

# *What's After Queer Theory? Queer Ethnic and Indigenous Studies*

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The decision to exercise intellectual sovereignty provides a crucial moment in the process from which resistance, hope, and most of all, imagination issue.

—Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets:  
Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*<sup>1</sup>

To what historical trajectory would queerness attach itself, so that it could be legible to itself and to others? Which geographic locations would be meaningful for queer theory's central inquiries?

—Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*<sup>2</sup>

## THE EMERGENCE OF A FIELD

READING CONTEMPORARY WORK IN THE FIELD of what, for the purposes of this essay, I will call queer ethnic and indigenous studies generally gives me a feeling of great satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> In the works that comprise this still-emerging field, I see the fruition of conversations I remember taking place among queer graduate students of color in the 1990s. To be more precise, many of the conversations that I and many other graduate students (queer, of color, and queer of color) had during the 1990s—whether in the hallways of our graduate programs, or over drinks after watching the latest Spike Lee film, or

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 BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY

*Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature.*

Edited by Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011.

*The Erotic Life of Racism.* By Sharon Patricia Holland. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

*Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization.*

Edited by Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

*Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States.* By Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

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sitting around someone's apartment living room on floor cushions discussing Kobena Mercer or Coco Fusco in a queer theory reading group, or while puzzling through a challenging passage by Jacques Lacan or Frantz Fanon in bed on a Sunday morning—have turned out to be the seeds from which the orchard of queer ethnic and indigenous studies has grown. In addition to the women of color and lesbian of color feminisms that were already available to us in the 1980s and 1990s, the early sentinel trees in this forest appeared during the last decade of the millenium: including Kobena Mercer's 1994 *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*; Evelyn Hammonds's 1994 article "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" in *differences*; Kevin Mumford's 1997 *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*; Cathy Cohen's 1997 article "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" in *GLQ*; David Eng and Alice Hom's 1998 collection *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*; José Esteban Muñoz's 1999 *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*; and Emma Pérez's 1999 *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*.<sup>4</sup> This trickle of books and articles transformed into a torrent in the following decade as the

floodgates opened for scholars informed by the critical scholarship from ethnic studies, critical race theory, indigenous studies, queer theory, and feminism. Without wanting to suggest any absolute separation among these fields, I would like to briefly tease out a few of the things that distinguish this emerging body of work from (1) women of color feminism and (2) queer theory, before going on to consider how the four texts under review here contribute to the field. It may be that the work of tracing continuities — particularly between this field and women of color feminism, as suggested by Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson in their introduction to *Strange Affinities* — is a generally more important project, but for the moment I am going to take the continuities for granted and see what can be learned from the discontinuities.

In thinking about what distinguishes queer ethnic and indigenous studies from women of color and indigenous feminisms, the first, most obvious, answer lies in their relationship to queer theory. In other words, if women of color and indigenous feminisms (understood as overlapping formations) can be located in the interstices between ethnic and indigenous studies, race-based social movements, and indigenous sovereignty movements, on the one hand, and feminism and the women's movement, on the other, then queer ethnic and indigenous studies emerges from the spaces between queer theory and LGBTQ2 (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit) social movements, on the one hand, and a second wave in ethnic studies and critical race theory and developments in so-called post-civil rights minority activism and contemporary sovereignty and decolonization movements, on the other.

Thus, while thoroughly indebted to women of color and indigenous feminisms to the point of overlapping and sharing a genealogy with them, queer ethnic and indigenous studies emerge from events and contradictions that are particular to the historical moment of the 1990s, rather than earlier periods that were formative to many key figures in women of color feminism such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa. As a result of the conditions of their historical emergence, queer ethnic and indigenous studies are relatively distant from the conversations and debates that shaped second wave feminism, for example, and its relationship to women of color and indigenous feminisms. While there are

