Christianity and settler colonialism remain mutually influential in North America. These forces concomitantly influence North American gender epistemologies and praxes. European colonisation forcefully introduced Christianity to Indigenous communities inhabiting what colonisers later termed the ‘Americas.’ With the introduction of Christianity came strictly regimented gender norms, which simultaneously served to reinforce Whiteness, cis-maleness, and heterosexuality, the effects of which are still visible in North American religions and society today. In this chapter, I conduct a genealogical analysis of colonial Christian sexual ethics, arguing that Christian sexual ethics is essential to understanding gender regulation in North America, past and present. Colonial sexual ethics dictated family, gender, and societal structures. Christian interpretations of theology and biblical passages were also used to justify the mistreatment and mass murder of Indigenous and African peoples in North America, rendering them sexually and racially inferior. As settler colonialism waned and gave way to the nation-state and subsequent nationalisms, the deep-seated relationship between colonialism and Christianity remained. This structurally entrenched relationship calls into question narratives of nationhood, citizenship, and whether people of non-dominant genders and non-Christians in North America are truly a part of or apart from ‘American’ society. Although religiosity in North America is varied and diverse today, the hegemony of colonial Christianity, which operates on power axes such as race, gender, and class, remains prevalent and begs questions about whether North America can or ought to be reimagined outside of its ubiquitously Christian context. I frame these questions by examining colonial Christian sexual ethics, the role of religion and gender in contemporary North American conceptions of citizenship, and the ways in which people who experience gender oppression in North America have used religion as a tool of liberation.

The imposition of colonial Christianity

Christianisation, by the Roman Catholic Church, as with the Spanish and the French, as well as by the Protestants, as with the British, occurred as part of the colonial conquest of North
America. Due to the United States’ continued imperial power, itself a form of neocolonialism, Euro-American Christian sexual morality dictates gender norms and socio-religious ideologies and praxes on a potentially global scale (Connell, 1998). The Spanish implemented Christian missionisation in the ‘New World’ starting in the late fifteenth century. The Spanish missions, ostensibly geared toward Christian conversion, proved deadly to Native peoples. Smith (2005) details these acts and argues that colonial violence is inherently sexual and that it works simultaneously to racialise and to sexualise Natives and other peoples of colour. According to Smith (2005: 1) ‘colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized. Smith reveals how sexual violence was a primary tool of the colonial project. This legacy of sexual colonial violence is inseparable from the White, colonial Christianities that readily employed this tactic in the name of evangelism. European colonisers used Christo-centric lenses to mark Native peoples as sexually impure:

Christian colonizers often likened Native peoples to the biblical Canaanites, both worthy of mass destruction. What makes Canaanites supposedly worthy of destruction in the biblical narrative and Indian peoples supposedly worthy of destruction in the eyes of their colonizers is that they both personify sexual sin. In the Bible, Canaanites commit acts of sexual perversion in Sodom (Gen. 19:1–29), are the descendants of the unsavory relations between Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30–38), are the descendants of the sexually perverse Ham (Gen. 9:22–27), and prostitute themselves in service of their gods (Gen. 28:21–22, Deut. 28:18, 1 Kings 14:24, 2 Kings 23:7, Hosea 4:13, Amos 2:7).

(Smith, 2005: 9–10, citing Cave, 1988; Porter, 1979; Warrior, 1989)

As the aforementioned demonstrates, European colonisers constructed Native and African peoples as racially inferior and inherently sexual impure by using various biblical passages to justify the processes of dehumanisation, violence, rape, and murder that they inflicted upon Native and African peoples en masse in the Americas.

Slave owners similarly used these and other biblical passages as an attempt to justify the ownership and destruction of human bodies during the period of chattel slavery (Bailey, 2016). Interpretations of Ham, Canaan, and other biblical narratives were used to establish White supremacy and to proclaim Africans as the inheritors of biblical curses and thus deservedly enslaved. Slave owners also focused on biblical stories that spoke of slavery and encouraged submission. In the case of American slavery, the simultaneity of White supremacy and sexual violence is likewise evident today:

Similarly, much of the sexual violence in African American communities is the colonial legacy of slavery. That is, under the slavery system, Black women were deemed inherently rapable by slave masters who could violate them with impunity. Black men were also often forced by their masters to rape Black women.

