Introduction

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The racialized queer body – especially when it is trans or gender nonconforming – is often the site of violence and misrepresentation. However, it is also a site of destabilization and decolonization when reimagined in literary forms by Black, Indigenous, and other racialized persons in the Americas. This special issue of *AmLit* explores how queer Black, Indigenous, and other racialized writers and artists represent the embodied reality of queer racialized existence in the Americas. In doing so, we ask: "What does a queer decolonization of our homelands, bodies, and psyches look like?" (Driskill et al. 219). This pertinent question, framed by Qwo-Li Driskill,[1] Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, explores the complex realities of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized queer individuals in the settler-colonial states of both Canada and the United States, as well as in the central and southern states of 'Latin' America. It is the starting point for this special issue because the various articles within it center the racialized queer voice in the Americas, specifically by questioning what a decolonial approach to analyzing the representation of the queer racialized body might look like.

Black, Indigenous, and variously racialized feminist cultural scholars and writers in the Americas and beyond have long engaged with the above question, foregrounding conceptualizations of queerness and queer identities at the intersection of settler-colonialism and gender/sexuality. Thus, a reflection on queer racialized self-representations in the Americas must begin with a recognition of settler-colonialism and the enduring legacies of instrumentalizing sexualities in the United States that exist until now. Scott Lauria Morgensen, utilizing

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Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," engages with the question of decoloniality and queer settler-colonialism by "highlighting the critical agency of Native peoples and contacts in which Natives influenced colonists while colonists relied on Natives for self-definition" (22). Morgensen further argues that "modern sexuality arises in white settler society as a 'contact zone,' defined by attempting to replace Native kinship, embodiment, and desire with the hegemony of 'settler sexuality,' or the heteropatriarchal sexual modernity exemplary of white settler civilization" (23). Thus, what is popularly understood to be the current conception of 'modern' sexuality in the United States could not exist without the contact between the Indigenous person and the settler. In this way, 'settler sexuality' can be seen as synonymous with 'modern sexuality,' which is precisely why decolonization is imperative within Two-Spirit and Indigenous queer critiques, as well as in Black and other variously racialized queer critiques in the United States.

To erase Indigenous sexualities and genders is to erase the Indigenous person from the settler state, committing not only genocide but also epistemicide (Santos) and gendercide (Miranda). This is why Morgensen asserts that "Native and queer studies must regard settler colonialism as a *key condition of modern sexuality on stolen land*, and use this analysis to explain the power of settler colonialism among Native and non-Native people" (21; emphasis added). Although Indigenous sexualities exist separate from settler/modern sexuality, the popular juxtaposition of the two (Native traditions vs. modern sexuality) showcases how the settler-colonial state, first, cannot exist without the erasure of Indigenous sexualities because it needs Indigenous peoples to die to lay true claim to the land. Second, the stability of the settler-colonial state is contingent on Indigenous peoples' internalization of its sexual values to produce a condition of "colonized sexuality," which as defined by Driskill is "one in which we have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture" (54). In order to decolonize modern sexuality as well as colonized sexualities, movement towards a sovereign erotic is imperative because "we must unmask the specters of conquistadors, priests, and politicians that have invaded our spirits and psyches, insist they vacate, and begin tending the open wounds colonization leaves in our flesh" (Driskill 54).

Driskill's notion of the "sovereign erotic" builds off Audre Lorde's use of the 'erotic' which is focused on "power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane" (Lorde 53). Thus, the erotic does not simply concern sex or desire, but the *power* that comes with sex and desire. When 'sovereignty' is added to Lorde's definition, it points to the *sovereign* choice of Indigenous, Black, and other variously racialized queer peoples in the Americas and how they dictate what constitutes sex, desire, intimacy, and love. By using the erotic, we can critique the oppression of sex, desire, and intimacy for colonized peoples, for queer peoples, for women, for gender diverse or gender non-conforming peoples, for trans peoples, and for peoples who have historically and who continue to be controlled by heteropatriarchal systems of oppression.