similarities in the tensions and lines of influence between queer theory and queer ethnic and indigenous studies and those between second wave feminism and women of color and indigenous feminisms, the substance and form of interaction was also different. For one thing, although both encounters took place both in the academy and in community organizing spaces, the encounter between queer theory and queer ethnic studies was much more soundly centered in the university. Its protagonists included the first big wave of so-called affirmative action babies who had been nurtured by Ford Foundation and Mellon Foundation fellowships, as well as other magnet and pathway programs to consider the academy their home. What distinguished the two moments was not so much the absence of women of color feminist academics in the 1980s (Hortense Spillers and María Lugones are among those who come to mind) but rather the absence in the 1990s and 2000s of younger equivalents to Lorde, Anzaldúa, Moraga, Hattie Gossett, and others who blurred the lines between high theory, creative fiction and nonfiction, and accessible political manifestos.<sup>5</sup> Also, although second wave feminism had its more liberal aspects, there were also quite visible radical strains that nourished feminist thought. The queer radicals of the late 1990s and 2000s, while certainly around, never achieved the same level of public visibility, and throughout the Clinton/Bush years the paradigmatic symbols of LGBT radicalism were resoundingly assimilationist ones: marriage and military service. Finally, the constituencies of queer ethnic and indigenous studies have tended to be more multigendered than at least the early waves of women of color feminism. Thus, for example, the book authors listed above are mostly male, although many queer women continued to contribute books to the field as the new millennium dawned (for example, Sara Ahmed, M. Jacqui Alexander, Catriona Rueda Esquibel, Gayatri Gopinath, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Jasbir Puar, Juana María Rodríguez, Chela Sandoval, Siobhan Somerville, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, and Gloria Wekker).<sup>6</sup>

The next thing distinguishing queer ethnic and indigenous studies from women of color and indigenous feminisms was that they had the good fortune of arriving after both the initial period of academic program building in ethnic and indigenous studies and a wave of internal criticism of the field by women. As a result, programs, departments, and scholarships were ripe for rebuilding and reshaping

in more comparative, heterogeneous, self-critical, and open ways. Many of the emerging scholars under consideration also had the good fortune as undergraduates and graduate students to learn from women of color academics, either through their publications or by having them as teachers and mentors.

Perhaps something of the shift from queer theory to queer ethnic and indigenous studies can be seen in the transition from Duke University Press's Series Q as a standard bearer for queer theory to the press's newer book series *Perverse Modernities*. Series Q began in 1993 just a few years after the oft-cited coining of the term "queer theory" and was ended in 2009 shortly after literary critic Eve Sedgwick's untimely death from breast cancer. The coeditors were Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and the series included some of the most influential books in the field during its sixteen-year run. There were occasional books included in the series that took race to be a central and definitive part of their inquiry (Somerville's *Queering the Color Line* is particularly noteworthy). For the most part, however, race, indigeneity, and colonialism were at best secondary to the series, whose primary mission is summarized on the Duke University Press's website as follows: "[Series Q] brought a theoretical and interdisciplinary lens to gay and lesbian studies, approaching questions of sexuality from a queer angle. Intersections of sexuality with cultural studies, gender theory, social theory, and literary theory characterize many of the books in the series in their embrace of questions of gender, culture, race and nationality, sexuality, and processes of representation." The decision to end the series, in turn, is described in terms of the new status of queer theory as fully entrenched within the traditional disciplines: "By the time of the death of co-editor Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in 2009, queer theory had found a place in multiple academic disciplines and its concepts informed a wide range of theoretical approaches. Therefore, the remaining editors decided to close the series."<sup>7</sup>

Overlapping by six years with Series Q, another Duke University Press series, *Perverse Modernities*, edited by Lisa Lowe and Judith Halberstam, was launched in 2003 with the publication of Martin Manalansan IV's *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (the same year that Juana María Rodríguez's *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* was published and that Roderick Ferguson coined the term "queer of

color critique" in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*).<sup>8</sup> From one point of view, the mission of this series stands in clear alliance with that of Series Q, working to advance the interdisciplinary study of sexuality in ways that emphasize the politically transgressive and culturally unruly nature of desire. However, from another point of view, *Perverse Modernities* stands in sharp distinction from Series Q in its insistence that sexuality and desire cannot be adequately understood apart from "race, colonialism, and political economy":

Perverse Modernities transgresses modern divisions of knowledge that have historically separated the consideration of sexuality and its concern with desire, gender, bodies, and performance, on the one hand, from the consideration of race, colonialism, and political economy, on the other, in order to explore how the mutual implication of race, colonialism, and sexuality has been rendered perverse and unintelligible within the logics of modernity.<sup>9</sup>

The fifteen books in the series to date, in turn, have made a major contribution toward shaping the contours of queer ethnic and indigenous studies, alongside José Esteban Muñoz and Ann Pellegrini's *Sexual Cultures* series at New York University Press (in which Rodríguez's *Queer Latinidad* appeared) and other books at a number of academic and trade presses, perhaps most notably the University of Minnesota Press, which published Muñoz's *Disidentifications* and Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* as well as other works in queer ethnic, indigenous, and postcolonial studies, including my own *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity*, published in 2011.