(Smith, 2005: 51)

Both cases reveal that per the colonial imagination, Christianity justified the belief that non-dominant bodies are inferior, penetrable, and ownable. Understanding the long-existing partnership between colonialism and Christianity as co-institutions, it becomes clear how European American perpetrators of colonial violence instituted a hierarchy that was simultaneously racialised, sexualised, gendered, and religious.
Colonial sexual ethics

A closer examination of colonial Christian sexual ethics reveals additional ways that Christianity informs religion and gender in America. Institutional Roman Catholicism, like other colonial Christianities, has historically preserved a hierarchical sexual ethic, which was operational during the period of Catholic colonisation. These sexual ethics ascribed gendered meanings to biological categories of sex, aligning male, man, and masculinity and presupposing male-man-masculinity’s ‘natural’ dominance over the complementarily subordinate female-woman-feminine. The Catholic Church couched this belief in predetermined gender roles in what it refers to as gender complementarity. Notably, the Catholic Church perceived this complementarity to be both social and physical in nature. The Catholic Church has also historically exclusively sanctioned procreative, conjugal sexual acts. This sexual ethic has had lasting cultural impacts on North America.

Another lasting effect of colonial Catholic sexual ethics is the fact that the Catholic Church aligns biological sex with gender. Drawing upon the perceived active-receptive penile-vaginal complementarity between males and females, the church has historically prescribed a subsequently dominant-submissive relationship to men and women (May et al., 2011; Aquinas, 1274). The church’s sex-gender alignment sanctions subsequent sexual behaviour. Since all sex acts must allow for procreation, heterosexual unions become compulsory: these heterosexual unions must also be male-female/dominant-submissive. The Catholic Church’s belief in gender-hetero-genital complementarity also historically imposes sanctions upon gender variance, social or physical. The social aspect of this hetero-complementary gender binary, present in Catholic as well as Protestant colonial Christianities, also imported European familial structures. These structures were generally limited to immediate family members: parents and their children. Even when families stayed together within larger kinship structures (a comparatively rarer occurrence), kinship ties were biologically based rather than social. Within European and colonial Christianities at this time, the role of the husband and father as the head of the household was essential to marriage and the family structure, respectively (Mintz and Kellogg, 1988). The cis-hetero-normative, nuclear family as an ideal remains relatively intact in North America today (Sarkisian, 2012).

Similar sexual ethics informed the structures of Protestant communities in what colonisers eventually claimed as the ‘United States.’ The Pilgrims arrived in ‘New England’ in the early seventeenth century. Although Butler (1990) has problematised the extent to which Puritanism possessed a monopoly on British colonial Christianity, the Pilgrims’ Puritanical doxa and praxis remain essential to U.S.-American founding mythology. As Porterfield (1992: 3) explains, one reason Puritanical sexual ethics has had a lasting impact on American culture is due to the unique ways in which the Puritans infused concepts of piety into everyday colonial domestic life. Piety, broadly conceived, refers to religious devotion. Piety also connotes modesty (Mahmoud, 2005) and is often gender-coded as feminine in these and other ways (Peña, 2011). The New England Puritan concept of piety was rooted in the imagery of ‘both the Church and the Christian soul as the bride of Christ’ (Porterfield, 1992: 3). For New England Puritans, ‘images of female sanctity and divine espousal coalesced with domestic feelings and behaviors. This coalescence shaped both social order and religious experience’ (Porterfield, 1992: 3). Like most settler colonial societies, religiously inspired social views decreed that men were heads of households, and since the household structured the Puritan social environment, men were also the heads of society. The metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ, also present in Roman Catholicism, dictated proper behaviour for any pious Christian. Puritans were particularly authoritarian with regard to their execution of piety. Successful piety required being
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submissive to God and to one's position in society. This authoritarianism was structured hierarchically; men were expected to adhere to social and professional higher authorities, but overall, their social capital greatly exceeded that of women, who were submissive to men and relocated to the domestic sphere (Porterfield, 1992: 9–10).

