



# Indigenous Decolonization and Queer Settler Colonialism at Music Festivals and Raves

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## Indigenous Decolonization

Denotes the **rematriation** of **Indigenous sovereignty**, and **self-determination** and secures **futurity** of Indigenous peoples through the complete reparation of **Indigenous lives and lands** [1].

Favours the resurgence of land-based relationships and languages **reimagining Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and pedagogies** as relevant in today's globalized world [2].

It **eliminates** settler property rights and the inheritance of settler wealth and power [3]

Our futures as settlers, and **futures of music festivals and raves** organized and attended by settlers, are neither guaranteed nor should they be prioritized [4].

As a step towards decolonization, "Settlers can **UNCOLONIZE**, as that is a voluntarily distancing, detaching from colonial [mores]." [5].

Uncolonization includes liberating decolonization from a metaphor mobilized to improve or hybridize settler societies, lives and institutions, or to reconcile guilt [6].

As a queer, non-binary (they/them/theirs), polyamorous, white settler of German, Irish and Scottish descent, I have a responsibility to challenge my communities to **dissent from the colonial project and the Western white middle-class spheres it produces**. My desire for safe and accountable space as a queer person (while important) cannot overshadow Indigenous people's rights to their land. It is my colonial inheritance that allows me to feel at home here. However, **this place I must call home** is not necessarily a safe space either. My queerness puts me at odds with my settler location and makes it easier for me to reject belonging to settler states such as Canada.

## Queer Settler Colonialism

Is the participation of queer (LGBTQIA+) settler subjects (QSS) in the ongoing colonial project of permanent settlement.

Is the product of **settler sex**, the **biopolitical regulation of love, sex, bodies, desires, relationships and property**, which has positioned QSS as gender and sexual minorities [7].

Is enacted through queer politics that hinge on the hegemony of settler colonial cultural norms and governance structures when advocating for settler society to be more inclusive of QSS [8]. Inclusion is offered to QSS who conform to the white heteronormative, homonational identity.

"[I]ncorporation as non-transformation" has given way to a wave of **"pinkwashing"** that falsely depicts Western civilizations as safe places for queer people. Open arms conceal foreign investments and conceals genocide, occupation, and attacks on 2SLGBTQIA+ communities such as governmental responses to the **HIV/AIDS epidemic, anti-trans legislation and misogyny** [9].

QSS mobilizes relationships and stereotypes of Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and potentially more, Indigenous peoples to recall, claim, and embrace a romanticized **"gay nature"** [10]. Gay nature can be best understood as the stories told by QSS about inherent belonging that naturalize queer settler genders and sexualities through **primitivist, back-to-the-land ideologies** and countercultures to create "indigenized" modern QSS that claims Indigeneity. Typically by **appropriating Indigenous cultural identities, rituals, symbols, and spirituality at collective rural gatherings** [11].

## Everyday Decolonial Queer Praxis for Qualitative Research

Through a praxis of **"everyday decolonization,"** I unpack decolonization / uncolonization in intimate spaces of music festivals and raves, advocating for integrating Indigenous and queer perspectives into everyday relationships, research practices and event organizing [12].

I encourage researchers to challenge **colonialism and heteropatriarchy**, centering **Indigenous women, Two-spirit, and queer communities** and contributing to knowledge production founded on an **ethic of mutual liberation** [13].

I ground myself in a **decolonial feminist methodology**, that rejects colonial categorizations and embraces Indigenous sovereignty as a central concern [14]

Methods: **Feminist interviews** prioritize building **relationships and dialogues** with participants, centering their voices, intersecting identities and lived experiences in the research process [15]. **Queer autoethnography** entails critically reflecting on and returning to personal experiences and one's relationship to the research topic, challenging normative categorizations of **identity, bodies, and pleasure**, and embracing the **fluidity and constant becoming of queer subjectivities** [16].

## Acknowledgments

This research was conducted on the territories of the **WSÁNEĆ First Nations** known as the, **Tsartlip and Tseycum**; the **Lək̓ʷəŋən people**, known as the **Songhees** and **Esquimalt**; and, at **Otherworld**, a regional Burning Man that takes place on the shared territory of the **Hul'qumi'num-speaking peoples** commonly known as the **Cowichan Valley**.