Of course, both *Perverse Modernities* and *Sexual Cultures* are marketed as queer book series, and many of these authors have also published key essays in *GLQ*, *differences*, and other queer and feminist journals. So why designate this emerging field as queer ethnic and indigenous studies and not simply the latest work in queer theory? To answer that question, it is useful to consider Ferguson's framing of queer of color critique, as well as the ways that authors and editors such as those under review here frame the genealogies of their projects. When Ferguson elaborates on the intellectual genealogy of queer of color critique in *Aberrations in Black*, he carefully avoids engagement with or citation to the most commonly accepted foundational texts of queer theory. Instead, he outlines this school of critical thought

through citations to Karl Marx and to women of color feminism. It seems unlikely that the omission of Michel Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Butler from the citations of a scholar writing in the early 2000s on race and sexuality would be anything but deliberate. The authors and editors under consideration in this review essay similarly go to lengths to explicitly place their books within a primary context of women of color and indigenous feminisms and of ethnic and indigenous studies. I think it is important to remark on these decisions and to think about their implications.

By defining themselves as emerging more from ethnic and indigenous studies than from queer theory or traditional disciplines, it is not the case that they are denying all connection to so-called Western thought or to white or European peoples. That statement seems obvious to me, but I have been accused or heard others accused of “hating white people” or of being “reverse racist” often enough to think it worth stating the obvious. In my own case, for example, I read Foucault before I read Anzaldúa and Sigmund Freud before Fanon. I count G. W. F. Hegel, Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, and Herbert Marcuse as among the thinkers I took the greatest pleasure in reading as a graduate student. Do traditional philosophy and mainstream queer theory inform my thinking and my scholarship? Of course.

The question at issue, however, is put very well by the editors of *Queer Indigenous Studies*. Drawing from the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Robert Warrior, and Andrea Smith in their introduction, they write that

“indigenous methodologies” represent the intellectual work Indigenous people can take up in order to decolonize both knowledge and the methods producing it. A methodological turn to Indigenous knowledges opens up accounts to the multiplicity, complexity, contestation, and change among knowledge claims by Indigenous people. . . . Focusing on Indigenous knowledges marks their variety and notes how power can act within them as well as within colonial regimes. In the spirit of such claims, we center knowledges produced by Indigenous GLBTQ2 people in order to counter colonial representation, affirm Indigenous GLBTQ2 intellectual histories, and foreground multiplicity among Indigenous people to critically examine their production within power relations. (4)

I believe that most of the scholars involved in building queer ethnic and indigenous studies would embrace some kind of allied vision with this statement, seeking to affirm the forms of knowing and living that have been developed among people of color and indigenous people. This does not require a lack of engagement with other traditions of thought. Andrea Smith, in her contribution to *Queer Indigenous Studies*, argues precisely for such engagement between Native studies and queer studies (including queer of color critique), also invoking Warrior's concept of intellectual sovereignty:

Warrior understands Native studies as a field with its own integrity that can be informed by traditional disciplines but is not simply a multicultural add-on to them. As I discuss below, this reformulation of Native studies [through engagement with queer theory] does not entail ejecting identity concerns but expands its scope of inquiry by positioning Native peoples as producers of theory and not simply as objects of analysis. (47)

For their part, Hong and Ferguson follow Ferguson's early characterization of his work's genealogy by arguing that their edited volume is grounded in the methods of "women of color feminism, and a related intellectual tradition . . . queer of color critique." They continue, arguing for more continuity between these two traditions than I have suggested above:

We assert that much of what we now call "women of color feminism" can be seen as queer of color critique, insofar as these texts consistently situate sexuality as constitutive of race and gender. Further, not coincidentally and not unimportantly, lesbian practice and identity were central to many of the most foundational women of color feminists, including Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, and the Combahee River Collective. We thus narrate queer of color critique as emerging from women of color feminism rather than deriving from a white Euro-American gay, lesbian, and queer theory tradition. (2)

Sharon Patricia Holland is perhaps the most insistent on her place within both critical race theory—her "first grounding" for *The Erotic Life of Racism*—and sexuality studies and queer theory—her "second grounding" (3). Meanwhile, Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie,

and Kay Whitlock—writing for a trade press and aiming for a broader audience of organizers and policymakers outside the academy—do not take the time to explicitly define their relation to activist-intellectual traditions such as women of color feminism or queer theory. Their citations and critical practices, however, are thoroughly grounded in the same traditions as the other texts, drawing centrally from the work of Andrea Smith, Cathy Cohen, Angela Davis, Dorothy Roberts, Siobhan Somerville, and others, including queer and feminist of color grassroots activist organizations such as the New York City-based FIERCE (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment).

#### RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

Both Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen's *Queer Indigenous Studies* and Hong and Ferguson's *Strange Affinities* are varied in their contents. As the editor of three academic collections myself, I understand fully that such collections are by their very nature internally diverse and rarely entail the kind of uniformity of vision, rigor, or focus that a singly or collectively authored book does. Given that fact of internal heterogeneity, therefore, it is worth noting the two different approaches taken by the editors to framing their volumes.

The editors of *Queer Indigenous Studies* go for heterogeneity as a defining characteristic of their collection and sell it as their vision and strength. They note that some contributors emphasize the retention and recovery of traditional gender roles and the generation of knowledge from contemporary Native American LGBTQ2 identities (despite the frequent repetition of the acronym LGBTQ2 and its variants, the focus throughout the volume is predominantly on gay male, queer, and two-spirit people). Other contributors, following the terminology of contributor Andrea Smith, choose to emphasize a "subjectless" criticism that emphasizes neither genealogies of traditional gender roles nor ethnographies of contemporary lived experiences and identities, but rather takes the form of structural or ideological critique (for example, of settler colonialism and heteronormativity).<sup>10</sup> The individual contributions of the four editors themselves might even be characterized on some levels as opposed to one another. For example, Driskill and Gilley both have clear investments in the

methods of qualitative ethnography to give texture and depth to the lived experiences of LGBTQ2 individuals in contemporary society, while Finley embraces a “subjectless” frame (specifically defined in contrast to ethnography) that focuses on broad ideological and cultural moves rather than lived experience. Alternatively, the editors might be understood as coming from different bases with regard to Driskill and Morgensen’s emphasis on gender as constitutive of two-spirit identity (in opposition to any notion of a sexual minority identity), on the one hand, and Finley and Gilley’s embrace of sexuality and desire as central to the projects of queer indigenous studies, on the other. The editors frame this diversity of perspectives and commitments in their introduction as a conversation that is taking place within a shared methodological commitment to thinking from the perspectives and realities of indigenous people, communities, histories, and struggles. (I will return to this methodological framing and the question of the “subjectlessness” of “subjectless” critique.)

By contrast, Hong and Ferguson’s introduction seeks to ground the diversity of projects within their collection within the legacies of women of color feminism and queer of color critique. They understand these two overlapping activist-intellectual projects as emerging in tension with “minority nationalisms” and the antiracist and decolonial social movements of the latter half of the twentieth century (6). Important for Hong and Ferguson in this framing is the rejection it entails of “simple” comparison among racial, gender, or sexual groups or movements in favor of the work of imagining possibilities for coalition and attending to difference in processes of gendered and sexualized racialization rather than emphasizing similarities across groups (8). As laid out in the introduction, I think this is an important and useful frame, very much getting at the heart of much of what I find most interesting in contemporary academic work in the overlapping realms of women of color feminism, (critical) ethnic studies, and queer ethnic studies. However, not all of the chapters in the volume explicitly identify women of color feminism or queer of color critique as a frame of reference. Furthermore, not all of the essays are thoroughly comparative—including editor Hong’s contribution on works by Chicana/o authors Oscar Zeta Acosta and Ana Castillo, despite a brief coda on the 1970 Chicano Moratorium’s imagining of commonality between Chicanos and the Vietnamese people.<sup>11</sup> On the other

hand, several contributions do an exemplary job of engaging the kind of comparative work that the introduction outlines. Chandan Reddy's chapter, for example, manages to break new theoretical ground on the much-discussed subject of gay marriage through his analysis of the uses lesbian and gay activists have made of the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case that struck down laws in the United States against interracial marriage. Similarly, Martha Chew Sánchez's critique of the language of *mestizaje* in Mexico and her recovery of the history of Mexican Chinese people is important and original, and Helen Jun's study of "Black Orientalism" in the nineteenth-century United States continues the work of others in pushing US ethnic studies toward an understanding of the thorny and conflicted relationships among racial minority groups at different times in the nation's history. I wonder if Hong and Ferguson might have theorized the internal diversity within their volume as part of a conversation about the various comparative and noncomparative directions being taken in critical ethnic studies as well as the varied influences from and investments in women of color feminist and queer ethnic critical genealogies among contemporary scholars. In other words, if the essays in the collection are not contributing to a singular vision of comparative racial studies, then what kind of conversation are they having and what can we learn from that conversation for the purposes of furthering the kinds of important comparative and coalitional work called for in the introduction?