Whilst Porterfield describes how Puritan views of piety placed women in subordination to men, she also points out that Puritans emphasised 'affectionate marriage' and 'invested relationships between husband and wives' (Porterfield, 1992: 4). She further points out, 'Although the constraints under which Puritan women lived should not be minimized, it is important to recognize that the patriarchal belief system essential to Puritan culture depended for its survival on women's support' (Porterfield, 1992: 80). Puritan women garnered some social capital through the strictly regimented familial order; for example, mothers gained status over young, single, and childless women (Porterfield, 1992). Although it is important to acknowledge the meaningful ways in which Puritan women navigated their circumstances, the lasting impacts of the strictly regimented and hierarchical familial order the Puritans instituted must also be highlighted.

Teachings on submissiveness and accepting one's lot in life were also used in strategically amplified ways to subdue Indigenous people, Black people, and other oppressed groups in America (Bailey, 2016). This Christian-, White-, male-centred authoritarian system disrupted the social organisation of most Indigenous cultures as well as immigrant families (Sarkisian, 2012. Although labour was divided along gender lines in many Native nations in North America, women's labour was generally equally valued, and women were also afforded social and cultural status (Jaimes and Halsey 1992). Early Jesuit accounts of interactions with the Native societies in what are now Canada and the U.S. additionally describe the Jesuits' surprise at the women's status in Native communities. Fr. Paul Le Jeune, a sixteenth-century Jesuit priest, remarked that women 'had great power . . . A man may promise you something and if he does not keep his promise, he thinks he is sufficiently excused when he tells you that his wife did not wish him to do it' (Allen, 1986: 39, citing Etienne and Leacock, 1980: 27). After the onset of settler colonialism, women were primarily restricted to domestic labour, subsequently devalued, and were afforded less status in society.

These kinds of structural displacements were not just an end but indeed a primary goal of colonialism. This goal was achieved in large part by the imposition of Euro-Christian sexual ethics, which disrupted Native (and some immigrant) social, familial, and gender structures. Allen (1986) explains:

During the five hundred years of Anglo-European colonization, the tribes have seen a progressive shift from gynocentric, egalitarian, ritual-based social systems to secularized structures closely imitative of the European patriarchal system. During this time women (including lesbians) and gay men . . . have suffered severe loss of status, power, and leadership.

(Allen, 1986: 195)

Although labour and social roles were typically divided into a two-gender system between men and women in Native American communities, some cases demonstrate openness to same-sex attraction and gender variance within Native societies. One example of this includes what some Native communities in North America refer to as Two-Spirit people. Driskill (2016: 5) explains, 'The term “Two-Spirit” is a contemporary term being used in Native communities to describe someone whose gender exists outside of colonial logic.' Two-Spirit ‘is an umbrella term that references Indigenous traditions for people who don’t fit into rigid gender
categories,’ and in some contexts, may also refer to Native people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The term Two-Spirit also describes a history of sexual and gender expressions that defy colonial Christian sexual ethics and standards (Morgensen, 2011). Although the examples of gender variance and comparative egalitarianism amongst Native societies should not be overly simplified or homogenised, it is clear that settler colonists imposed gender and sexual norms on Native peoples. These external impositions complete and reinforce the Christian colonial logic that simultaneously constructed Indigenous and African peoples as sexually impure and racially inferior, therefore necessitating the enforcement of Euro-Christian ‘values.’

Another example of the violent symbiosis between Christianity and colonialism occurred with the establishment of boarding schools throughout what is now the United States and Canada. Native boarding schools represent the mutualistic nature of Christianity and citizenship within the context of settler colonialism. Assimilation was, ostensibly, the primary objective of these institutions, and conversion to Christianity was a compulsory component of the ‘civilising’ process. To make Native children more European, settler colonists cut their hair, gave them Christian names, dressed them in Euro-American style clothing, and prohibited the use of Native languages. Settler colonials violently endeavoured to make Native children mimic White Christian cultural mannerisms as much as possible (Jaimes, 1992; Trafzer and Keller, 2006). Sexual violence at these institutions was also rampant (Smith, 2005). Ultimately, due to the White supremacist racial hierarchy that the colonists had already instituted, Native assimilation was inevitably unattainable. Dean (1999: 47) refers to this phenomenon as the ‘colonizer’s quandary: the paradoxical need to enculturate the colonized and encourage mimesis while, at the same time, upholding and maintaining the difference that legitimizes colonization.’ Because of this, children brought to boarding schools, already isolated from their Native communities, were simultaneously ostracised by White society (Adams, 1995; Churchill, 2004; Noriega, 1992).