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## Indigenous Peoples' and Queer Settlers' Stories From Music Festivals and Raves

"Otherworld is like this **reset** or like **recalibration** . . . Just like, you live in this capitalist society. You just get . . . really centered around work and your nine to five schedule and the . . . grind of getting those things done and like making money to spend money; you know, do the thing. . . . I feel like Otherworld is this opportunity to like recalibrate on what is important and what matters most in life and just like connecting with other people and, yeah, **Just having honest and real connection and emotional experiences**" (Addison (he/him) - Queer Settler)

pleasure

"I go for the music always. **I'm really the person that's there to dance and be in the crowd . . . interacting with people in a nonverbal way**. . . and I feel free when I'm dancing to live music. . . . There's a freedom there like I'm a part of a collective. **I'm being creative in the ways that I'm moving. I'm listening to someone in front of me be creative**, and there's just this sense, if the energy is right, where this, it's just free." Tanisha (she/her) - Cree Métis, English, German and Norwegian, Treaty 6 Territory, Cold Lake, AB)

"The experience of being **[at mainstream music festivals]** wouldn't feel comfortable, just like wearing whatever I wanted to wear. I wouldn't feel comfortable as a trans person taking off my shirt. I wouldn't feel comfortable approaching or flirting with someone. **There are all of these experiences that are just inherently not really safe and also just not really possible** in festivals like that and, so I'm just not interested in them anymore [laughs]." (Addison (he/him) - Queer Settler)

identity

"Sometimes, while you're finding yourself, you can latch on to [the rave community or the EDM scene or things like that] that have a sense of identity while you're trying to find out who you are, and maybe that is a part of your identity. That's fine. It's not either or, but . . . I think **people are starving for connection and so wherever they find it, they find it, even if it's not totally true to their heart.**" (Tanisha (she/her) - Cree Métis, English, German and Norwegian, Treaty 6 Territory, Cold Lake, AB)

event organizing

"**[Campbell Bay Music Festival]** only source artists that are of colour or with intersecting identities and I think **the intentionality that they put into organizing that festival with that in mind has shifted the whole energy**. . . . To me, it didn't feel . . . like something they're checkboxing. It didn't feel very intentional. . . . They had elders there . . . centered as the part of the whole weekend. They had a poll raising ceremony . . . [and] dancers as part of the itinerary. . . . **[Elders and performers] weren't there to serve a purpose . . . they were actually attending the festival** . . . you know, they weren't just there to be the token; yeah, Indigenous person. . . . And to close, we did like a big circle with the knowledge keeper, and then he blessed the food." (Tanisha (she/her) - Cree Métis, English, German and Norwegian, Treaty 6 Territory, Cold Lake, AB)

"**When I think of festivals, and I think of partying, I often think of its history as political resistance** to contemporary social structures, and so, for example, you know, at the turn of the Millennium, around 2000, there was this, like, really interesting discourse around raves when municipalities were kind of trying to ban them, you know, dance bylaws. And dance acts were coming into place, but there was a whole kind of contingent of folks who didn't necessarily fit in within broader mainstream politics or within broader society who . . . **were creating [these spaces] as an alternative to what exists in the world** and were doing it for fun; were doing it for **pleasure**; were doing it for **connection**; were doing it to **redistribute funds** to other people. . . ."

Recognizing that you know, capitalism and neoliberalism and the heteropatriarchy and all those things are fundamentally connected to colonization and colonialism and are results of those things. **Spaces [that are] created to try and resist all those factors has the potential to be decolonizing, or has the potential to build a community or to build resistance to all those inequalities.**" (Piotr (he/him) - Queer Polish Settler)

" . . . **there's so many things that are not accessible about Otherworld**, even just like I have terrible asthma and like there's only some dance floors that I can go to because people smoke cigarettes right in the middle of the dance floor. And I had an asthma attack at the last Otherworld because I wasn't in a mind space to keep track of my body in that way. And I had to get back to my tent to get my inhaler which I never have to do. It was really scary." (Carmen (she/they) - Crane Clan, Hiawatha First Nation, Rice Lake, ON)

spirituality

"**[Music festivals and raves] don't make me spiritual, but they certainly spark or ignite something of the collective experience that makes us all feel like we're together** . . . I think how you move through the world and if you're spiritual, going to a festival will just kind of amplify that." (Tanisha (she/her) - Cree Métis, English, German and Norwegian, Treaty 6 Territory, Cold Lake, AB)

"The temple and the burning the man or whatever. I just don't like that for me; it's not meaningful. It doesn't connect at all to my spirituality. I see that it's important for others, but yeah, just **there's not really space for my spirituality [at Otherworld]** . . . and it's not a safe place for me to bring it because . . . **I don't feel safe bringing my Indigenous identity into spaces because in spaces like that, people will pray on it and take pieces of it** . . . and I don't want that. So, I only really am able to bring that part of me into spaces where I feel like it's going to be respected and like I want to share it because I trust people." (Carmen (she/they) - Crane Clan, Hiawatha First Nation, Rice Lake, ON)

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