

colonial/imperial forms.

This book triggers important questions that we need to consider in Canada: What would fully contextualized indigenous forms of following the Jesus Way look like? What if Indian Country finally was the sending site of Christian mission rather than the perpetual mission field? What might the non-indigenous church in Canada have to learn from loving our indigenous neighbors as those neighbors are asking us to love them rather than how we think they should be loved? The mountain is ours to climb.

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**Qwo-Li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 2016. 224 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780816530489.**

Teaching a course at Bible college, I asked a class what the historical context of Creation was. There was some murmuring and a bit of nervous laughter. When speaking of origin stories, either the beginning comes later or the beginning is a pure event untainted by the messiness of life.

This tension between the newness of creation and the flow of history surfaced as I read Qwo-Li Driskill's *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*. The subtitle is suggestive. Queer is a broad and somewhat fluid term addressing anything from variant sexual practices to political stances. Two-Spirit remains enigmatic to many non-indigenous (as well as indigenous) people and is here used to "describe someone whose gender exists outside of colonial logic" (5).

I was hopeful and curious about whether the author's *memory* would include neglected or lost texts and stories recounting expressions of Cherokee gender and sexuality prior to colonial contact. Unconsciously I wanted a *pure event*, a literal creation account of how the Cherokee people expressed themselves. There is no such account. Driskill, perhaps a little like the Jews in exile crafting their origin story, is attempting to weave a story for hir<sup>10</sup> people that is true to their past and empowering in the present. But as with the Jewish exiles in Babylon, much of the materials have passed through the language and influence of colonizers. The result is that the creation account is both indebted to and in conflict with the accounts of the colonizer.

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<sup>10</sup> It is my understanding that in identifying as Two-Spirit the author uses the pronouns "s/he" and "hir" respectively. I have employed these terms in the review. See author bio at <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/users/qwo-li-driskill>.

The term *asegi* carries the connotation of strange or *queer*—that which deviates from or is unaccountable to and unassimilated by dominant forms. These *asegi* forms must be drawn out as fragments or threads from the dominant expressions that appropriated them into their own logic. These extracted threads then can be “woven” (the author’s guiding metaphor) creatively to imagine possible pasts and consider different futures. What this means for Driskill is that every aspect of his work—from critical methodology to choice of sources—must be attentive to and reflect an *asegi* style. For instance, “scientific objectivity” is discarded in the way it objectifies lives, cutting up and classifying them by dominant logics. “This book does not attempt to argue for cultural ‘truths,’ but, rather, argues for radical disruption of master narratives.... This is a political and activist project” (7).

Because there is no documentation of gender or sexuality (the terms themselves being anachronistic) among Cherokee people prior to colonial contact, Driskill begins after contact. It is clear from these sources that Europeans “thought that *all* of our genders were ‘variant,’” as seen in their criticisms of overly “feminine” men or “masculine” women as well as differing forms of commitment and kinship models (19, see also 41). Driskill spends time picking up the threads within these accounts that both suggest *asegi* forms, and then uses them to imagine what might have been and what could still be.

The bulk of Driskill’s historical work traces two broad trajectories. First is the early historical accounts of contact between Europeans and those in traditional Cherokee territory. As mentioned, these accounts reflect broad criticism of how Cherokee people expressed gender and sexuality. Cherokee sexuality as a whole was encountered as deviant. Some of the criticisms included matriarchal authority, mutual “divorce” among couples, instances of cross-dressing, and gender roles in conflict with colonial norms. The second trajectory traces how colonizers implemented policy and laws that would bring Cherokee forms in line with colonial aims. This included attempts at having Cherokees incorporate chattel slavery as an economic practice as well as sending missionaries to enculturate Cherokees in colonial languages and values. All of these economic and religious reforms had the effect of molding Cherokee gender expressions along colonial lines.

Driskill does not consider historical accounts as the most “accurate” understanding of past expressions. For instance, early accounts of the Cherokee ritual of “perpetual friendship” (which could be performed between members of the same or opposite gender) are passed through colonial values and terms leaving the reader unclear as to the meaning of this ritual (see 140–47). Driskill’s methodology can prove frustrating for the reader formed by modern standards of historical criticism. S/he concludes each chapter by *imagining* how *asegi* and Two-Spirit expressions *may* have existed in those accounts. In a reflective response to doubts over his chosen approach, s/he concludes one chapter, “No doubt, this doesn’t just have to be imagining. We survived. Look at our hands: we are reweaving” (136).

In resistance to how the body of the colonized was a malleable and expendable tool of the colonizer, Driskill reclaims and draws on the integrity of the body as a living memory revitalizing the present (123). The past must always remain accountable to the present. “Our memory and practices are always *now*, even when we draw from older practices and memories” (149). Every account of the past, whether scientific or intuitive, is an act of the present.

Driskill *queers* the practice of memory and history. S/he works as an exile within colonial logics, creating origin stories that find their significance in the present. The question that should be raised for settler Christians and those wrestling with the theology and practice of missions is whether the missionary encounter with the Cherokees (most of whom are Christian today) could have been different. While Driskill finds room for asegi imagining within some missionary encounters (particularly the Moravians, see 121) these must again be drawn out from the dominant colonial logic that is the guiding missionary logic.

So again, the question remains, are we able to extract threads from *our* history and theology of missions that could imagine Christians encountering asegi or queer forms among non-Christians, where we remain open and attentive, witnessing what resonates, challenges, or expands our understanding of the gospel, the message that brings freedom from colonial logics? To shift Driskill’s metaphor from Cherokee to Mennonite practice, such a quilt has yet to be crafted or acknowledged.

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