Unsurprisingly, the educational system at boarding schools, like most institutions designed to subjugate Native peoples, was racialised, gendered, classed, and often overtly abusive. Paxton (2006) notes this in her study of the Sherman Institute, a boarding school located in Riverside, California, in the U.S, which is still operational. According to Paxton (2006: location 2471),

Female students at Sherman Institute faced an educational system that included, among other goals, gender assimilation. Two influential organizations that many female students encountered at Sherman Institute were the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the outing system. Both of these were essential in teaching female students what ‘being female’ meant in Euro-American terms.

The outing system sought employment for Native students as part of the assimilation process. Paxton shows how boys and girls were given gendered labour opportunities, nearly all of which was menial (boys were encouraged to take up landscaping and farming; girls, who had comparatively limited options, were encouraged to take up domestically oriented work) (Paxton, 2006). The outing system and the YWCA ‘worked in combination to indoctrinate young Native women into specific Protestant domestic and gender ideals’ (Paxton, 2006: location 2494). In addition to being explicitly geared towards wiping out Native cultures, Native children endured systemic emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of colonists. Boarding schools, which were designed to Christianise and civilise Native children, proved to be an additional weapon of colonialism, one specifically rooted in colonial Christian gender norms.
Contesting citizenship

Colonial Christian morality and sexual ethics also impacted issues pertaining to citizenship. As this section demonstrates, North American conceptions of citizenship are at once racialised and gendered and remain rooted in colonial Christian hegemony. Conversion to Christianity was a compulsory component of forced assimilation under colonial occupation (Wade, 2008). Assimilation for Native peoples meant complete conversion to White, Christian ways of being (Trafzer and Keller, 2006). European colonists undercut Native authority not only by reducing the social power of women, but also by working to undermine men according to European standards of masculinity (Allen, 1986). Natives under initial colonial rule were legally subjected to Christianisation in Catholic as well as Protestant territories, as state and church powers were inseparable during the advent of settler colonialism. Despite modern separations of these powers in North America, questions regarding the relationships between Christianity, coloniality, and citizenship remain, Smith (2005: 185) suggests that ‘White supremacy, colonialism, and economic exploitation are inextricably linked to’ ideals such as citizenship, which is a concept ‘based in exclusivity’ (Smith, 2005: 185). Read in conjunction with the influence of colonial sexual ethics, it becomes apparent that part of the exclusivity surrounding citizenship is explicitly based on gender. Moreover, modern concepts of citizenship and nationhood are rooted in colonial conquest (Anderson, 1983), itself a co-conspirator with hegemonic Christianity (Wade, 2008), which is always gendered and sexualised (Smith, 2005). Because of these legacies, Smith (2005: 185) argues that it ‘is incumbent upon all people who benefit from living on Native lands’ to rethink concepts such as citizenship and nation-state and the ways in which they are rooted in colonialism and exclusivity. Citizenship narratives become further complicated when we consider immigration.

Processes of immigration and globalisation have contributed to the rich texture of North American religions; however, immigrant communities are another place to investigate modern concepts of citizenship’s relationship to colonialism and gender. Interestingly, between two thirds and three quarters of non-White immigrants to the U.S. post-1965 have been Christian (Warner, 2016). This raises important questions as to whether Christianity maintains institutional power in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As of 2010, approximately 77.4% of people living in North America were Christian, 17.1% were unaffiliated, 1.8% Jewish, 1.1% Buddhist, 1% Muslim, and 0.7% Hindu (Pew Research Center, 2015). Since the U.S. remains a neocolonial power, waves of immigration to the U.S. since the nineteenth century help illustrate the relationship between immigration, religion, gender, and neocolonialism.

The first major influx of non-European immigration occurred in the mid-1800s when large numbers of Chinese people moved to California during the Gold Rush. The Chinese primarily introduced Mahayana Buddhism to the U.S. (Mann et al., 2008). Beginning with this wave of immigration, however, it becomes obvious that although non-Christian immigrants and immigrants of colour have often brought to the U.S. rich new religious traditions and cultures, they have consistently been met with institutional racism, xenophobia, and exclusion, which Puar suggests are also implemented by hierarchies of sex, sexuality, and gender (2007). This intersectional oppression reinforces the subordination of women and other people of nondominated genders but also genders men (Puar, 2007). This can be seen throughout the history of immigration laws in the U.S.

