present tense for this particularly horrific description of the effects of colonization, and the infection of smallpox in particular, disrupts canonical Native history in which Native people exist exclusively

in the past. Since Native history is often buried or romanticized, depicting Native people as the passive recipients or victims of colonization, which “turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it,” bringing the history into the present is a tool of empowerment (qtd. in Weaver 19). By retelling Native history in her own words, in her own way, Savageau turns the horrors of colonization and of historical trauma and violence into a way to reclaim Native history and perhaps empower a new Native future.

“Smallpox” reflects the ongoing effects of historical colonization into the present day as well as the ability of community to help cope with those effects. In the ninth stanza of the poem, the speaker says “it is because [she is]/indian [she knows]/though no one/will say so” as an explanation for having the measles (67-70). She has attributed her diseased body to the mere fact she is Indian, demonstrating an internalization of colonial racism. For her, it is because of her ethnicity that she is ill. Furthermore, because of the retemporalization of the historical trauma of smallpox infection described earlier in the poem, the timeline of the speaker becomes complex. Because the rest of the poem is in combination of the present and the past, it becomes unclear whether the speaker is also part of that past or part of the modern-day present. The effect of this confusion is to conflate the two possibilities into one. The temporal confusion allows the speaker to be both historical and modern, creating a connection between modern-day Native people and our historical ancestors. Additionally, although the speaker draws the connection between illness and Indianness, no one else will confirm her suspicions. Stating that “no one/will say so” suggests that others understand the connection between illness or death and Indianness, and it is not a lack of knowledge that prevents them talking about it, but rather an active desire to avoid discussing the connection. The navigation and negotiation with a history that has been written for them, “a history

that shames them, destroys their confidence, and causes them to reject their heritage” are understandably difficult, especially for elders who may be temporally closer to the original trauma (qtd. in Weaver 19). The speaker of the poem seeks to navigate this history by laying claim to the unspeakable past of colonization and how it is affecting her life now, whereas the others around her are trying to negotiate with this history simply by avoiding it. Unlike avoiding the past, the speaker’s acknowledgment of historical trauma allows for a coping/healing process and for her to move forward, despite the initial pain of remembering.

“Smallpox” asserts a connection between the speaker and the past made more explicit when she discusses measles with her mother and clearly shows the importance of queer Indigenous reconceptions of colonizing actions and past struggles. In addition to attributing her illness to her ethnicity, she too fears death as a result of historical infection. While ill with the measles, an easily treatable illness, she asks her mother, “lots of them [Indians]/died will I die” (73-74). Because of the death of ancestors and a known history of colonization, the speaker fears death. She is acutely aware of Native peoples’ history with colonization to the point that it affects her physical health and well-being. While sleeping, she remembers more of Native history:

it is after
they [colonizers] know how
to prevent it
that they give
the blankets
that will cause it. (96-101)

Once again using the present tense, the temporal location of the speaker becomes unclear. However, in this particular passage the speaker is occupying a sort of future space as well. Writing from the apparent present

about the past in the present tense, the speaker also has knowledge of the future. She is able to understand the future actions of colonizers who give smallpox blankets only after they understand how to prevent contracting the disease themselves. Her place in the past, the present, and the future is a way of reimagining Native history. Since “history does not fall from heaven; we make history,” her acknowledgement and creation of a new Native history is important because it introduces Native people as active subjects into history rather than as passive objects to be written about (Smith, *Conquest* 191). Rather than passively accepting a history written for her, the speaker of the poem is creating her own history as well as her present and eventual future.

Additionally, her temporal place between past, present, and future corresponds to definitions of cultural or historical trauma made visible via the trope of disease. Her memory is consistent with the idea of collective trauma that Hałas argues “shows the symbolic, emotional and moral dimensions of memory as a cultural phenomenon, the temporality of which is not limited to the past in the present, but also encompasses the future” (307). Thus, the disease becomes a symbol of collective or cultural trauma, infecting the speaker of the poem. She is able to understand the collective past, feel the effects of it in the present, and by coping with it in the present, look forward into the future. However, in doing so, she feels the physical effects of that connection. Despite these physical effects, the speaker, as with the elders in Stamm’s study who “attribute[d] the strengthened connection to place and their heritage to healing the traumatic stresses of their past,” has an increased connection to the heritage that enables her to begin to heal from the past (Stamm et al. 96). Healing is possible because here and elsewhere in Savageau’s work, rather than ignoring the traumas of a colonized past, acknowledging them, despite their horror, allows for the “rewriting and rerighting [of]

our position in history” (qtd. in Brooks, *Common* xxvii). By facing our history and negotiating it rather than allowing it to be buried, forgotten, or ignored, we move forward towards decolonization.