Also striking about the way *Strange Affinities* is framed is the book's tense relationship to Native American histories and scholarship. Reading *Strange Affinities* alongside Andrea Smith's critique of queer theory and queer of color critique in *Queer Indigenous Studies*, one cannot help but notice (in addition to the absence of any contributions focusing on Native American, First Nations, or indigenous people) that the framing of *Strange Affinities* in terms of comparative racialization and as a critique of minority nationalisms already places it out of conversation with contemporary currents in Native studies. Despite Hong and Ferguson's emphasis on difference rather than similarity as a basis for comparative projects, the idea that racialization should form a common central object of inquiry (rather than, say, indigeneity, sovereignty, or settler colonialism) overlooks the contested state of race within Native American studies, where racialization has been taken

as one element in a conversation whose more important elements include tribal membership, Native sovereignty, and Native nationalism (which the contributors to *Queer Indigenous Studies* repeatedly emphasize is not the same as minority nationalism).

Since the introduction to *Strange Affinities* takes (minority) nationalism to be problematic and located in the past and because it defines its theoretical bases (women of color feminism and queer of color critique) as emerging in opposition to nationalism, it is hard to imagine how Native arguments for sovereignty from a US settler state could be included within its proposed scope of comparative racial studies. For example, Hong and Ferguson invoke Mike Murase's work on the origins of ethnic studies to show the limits of minority nationalisms and their logic of comparison by similarity. They first criticize the idea that African American, Asian American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Native American histories and struggles can be equated as "discrete and comparable" entities. They then make two specific objections to Murase's frame: "these examples of racialized dispossession and abjection might depend . . . on differentiated life chances and modes of incorporation for some racialized groups over and against others" and "differences might exist within these groups along lines of gender and sexuality" (8). As right as they are in these two objections, they do not go on to think through other qualitative differences, such as the different status of Native Americans as sovereign peoples who have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands rather than as racialized minorities within a multiracial society stratified along lines of class, gender, race, and sexuality. I hasten to point out that the failure to be in conversation with Native American and indigenous studies is by no means particular to *Strange Affinities*. (One could make a similar observation about some of my own published work on Chicano nationalism, for example.<sup>12</sup>) I think it is, sadly, typical of the field of ethnic studies—queer or otherwise.

Looking over *Queer Indigenous Studies* and *Strange Affinities*, it seems that one of the conversations characterizing queer ethnic and indigenous studies at the present moment is a certain tension over the status of identity as a keyword for activist-intellectual projects. Andrea Smith, for example, writes that she is interested in putting "Native studies into conversation with queer theory to look at both the possibilities and limits of a post-identity analytic."<sup>13</sup> Implying some limits

to an identity analytic, Finley writes, “Native studies should analyze race, gender, and sexuality as logics of colonial power without reducing them to separate identity-based models of analysis.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the editors of *Queer Indigenous Studies* exhibit explicit concern in their introduction with accounting for the different identities of contributors and extol, as described above, the importance of centering the knowledge and perspectives of indigenous people. Indeed, Driskill’s ethnographic interviews with LGBTQ2 individuals form precisely an effort to understand their subjective relationship to the different gender and sexual identities available to them. Similarly, while Hong and Ferguson explicitly invoke the “lesbian practice and identity” of women of color feminists in a passage already quoted from their introduction, they elsewhere express anxiety about identity:

This project is necessitated by the changing configurations of race and nation in the wake of movements for decolonization and the social movements of the mid-twentieth century, which have revealed the limitations inherent in nationalist and identity-based forms of collectivity, even or perhaps especially when they are expressed in minority or cultural nationalisms. (1)

Yet, they clearly remain aware of the importance of identity for their project. Ferguson, for example, begins his contribution to the volume with the example of Ethiopian artist and immigrant Julie Mehretu, whom he describes as motivated in her work by “issues of globalization, power, history, identity, and culture.” He goes on to call for “an African American studies organized around the heterogeneity and radical nonidentity of black racial formations.” He specifies that by this he means that “African American racialization cannot be reduced to a single identity, issue, or national history.”<sup>15</sup> Holland and Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock do not explicitly express either anxieties about or commitments to the language of identity, although I would argue that their grounding of their projects in the lives of specific groups of people—specific “historical trajectories” and “geographical locations,” in Holland’s words from the epigraph to this essay—suggests at least some shared concern over how identity might be understood.

