

OWNING YOUR PARTNER ISN'T SEXY:

VIEWING MONOGAMY AS
A COLONIAL PROJECT
by alexa sorensen

In this zine, I aim to prove that the thought processes behind colonization and capitalism are related to our modern day understanding of monogamous relationships, by exploring colonial history and calling attention to its connections to modern day relationship norms. As an answer to my critique, I conclude the zine by offering thoughts on polyamory, a relationship structure that I believe presents a path towards the decolonization of relationships.

This is not an exhaustive resource, but rather a broad overview of a large topic, with the goal of facilitating critical questioning among folks new to discussions of hegemonic relationship structures. Throughout the zine, I casually reference the materials below; they are listed here as suggestions for further exploration on this topic.

All My Relations podcast Ep. #5 "Decolonizing Sex"
"The Ethical Slut" book by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy
Multiamory podcast Ep. #181 "Settler Sexuality"
"Settler Sexuality" zine by keinfoshop
"What Will the Land of Liberty Make of Polyamory?" article by Louisa
Leontiades for the Huffington Post

• CAPITALISM: •

an economic, social, and political system in which the primary goal is to maximize profit

• COLONIZATION: •

the act of displacing, taking control over, and committing genocide against the Indigenous people of an area, in order to gain access to their land and resources (Settler Sexuality). This zine refers specifically to the history of colonization in the U.S. and Canada.

• SETTLER SEXUALITY: •

term coined by scholar Scott Morgensen, “a white national heteronormativity that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects” (Settler Sexuality).

• MONOGAMY: •

the practice of being in relationship with one person at a time

• POLYAMORY: •

the practice of being in relationships with multiple people at a time. This takes many forms, such as people in group relationships, people in multiple separate relationships, and more.

During colonization, the nation state exercised control over their new territory by rewarding behaviors that they saw efficient among their citizenry. For example, settlers got more land if they were married and had children (All My Relations); The state rewarded them for creating family units that would reproduce the population and efficiently manage the new resources of the land. By assigning morality to sexuality, marriage, and private property, nation states created a mutually inclusive hegemonic standard of family, designed specifically and exclusively to advance colonization and enforce modernity in new territories (Multiamory).

Scott Morgensen coined the term “settler sexuality” to describe the ways colonial regimes policed sexual practices and enforced colonial standards of morality. Monogamy was not the overarching norm among Indigenous people before colonization, but the colonizing state authority upheld monogamy as the most “normal” relationship structure in order to streamline the colonization process. Anything other than monogamy thus became seen as “primitive” and “unexceptional” (Settler Sexuality). In other words, colonization began regulating relationships and disciplining relationships that privileged mutual care and pleasure, in favor of advancing the morals of modernity by enforcing monogamy.

“Hierarchies, ownership. Territory and categorization. All these things are no stranger to a culture that arose out of an estranged desire to name and thereby claim ownership not only over the land and animals of the world, but also one another” (What Will the Land of Liberty Make of Polyamory?).

As settlers colonized land, they claimed women and children as their property and were entitled to their labor and resources. By analyzing our current day relationship to coloniality and capitalism, we can see that the modern practice of monogamy is an outgrowth of the colonial mindset of entitlement. Today, mainstream monogamy continues to perpetuate the idea that you can own your partner.

Monogamy necessitates that couples create stringent rules around the hierarchy of their relationships (i.e., who is allowed to interact with their partner and in what way, and how their partner is allowed to act in order to avoid infringing on the one romantic and sexual partner they have committed to spending energy on). Monogamy reinforces practices of capitalistic and colonial thinking; Though many monogamous couples would hesitate to describe their relationships with the words “ownership” and “territorial,” at the root of monogamous practice is the idea that couples must compete with others to claim ownership over their partner, defending their “territory” with inflexible rules to ensure access to the resources that monogamous relationships supply.