The method of reclamation put forth in “Smallpox” is applicable to other poems in her work, including those more explicitly interested in sexuality, eroticism, and the reclamation of the sexual Native body. “Survival” in *Dirt Road Home* bridges the ideas of colonization and history put forth in “Smallpox” and the need for sexual reclamation and empowerment that is examined elsewhere in Savageau’s poetry. For instance, while detailing historical colonization of Native lands and violence toward them, the poem does so using gendered, kinship-related language that connects that violence to violence perpetrated against Native individuals and their bodies. “Survival,” like “Smallpox,” reflects the blurred temporal lines many Native people inhabit, especially while attempting to decolonize our history and our land.

The poem’s emphasis on the relationship between history and land is captured in Savageau’s use of the setting “on Cape Cod” (71). The poem anachronistically uses the term “Cape Cod” to describe the land despite describing an event that took place before the term “Cape Cod” was established. As in “Smallpox,” this blurs the temporal setting between the historical event she describes and modern day, questioning the distinction between historical and modern colonization and oppression. Throughout the poem, the speaker continues to use the present and future tenses, creating the same simultaneous past, present, and future as in “Smallpox.” However, unlike “Smallpox,” which brings a historical event into the future by using the present tense, “Survival” pulls the present into the past. Anachronistically pulling Cape Cod into the past as the setting for distribution of smallpox-infected blankets blurs temporal lines once again. The specific setting of Cape Cod, an elitist, tourist-based, resort town built

upon Native land whose people were either forcibly removed or denied contemporary presence as a people, implies that original settlers were, in a way, also elitist tourists, emphasizing the connection between modern occupation of Native land and historical settling and colonizing of Native land.

Despite sharing the temporal setting of “Smallpox,” “Survival” portrays a different form of colonization. The colonization in “Smallpox” was deliberate, medical, bodily, yet still mostly passively violent, whereas in “Survival,” the violence is active as evidenced by the speaker’s use of active verbs and adjectives. The body being colonized is not human; rather it is the earthly body, reflecting not only personal colonization but cultural or spatial colonization. On Cape Cod, the colonists “plow the mother’s breast” (4). This line does multiple things. The term plow is simultaneously agricultural and sexual because connotations of the word plow imply sexual conquest, which then makes the agricultural colonization of Native land a sexual relationship that is explicitly exploitative and potentially violent. This relationship also attacks a “mother.” The use of the term “mother” to describe the earth creates a parental or familial relationship between the speaker and Native people and the land. By emphasizing intimacy and kinship, the poem likens colonization of the land to the colonization of family. The importance of this connection is illustrated in Daniel Heath Justice’s essay in *Reasoning Together* in which he writes:

When a family, a community, or a nation is fully removed from the land of its origins, that land doesn’t cease to shape the People’s cosmos, even when they’re building new relationships with a new land; their links to it change, but they rarely vanish, just as separation from a loved one inevitably changes but doesn’t necessarily erase our relationship to that person. (Heath 164)

Thus, despite colonization of the land that makes it almost unrecognizable,

or forced relocation of Native tribes from their homelands, the relationship between Native people and their homelands does not disappear. To push this idea further, while our relationships with our land, our history, our ancestors, or even seemingly lost aspects of ourselves may change or shift with time or because of colonization, they do not disappear. Rather, the relationships change; those individuals, places, and qualities still continue to shape who we are both as individuals and as a collective people, which helps explain both how and why colonization still impacts Native communities. Because colonization of ancestors continues to impact and shape Native lives and identities, the process of decolonization becomes that much more difficult and important.