Relatedly, the act of existing authentically and outside of heteropatriarchal, settler-colonial conceptions of sexuality and gender can be understood as a "sovereign prac-

tice" (Burns 28), meaning that the act of existing can in and of itself be a sovereign process for Two-Spirit and Native queer and/or trans individuals. Daniel Heath Justice relatedly believes that, "[t]o ignore sex and embodied pleasure in the cause of Indigenous liberation is to ignore one of our greatest resources. It is to deny us one of our most precious gifts. Every orgasm can be an act of decolonization" (106). The sovereign erotic therefore highlights the joy, ecstasy, and bliss of pleasure that has been stolen from Two-Spirit and Indigenous peoples as well as other racialized individuals living with settler-colonial states who were targeted due to existing in a gender variant body or expressing diverse sexualities that did not adhere to Christian ideals within the Americas. This special issue similarly highlights how modern sexuality within the settler-colonial paradigm as a settler-sexuality can be decolonized and deconstructed by Indigenous, Black, and other racialized queer and/or trans peoples in the Americas. For example, not only do settlers enact a colonial mentality of sexuality, but oftentimes racialized and colonized queer and trans individuals living in the Americas enact this upon themselves because colonized sexualities are systemic, and they are taught through the colonial mentality that continues to exist within settler-colonialism.

Morgensen believes that Two-Spirit activism and its relating theoretical critique "models a decolonizing and transnational queer politics that can disrupt the settler colonial conditions of queer globalism, including by calling on non-Natives to challenge their locations within these power relations and to ally with Native queer and Two-Spirit people's work for decolonization" (193-194). The allyship and collaboration/cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous queers within the settler-colonial state is necessary to contest the historical remnants of colonial language, epistemicide, and gendercide that endure. Concepts such as the sovereign erotic or colonized sexualities are integral aspects of Two-Spirit and Indigenous queer theories that continue to decolonize the settler-coloniality evident within modern/settler sexuality discourse. The settler-colonial state – which can be found throughout the Americas, whether that be through the advancement of Mestizaje in Latin America or through modern/settler sexuality hegemony – relies on the erasure and death of Indigenous peoples in order to exist. Racialized queer peoples that are not Indigenous within the Americas must grapple with this power structure differently, and recognize the imbalances of power that stem from the state that makes them 'racialized' in the first place.

Towards Envisioning Queer Racialized Self-Representations

The formative feminist anthology, *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* is one powerful cultural material that attempts a balancing act between the aesthetics of self-representation and the intersecting structures of power that shape the lives of Black, Indigenous, Chicana, Asian American, and other racialized women. While all of the essays in the volume are generated out of the contributors' personal experiences of racism, anti-Blackness, sexism, misogynoir, homophobia, and classism, and reflect on issues of subjectivity and individuation, they move beyond mere autobiographical poetics to engage with broader social and political critique and envision a transnational and decolonial feminist coalition. For example, Cherríe Moraga, a Chicana lesbian feminist writer and also one of the

editors of the anthology, reflects on both the power and risk of "claim[ing] color" (28), noting that "for most of my life, by virtue of being white-looking, I identified with…privilege" (29). She uses this self-interrogation to model collective, transnational feminist solidarity.

This model of positionality-informed and transversal solidarity is echoed by African American author bell hooks's popular soundbite on the definition of queerness, also quoted in Oluwadunni O. Talabi's contribution: "Queer not as being about who you are having sex with, that can be a dimension of it, but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" ("Are You Still a Slave?", 01:27:35-01:28:00). Two points are made clear in hooks' quote. First, being queer encompasses sexuality but also *exceeds* sexuality, functioning as a broader critique of dominant structures and identities. Second, being queer entails modes of self-representation that oppose dominant structures of consciousness. In one of her earliest essays, "Talking Back," hooks highlights the racial-gendered dynamics of speech, noting that Black girls are discouraged from using speech in the form of "speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (123). This structural silencing, hooks argues, follows Black and ethnic girls into adulthood where they choose to remain silent or alter the direction of their speech. Under white supremacist patriarchy, the act of speaking, writing, and publishing from a speaking subject positioning becomes an empowering genre "for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, [...] that act of speech, of 'talking back' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice" (128).

