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### Aloha, Marriage Equality: Unsettling Gay Constructions of Paradise

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**Aloha, Marriage Equality:  
Unsettling Gay Constructions of Paradise**

Cuylar Otsuka

Advised by Professor Harry Hirsch

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and  
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Final Draft  
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**Abstract:** Through studying the discourse deployed by Hawai‘i’s predominantly white LGBT political community, this paper explores the limits of single-issue gay marriage politics with respect to the Native Hawaiian community. This paper connects white LGBT political organizations to Hawai‘i’s tourism industrial complex through the community’s discursive deployment of “aloha” and destination weddings in arguing for same-sex marriage legalization. In exploring the māhū identity, this paper theorizes potential decolonized queer futurities.



## Introduction

“There’s a pink one and a green one and a blue one and a yellow one and they’re all made out of ticky-tacky and they all look just the same.”

— Malvina Reynolds, “Little Boxes” (1962)

On November 13, 2013, Hawai‘i became the fifteenth state in the United States to legalize same-sex marriage, after having passed both houses of the Hawai‘i State Legislature and being signed into law by Democratic Governor Neil Abercrombie. The struggle for same-sex marriage came a full twenty years after the Hawai‘i Supreme Court began dialogue about marriage for same-sex couples with its ruling in *Baehr v. Lewin* in 1993. *Baehr* held that the denial of marriage rights only to same-sex couples was effectively a violation of the Hawai‘i constitution, which provides for equal protection on the basis of sex, among other protected classes. In 1998, Hawai‘i voters approved a constitutional amendment that allowed the legislature to define marriage as being between one man and one woman.<sup>1</sup>

Most commentators and even participants in the political spectacle overlook one key component of the political struggle in Hawai‘i: Hawai‘i is uniquely positioned in comparison to the other states due to its continued settler colonial history in the present day. To speak of politics in Hawai‘i, one must understand and recognize that Hawai‘i politics do not function in the same way as Californian or Ohioan politics. As tempting as it may be to frame the struggle between the progressive, pro-marriage equality left and the conservative, anti-marriage equality right, such a view of the political field is reductionist and incomplete.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the Legislature never acted to define marriage as between one man and one woman. For that reason, while this constitutional amendment has not yet been repealed, same-sex marriage was able to pass without constitutional conflict.

Using Hawai‘i’s twenty-year road to marriage equality as a case study, I explore the apparent contradictions and fissures that arise when speaking of sexuality and gender in a neocolonial state. At the core of my argument is the belief that the mainstream gay politics of inclusion does not lead to shared liberation; rather, it leads to uncritical gay integration into a society that reinscribes existing injustices, seeking instead to become a post-social justice gay community.

Marriage equality as a strategy to secure rights within the framework of settler society is an understandable short-term goal. However, the Hawai‘i case illuminates the contentious political tensions between a white settler progressive left, the incumbent Japanese-dominated Democratic left, and the relatively small conservative right, with little space for queer folks<sup>2</sup> and Native Hawaiians to enter political discourse.

I have been particularly dissatisfied by the binaristic frameworks that have been used in order to ascribe meaning to the political discourse around LGBT rights in Hawai‘i. Central to my argument is the assertion that the question should not be framed in reductionist terms such as “for” and “against” same-sex marriage and, as such, being an “ally” or a “bigot,” respectively. I find such logic to be unhelpful and insulting, especially to radical queer activists who are critical of rights-based political movements and instead advocate the politics of intersectional liberation.

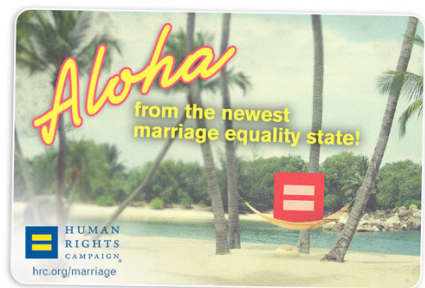
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<sup>2</sup> I use queer as an umbrella term referring to non-normative identities by European and American standards in terms of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. I also use queerness as a politicized identity, signaling a type of LGBT+ politics that is more radical and critical than that of the gay mainstream. Throughout this paper, I use queer as a reclaimed adjective and as a verb. In the words of John Howard at King College’s American Studies department, “to queer an analysis is to trouble an idea and look at it differently.” (*Guardian*, “There’s nowt as queer as queer theory.”)