Prior to the influx of Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush, the United States had already issued the Naturalization Act in 1790, which stipulated that only ‘White’ immigrants would be considered for citizenship. Not long after the influx of Chinese immigration, the U.S. established the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Immigration from most of the world aside
The legacy of colonialism in North America

from certain parts of Europe slowed until the middle of the twentieth century, when the U.S. passed the Immigration Act of 1965. This act, also informally referred to as the ‘brain drain,’ opened immigration to non-White countries, but also sought elite and talented immigrants whose specialised work in fields such as science and medicine could benefit the U.S. (Hsu, 2016). Whereas during the Gold Rush Chinese immigrants were exploited for their labour, the Immigration Act of 1965 used discriminatory tactics to bring in hand-chosen, educated, upper-class immigrants. In either case, the United States’ simultaneously classist and racist approach to immigration is clear; the U.S. exploited immigrants of colour for manual labour in the former case and used exclusionary tactics to select immigrants with specific credentials in the latter case.

Another wave of immigration important to the landscape of North American religion occurred during the Vietnam conflict, when many Southeast Asians, primarily from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, sought asylum in the U.S. as refugees in the 1970s–1980s. The conflict in Vietnam amplified xenophobic and racist attitudes towards these refugees. In addition, having fled their countries under such extreme circumstances, most refugees had little to no resources (Hein, 1995). These circumstances compounded Southeast Asian refugees’ experiences in American society, which operates on intersecting axes of racial, religious, and class hierarchy; a hierarchy which is simultaneously gendered. Many immigrants and refugees are relegated to menial work, for which they are usually underpaid. Espiritu (1999: 628) explains the relationship between gender and labour within Asian immigrant families in the U.S.:

The patriarchal authority of Asian immigrant men, particularly those of the working class, has been challenged due to the social and economic losses that they suffered in their transition to the status of men of color in the United States. On the other hand, the recent growth of female-intensive industries—and the racist and sexist ‘preference’ for the labor of immigrant women—has enhanced women’s employability of that of some men. . . . However, Asian women’s ability to transform patriarchal family relations is often constrained by their social positions as racially subordinate women in U.S. society.

Due to the United States’ deeply embedded hierarchical gender standards since the advent of colonial Christianity, most women immigrants end up working in the domestic sector, for an even less competitive wage than White or U.S.-born domestic labourers. Simultaneously, Asian men lose their status within the context of White, male-centric American society, whilst Asian women remain simultaneously restricted by androcentric norms within their households and communities. Referring to the disproportionate challenges facing immigrants of colour, Gabaccia (2016: 117) notes:

By many measures, the United States itself has not yet achieved gender equality, and the jobs most traditionally held by women are now often held by racialized immigrants from Latin America and, to a lesser extent, Asia. Since at least the colonial era, opportunities for immigrant women from Europe to expand their own sense of personal autonomy and agency have repeatedly surpassed similar opportunities for immigrant women from Asia, Latin America, Africa, or the Caribbean.

Within the context of immigrants and other minoritised communities in America, many groups end up vying for more social and economic power within the institutional frameworks
that already exist, hoping to ascend to societally accepted levels of Whiteness and maleness. Taking Asian immigrant men’s loss of patriarchal status as an example, it becomes apparent that sexism serves as a barrier to racial equality and vice versa, if men of colour are expected to attain more male privilege in order to compensate for their lack of White privilege. Since these axes of sexism and racism are also transected by citizenship privilege and Christian privilege, it becomes clear that all of these categories are also simultaneously gendered, as Espiritu (1999) notes previously, and that none of them can be dismantled without effectively dismantling the others.