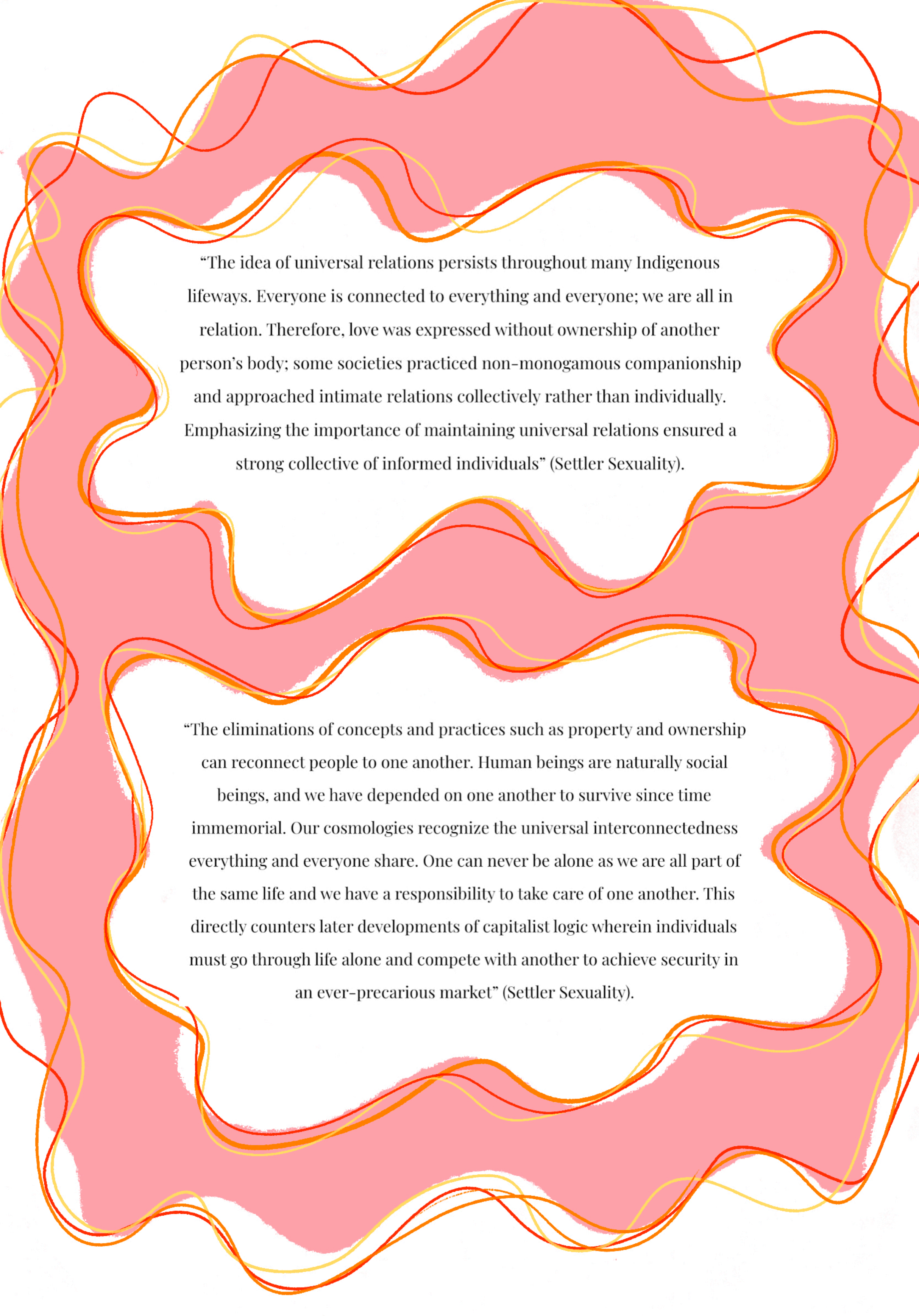
“I WILL NOT OWN
MY LOVERS!
I REFUSE!”

(All My Relations)

Polyamory opens up the possibility for relationships that are rooted in mutual care, rather than ownership and entitlement. Capitalism and colonialism create a scarcity mindset that makes us think we must stake our claim on one person, before we lose our shot. Polyamory invites us to unlearn this mindset and instead inhabit a mentality of abundance; In polyamory we learn that loving one person does not detract from our ability to love anyone else (Ethical Slut). How freeing it is to exist knowing that we can practice love without containment!

Polyamory is a relationship structure, as well as a political critique of the state (Multiamory). The work of polyamory is to prioritize the unique needs and desires of each person in a relationship, rather than assuming that a one-size-fits-all model is possible. We learn to healthily detach from ownership and territorialism and instead practice compersion: feeling joy for our partners' joy. Through deconstruction, we learn compersion and begin to value the opportunity for ourselves and our partners to experience an abundance of love and joy, over our need to assert claim over their actions and desires.

“In practice it [polyamory] is, quite simply, the attempt at letting relationships be what they are; seeking to relate intimately with other human beings without the structure of ownership.” (What Will the Land of Liberty Make of Polyamory?)



“The idea of universal relations persists throughout many Indigenous lifeways. Everyone is connected to everything and everyone; we are all in relation. Therefore, love was expressed without ownership of another person’s body; some societies practiced non-monogamous companionship and approached intimate relations collectively rather than individually. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining universal relations ensured a strong collective of informed individuals” (Settler Sexuality).

“The eliminations of concepts and practices such as property and ownership can reconnect people to one another. Human beings are naturally social beings, and we have depended on one another to survive since time immemorial. Our cosmologies recognize the universal interconnectedness everything and everyone share. One can never be alone as we are all part of the same life and we have a responsibility to take care of one another. This directly counters later developments of capitalist logic wherein individuals must go through life alone and compete with another to achieve security in an ever-precarious market” (Settler Sexuality).