While increasing the tangibility of the relationship between Native people and the subjugation of the land, gendering the land and colonialist relationships with it often creates a gender binary in which the passive, powerless land becomes feminized and the active, powerful colonizers are masculinized. Especially in colonial rhetoric, the land becomes feminized, awaiting subjugation by the masculinized colonizers. On Cape Cod, rather than the land simply being feminized, the earth itself is a “mother’s breast,” there to be plowed whereas the masculinized forest is more active, standing tall where:

 this sand
 where white pine,
 shrunk from grandfather forests
 to these survivors. (17-20)

While the feminized earth remains plowed, a subject for the actions of the colonizers, the masculinized forests are fathers, standing survivors. Though the distinction between the land and the trees seems to perpetuate a gender binary between men and women, mothers and fathers, it also does something more subversive. In Abenaki tradition, people are made from

the trees, which gives a procreative connotation to the masculine trees. Instead of the feminized, “mother” land giving life, it is the masculinized trees that subvert gender expectations. Additionally, it disrupts the binary created by colonial rhetoric in which all of the land, particularly in the Americas, is feminized and passive. In colonial rhetoric, feminization of the land heterosexualizes the relationship between colonizers and their subjugation of the land. However, the introduction of a male aspect of the land allows for a queering of the relationship between those male colonizers and the land that they are colonizing, an aspect that disrupts heterosexualized history. The colonial relationship is queered in that a traditionally heterosexual relationship, used to reaffirm colonial masculinity, is confronted with a masculinized landscape that changes the sexuality of the colonial narrative. This not only interrupts the portrayal of the land as a female body open to male colonizers, but also reveals a potentially hidden queer colonial history. Queering the relationship between the land and colonizers introduces a potentially non-binary land as well as non-heterosexual colonizers.

The relationship between feminized body and land is also useful for reclaiming the Native body. As with reclamation of a traumatized and diseased past in the poems “Smallpox” and “Survival,” reclamation of the Native body through the land begins with an acknowledgement of past violence perpetrated against Native people, Native land, and the invisibility that can accompany the idea of Native people as part of the land. In the poem “Pemigewasset” from *Mother/Land*, Savageau explores the modern impact of historical collusion of land and Native bodies. Set in a landscape that is now a protected area, the poem describes the experiences of the speaker and another Abenaki woman in the middle of a “wilderness” area. While they are standing by the water, “tourists/rush past” (*Mother/Land* 7-8). Describing the people surrounding them as tourists immediately

gives the speaker and her companion a sense of ownership or belonging in the area that the others around them do not possess. While the two Abenaki women belong, those around them do not, creating an “us versus them” dichotomy. As the only non-tourists in Pemigewasset, the wilderness area becomes home for the Native women in opposition to the others who are intruding upon that space.

As in the past, the tourists, although intruding upon the Native women’s home, do not acknowledge their presence. The speaker’s companion says “I feel like a ghost...they [the tourists] can’t even see/us” (12-15). Tourists typically try to look at everything. That is the point of tourism, to consume as much of another seemingly foreign location or culture as possible. However, for these tourists, it is as if the Native women do not even exist. They are ghosts. The term ghosts, beyond simply implying invisibility, has particular relevance considering the violent and lethal history of colonization Indians have experienced. History has repeated itself. Native women remain standing in their homeland (still named in Abenaki as Pemigewasset), not being recognized as people, while being swarmed with tourists, made to feel not only invisible but dead, simply ghosts.

The speaker of the poem responds to her friend’s understandably grim feelings with a more reclamatory statement, based in a modified understanding of spatial relationships and the land they are standing on. She says that the reason the tourists do not see them is “because/they are in a state park ... and we are at/the center/of the world” (27-32). Her response is to essentially reframe the spatial relationship between the Abenaki women, the tourists, and the land on which they are standing. The reason the tourists are unable to see them is because they are physically in different locations based on their relationship to the earth. For the tourists, unconnected and unfamiliar with the land, they are simply in a state park.

However, for the Native women, traditionally connected to the land either through kinship relationships with an “earth mother” or as physically part of the land itself, their homeland becomes the “center of the world.” This refocuses attention geographically on Native space, similar to the refocusing of history on Native history as Savageau described in “Graduate School First Semester: So Here I Am Writing About Indians Again,” a poem in *Mother/Land* that examines the difficult position Native people have in academia. In both “Survival” and “Graduate School First Semester,” as part of decolonization the speaker focuses the reader’s attention on an often-unnoticed Native space both temporally and geographically. This shifts attention from the tourists who are taking over the land to the Native perception of and relationship to the land.