Some immigrant religious communities serve as sites of resistance to these White, male, Christian-centric North American norms. In the case of Asian refugees who moved to the U.S. in the 1970s–1980s, many were Christian, but a substantial number were Mahayana as well as Theravada Buddhists, and their presence therefore marked another upsurge in U.S. Buddhism (Hein, 1995; Seager, 1999). In addition, many of the immigrants that the U.S. sought after the Act of 1965 were Asian, of which a large number were Indian. Of these, many were Hindu (Warner, 2016). For Southeast Asian and other refugees as for many other immigrant communities of colour, engagement with Buddhist, Hindu, and other religious communities provided platforms for additional support. Refugees, relocated at random by state government sponsorship programs, were often particularly isolated by their resettlement. The majority of immigrants, especially of colour, and women of colour in particular, were ostracised by White, U.S.-born members of society (Espiritu, 1999). Buddhist and Hindu temples and other immigrant-centred religious spaces offered engagement with other people of similar ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds and support that was often not afforded to them by other avenues. In addition, religious duties in these communities are often allocated to women. Women typically handle shrine and altar maintenance, including daily rituals and providing offerings at home as well as at designated places of worship (Mann et al., 2008; Peña, 2011). This phenomenon might be understood as resisting North American colonial norms, which often regard men as religious leaders, both within their own communities and within the wider American milieu.

To be sure, immigration to the United States, particularly from non-Christian majority countries, has added rich textures to the landscape of North American religion. Nonetheless, immigration legislation is one of many indicators of systemic racism—and sexism, as delineated by Espiritu (1999) and Gabaccia (2016) in the U.S. Many non-Christian immigrants are racialised and gendered on the bases of their races, ethnicities, and their religions. Although immigrants from non-Christian countries may have somewhat heterogenised religious life in North America, evidence of Christianisation within these groups is still present. Whereas in Asian countries, Buddhists and Hindus might visit temples at any time or day of the week and in small groups or individually (or not all), official services in many U.S. Hindu and Buddhist temples are typically held on Sunday (Mann et al., 2008). Traditionally, Buddhists and Hindus sit on the floor barefoot while at the temple; many temples in the United States have added pews and kneelers to accommodate American standards of (Christian) religiousness (Mann et al., 2008). In addition, although the majority of Hindus in the U.S. remain ethnically Indian, many Buddhists in the U.S. today are White, U.S.-born converts to Buddhism (Warner, 2016). These processes of Christianisation and White racialisation beg questions as to whether immigrants and other minoritised groups are similarly forced to undergo ‘gender assimilation’ (Paxton, 2006). Despite the fact that Christianity has historically been used at the hands of the colonisers, it has also been used at the hands of the colonised. Women (particularly those who are intersectionally oppressed) are at the forefront of the ways in which Christianity is used as a tool of liberation.
Christianity: a tool of the oppressor and the oppressed

Although this chapter has historicised Christianity’s involvement in the colonisation of North America, many historically oppressed groups have also embraced Christianity as a tool of liberation. For example, although slaveholders used Christianity to justify slavery and to encourage submissive behaviour on the part of slaves, others used additional biblical verses to advocate for abolition. Many African American slaves found resonance with the story of Exodus, which tells of a group of Egyptian slaves led to freedom in the promised land (Bailey, 2016). Many slaves sang spirituals, which, drawing from West African as well as Christian traditions, appeared to slave owners to be adaptations of traditional White Christian hymns. However, these songs, unique in form, contained messages about spiritual liberation as well as escaping to freedom in the North. In addition, under slavery and, later, under Jim Crow laws, Christian churches were among the only platforms African Americans could use to organise or hold positions of authority. Black churches serving as fora for social and political organisation continued throughout the civil rights era, and remain historically and culturally significant, especially in the U.S., today.

Black Christianity in the U.S. also inspired women’s rights movements that focus on racial inequality in tandem with sexual and gender equality. For example, Walker coined the term womanism in 1984, describing a womanist as a

black feminist or feminist of color. . . . who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility . . . and women’s strength. . . . Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people. . . . Loves the Spirit. (xi, emphasis original)

As Walker’s mention of the Spirit indicates, womanism was also influenced by and went on to inspire later Christian theologies.

Moultrie (2017) assumes a womanist approach to Christian sexual ethics in her study of women in African American churches. Moultrie (2017: 2) expands on Walker’s definition, defining womanism as ‘the discipline interrogating the multilayered oppression of women of color.’ Moultrie conducts an ethnography of Black churchwomen, focusing on Black Christian women’s sexuality. Moultrie’s womanist sexual ethics highlights the intersectional oppression that African American women have historically experienced on the bases of race, sex, and socioeconomic status. Her research reveals that in addition to experiencing racial discrimination in White-dominated society, the majority of Black churchwomen also experience gender discrimination within their churches, which are typically male-dominated. Moultrie illuminates the ways in which womanism, rooted specifically in Black Christianities, has influenced Black women’s activism in recent decades, and the ways in which womanist sexual ethics are useful to address gender inequality within Black churches.