While this powerful move of "talking back" is embodied by literary and other aesthetic self-representations, Pakistan-born American scholar, Sara Suleri offers a critical interrogation of hooks' notion, spotlighting its limitations and underscoring the importance of not reducing self-representation to the genre of embodied narrative. Suleri argues that "the anecdotes of lived experience" or "the unmediated quality of local voice" should not be a replacement "for any theoretical agenda that can make more than a cursory connection between the condition of postcolonialism and the question of gendered race" (764). In simple terms, this means that "talking back" while empowering for the oppressed, must critically engage with the Eurocentric and patriarchal pattern of laws that interpellate us as subjects in relation to the state and to one another. While self-representation has its "contestatory" potentials, Suleri maintains that it can easily serve as a "fodder for the continuation of another's epistemology" with 'another' signifying both the realism of postcolonial, multicultural, and contradictory laws, as well as the symbolic assimilation into the predetermined "pigeonholes constructed for multiculturalism" (766).

Gayatri Spivak expresses similar critiques of uncritical representational discourse in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak critiques a conflated sense of 'representation' in French poststructuralist thought, particularly in Deleuze's and Guattari's theories of power and subjectivity, by questioning the assumption that the working class can fight their oppression and reclaim power simply by accessing their prediscursive desire and acting upon said desire. Spivak makes a distinction between two senses of 'representation'

i.e., "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy," and argues that the role of ideology in constructing the Western intellectual class as the master narrator of knowledge can allow for a linear relationship between the two senses, wherein the subaltern being represented (spoken for) leads to being re-presented (depicted) (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 28). An attention to the structure of ideology or discourse and "[t]he critique of ideological subject-constitution within state formations and systems of political economy" as well as "the active theoretical practice of the 'transformation of consciousness'" can however permanently discontinue this relationship (28). In essence, representation, as Spivak argues, concerns not necessarily, "'Who should speak?'" but instead "'Who will listen?" (*Question of Multiculturalism* 59). With this reasoning, she moves to show that the power imbalances in representation are not solely about who and what is represented, but about the discursive practices and "representationalist realism" (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 27) that foreground the phenomenological knowledge of the subaltern subject, who exists outside the intersecting networks of material and discursive power.

What this means for the representation of queerness and queer gender and sexuality is that it cannot solely focus on aesthetic expressions. It must remain attentive to the settler-colonial discourse that enlivens the space between the reality of colonized sexualities and queer representation. In engaging with the self-representations of queer racialized subjects, all of these feminist polemics frame the keywords of our special issue as we examine how queer Black, Indigenous, and other racialized creators and writers, given to existing at the most periphery of inter and intra discourse and imposed upon by the limits of Western gendered vocabulary in queer discourse, make visible the diverse and complex consciousness of queer racialized identities in the Americas. The following questions thus arise in our engagement with the nexus of queer racialized self-representations in the Americas: How are queer bodies dehumanized through both racialization and heteropatriarchy? Why are modes of self-representation important within the context of queer liberation/personhood in the Americas? What role does literature, an overarching structure of representation, play in the writing of queer and trans bodies in the context of settler-colonialism? How might literature serve as a catalyst for moving beyond a politics of visibility and representation toward modes of engagement grounded in revolution and liberation? This special issue of *AmLit* seeks to answer these questions. It is the second installment of publications that arose out of the 2023 Postgraduate Conference of the Association for Anglophone and Postcolonial Studies titled, "Queering Postcolonial Worlds." With an interest in how marginalized writers respond to the ongoing legacies of settler-colonialism in the Americas, this issue centers critical readings of marginalized literatures that subvert and disrupt dominant subjectivities. The contributions therefore span a diverse cultural range, engaging Chicanx, Black American, Vietnamese, and Cuban texts that center queer life, desire, love, and intimacy.