In *Dirt Road Home*, the conflation of the land and the body expresses sexuality and eroticism in ways that are affirmative, autonomous, and self-directed. In “Night,” a love poem, Savageau uses land-based language to depict a relationship between the wind, smoke, and fire as well as the relationship between the speaker and her lover. The second person narrative used throughout the poem allows for a genderless lover. Although the poem is dedicated “for Bill” (65), the second person subject still addresses the reader in addition to the individual to whom the poem is dedicated, a technique that allows for a queering of the erotic or romantic relationship portrayed in the poem. Unlike the queered relationship between colonizers and the Americas, which looks to a hidden queer past, this queered relationship exists in a constant present. The poem exists in a continual present, creating a relationship with the reader regardless of gender. The gendering of the landscape around them queers not only their relationship but also the relationship between individual and land that is present throughout both colonial rhetoric and Native literature. The speaker and her lover have:

stolen the orange harvest moon
to light our fire
now she glows
chill silver. (2-5)

The term “she” in the fourth line genders the relationship between moon and fire in complicated ways. The location of this pronoun makes its original noun unclear. The reader is unsure whether the term “she” refers to the fire or the moon, an ambiguity that blends them together into a simultaneously feminine and unified relationship. The moon and the fire both become feminized as well as one entity, creating a relationship in which one partner consumes the other. The consumption of another entity mimics the idea of settler colonialism in which the settling force invades and consumes the native population. However, in this instance, the motivation is not absorption/hostile takeover for resources or greed, but rather, a desire to become one out of love. Although this consumptive model of love mimics colonial invasion of the land, through a shift in motivation and subjects, Savageau uses this relationship to subvert damaging colonial relationships. Instead, she mimics the time when “relationships that were formed in Native space between settlers and Abenakis prevented violence, even in the midst of war” (Brooks, *Common* 40). This relationship not only mimics old relationships between colonizers and the Abenaki tribe but also mimics the idea of the reconstruction or “re-memberment” of Native past, present, and future. Brooks defines the idea of “re-memberment” multiple ways throughout her book *The Common Pot*, but the definition most applicable here describes the “process of re-memberment [as] a careful reconstruction of the communal body, a ‘quest for wholeness’ that is essential to the healing of the fragmented political, social, and cultural ‘base’” (Brooks, *Common* 67). Thus, through the relationship between the moon and the fire, the lovers are coming together, re-membering the

communal body via a process of mutual consumption. The consumptive definition of love and relationships in this poem become models not only for human relationships but also for the collective re-memberment of the Native community.

Just as the moon and the fire become unified in their relationship, the relationship between the lovers in the poem becomes merged with the relationship between the earth, fire, and wind. Savageau creates that unity in multiple ways: by using humanistic, sensual language when referring to the earth as well as by using the same language to refer to the relationship between the speaker and the lover. In reference to the earth:

the wind
pulls the smoke into
itself. Flames curl
securely around the logs. (13-16)

The relationship between the wind and the smoke is almost human. The imagery is evocative of people sleeping together, cuddling. Flames are not usually described as curling around logs nor smoke as being pulled into the wind in this very human way. The language makes these natural relationships appear more romantic, more human than they are typically portrayed. Additionally, the wind pulling the smoke “into itself,” creates the same consumptive idea of relationships portrayed by the moon and the fire at the beginning of the poem. Later in the poem, when referring to the relationship between the speaker and her lover, she says, “I want/to curl my warmth/around you” (19-21). Her language when referring to her lover is the same as that used to describe the flames and the log. In this instance, she becomes the flames, curling around her lover, the log. The connection between her lover and the earth, specifically logs, is made more explicit because they sleep with their “heavy length against/the ground” (17-18). Thus, in this love poem, the humans are given elemental properties, the

natural elements are humanized, and both are blurred together. This creates an empowered relationship within Native romantic relationships as well as between Native people and our homeland. The utilization and integration of nature-based language in the process of decolonizing love is crucial because it repurposes a previously oppressive trope that aligned Native people with the earth in a way that justified their subjugation.