In thinking about these contradictory statements about identity, I am reminded of a passage in Judith Butler’s 1995 engagement

with Drucilla Cornell, Seyla Benhabib, and Linda Fraser.<sup>16</sup> Their book, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, was conceptualized as a conversation, if not a debate, over key concepts that should define feminist philosophy. Each scholar contributed an essay responding to the others in turn, followed by four shorter reflections on the issues that emerged from the complete set of four essays. In a compelling moment of candor, Butler writes the following in her final comments: “the question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting is, in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory we do, what it promises us, from what it promises to protect us.”<sup>17</sup> Taking a cue from Butler, I am drawn to propose (perhaps wrongly) that the differences one finds among different participants in the queer ethnic and indigenous studies conversations with regard to the keyword *identity* are more contestations over the usefulness of the word based on critics’ and their subjects’ own historical relationships to the term (what it promises them and from what it promises to protect them), rather than contestations that name substantive differences in scholarly or political commitments. In other words, although there are certainly many scholarly and political disagreements to be observed within queer ethnic and indigenous studies, I do not know that they would best be illustrated by a given scholar’s tendency to use *identity* in her or his work or to distinguish her or his work from work that is “identitarian.” Thus, while Hong and Ferguson write about identity in a way that implies it is inevitably naive or inflexible and advocate for a more fluid and complex understanding instead, Finley advocates for a “subjectless” critique that can transcend the limitations of colonialist ethnographic curiosity and domination. Meanwhile, other scholars advocate for a multiple and permeable conception of identity, and Driskill endeavors to theorize a nuanced and self-reflexive relationship to traditional and contemporary identities of two-spirit and *asegi* (a Cherokee word Driskill translates as “strange” or “odd” and that many use to talk about two-spirit identities). What I would like to propose is that we understand these differences in approach as being, at the very least, in conversation with—or as bearing, as Hong and Ferguson’s title suggests, a “strange affinity” to—each other’s activist-intellectual challenges to racism, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. If we do so, then perhaps the best direction for the future of the

field would be to engage in a conversation about how and where our projects intersect in their challenges rather than continuing to pose this or that position as more radical or more critical than another by virtue of its rejection of identity, nationalism, race, or some other term of other people's resistance that might be convenient to vilify at the moment. Such gestures almost invariably paint the demonized term with too broad a brush and define it too narrowly (for example, *nationalism* as always and only sexist or *identity* as always and only exclusive of difference and heterogeneity). These gestures thus frustrate or mischaracterize the efforts of feminists and queers who, for example, are working to expand practices of Native nationalist struggles for sovereignty or to understand identity as complex, fluid, and multiple. Such mischaracterizations, if they are mischaracterizations, emerge mostly from the desire for a critical shorthand ("How do I name that kind of practice that I disagree with?"). I fully understand that desire. However, as someone who has worked over the course of two books and three edited collections to think about the importance of identity and the many different kinds of ways that people (inside and outside of the academy) understand the term, I think that we are better served by more substantive descriptions of what makes a given practice or theoretical frame objectionable than simply that it seems to be associated with "identity."

*Queer (In)Justice* and *The Erotic Life of Racism* are not edited collections and, as a result, are able to present a more coherently focused point of view than the other two texts I have been considering, simply as a result of their form. That said, I think that each of these texts exemplifies much of what is most impressive and compelling in current queer critical ethnic and indigenous studies.

As someone whose scholarship straddles the fields of queer studies, ethnic studies, and critical prison studies, I must confess that *Queer (In)Justice* is the book I have been waiting twenty years to read. Like all books, it has limits and one could take issue with this or that point here and there. Nevertheless, I find it refreshing in its interventions into critical prison and criminal justice studies by centering gender and sexuality (and not equating a centering of gender only with a study of women but rather of gendering practices and ideologies of femininity and masculinity). It is also welcome as an addition to queer ethnic studies in that it substantively draws from indigenous studies

and critiques of settler colonialism. The book is possibly unique in its decision to begin a study of criminal justice and imprisonment in the United States with a review of the history of gendered practices of European colonization and genocide in the sixteenth century. With this racialized, gendered, and colonial groundwork established, the book then moves on to explore the history of the criminal justice system and imprisonment in the United States as a history of intertwined racism, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy.