## *Queering Hawai'i Temporalities*

There is a certain nostalgia embedded in a sepia postcard depicting tall palm trees, deep emerald water, and a hammock swinging idly in the trade winds, with the word “Aloha” emblazoned in cursive. The graphic, produced by the Human Rights Campaign, is modeled after the early postcards that boomed during the 1950s, a time of economic expansion, strong anti-Communist sentiment, and an expansion of access for the burgeoning white middle class under the Eisenhower administration. During the 1950s, suburban growth and white flight took hold across the nation, with Levittown-esque American dreams becoming reality for many white American families. The nostalgia that accompanies the 1950s is often informed by the construction of the period as a time of relative civil peace and economic prosperity, undergirded by the emergence of intense racialized struggle. This is implicitly contrasted with the rise of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, marked by the peak of Black activism and student activism in the post-Kennedy 1960s, and of women’s and gay liberation throughout the 1970s, in addition to the economic “stagflation” of the Nixon presidency.

The palm tree postcard (figure a) quite directly reflects the expansion of geographical and capital access, particularly for white Americans in the booming 1950s, and situates that privilege and access in a gay modernity. What does it mean that gay nostalgia for the 1950s has visually surfaced after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Hawai‘i? Is gay politics located in a pre-civil rights era, a post-gay rights era, or something else? Is the gay community symbolically accepting its inclusion into a class of privilege and comfort, albeit queered?



**figure a:** HRC postcard-styled graphic deploying aloha discourse and their signature red equal sign.

Concurrently, the territory of Hawai‘i gained statehood in August of 1959, conferring with it direct representation in the United States federal government, but also continued reliance upon the tourism industry in order to remain economically afloat. Mainstream depictions of Hawai‘i during this time of expanded tourism and access presented sexualized women of color donning grass skirts and lei performing a hula for the viewer, or exoticized men of color surfing on the beaches of Waikīkī, surrounded by palm trees, golden sand, and deep blue water. Suddenly, with the expansion of the aviation industry, Hawai‘i as a geographical place became accessible to middle-class white American settlers, the effects of which manifest as the tourism industrial complex in Hawai‘i today.

From the supposed “discovery” of the “Sandwich Isles” in 1778 by British Captain James Cook to the present day, Hawai‘i’s history has been shaped by colonial and imperial rule, dictated by British missionaries and American aristocrats and landowners. Mass conversion of Native Hawaiian people was facilitated by the interdiction of the Hawaiian language and the continued presence of European Christian missionaries in Hawai‘i well into the late-1800s. The overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom was catalyzed by calls from white American businessmen and politicians who viewed Hawaiian rule under Queen Liliuokalani as a threat to Euro-American capitalist interests. An article published in the *New York Times* dated January 28, 1893 read:

Queen Liliuokalani attempted on Saturday, Jan. 14, to promulgate a new Constitution, depriving foreigners of the right of franchise and abrogating the existing House of Nobles, at the same time giving her the power of appointing a new House. This was resisted by the foreign element of the community, which at once appointed a committee of safety of thirteen members, which called a mass meeting of their classes, at which 1,200 or 1,500 were present. That meeting unanimously

adopted resolutions condemning the action of the Queen and authorizing the committee to take into consideration whatever was necessary for the public safety.<sup>3</sup>

As a U.S. territory, white American businessmen and landowners forever changed the course of history in Hawai‘i when they imported Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Korean laborers to work on their sugar cane and pineapple plantations, beginning in the 1850s and finally taking off at the turn of the century, after the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom. Many of the descendants of those immigrants, such as myself, continue to live on Hawaiian lands as settler colonists of color.

The unique condition of Hawai‘i lends itself to the discussion surrounding gay rights and settler colonialism. The existence of a visible Native Hawaiian population alongside white and Asian American settler colonists creates not a binaristic us-and-them paradigm, but a complex structure of racial power dynamics that Hawai‘i continues to grapple with. In addition, the strong queer history of Hawai‘i sharply contrasts with the modern neocolonial paradigm propagated by both conservative Christian Native Hawaiians and white sexual-exceptionalist settlers.

