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Queer Indigenous and Two Spirit Marginalia: Indigenous Heteromasculinity and Settler Homonationalism

Billy-Ray Belcourt is clearly upset at the way "Indigenous Masculinity" may be upheld in the name of what it is not. If Indigenous masculinity is cis-heteronormative—as Belcourt sees it—a queer, trans* or Two-Spirit Indigenous masculinity is at odds with the "brothers" Innes and Anderson speak of. I hope to explore this exclusion and anger that Belcourt articulated so well in the piece "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?" If Innes and Anderson's "brothers" are heteropatriarchial and cisnormative as Belcourt understand it, "Indigenous masculinity" is upheld at the expense of the queer *other*. I hope to explore this contention between Indigenous queerness (queer, trans*, Two-Spiritedness) and stable (colonially normalized?) "Indigenous masculinity". As well, I hope to explore the sexual implications of normative heterosexual Indigenous masculinity within *Me Sexy*. I first hope to situate "at risk" Indigenous masculinity—gang violence, incarceration, drug use—that Innes and Anderson rightfully draw attention to, before seeing what ramifications this brand of Indigenous masculinity has for Indigenous queerness. Furthermore, I hope to draw upon a body of work detailing the rejection of Two-Spirit and Indigenous queers at Settler-Colonial pride festivities, such as those in Montreal and Toronto. This is notable that even in diverse Canadian cities such as these, celebrating "pride" maintains Settler-Colonial sovereignty through Indigenous exclusion. At the same time, it celebrates queerness without any acknowledgement of Two-Spirit histories or existence that

predates settler-colonial society. It is notable that this omission of Indigenous queer and Two-Spirits from pride festivities often occurs simultaneously with degrees of appropriating Two-Spirit identities. With these two trains of thought, together I seek to explore how the "Native Studies' Native cannot be queer" as well as how Settler-Colonial homonationalism comes at the expense of Indigenous Queers.

To define my terminology for this paper, Two-Spirit is a contemporary term for gender roles (and their consequential sexualities) outside of the binary that are unique and distinct to the diverse nations and cultures of Turtle Island and have existed since time immemorial. However, it has come to sometimes signify lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans* Indigenous peoples. I will refer to Two-Spirit peoples (as either a historic or contemporary identity) appropriately, and otherwise broadly refer to LGBTQ people more broadly as Indigenous queers. Homonationalism is in reference to process of citizenship, community building, and political action of the largely white-Settler "gay" and queer community. I seek to appropriately situate myself as a white-Settler who is queer, male, and gender non-binary into my line of reasoning. I preface that any conclusions drawn in this paper are an "exploration" of these topics. My methodology includes personal blogs, poetry, writing and documentary film to access personal experiences that I cannot associate with. As well, I consult theoretical academic texts from Indigenous studies, and sexuality studies to ground my analysis. This research approach may be unorthodox, but I think this methodology is appropriate to explore the very personal nature of this topic.

So what is the "Indigenous masculinity" that Belcourt is responding so strongly against? The conception of Indigenous men on the pages of academia is encompassing of all who relate to masculinity, presumably Indigenous gender-non conforming, trans* people, or cis-women who

portray "masculine" Settler-colonial behaviour. [1] Similarly playwright, Thomas Highway reflected that a problem arises when an Indigenous man thinks on oneself as "100% male…That simply doesn't exist biologically, spatially, psychologically. We have elements of both sexes in us."[2] In many Indigenous worldviews, the idea of binary opposed sexes is at odds with conceptions of gender holistically connected to spirit, body, and land. Later I will explore the discrepancies between how Indigenous masculinity is *theorized* and how it is *practiced* or *performed.*

"Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?" is truly a pinnacle that made me rethink the way "Indigenous studies" is posited as a field of study. If Indigenous Studies is an intervention into colonial knowledge production, Belcourt's angers and concerns are a queer critical intervention into Indigenous Studies.[3] He seems to take offence to the "Native" in Native Studies and is offended by the brand of "Indigenous Masculinity" that Innes and Anderson study. I was surprised mostly by the emotive, strong, and personal critique, and his concerns are largely where I steam my interest in this topic from. Innes and Anderson position their definition of masculinity broadly and recognize how external forces have rubbed off on the way Indigenous peoples prefer their gendered, sexual relations. They state "the performance of Indigenous masculinity has been profoundly impacted by colonization and the imposition of a white-

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[1] Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson "Introduction: Who Is Walking with our Brothers?" in *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration,* (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 5.

[2] Sam McKegney. *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. (Winipeg: University of Manitoba Press. 2014), 27.