The act of writing love poetry for Native women is an empowering action in itself. Discussing the absence of Native women's love or erotic poetry in general academia, Deborah Miranda asserts that "for Indian women to express the erotic is almost as frightening to America as if the skeletal witnesses in anthropology departments and national museums had suddenly risen" because in love poetry "the lover makes herself visible and patriarchal culture suddenly invisible" (Miranda, "Dildos" 143/146). The very act of writing love poetry is empowering for Native women after being either hypersexualized or the victims of sexual violence throughout much of our history. Thus, by writing love poetry or erotic poetry on our own terms, about our own experiences, we are able not only to reclaim our own bodies and relationships but also put forth an image of Indian women that defies the stereotypes of "squaw sluts, Pocahontas, or Indian princesses," instead putting forth the multiplicity of Native women's romantic experiences and of life experiences as a whole (Miranda, "Dildos" 138). Additionally, Savageau integrates language relating to the land and nature in its reclamation of sexuality and sensuality. By doing so, she not only rewrites Native women's sexual relationships but also the relationship with the land, helping to separate both sexual and land-based relationships from colonial frameworks that depict Native people as closer to nature than human or the somehow mystical progeny of the land.

The reclamation of the body and of land from colonization is more explicit in "Like the Trails of Ndaakinnna" in *Dirt Road Home*. This poem is

not explicitly sexual or necessarily even romantic. However, it addresses the negotiation with a colonized past, connections between body and land, and the reclamation of that past to reclaim both body and land. First, Savageau opens the poem by making Native identity a battleground. The speaker's father says "we're French and Indian like the war," (1) attempting to reconcile his history by relaying it to his daughter. While the speaker's father tries to pacify this battle, saying that "they fought together/against the English," the speaker questions this understanding of history and pushes against the myth of allied Indian and French forces (3-4). The speaker responds by saying that "it's still a lie/French and Indian/still fighting in my blood" (7-8). Not only does the speaker retemporalize this battle into the present but also calls into question the dominant history that says that the French and Native Americans fought together. By saying "it's still a lie," she not only questions the unity of the various parts of her heritage but also questions the unity of the French and Indians in the past as well as the accuracy of colonial education.

Speaking to her father, she continues to address the legitimacy of conventional knowledge beyond history, including cultural knowledge and geographical knowledge. She writes to him that he:

Taught [her] to see no borders
To know the northeast as one land
Never heard the word Ndakinna
But translated without knowing it
Our country, Abenaki country (15-19).

Although he did not know the exact word for the concept, her father was able to communicate its exact meaning. In much of Savageau's poetry, her father becomes a mentor and teacher, especially in Native experiences and history. Just as in "Looking for Indians," "Trees," and "Indian Blood," Savageau reveres her father for his knowledge of life,

particularly Indian life, despite a lack of “formal” education. Instead, Savageau’s father and his knowledge are valuable because they transcend the dominant romanticized Native history put forth by dominant, white education. Likewise, in “Trees” her father taught her “the land so well” that she “never saw the highway/the truckstops, lumberyards” (1-4). In Savageau’s poetry, knowledge is useful or revered only when it allows one to move past definitions put forth by a dominant culture of colonization. Specifically, in this poetry, to truly know the land is to redefine spatial borders that define states created by settlers and the divisions between the “United States of America” and “Indian Country.”

The redefinition of spatial relationships that Savageau uses to reclaim the relationship with the homeland also appears in “Like the Trails of Ndinakina” to reclaim the Native body as well. She describes “Grandmothers and grandfathers/[who] are roaming in my blood...chased by blue eyes and white skin ... invisibility their best defense” (20-28). This description collapses the history of colonization and modernity, the distinction between the speaker and her ancestors as well as the difference between her body and the land. Her ancestors, in the present tense, are still running, an observation that brings the historical colonization of Native people into the present. However, rather than running and hiding on physical ground, they are doing so within the body of the speaker. Her body becomes the battleground of settler colonial America. The speaker’s mixed heritage, French and Indian, provides an opportunity to examine internalized racism and colonialism. Though the battle is taking place within the Native speaker, she is also French; hence even within her body, her grandmothers and grandfathers are still being chased by those with blue eyes and white skin. This reflects not only the historical battle between Native and white people but also the internal battle that still exists for many Native people with mixed ancestry who may feel alienated both

from white culture as well as their own Native culture and background.