I view those complex structures of power and relationships to be concordant with my definition of politics. Politics is the legally sanctioned system of decision-making that determines the allocation of resources, power, and privilege. The transfer and exercise of power is at the heart of questions related to the sociopolitical condition. Hawaiian lands have been forever changed by the political shifts that have been imposed by settler colonists on indigenous peoples,

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<sup>3</sup> “A Revolution In Hawaii: Queen Liliuokalani Deposed From The Throne,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1893, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0117.html#article>.



from the commodification of Hawaiian land to the suppression of Hawaiian culture, to the caricaturization of Hawai‘i and Hawaiians<sup>4</sup> as an orientalized, primitive, yet exotic other.

How is a single-lens or single-frame politics limited in its scope? A singular gay-rights politics that focuses almost exclusively on rights or freedoms such as the right to marry without considering the implications of those rights or freedoms on other struggles for liberation can only go so far in its subversion of injustice. In fact, non-intersectional and whitewashed gay politics have been known to cause harm to communities of color and even trans communities. I name those gay politics as “gay settler colonialism,” opting to highlight the role of settler colonialism in homonationalist exercises of power and privilege. Hawai‘i as a case study is of particular interest because the settler state of Hawai‘i is founded upon the violence enacted by the United States government. Politics of inclusion, even on the sociopolitical left, have failed to uproot the capitalist settler society that is responsible for displacing and violating Native Hawaiian bodies and communities. Indeed, the politics of inclusion aims to be included in the capitalist quest to dominate othered bodies.

This project arose out of an interest in making sense of a white-dominated gay political community. As someone who was relatively active in the campaign for civil unions from 2008 to 2010, I am personally familiar with many of the major players in the gay rights political landscape. The political community is dominated by white mainlanders, many of whom moved to Hawai‘i at the turn of the millennium. Many of them, given their background, were unfamiliar

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<sup>4</sup> In Hawai‘i, the demonym Hawaiian along with the phrase Native Hawaiian refer exclusively to Hawai‘i’s indigenous people. As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui notes in *Hawaiian Blood* (xii),

When not referring to a specific legal definition, I use “Kanaka Maoli” and “Hawaiian” interchangeably to describe those indigenous to Hawai‘i. I do so in order to underscore the shift between the two and to remind the reader that the term “Hawaiian” does not work as a residency marker in the way “Californian” does. As Queen Lili‘uokalani put it: “When I speak ... of the Hawaiian people, I refer to the children of the soil,—the native inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands and their descendants”—an “aboriginal people” with a “birthright.”

with their implication in exercising their political voice within the neocolonial framework that is modern Hawai‘i. The depiction of Hawai‘i as a tolerant, multicultural place lends itself to the erasure of racism and U.S. occupation by positioning Hawai‘i as politically post-racial, welcoming people from all races. The enactment of gay politics, then, is seldom explicitly called white, given the post-racial construction of liberal-multicultural Hawai‘i.

Even so, from the standpoint of people of color, particularly heterosexual people of color, the continued dominance of white voices in gay politics exacerbated an already existing rift in the case of same-sex marriage. Those who opposed same-sex marriage were yelled at and called “bigots” by white gay advocates, who were in turn seen by many people of color as behaving erratically and self-righteously, rooted in a perception that white mainlanders view the state of Hawai‘i and its residents of color as mere objects to be dominated. The racialized tensions in negotiating politics are explored in the first section of this paper, “The Racialized Struggle for Political Power.”

In the second section of my paper, “Is queerness hewa?” I explore the history of queerness in Hawai‘i by providing an alternative hi/story. Less often spoken about is the identity of māhū, an identity rooted in Hawaiian history that queers hegemonic Western constructions of gender and the performance of gender. Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, a kumu and self-identified māhū, defined māhū as

an individual that straddles somewhere in the middle of the male and female binary. It does not define their sexual preference or gender expression, because gender roles, gender expressions and sexual relationships have all been severely influenced by the changing times. It is dynamic. It is like life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jade Snow, “Beyond the Binary: Portraits of Gender and Sexual Identities in the Hawaiian Community,” *Mana Magazine*, March 2014, 24.