Similar to womanist Christian theologies, Smith (2008) points out that many Native peoples have adopted evangelical Christianity as part of their platforms for social justice. Smith (xi) suggests that when historically excluded groups recuperate Christianity, the act of recuperation itself is potentially radically liberating. She observes, ‘Christian Indians are generally seen as dupes for white supremacy, complicit in their own oppression’ (Smith, 2008: location 77). Many Native Americans have undertaken the challenge of decolonising the ‘interrelatedness of white supremacy and Christian imperialism,’ in part simply by challenging White claims to Christian ownership (Smith, 2005: 52). Importantly, Native evangelical communities offer platforms for women to organise, a phenomenon which has gone widely underrepresented and
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unencouraged academically and societally. Moreover, Smith points out that European American logics are belief-dominated, whereas Native peoples tend to emphasise community and praxis. In contrast, European epistemologies have historically dominated Christian articulation and legibility. Significantly, as this chapter has argued, the lasting impact of colonial Christianity on nondominant peoples pertains largely to sexual ethics, a category primarily dependent on belief and orthodoxy. In rejecting belief and epistemological consciousness in favour of practice and communalism, Indigenous praxes of Christianity defy settler colonial Christian imperialist logics and offer potentials for resituating Christian gender and sexual structures in liberating ways. Smith (2008) aptly points out how this reality makes Native evangelicals ripe for organising and for undermining White Christian neocolonialism by rearticulating traditions that colonists have for so long yielded as weapons of oppression.

Turning to a Roman Catholic example of liberational Christian expressions, the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe serves an important symbol of Mexican Catholicness and Catholic Mexicanness. La Virgen de Guadalupe, an incarnation of the Virgin Mary, appeared in New Spain in the sixteenth century to a Christianised Indigenous man, Juan Diego. Unlike other depictions of the Virgin Mary, however, La Virgen ‘is imbued with Aztec, Totonac, and Spanish histories,’ as are her physical features (Peña, 2011: 6). Importantly, La Virgen and her story reflect indigeneity and mestizaje, bearing more resonance with colonised peoples in New Spain than with colonisers. In addition to Roman Catholic elements traditionally attributed to the Virgin Mary, La Virgen de Guadalupe possesses traits resembling Tonantzin, an Aztec goddess with a similar story and similarly dark features. This hybridity, in addition to an Indigenous rearticulation of Christianity, can be read as a form of resistance to colonisation, as it allowed Native peoples in Mexico to incorporate their own customs into what otherwise might have been a colonially imposed symbol.

Additionally significant about La Virgen is that La Virgen has likewise been utilised as a symbol for activism and social justice. Because La Virgen is a female figure, women are heavily drawn to her devotion. Shrines to La Virgen create spaces for women to exercise leadership and autonomy, in ways similar to what Moultrie and Smith describe in their studies on Black and Indigenous churches. Peña (2011: 9) further explains, ‘Guadalupanas/os from Miguel Hidalgo to César Chávez, from Emiliano Zapata to Alma López have used her iconic image to spark upheaval, foster civil rights and gender equality, strengthen political campaigns, create art, preserve identity, and build communities.’ In addition, ‘These material and symbolic realisations indicate some of the ways devotees entangle belief in the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe with cultural and sociopolitical aspirations.’ Additionally striking about La Virgen is her prominent use as a symbol of Mexican national identity and unity.