[3] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?" Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society. 1 February, 2016. Online. https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/can-the-other-of-native-studies-speak/.

supremacist heteronromative patriarchy."[4] They continue "as a result of the colonization of their lands, minds, and bodies, many Indigenous men not only come to accept these perceptions but also internalize them."[5] The groundbreaking scholarly work on the raced, gendered, and colonial experience of Indigenous men is a worthwhile pursuit. As the authors point out, in some parts of Canada Indigenous men are being incarcerated or killed at alarming rates, or gravitating towards lifestyles with violence and addiction.[6] The conception of Indigenous men as being "at risk" works counter to colonial stereotypes of the noble hunter provider, or fierce warrior.[7] On that topic Taiaikae Alfred reflects that the warrior stereotype is decontextualized. "The image of the male Native is defined in the context of a family with responsibilities to the family… if you put the person back into their proper context there are responsibilities that come with that".[8]

So what is this "at-risk" masculinity as it is practiced? Writer Keteri Aiwenzie-Damm points out that many Indigenous men learn their masculinity from "the worst sources possible" such as Residential Schools, jail, or parents who were in these systems and "lacked parenting skills need to guide their sons."[9] Settler-scholar Allison Piché asserts that gang membership acts as a substitute for family structures broken by violence, addiction, or incarceration in cycles of intergenerational.[10] Colonial legacies, polices and the structural inequalities in justice or foster care systems have a direct impact on Indigenous lives and the way generations relate to each

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[4] Innes and Anderson "Introduction: Who Is Walking with our Brothers?", 4.

[5] Innes and Anderson "Introduction: Who Is Walking with our Brothers?", 10.

[6] Innes and Anderson "Introduction: Who Is Walking with our Brothers?", 6-9.

[7] Innes and Anderson "Introduction: Who Is Walking with our Brothers?", 10-11.

[8] McKegney. *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. 79.

[9] McKegney. *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. 181.

[10] Allison Piché, "Imprisonment and Indigenous Masculinity: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Toxic Environment" in *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration,* eds Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 204.

other. This perhaps explains why there is a problem of many Indigenous men turning to gang culture. The practices of (hyper)masculinity through crime and force is in the absence of "traditional masculine rites of passage" as theorized by Henry.[11] Furthermore, this construction of masculinity articulated through "hyperviolence (is) magnified through colonization process on Indigenous bodies", and often against one another.[12] Thus Inuit, Métis, and First Nations men find themselves over represented in the Settler-Colonial justice system. Piché correlates this to historical polices like the Indian Act, Residential Schooling, and the 60's Scoop.[13] Currently in Saskatchewan experimental rehabilitation programs for inmates include creative educational therapy, but should be extended to include substance abuse treatment, violence prevention, parenting skills, and cultural-spiritual programming to foster "healthy masculinities."[14]

So practices of Indigenous masculinity vary from how scholars may theorize an inclusive and intersectional masculinity. But what are the sexual implications for normative Indigenous masculinity? In the humorous personal fiction piece "Bush Country" Joseph Boyden explores some rumours behind Indigenous peoples and public hair. In the tale he talks to his buddies about their bodily experiences and their experiences with women. At one point he even speculates doing his research on the internet using pornography to access images of Native "womanly bits"

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[11] Robert Henry, "Social Spaces of Maleness: The Role of Street Gangs in Practicing Indigenous Masculinities" in *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration,* eds Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 186-88.

[12] Henry, "Social Spaces of Maleness: The Role of Street Gangs in Practicing Indigenous Masculinities", 189.

[13] Piché, "Imprisonment and Indigenous Masculinity: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Toxic Environment", 201.

[14] Piché, "Imprisonment and Indigenous Masculinity: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Toxic Environment", 210.

but quickly abandons that idea.[15] I do not want to simply point out that queer sexuality is absent in the tale and the sexuality is explicitly/exclusive heterosexual. But more so that Boyden's characters reaffirm their masculinity to each other sexually vis-a-vis women and heterosexuality. Similarly Drew Hayden Taylor's prose explores the taboo of Indigenous sexuality form colonization, Western religion, and Settler popular culture without considering the privilege that straight Indigenous peoples have in at least seeing themselves represented.[16] Its noteworthy that cutting edge authors in the field of Indigenous studies are perpetuating performances of masculinity that silence queer experiences, and reinforce heteronormativity within Indigenous experiences. Do we need to recognize queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit experiences within our scholarship to "let the other of Native Studies speak?"