*Queer (In)Justice* is fundamentally a book that announces a turning point for critical prison studies, exploring the interrelated issues of the policing of sex and gender, homophobic bias in court proceedings, the heteropatriarchal violence of prisons, and the shortcomings of LGBT-advocated legislative strategies for hate crimes. All of this is accomplished with a constant eye on the interplay of race, gender, and sexuality. Indeed, the book stands as a solid retort to those scholars who still complain that including race, gender, sexuality, class, and indigeneity is too unwieldy or too much work for one book or article. Another thing that I greatly admire about the book is its ability to engage some of the most sophisticated contemporary theorizing about colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and racial formation while remaining lucid and clear of jargon. This says to me that the authors care enough about their ideas to take the time and effort necessary to present them in a form that will be able to reach the greatest number and variety of readers. It means, for example, that I can assign this book (as I recently did) in a class of 150 undergraduates or recommend it to friends, family, and activist colleagues whose highest level of education is a high school diploma. If scholars really believe that the work of queer ethnic and indigenous studies is important to queer communities of color, then we should place a value on making our ideas accessible to audiences engaged in social change rather than viewing them simply as tools for our own professional advancement. I write this not with the intent of criticizing scholars, including myself, whose work is densely theoretical or full of subtle distinctions of academic jargon, but rather as someone who wishes fervently that more of the work of activist-intellectuals in critical ethnic and indigenous studies were more readily available to audiences outside the academy. Within the academy, anyone interested in challenging tenacious presuppositions about the separability of class, gender, race, and

sexuality in queer studies, ethnic studies, or criminal justice studies would be well served by giving this text a prominent place in their course syllabi.

*The Erotic Life of Racism* is also a much welcome contribution to queer ethnic studies. As I noted previously, Holland situates her project squarely at the intersection of critical race theory and queer theory. However, she does not ask the usual question, What can these two bodies of theoretical literature say to each other? Instead, she asks, What purposes are served by the maneuvers that have kept these two fields separate and what can we learn by pushing against that separation? Her answers are surprising and should be part of a conversation remaking both critical race theory and queer theory. In that sense, the book is mostly a work of metatheory, although she concludes the book with a literary reading. Holland first surveys a swathe of recent critical race theory to explore the various desires to move beyond race (sometimes figured as a desire to move beyond the black-white binary) and the investments informing those desires. She then surveys feminist and queer theory to argue that the disarticulation of desire from blackness (and specifically, the black lesbian body) is a feat that was first accomplished within Second Wave feminism and that has formed both an enabling condition for the emergence of queer theory and queer theory's most problematic inheritance from feminism.

As Holland defines it, the core of *The Erotic Life of Racism* is twofold. First, there is a study of the interplay of desire and the erotic in the everyday, quotidian making of race through casual actions that may not normally be understood as racist. Holland lays this project out nicely in her introduction and returns to it occasionally throughout the book like a touchstone. It never gets sustained attention, however, and I think *The Erotic Life of Racism* might best be understood as a book engaged in clearing theoretical ground so that a more comprehensive study of race, racism, desire, and the erotic in everyday interactions might be written. The second project that Holland outlines for her text is a defense of the importance of race (and specifically of the structures inherent in black-white relations) for any understanding of desire or the erotic in the United States. This aim is one that she pursues doggedly—and successfully—through an impressive range of theoretical engagements.

There is a degree of insistence in her defense of “the black/white binary” that seems to me to be overplayed, however. Briefly, the idea of a black/white binary can entail a number of commitments. It can entail a belief that race only or only primarily operates in the United States through a model established through black/white relations over the course of US history. In this model, the way(s) that blacks have been racialized in the United States sets the pattern for all forms of racialization. An alternate understanding of the black/white binary would hold that other forms of racialization exist, but that these always take shape with reference to black/white relations such that even relationships between Chicanos and Filipinos take place against an implicit backdrop that references the state of blacks. This frame understands black/white relations as not the only form of racialization, but as the most important. Finally, one could claim that other forms of racialization exist and that they are important, but that the racialization of blacks in the United States takes place largely independently of them, and that the most important frame for understanding the racialization of African Americans is through a black/white frame.

On one level, Holland’s defense of the binary is a defense against those who think we should get “beyond” race. These critics claim that the complexity of a multiracial society has made race of less importance in determining life chances and shaping experiences. Thus, Holland is simply defending the importance of race as an object of study. On another level, Holland’s defense is a refusal to give up on the idea that black-white relations are the most important way to understand race and racism. Holland very successfully makes a case against the call to move beyond race. I think her success in the second direction is more limited. She writes, “even though critics want to move away from a black/white binary toward a more ‘open’ field of inquiry, the way in which we understand how racism manifests itself is through a black/white example that belies a very static, but necessary, repetitious reading of racist practice” (8). Later she adds, “in returning to the black/white binary and asking what really happens or happened there—we might be able to consider, at least for a moment, what our ‘pleasure’ might look like” (8–9). In these passages and elsewhere, there is a bit of a grammatical sleight of hand that defines a first-person plural whose primary understanding

of racism—whether “we” want it to be or not—is the black/white binary. She writes, for example, “It is my contention that this expansion of the discourse to other racisms or other bodies hasn’t diminished the need to rethink the black/white binary and its hold upon exemplary epistemologies. This looking ‘outward,’ . . . might not be the remedy for our confused racial feeling” (29)