The first article of this special issue, titled "Queering the Macho: Sexuality and Hegemonic Masculinity in Queer Chicanx Poetry" by Tilo Böhme, explores the intersection between machismo and homosexuality in queer Chicanx poetry. Through the works of var-

ious queer Chicanx poets, Böhme examines how their voices reclaim and redefine machismo – a form of hegemonic masculinity that is predominant in Latinx cultures due to settler-colonial impositions of heteropatriarchy. He primarily argues that the poems "develop a gay macho persona" which then "breaks conceptions of homosexuality as the opposite of machismo" (14). Böhme contends that the hybridity of homosexuality and machismo within these texts allows the queer Chicanx writers and poets to reclaim their power because they work *with* hegemonic ideals of masculinity *alongside* their queerness, ultimately overturning these same power structures that control them within Chicanx culture. Böhme thus concludes that the image and conception of the "gay macho" transforms traditional conceptions of masculinity within Chicanx culture.

Following Böhme's article, Oluwadunni O. Talabi's contribution "Queer Black Feminist Self-Poetics in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" turns from a focus on queer masculinity to an investigation of queer Black feminist self-hood in Morrison's second novel *Sula* (1973). Talabi begins by identifying a lack of critical attention to Morrison's use of queer self-poetics in the novel, demonstrating the need to combine queer and Black feminist approaches in her reading of *Sula*. In her careful analysis, Talabi considers the novel's setting "the Bottom," its female characters as they exist in relation to Sula, and Sula herself. This analysis convincingly argues against a reading of Sula's life as unfulfilling (hooks 1995; Nigro 1999; Page 1999) and instead underscores the ways in which Sula disrupts the phallogocentrism of the Black community within the context of the multiple systemic oppressions she faces. Talabi's contribution ultimately takes seriously the need to queer established readings of canonical Black texts and attend to "the messy histories of the Black community" within queer feminist scholarship (46).

Maintaining a focus on queer Black feminist scholarship and Black American literature, Dorit Neumann's article "'You Cannot Escape Specters': The Hauntology of Blackness and Queer Performativities in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*" uses a hauntological lens to read queer Black women's trans and drag practices of passing, acting, and performing in *The Vanishing Half* (2020). Similar to *Sula*, Bennett's narrative is also predicated on the escape from and return to a small town, this time the Louisiana town of Mallard, founded on the ideal of lightness. Through a close reading attuned to the motif of haunting, performativity and (in)visibility, and oceanic kinship, Neumann illustrates how the numerous hauntings the characters experience and their differing responses are strategies of self-representation that alternatively yield "liberation and kinship" as well as "alienation and loneliness" (51). Reading Bennett's novel in a web of intertexts of 20th century American literature, including Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby," Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and Sarah Wright's *This Child's Gonna Live*, Neumann's contribution offers synergies with Black American and Southern American literary canons that reveal an ongoing Black feminist literary engagement with the haunting intersections of patriarchy and white supremacy in the United States.

Also centering on the themes of (female and homosexual) visibility and invisibility, Lena Falk's article "(In)Visibilities of Female Same-Sex Desire in Marilyn Bobes' Short Story 'Somebody Has to Cry,'" considers queer (self-)representations in the context of post-Soviet

Cuba, interrogating persisting Spanish-Catholic colonial influences on the lived realities and representations of queer Cubans in the late twentieth century. After providing a valuable overview of the historical and political context shaping queerness and sexuality in Cuba, this article's analysis explores how the queer female protagonist in "Somebody Has to Cry" (originally "Alguien Tiene Que Llorar") is marginalized even after her death in a society shaped by machismo, marianismo, and ideals of heterosexuality and masculinity. Falk demonstrates how a fragmented narrative structure and narrative perspective are used to mirror the legal and cultural contexts that erase and disempower lesbian women in particular, as the short story (re)constructs its protagonist's life through silences, ambivalence, and the perceptions of other characters, while an account of herself remains absent. The article thus reflects both on the role of latent colonial legacies influencing homophobia as well as on formal and narratological ways of representing them in fiction.

The special issue concludes with Anne Stellberger's article titled, "Queer Orientation and Space in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*" which essentially returns to Gayatri Spivak's idea that one should not focus on 'who can speak' but instead, 'who will listen.' Stellberger argues that Vuong's novel raises this question by centering on the idea of whose stories are actually centered and *heard*. Her article examines how the novel engages with storytelling – and retelling – in order to destabilize U.S. American conceptions and narratives of war by offering diverse perspectives of Vietnamese immigrants through the characters of Little Dog, his mother, and grandmother. Stellberger analyzes the novel through Sara Ahmed's approach of "orientation as spatial," which she argues, "orients readers towards a different experience and story of space, namely the U.S. nation-state, realms of trauma and home, and the embodied resistance, agency, and self-representation of the protagonist" (92).