Finally, despite both current and historical colonization, the speaker is able to use the same framework she used to reclaim the northeast as Abenaki country to reclaim her own body. First, she blurs the line between her white and Native ancestors by once again addressing her grandmothers and grandfathers, telling them that their “blood runs thin in [her]” (29-30). Since the last subjects addressed were the white skinned, blue eyed individuals chasing her ancestors, it is unclear whether the grandfathers and grandmothers she addresses are French or Indian. Further, the line between enemy and friend becomes blurred when she tells them that she catches “sight of you [her grandmothers and grandfathers]/sideways in a mirror” until they “then sink/behind the enemy’s colors” (31-35). Because the ancestors the speaker addresses are unclear, the enemy also becomes unclear. Additionally, since this episode occurs in the face of a mirror, the speaker’s body becomes simultaneously the reflection of both her ancestors and their enemies.

Then, apparently addressing both her grandparents and her father, she writes that:

you are walking the trails
that declare this body
Abenaki land...
speaking my true name
Ndakinna. (36-41)

Despite her struggles with mixed ancestry presented in the beginning of the poem, the speaker proudly states her identity, claiming both her body and the land. The term “declare” makes this line autonomous and demonstrates agency. She declares her true name, the land’s true name, in Abenaki, reclaiming it from modern, English, colonized titles. The way she reclaims her body is important as well. She does so through the idea of

homeland presented in the Abenaki word, Ndakinna, our land. Thus, not only is she reclaiming herself and her body's true name but the land's true name as well. The land is not "Cape Cod" or "New Hampshire" or "New England." It is Ndakinna. It is Abenaki land. Ndakinna translated means approximately "our land," which makes this a collective reclamation as well. She is not claiming private ownership through Ndakinna but rather community ownership in the form of tribal relations to the land and acknowledgement of her ancestors within her own body.

Finally, after setting up a framework of reclamation of land, empowerment of self and body, and negotiation with a colonized past and present, how does this basis affect Native erotic or sexual bodies? The methods for reclamation of eroticism and sexuality are essentially the same renegotiations with history, time, and space, as utilized for the nonsexual body or land. In *Mother/Land*, the last poem of the first section, "Red," explicitly addresses colonization of the land. Although an unnamed poet referred to only as "he" and associated pronouns uses the woods as a metaphor for martyrs, the speaker of the poem argues:

Look at the trees I want to tell him
Listen The trees have their own stories to tell
like the story of fire deep within the heart They too
have been martyrs in the long war against the land. (7-10)

The argument is that rather than a metaphor for martyrs, the trees themselves have experienced suffering. Like the indigenous people who experience colonization, the trees have their own stories to tell, but the unnamed poet ignores them and sees them as nothing more than a metaphor for human suffering, not acknowledging the importance of the land as its own entity.

However, this poem is not simply discussing historical colonization of the land. Rather its point is to highlight the progress that has been made to help rectify some of the damages done by colonization because, "a hundred

years ago these hills were full of trees ... the illusion of ownership” (12-14). In the past, colonial desires for land ownership led to the ransacking of land and the destruction of trees and the natural landscape, a process that Savageau repeatedly addresses in “Survival,” “Poison in the Pond,” “Algonkian Paradise,” and other poems. She also speaks to such relationships in her quilts, “Jazz Autumn” and “The Illusion of Ownership.” “The Illusion of Ownership” (Figure 1) is made of “colors that disappear,” similar to both the disappearing landscape described in the poem as well as the idea of a “disappearing Indian” (*We’re Still Here*). The phrase “illusion of ownership” is also interesting, both in the poem and in the quilt of the same title. The poem implies that settlers perceived ownership as dependent upon the removal of trees; however, that ownership is still not real. It is an illusion. In the quilt, this idea is taken a step further. The disappearing colors portray the disappearing Indian country and a history of Native people forcibly disappearing through death. However, since the quilt actually depicts cabins, a marker of civilization and colonization, it also implies that colonization is slowly disappearing as well.