In reading these passages, I feel a bit like an eavesdropper, listening in on a conversation that has been defined so as to not include me. Do *I* always understand race, ultimately, through a black/white binary? Does the black/white binary tell me what *my* pleasure as a gay Chicano might look like? Does looking at it hold the remedy for *my* confused racial feeling (about indigeneity and mestizaje)? *Who* cannot think about race without returning to the exemplary epistemology of blacks and whites? Is the “we” in these passages intended to refer to Holland? To Holland and me? To all US Americans? To blacks and whites? Any of these possibilities is plausible, but I think that the case Holland makes through her examples and citations for revisiting the black/white binary is most effective if I understand her to be referring to black and white critical theorists as the ones who cannot think outside the black/white binary.

As a comparative scholar situated between Latina/o and African American studies, I have no problem endorsing the importance of the black/white binary as an indispensable tool for understanding race and racism in the United States. However, I do worry that Holland’s zealous defense of it as primary and the ambiguous grammar of her first-person plural risks shutting “others” out of the conversation she is having with white and black theorists. This worry returns me to the project laid out in Hong and Ferguson’s *Strange Affinities*. The ultimate hope of these editors is that new comparative methods will enable new forms of political coalition and solidarity. The possibilities of this hope, in turn, can be glimpsed in several of the contributions to that volume, especially the chapters by Reddy, Chew Sánchez, and Jun. Queer ethnic and indigenous studies, to the extent that they in fact constitute a field or fields, can and must be many things, containing many conversations. One of those continuing conversations will need to be about the role of comparative studies (like *Strange Affinities* or *Queer (In)Justice*) in relation to studies with a more (ethnically, nationally, racially) distinct object of inquiry (like *Queer*

*Indigenous Studies* or *The Erotic Life of Racism*). The test of whether it even makes sense to name this field will be whether those conversations can endure.

#### NOTES

1. Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 124.
2. Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 68.
3. To a certain extent, this naming is arbitrary. I am accepting the insistence from the editors and contributors to *Queer Indigenous Studies* that queer indigenous studies and queer of color critique are distinct. In turn, I am opting for “ethnic studies” and “queer ethnic studies” partly out of an admitted US West Coast bias. The phrase “ethnic studies” has much less purchase east of the Mississippi River and I can therefore understand why scholars located farther east might look on it with suspicion and prefer “critical race theory” (Holland’s preferred term) and “queer of color critique” (Hong and Ferguson’s). I have nothing against either, although they both seem to privilege theoretical cultural studies scholarship, rather than forms of empirical social science that are included in *Queer Indigenous Studies* and that inform *Queer (In)Justice*. Throughout this essay, when discussing a specific author, I have opted for the terms that the author uses (for example, “Native studies,” “Indigenous studies,” “women of color feminism,” “queer of color critique,” or “critical race theory”).
4. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Evelyn Hammonds, “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, nos. 2–3 (1994): 126–45; Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–65; David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, *Q & A: Queer in Asian America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
5. See Hortense J. Spillers, “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 73–100; María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception,” *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 3–19; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983); hattie gossett, *Presenting . . . Sister No Blues* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1988).

6. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Catriona Rueda Esquibel, *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Frances Negrón-Muntaner, *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Juana María Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
7. Duke University Press, "Series Q," <http://www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ProductList.php?viewby=series&id=48&pagenum=all&sort=newest>.
8. Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*; Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
9. Duke University Press, "Perverse Modernities," <http://www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ProductList.php?viewby=series&id=39&pagenum=all&sort=newest>.
10. Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," in *Queer Indigenous Studies*, 45-46.
11. Grace Kyungwon Hong, "Fun with Death and Dismemberment: Irony, Farce, and the Limits of Nationalism in Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Revolt of the Cockroach People* and Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," in *Strange Affinities*, 264-65.
12. See, for example, Michael Hames-García, "How to Tell a Mestizo from an Enchirito: Colonialism and National Culture in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*," *diacritics* 30, no. 4 (2000): 102-22.
13. Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies," 47.
14. Chris Finley, "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-Dyke): Bringing 'Sexy Back' and Out of Native Studies' Closet," in *Queer Indigenous Studies*, 33.
15. Roderick A. Ferguson, "The Lateral Moves of African American Studies in a Period of Migration," in *Strange Affinities*, 114, 116.
16. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
17. Judith Butler, "For a Careful Reading," in *Feminist Contentions*, 128.

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