Many scholars have written about the impacts of colonization on gender and sexuality practices that did not fit European binaries or "propriety". One critical voice is from Brendan Hokowhitu. He points out the constructedness and internalization of Settler brands of masculinity that are heterosexual, cis, patriarchial, and homophobic sometimes disguised as a "neo-traditionalism".[17] He takes this critique further, taking aim that "Indigenous men did not unwittingly (fall into) heteropatriarchy and innocently enjoyed its benefits ."[18] He takes this further inspired by scholar Stuart Hill stating that "Indigenous cultures have come to a point where we can no longer translate our collective identities through the innocent Indigenous

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[15] Joseph Boyden, "Bush Country" in Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality eds Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2008), 5-14.

[16] Drew Hayden Taylor, "Indian Love Call" in Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality eds Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2008), 20-32.

[17] Brendan Hokowhitu, "Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchial Masculinity" in *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration,* eds Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 90.

[18] Hokowhitu, "Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchial Masculinity", 87.

subject.[19] In this way he is extremely critical of how Indigenous heteropatriachial men have "willingly enjoyed" an advantage from associating with certain forms of dominant colonizer subjectivites.[20] He concludes that "regardless of the atrocities of colonization", it is "inauthentic" to point out the corrupt morality of colonization while simultaneously many Indigenous cultures have a "contemporary heteronormative patriarchal face of many Indigenous culture remains to subjugate women and alternative forms of Indigenous masculinity and sexuality."[21]

Settler scholar Rifkin outlines how Settler states exert "metapolitical authority" through defining land tenure, political identity, meaningful consent, and sexual relations.[22] Thus a critique of heteronromativity in Turtle Island can shed light on how "control over native peoples is legitimized and naturalized by reference to the self-evident superiority of bourgeois homemaking and how native intellectuals and governments sought to validate tribal autonomy through investments in native *striaghtness.*"[23] In this line of thinking, heteronormativity legitimizes the Settler state by "presenting the political economy of privatization (as) the natural conditions for human intimacy, reproduction, and resource distribution" independent of "queer kinship."[24] These important criticisms of Settler-Colonial regimes make queer or Two-Spirit critiques of the state attractive to any Indigenous person interested in decolonial politics, queer, trans*, gender non-conforming, or straight. Not only for process of community unity, or human rights, should mainstream Indigenous studies be concerned with queer/Two-Spirit critiques, but

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[19] Hokowhitu, "Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchial Masculinity", 87.

[20] Hokowhitu, "Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchial Masculinity", 87.

[21] Hokowhitu, "Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchial Masculinity", 87.

[22] Mark Rifkin. *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 2011), 17.

[23] Rifkin. *When Did Indians Become Straight?,* 17.

[24] Rifkin. *When Did Indians Become Straight?, 25*.

because they are potent blows to the legitimacy of colonial structures. Rifkin associates the "straightness" of Indigenity to historic education polices like Boarding/Residential school as teaching gendered bourgeois homemaking.[25] This indoctrination into heteronromative nuclear families "splinters tribal territory" into single family households, with the goal to replace kinship networks.[26] One example of this internalization is described by Daniel Heath Justice and how his Cherokee Nation was the first to pass a ban on "gay marriage."[27] Despite this Justice has found an accepting community among Theatre and English academics, and describes an unapologetically proud and campy queer Indigeneity. Similarly, Métis writer Gregory Scolfield found a positive correlation to his queerness and Indigeneity as a poet. He talks frankly about his personal exploration of the term "Two-Spirit" and his discussions with Cree elders, as well as his reflections on how he may relate to the term.[28]

So with this contextualization into the theoretical considerations, and the real-world practices of Indigenous masculinity (may they overlap or be separate) I wish to turn to the personal accounts of queer Indigenous exclusion. Belcourt's critique of the hetorpatriarchial masculinity of Indigenous studies is strongly emotive, gushing rhetoric like a "half written suicide note." The author is drawing attention to the experiences of colonialism, and the added experiences of marginalia that queer/Two-Spirit people may experience as Indigenous studies is practiced in the academy. He states "there is a painful distinction between being taken from the

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[25] Rifkin. *When Did Indians Become Straight?,* 147-9.

[26] Rifkin. *When Did Indians Become Straight?,* 149.

[27] Daniel Heath Justice, "Fear of a Changeling Moon: A Rather Queer Tale from a Cherokee Hillbilly" Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality eds Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2008).