In queering hegemonic Western gender constructions and performances, the māhū identity simultaneously uproots Western gender binarism as well as Western hegemony. Other than Kumu Hina, very few māhū voices were heard during the marriage debate, if any. First, a politicized māhū identity poses a threat to the Euro-American dominance in mainstream marriage politics; second, the māhū population, being affected by multiple stigmas and problems due to their queer and indigenous nature, may be less concerned with the politics of marriage and more interested in politics of community support and survival. While Kumu Hina has repeatedly defended the push for same-sex marriage, much of her political work is directly related to issues facing Kanaka Maoli, including issues of land ownership and capitalism.

In terms of conservative Hawaiian Christianity, I explore the tensions that arise *within* the Native Hawaiian community between queer or politically progressive Native Hawaiians and Christian Native Hawaiians. Due to the political and ideological colonization that many indigenous Hawaiians have widely internalized, I explore the problems that arise around a purely identitarian politics, rather opting for the advocacy of Maoli<sup>6</sup> principles or methodologies—that is, a framework through which collective liberation of Native Hawaiian people and other queered identities may be advocated and realized. Central to this aspect is the politicization of remembrance, particularly for a spirituality that predates Hawai‘i’s colonial missionaries.

In the third section of my paper, “The Marketing of Aloha and the Displaced Native,” I explore the role of the settler state’s neoliberal multicultural politics in the state’s quest to protect the status quo. In particular, I focus on the settler state’s appropriation of the word “aloha” in rendering invisible the criminalization of Native Hawaiian bodies and commodification of

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<sup>6</sup> Maoli: Hawaiian, cf. *Māori*, the indigenous Pasifika people of Aotearoa (New Zealand); *Mā’ohi*, the indigenous Pasifika people of Tahiti.

Native Hawaiian caricatures propagated by the state itself. Interestingly, the gay community in Hawai‘i chose to deploy what I term “aloha discourse” in its activism for same-sex marriage.

Maoli writer and scholar activist ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui writes:

Kanakanā Maoli writers are fighting to retain and regrow our literary sovereignty through an assertion of our indigenous voices against a backdrop of haole<sup>7</sup> and Asian settlers who continually try to usurp, undermine, and misappropriate our traditions using a variety of political hegemonic tropes, from American ideals of “freedom” and “democracy” to the mislabeled and misleading Hawai‘i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) concept of “aloha spirit.”<sup>8</sup>

In positioning Hawai‘i as the Aloha State or as a state that respects liberal multicultural rights, the settler state—with help from the gay community<sup>9</sup>—paints itself as a tolerant and post-racial space where everyone can embody and enact the “aloha spirit,” rendering itself invisible in its role in enacting violence against Native Hawaiian communities and other communities at the margins of society.

In the section “Unsettling Settler Activism,” I bring the transnational debate of pinkwashing and homonationalism and situate it within the context of Hawai‘i, a fiercely neocolonial and neoliberal multicultural society. The most prominent gay activists, I explain, are not only phenotypically white, but they enact whiteness in their political discourse. They, like

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<sup>7</sup> Haole has historically developed from its meaning as “foreigner” to its more recent meaning as “white.” Judy Rohrer writes, “It seems that the word’s general evolution in meaning went from foreign, to white person, to its complex set of meanings today reflecting over two hundred years of colonization and its crossover from native Hawaiian to Hawai‘i Creole English (HCE). It is popularly understood today in HCE to refer to white people and is also a marker of a certain set of attitudes and behaviors that are distinctly not local, reminding us that racial constructions always include more than skin color.” (Rohrer, 59.)

<sup>8</sup> ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Was My Land: Kānaka Maoli versus Settler Representations of ‘Āina in Contemporary Literature of Hawai‘i,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, eds. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 118.

<sup>9</sup> I use “gay” to describe mainstream forms of political communities and activism, particularly those dominated by class-privileged Euro-American settler colonists. I opt to use the adjective “queer” to describe politics that are more critical and/or intersectional in nature.

their privileged mainland counterparts, construct same-sex marriage as the new “civil rights” issue, while ignoring the existence of racism and racial civil rights work in the present day. In positioning single-lens gay activism as *the* civil rights issue, white gay activists imply that modern society is collectively moving from post-racial to pro-gay. Much of this perhaps stems from the lack of willingness to recognize the presence of racism which those same activists are culpable of proliferating. The goal, I argue, should not be the continuance of single-issue gay politics, but rather intersectional political coalitions that are willing to fight for the decolonization of settler capitalism—and not for the inclusion thereinto.