Shrines to La Virgen often feature Mexican flags, and although she is not exclusively a Mexican symbol, La Virgen has gained increasing nationalist significance in the modern state of Mexico. La Virgen’s status as a nationalist symbol begs important questions as to nationalism’s origins in colonialism and the subsequent rise of the nation-state. Like Christianity, it is important to examine whether nationalism and concepts of nationhood can be uprooted from their settler colonial heritages. Even so, some find La Virgen de Guadalupe’s symbolism, specifically as she represents Mexicanness and Catholicness, liberating. For some, La Virgen represents a Catholicism that is Mexican, Indigenous, and therefore anti-colonialist; indeed, La Virgen is more than a Catholic icon. Peña (2011: 9) explains, ‘la Virgen de Guadalupe’s image . . . is both a Roman Catholic icon and a malleable symbol of strength for devotees across the Americas.’ Although it remains to be seen whether symbols of nationalism can be recuperated, for many devotees of La Virgen of Guadalupe, she represents a rejection of colonial symbolisms and Indigenous and mestizaje possibilities of nationhood.
Although La Virgen de Guadalupe is certainly an important symbol of *mestizaje* and Mexicanness for many, Peña complicates an overly simplistic reading of La Virgen as exclusively a Mexican or national symbol. Peña’s work traces the construction of a second shrine to La Virgen outside of Chicago, Illinois, in the north-central United States. This process occurred because of the labour and immigration patterns of migrant workers from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. For this reason, La Virgen has become a transient, transnational entity, and Peña argues that La Virgen de Guadalupe therefore bears no allegiance to geography or nation-state. Moreover, devotees of La Virgen have always described her identity as one that is similarly porous and multiple. This transnational migration of a religious movement and icon imbued with Catholic, Indigenous, *mestizaje*, Mexican, and multiple-American influences, to name only a few, offers an example *par excellence* of contemporary North American religiosities, which are likewise varied and diverse; fluid and porous. The role gender plays within this context is similarly dynamic, at times proving liberating to people of nondominant genders, and at other times perpetuating White, cis-hetero-centred systems of gender regulation.

**Conclusion**

An analysis of colonial Christian sexual ethics in North America demonstrates that Christianity operates as a tool of colonialism and vice versa. Colonial Christianities introduced strictly regimented gender and sexual hierarchies that regulated familial and social structures. These hierarchies were fundamental to reinforcing racism and White supremacy in North America, by rendering people of colour simultaneously racially and sexually inferior. Although Christianity remains the majority religion, a diversity of religious traditions exist within North America today, all of which offer a variety of ways of engaging gender. Many of these traditions offer tools to negotiate oppression. However, the question remains as to whether North America can be decolonised without addressing Christianity’s role in the relationship between Whiteness, citizenship, and colonialism. Important questions remain as to whether non-Christians, people of colour, people of nondominant sexes, genders, and sexuality, and other marginalised individuals can participate in North American society without addressing the role Christianity continues to play in neocolonialism, politics, and the public sphere. Just as gender has been reimagined in important and innovative ways in recent years, so must the relationship between coloniality and North American religiosities.

**Notes**

1. It should be noted that many Indigenous people in North America do not recognise terms and boundaries, such as America and the United States, that were established through settler colonialism. Some Native people reject the sovereignty of the U.S. and other North American countries and view these as occupied territories (Morgensen, 2011).
2. Although the scope of this chapter does not deal with Russian colonisation or colonial territories, it should also be noted that Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church colonised parts of present-day Alaska and California.
3. One of the aims of this chapter is to establish how categories of Europeanness, whiteness, and ultimately Amerindianness overlap due to the legacy of colonialism, which is inherently tied to Christianity. For this reason, the aforementioned racialised/ethnicised terms are used interchangeably.
4. It is also worth noting that many boarding schools are still operational (Trafzer and Keller, 2006).
5. Notably, the U.S. did not grant Native people citizenship until the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 (Carter, 2016).
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6 These statistics should all be treated with caution, as religion proves particularly difficult to quantify, due to the diverse ways to which people subscribe to various religions (requiring attending formal services in a designated building, for example, would skew the data as compared to questions that ask about shrines and altars in the home).

7 Since race is a social construct, the U.S. legal and social definition have varied greatly over the past two centuries. The term once excluded Irish and Italian immigrants, and cases such as Ozaawa v. United States (Reimers, 2016) and United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (Snow, 2007) were fought over this definition, each plaintiff, Japanese and Indian respectively, arguing that they should be legally recognised as White and therefore granted citizenship.

8 Jim Crow laws were enacted after the abolition of slavery in the U.S. and legalised racial segregation until the mid-1960s. In addition to enforcing segregation (including public interaction), Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans from using many public services and spaces available to White Americans (Kennedy, 2011).

9 A primary example includes the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), most famously associated with the United States civil rights movement and figures such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. The SCLC remains active today.

References
The legacy of colonialism in North America