[28] Gregory Scofield, "You Can Always Count on an Anthropologist (To Set You Straight, Crooked or Somewhere In-Between)" in Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality eds Drew Hayden Taylor, (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2008).

world, and not being given a world in the first place."[29] But this marginalia for the sake of "cruel nostalgia", goes beyond the stone walls of old colonial universities. This is best encompassed in his poem "Sacred" which describes a Native man refusing to hold his hand in a circle dance. "i pretend that his pupils are like bullets and I wonder what kind of pain he's been through to not want me in this world with him anymore."[30] He explains the significance of the Round Dance the irony of exclusion in such a ceremony:

> you see, a round dance is a ceremony for both grief and love and each body joined by the flesh is encircled by the spirits of ancestors who've already left this world… i dance with my arm hanging by my side like an appendage my body doesn't want anymore. the gap between him and i keeps getting bigger so i fill it with the memories of native boys who couldn't be warriors because their bodies were too fragile to carry all of that anger.[31]

His exclusion as a queer Indigenous man is embedded with a macho-masculinity that seems antithetical to queer or Two-Spirit peoples. This is despite historically, some Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming Indigenous peoples being revered warriors in some cultures. He continues this reflection about what Hokowhitu defined as "neo-traditionalism" in a conversation with an elder: "i think about the time an elder told me to be a man and to decolonize in the same breath."[32] With this personal experience captured in prose, a Settler like me can begin to understand the ways in which cultural norms guised as "tradionalism" work to exclude queer-Two-Spirit folk, but also normalize a brand of Settler hetoeropatriarchial cis-masculinity.

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[29] Belcourt, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?".

[30] Billy Ray Belcourt, "Sacred",https://nakinisowin.wordpress.com/author/billyray94/ (date of last access March 14 2016).

[31] Belcourt, "Sacred".

[32] Belcourt, "Sacred".

Belcourt's poem "Love and Other Experiences" explores a few of the historical processes that Indigenous men have endured, and why these attitudes may appear as "normal" or "natural" as explored above by Rifkin and Hokowhitu. He reflects:

> He was native, too, so I slept with him. I wanted to taste the same histories of violence that I couldn't get rid of with mouthwash. I wanted to smell his ancestors in his armpits, the aroma of their decaying flesh, how they refuse to wilt into nothingness. I wanted to touch his brown skin, to make a kind of friction so complex other worlds would emerge in our colliding.[33]

I am interested in the extreme awareness here to the similar historical and intergenerational traumas. The appeal in the lover is not just in their sexuality, but in their racial-colonial experiences that he can relate to. In my interpretation, Belcourt seeks the Indigenous man to connect with the experiences he does not see reflected in Indigenous Studies or in Indigenous community practices of masculinity. He concludes "What happens when 'decolonial love' becomes a story you tell yourself after he falls asleep?"[34]

Two last sources I wanted to bring forth are a documentary and a play. The film *Sex Spirt Strength* profiles Jack, a Cree transman. He describes his relation to the Term-Spirit in that apart from male and female spirits inhabiting one vessel, for Indigenous LGBTQ people it can translate that their Indigeneity and their queerness are not mutual exclusive, but intertwined.[35] In the documentary Jack explains why he beings testosterone hormone therapy, and discusses the issue of himself passing as male, or trying to pass within Indigenous but also Settler-Colonial spaces that are trans-antagonistic.[36] I had the privilege to see my last source performed earlier

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[33] Billy Ray Belcourt, "Love and Other Experiments",https://nakinisowin.wordpress.com/author/billyray94/ (date of last access March 14 2016).

[34] Belcourt, "Love and Other Experiments".

[35] *Sex Spirit Strength*, Courtney Montour, (Mohawk Princess Pictures, 2015).

[36] *Sex Spirit Strength.*

this month. Waawaate Forbister's one-man production is "Agokwe" is a "contemporary tragic love story about two star crossed Anishinabe boys" from Reserve rivals during an annual hockey tournament. "Based on real events" the play explores homophobia, social isolation, bullying, and suicide.[37] In the play Jakie experiences homophobia from his female cousin Goose, and his love unrest Mickie has to reconcile his macho status as a skilled hockey player with his queerness.[38] When Jakie build up the courage to talk to Mike he immediately follows his love interest with the phrase "If you're gonna beat the shit out of me do it. It wouldn't be the first time."[39] Although a polished, and edited production, the personal accounts of the characters, and the experiences of social isolation heighten the anxiety viewers feel for the characters around homophobia and the pressure to conform to heteronromative masculinity ideals. For one of the characters the pressure and conflict is too much and the play takes a tragic Shakespearean turn.