Tensions arise between inclusionist gay politics and liberationist Hawaiian politics quite clearly in the discursive deployment of destination weddings in the Hawaiian context. On the one hand, the gay community has justified the quantifiable economic benefit of same-sex marriage legalization by putting forth the argument that gay couples will flock to Hawai‘i to have destination weddings, which will in turn stimulate the economy. Tourism, however, has historically been an industry that capitalizes off the cultural genocide of Kānaka Maoli. The capitalist tourism industry encourages tourist claims to, ownership of, and belonging to Native Hawaiian lands. Gay advocacy for what I call the tourism industrial complex still capitalizes off of the disappeared Native and the bastardization of Hawaiian language, culture, and history. I explore this direct tension in the section “The Tourism Industrial Complex and the Commodification of Paradise.”

In the concluding sections of my paper, I pose the question—what would the unsettling of gay settler colonialism look like? Of course, the best I can do as a queer settler colonist of color is to draw from the scholarship and activism of Kānaka Maoli in tandem with my own queer of

color analytical frameworks. In documenting and critiquing the colonial rhetoric on the part of white gay activists in Hawai‘i, I hope to make a clear case that gay politics cannot be limited to the advocacy of marriage between two men or two women. Issues facing queer communities everywhere are interconnected with violence that Native Hawaiian people face: queer and Hawaiian poverty, queer and Hawaiian homelessness, elevated levels of queer youth and Hawaiian suicide, elevated levels of mental illness in queer and Hawaiian communities. All of these structural inequalities are generated and compounded by the oppressive nature of settler capitalism as well as the privileged political frameworks internalized by people in positions of power. In addition to challenging the heterosexism of straightness, gay politics must overcome its own challenges with whiteness and the homonationalist desire to be incorporated into the neoliberal-multicultural capitalist régime.



## Method and Methodology

I conduct my research with particular focus and attention on Honolulu, the economic and political hub of the state of Hawai‘i. I chose to focus on O‘ahu for logistical reasons, including the difficulty and costliness of traveling to neighbor islands to conduct research. The vast majority of demonstrations and legislations related to queer issues arise in Honolulu, the state’s sole metropolitan area. The many interlocutors and mentors of mine throughout this process hail from around O‘ahu, spanning west as my hometown of the Wai‘anae Coast, to east past downtown Honolulu. Of course, I recognize that politics, power, and dominance permeate all corners of Hawai‘i, not simply urban Honolulu or even O‘ahu; I also however recognize that I cannot call myself an expert in any capacity on the state of political affairs on the neighbor islands.

I began the research process by conducting participant observation during the summer of 2013, just as *United States v. Windsor* (2013) and *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (2013) were being decided and the push for a special session in Hawai‘i was just beginning. I interviewed various folks who identified either as Native Hawaiian or any of the many identities that may fall under the queer umbrella. I came into contact with most of the people I ultimately interviewed by what has been termed “snowball sampling,” whereby I asked personal contacts if they could recommend anyone else I should see. In the end, I interviewed about ten people, many of whom were prominent political stakeholders in O‘ahu Democratic politics, including former Majority Leader Blake Oshiro, Hawaiian lesbian couple Tambry Young and Suzanne King, and queer Filipino-Japanese community organizer Jaco Gallarde. I found interviews and participant observation to feel methodologically right to the purpose of my paper. As an insider–outsider



who has been far in proximity to the work of queer activists in Hawai‘i, I found it necessary to return to the community, this time with an open mind and a relatively newly critical perspective.

Due to the unreliability of the recordings as well as my notes of my interviews, I do not cite any of my interlocutors directly. Rather, I use the knowledge and perspectives I gained from them to inform the concepts that undergird my paper.