The joy of survival past colonization is expressed in “Jazz Autumn” and in the poem itself because “now the hills are red with maples” (14). Despite colonial destruction of the landscape, it can be rebuilt. The damage of colonialism does not have to remain permanently unchallenged, and the joy of this possibility is reflected both in “Red” and in this quilt (see fig. 2). In the quilt “Jazz Autumn,” the fervor and excitement of the trees is communicated through the vibrant reds of the quilt. The colors leap out of the quilt, and the triangles seem to shift, forming new patterns as the eye views the quilt. The joy of these new red maples is almost uncontainable within the confines of the quilt.

In the poem, the joy over these trees becomes sexual, almost erotic. When the speaker of the poem sees them, her “heart is leaping out to meet

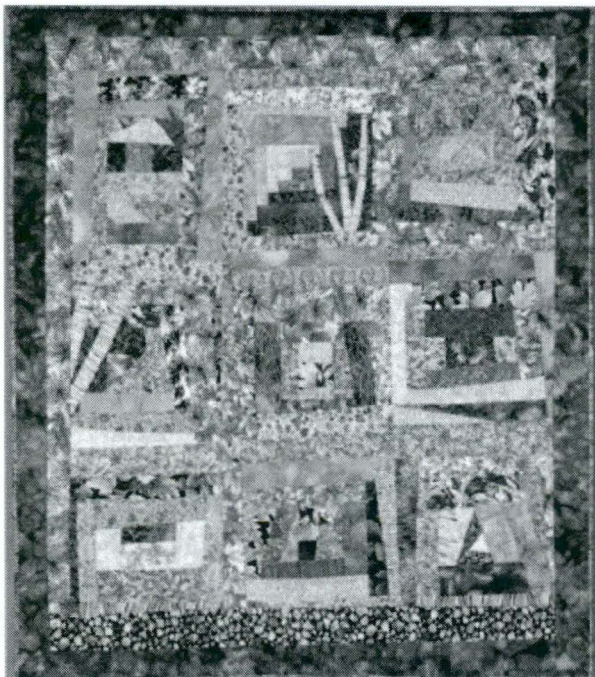


Figure 1. "The Illusion of Ownership". Savageau, Cheryl. Senier, Siobhan. "All This / Is Abenaki Country." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 22.3 (2010): 1-25. Project MUSE. Web.

them, [her] eyes cannot be full enough" (14-15). Just as in "Night" in which love becomes almost consumptive, overtaking or subsuming the lover, here she uses the same idea, but rather than the speaker consuming her lover, she is being filled with them. Her lover, the trees, cannot fill her eyes quickly enough. There is a sense of overabundance in this scene, an overwhelming, overtaking joy that accompanies the speaker's relationship with the trees. This love becomes particularly important in light of the unique Abenaki relationship with trees. According to Savageau, "In



Figure 2. "Jazz Autumn." Cheryl Savageau. "Center for New England Culture, University of New Hampshire, Contemporary Indigenous New England Artists." *"We're Still Here" Online Exhibit*. Center for New England Culture, n.d. Web. 07 May 2013.

Abenaki creation stories we are told that we were made from the trees, that the trees are quite literally our relatives, and their survival and ours are intimately connected" (*We're Still Here*). Since humans come from the trees, in a way, they become interchangeable; the trees are just waiting to become human. The speaker's love for the trees is a love for other human beings before they are actually human. In so doing, the erotic created is a polyamorous one. The speaker is not simply addressing one tree, one person; rather, she shares this relationship with all of these trees, all of

these potential humans.

Affection for the trees and their eventually human counterparts derives from their ability to survive and persevere. The speaker's initial joy at the trees is because they were completely gone a hundred years ago. Now, she admires their ability to survive because "though acid falls from the clouds/maples have gathered on the hillsides/in every direction" (16-18). Mentioning the modern conditions the trees face as they survive draws attention to the connection between historical and modern harm. The trees survived the forced "civilization" of colonization just as they are now surviving the effects of "civilization" through acid rain. It is their ability to survive, both as trees and as eventual humans, that is attractive to the speaker. In the face of the acid rain, the trees "celebrate ... wearing their brightest dresses," which causes the speaker to join them (18-19). The implication is that it is in the face of pain and struggle that the trees are able to celebrate. By surviving these trials and celebrating that survival, the trees become beautiful, attractive. Survival does not diminish the trees. Instead, it redefines/reimagines their beauty outside of the constraints of colonization.