I did not want this research to just be a white-Settler critique of homo/transphobia in Indigenous communities. On the contrary, I have tried to seek out representations of individuals who articulate these feelings as their own expressions and experiences. But an important question to explore is the exclusion of Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit people from Settler-Colonial "gay pride", and gay liberation homo-national movements. This marginalia even in mainstream gender and sexuality diversity culture is noteworthy. Justice is critical of the solidarity that "dominant white gay male culture" may claim from a place of shared "uniqueness" and support.[40] He explains "Racism, class discrimination, and sexism can be even

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[37] "Agokwe: Gay Love on the Rez", written and performed by Waawaate Fobister, seen at Theatre La Chapelle, 12 April 2016.

[38] "Agokwe: Gay Love on the Rez", Fobister.

[39] "Agokwe: Gay Love on the Rez", Fobister.

[40] McKegney. *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. 161

worse within our own community than they are in general society. Furthermore, many urban gay/ lesbian/transgendered Native people only add to their sense of isolation and disconnection."[41] Most gay pride festivals, and mainstream gay culture is uncritical and unacknowledged colonial history, legacies, or the ongoing effects of contemporary colonialism. In Toronto on Anishinabeek Mississauga territory the first inclusion of Indigenous queers was in 1999 with the inclusion of a Two-Spirit float in the parade. One testimony by Golden Hawk reflected that the event series as a whole is quite inaccessible for Two-Spirit/Indigenous queer people: "people that I know in Toronto are committed to organizing inclusive events for Queers. But I haven't heard of ay sort of events that are specifically for Two-Spiriped folks."[42] Another patron, Snow Owl expressed that more change needs to occur: "Two-Spirit people continue to experience marginalization, exploitation, or oppression under the umbrella of Pride Toronto's inclusive LGBTTIQQ2S acronym."[43] For some, any inclusion of Two-Spirit people seems to be lip service, as events still cater to Settler-Colonial queer community building. But this inaction has consequences, another patron Wolfe described these environments as unsafe, experiencing sexual violence, groping, racism, and cultural appropriative tokenization like the use of Plains headrests at Pride Toronto events.[44] For Wolfe the programming of Pride Toronto routinely fails Two-Spirit and Indigenous people by being "diluted by white-settler gay mens hypersexuality*."*[45]

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[41] McKegney. *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. 161

[42] Cameron Greensmith and Sulaimon Giwa, "Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics: Settler Homonationalism, Pride Toronto, and Two-Spirit Subjectivities."American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 37.2, 2013, 137.

[43] Greensmith and Giwa, "Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics: Settler Homonationalism, Pride Toronto, and Two-Spirit Subjectivities.", 138.

[44] Greensmith and Giwa, "Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics: Settler Homonationalism, Pride Toronto, and Two-Spirit Subjectivities.", 139-40.

[45] Greensmith and Giwa, "Challenging Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Queer Politics: Settler Homonationalism, Pride Toronto, and Two-Spirit Subjectivities.", 139.

These processes of Settler-Colonial queer exclusion take place in other cites too. In Montreal on Haudenasaune and Anishinabe territory, one student scholar cited issues with the organization around the inaugural 2006 "Out Games" sporting event. The event unsurprisingly had a disregard of the colonial past.[46] Furthermore, Pride Fierté is still mandated as working under a very limited LGBTQ banner.[47] Hung points out that even in spaces like Toronto when multicultural recognition includes Indigenous/Two-Spirit peoples they are subject to tokenization, exoticism, racism, and often confront people poorly educated about their term, history, or significance.[48] She furthers this critique to Coat Salish and Squamish territory of Vancouver and Whistler. She points out the Canadian nationalism on display in the 2010 Olympic Games featured queer inclusion through the form of the "Pride House." This inclusion and acceptance in to Settler-Canadian modernity disregards and is unacknowledging of fervent Indigenous activism around the games.[49] I saw this as crucial to not only examine the marginalization of Indigenous queers by Indigenous communities or masculinity, but also call out this exclusion at the hands of Settler-Colonial queerness. This has been my humble exploration into an issue I have no personal investment in, or any place speaking about. I sought to put theoretical source sin to dialogue about personal experience, and explore the connections between the pages of academia, and the lived experiences of Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit peoples.

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[46] Carolin-Hung, "Landscapes of Absence: The Erasure of the Colonial Past through Homonationalsit Gay Imagining in Montreal" in KATANA Indigenous Studies Journal vol. 7, 2014.

[47] Hung, "Landscapes of Absence: The Erasure of the Colonial Past through Homonationalsit Gay Imagining in Montreal".

[48] Hung, "Landscapes of Absence: The Erasure of the Colonial Past through Homonationalsit Gay Imagining in Montreal".

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