Ultimately, what all five contributions of this special issue work to deconstruct are the hegemonic power structures that continue to colonize and oppress queer and gender non-conforming racialized individuals within the Americas. The contributors do so not only by *listening*, as Spivak argues, but also by highlighting how the authors of these self-representational texts choose to curate different realities for themselves or for their characters beyond the heteropatriarchal power structures that continue to confine them.

Notes

[1] On October 25, 2023, the North Carolina based Tribal Alliance Against Frauds called for the removal of Qwo-Li Driskill from their position as professor of Gender and Sexual Studies & Queer Studies in OSU's College of Liberal Arts due to falsely claiming Cherokee and Lenape identity. Both nations have not claimed Driskill, even after the call for their removal from the university came about. The call also follows another complaint from "seven graduate students" who "submitted a nine-page letter to faculty leaders and Dr. Larry Rodgers, OSU's dean of liberal arts, accusing Driskill of 'biased and abusive behavior towards graduate students and graduate employees'" (Jaquiss). These accusations are important to acknowledge, especially within Indigenous North American studies, which is why we would like to highlight this case regarding Driskill and acknowledge the erasure and settler-colonial violence that occurs through falsely claiming Indigenous identity. The work done by Driskill regarding

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the sovereign erotic and queer Indigenous studies has often been lauded as "groundbreaking," since it carved a pathway for other queer Indigenous theorists, writers, and creators in the Americas (and specifically in the North American context). Because of this, we hesitantly continue to cite and use Driskill's works (much of which are collaborative with Indigenous theorists and writers) because they are integral within the studies of settler-colonialism and Indigenous queer sexualities in North America.

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Biographies

Corina Wieser-Cox was born and raised on the Mexico-US border in Brownsville, Texas and is a Mestize* Mexican American. Their MA thesis titled "Brujeria in the Borderlands: Portrayals of Mexican American Witchcraft in Hollywood Horror Films" won the GAPS Graduate Award in May 2021 and the Bremer Studienpreis in March 2022. It is to be published as a monograph with Peter Lang Verlag in 2026. Cori is currently a PhD candidate and research assistant at U Bremen and their dissertation is titled "We're Trans, We're Queer, and We're Here: Decolonizing Mexican and Chicanx Queer Cinema." Cori is currently co-editor of COPAS (Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies), co-edited *The Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Cinema* in 2024 with Kerstin Knopf, WG Pearson and Ernie Blackmore, and is the executive director of INPUTs – Institute for Postcolonial and Transnational Studies at the University of Bremen.

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Oluwadunni O. Talabi is a postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of North American and Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies, and the Executive Director of the Bremen Institute of Canadian and Québec Studies at the University of Bremen, Germany. Her research and teaching focus on Black studies, queer theory, critical futures, and counter-discourses of the modern subject. She completed her PhD in 2023 at the University of Bremen and in 2022 was a visiting scholar at the African American and Black Diaspora Studies Department, Boston University, USA. Her first monograph *Woman, African, Other: Black Feminism and Intersectionality in the Contemporary Works of African Diasporic Women* was published by Transcript in 2025.

Rita Maricocchi is a researcher and lecturer for English, Postcolonial, and Media Studies at the University of Münster, Germany. She is currently completing a PhD thesis on representations and translations of German colonial memory in contemporary anglophone texts. Her work has been published in *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents, Kairos: A Journal of Critical Symposium*, and the edited collections *Ruptured Commons* (John Benjamins, 2024) and *Participation in Postcolonial Wor(l)ds: Literatures for, on, or against the Global Literary Market* (Routledge, forthcoming). She is co-editor of *Queering Postcolonial Worlds* (special issue of gender forum, 2024) with Dorit Neumann, Oluwadunni O. Talabi, and Corina Wieser-Cox and *Queer Graphic Diasporas* (In Focus dossier in Journal of Cinema and Media Studies, forthcoming) with yashka Chavan and Felipe Espinoza Garrido.

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