The personification of the trees, especially based on Abenaki myth and legend, becomes most clear toward the end of the poem. The speaker switches from referring to the maples as trees or objects to addressing them as "sisters," making them human and relations (20). The implied connection between the trees and their human counterparts is made explicit. Because these humans came from the trees, they share the same beauty and attractiveness through struggle. The implication does not exalt Native struggles against colonization, but honors them. We, like the trees, are not damaged because of our struggles, but rather, become more beautiful as a result of our strength. This redefines our beauty and our relationships outside of a colonized context. This is furthered through the way in which

the speaker courts the treewomen. She asks them:

I offer you a song
Let me paint
it red with
passion. (21-24)

Rather than offering material objects as part of the relationship, or as settlers did to make deals with the indigenous people of America, the speaker offers impossible immaterial goods. She offers a song that has been painted, an impossible, intangible object. Moreover, this object is painted red, with passion. Red is the color of passion but also of love, of anger, of eroticism. She offers the treewomen an object made of all of these things, a love wrapped in passion, anger that is both passionate and loving; she offers the treewomen the reality of Native experience.

By offering them this gift that is at once impossible and somehow universal in its description of experience, the speaker extends the universality of the love or sexuality presented in the poem. It ends with a quote from another Native woman poet, telling the treewomen that they “are/all the women/I have ever loved” (25-27). Firstly, this queers the relationship between the speaker and the treewomen. The trees are feminized as is the speaker of the poem, creating a queer relationship between the two. Additionally, within the colonized rhetoric of a feminized American land, any close relationship between a (Native) woman and the feminized land may be interpreted as a queered relationship despite operating within an originally heterosexist, binary rhetorical context. Because Savageau has masculinized aspects of the land, the land incorporates both masculine and feminine elements, which disrupts the original colonial binary, redefining the land in terms more in line with older Abenaki gender and sexuality ideas.

Secondly, the last stanza expands this one moment to all of the speaker’s

relationships. The speaker describes the treewomen as all the women she has ever loved, which implies they were all derived from trees. In addition to creating non-heterosexual relationships between the speaker and other women, this passage posits the Abenaki creation myth as the definitive one, rather than any Anglo-European creation story. The previous integration of both masculine and feminine elements into the land blurs gender lines of the treewomen. They grow from the earth, containing both male and female elements despite being described as women, which broadens the definition of the masculine, and the feminine. Thus, the poem redefines romantic relationships in a regendered space that utilizes decolonized ideas of beauty, gender, and sexuality. These redefined relationships put forth a new creation story in which humans are born from the regendered, non-binary earth rather than the more canonical western creation story.

Conclusion

Whether Native people are trying to decolonize the land, their history, their bodies, or their communities, the decolonization process takes a similar form. It often includes a renegotiation or redefinition of the temporal and spatial relationships they have with these aspects of contemporary Native life. This can mean either rewriting (re-righting) history, redefining land barriers, redefining the boundaries between self and community, or renegotiating the relationship we have with ourselves and our own bodies. The various types of rhetorical navigation and negotiation indigenous people use to try to reclaim our lives after and during colonization can be seen in Cheryl Savageau's creative work, including her poetry and quilts. Through Savageau's work one can see some of the rhetorical and ideological methods Native people are using to attempt to redefine and reclaim our histories and ourselves.

Looking at these poems and this history through a queered context

allows for the re-empowerment of Native sexuality and eroticism, especially in the face of a particularly sexually violent colonial history. Although historical reclamation and rediscovery of gender and sexuality are often considered separate pursuits, the reality is that in order to properly reclaim our history, it must be done with gender and sexuality in mind. Looking at this history in a queered framework allows for the expansion of Native history in ways that a heterosexist, colonized framework would not allow and helps to prevent further heterosexism in decolonization attempts. Poetry and other creative work by Native authors, especially queer Native authors, is integral to moving forward in decolonization. This work involves Native people creatively putting forth their own experiences, working through and reclaiming their bodies and histories in their own words, making it central to the reclamation of Native history and sexuality and moving forward as a unified community.

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