I write my piece with the understanding that a large sector of my potential audience may be completely unaware of either Hawaiian words or syntax. I have footnoted Hawaiian words and phrases with brief definitions and etymological explanations in Standard American English, yet have chosen specifically not to italicize Hawaiian words as is customary with foreign words, because in the context of Hawai‘i, the Hawaiian language is the language of the land.

A sizeable portion of my analysis relies on discourse in particular because I approach my research with the understanding that discourse contributes to the shaping of power differentials. Just as Edward Said notes that there is no “Orient” on its own, the formation of the Orient in opposition to the Occident has had profound cultural ramifications globally and transnationally. Similarly, I attempt to name Jacques Derrida’s “shadows” or “specters” haunting Hawai‘i by analyzing the discourse that shapes Hawai‘i politics. Language is one vehicle through which the invisible is able to be named.

As a queer scholar-activist of color, I am explicitly committed to the scholarship not only of queer of color theorists before me, but also to Native and feminist scholar-activists whose writings consistently push their readers to think beyond binaristic dichotomies. While I strive to be multipartial in my analysis of same-sex marriage, homonationalism, and exceptionalism as

they unfold in the context of Hawai‘i, my goal is to challenge the neoliberal sociopolitical left in Hawai‘i to become aware of its own entanglement with the settler colonial state.

As a settler resident, my position in relation to the settler structures is complex. Having grown up in Hawai‘i, I consider myself privy to certain insider information about Hawai‘i politics of which academics from the mainland may be unaware. Yet, I write with the deep understanding that, while I grew up in a predominantly Polynesian and Hawaiian area, I am not an embodiment of Hawaiian struggle for self-determination, nor should I be considered as such. It is with this understanding that I commit within my academic work to actively disrupt hegemonic frames by interjecting alternative standpoints that weave a distinct—albeit important—story.



## Literature Review

In the past ten years or so, queer scholarship has documented the mainstream gay movement toward assimilation into the settler state, a trend that was termed “homonormativity” by Lisa Duggan in 2003 in her book *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Duggan defines “the new homonormativity as”

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.<sup>10</sup>

Duggan analyzes gay politics of inclusion through shifts in history, paying particular attention to the widespread acceptance and implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s as well as the political situation of the United States post-9/11.

In 2007, Jasbir Puar incorporated Duggan’s “homonormativity” with the rise of U.S. nationalism and American sexual exceptionalism in the gay community, which Puar terms “homonationalism.” Both homonormativity and homonationalism, in conjunction with pinkwashing, a term popularized by Sarah Schulman in her *New York Times* piece “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing,’” have had troubling implications for the outlook of gay politics in the U.S. context and transnationally.

The rise of homonationalism and pinkwashing worldwide has illuminated tensions that exist between the homonationalist community and indigenous communities and communities of color which, like the Orient, are constructed as backwards others. White gay dominance over these Oriented others is defended through the morally backward nature the gay community has

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<sup>10</sup> Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press), 50.

ascribed upon those people. Schulman in particular discusses the role of pinkwashing and Israeli sexual exceptionalism in her article “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing’” in the *New York Times*.<sup>11</sup> Schulman argues that, through positioning itself as gay-friendly and therefore politically progressive, the state of Israel has made a concerted effort to legitimize its occupation of Palestinian lands. Similarly, racist Dutch politicians such as Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh legitimized their white supremacist politics by constructing immigrants of color—particularly Muslim immigrants—as being anti-woman and anti-gay, therefore threatening the imagined classical liberal ethos of Dutch society and European society more broadly.

My research seeks to continue the research of Duggan, Puar, and Schulman by incorporating Hawai‘i into the fold of queer scholarship. Similar racialized constructions of gay-friendliness have been constructed by white gay activists in Hawai‘i. Admittedly, I am more interested in exploring the tensions between the indigenous Hawaiian community and homonationalist politics, bringing settlers of color into the fold to complicate normative American constructions of race within the dualistic black-white binary.

My paper would not have been possible without the work of Native Hawaiian scholar-activists, including Haunani-Kay Trask, whose prolific writing forced me to recognize my positionality as a non-Native settler. Noelani-Goodyear Ka‘ōpua, author of the book *The Seeds We Planted*, envisions avenues for the pursuit of self-determination for Kānaka Maoli even within the framework of the settler colonial state through Native Hawaiian charter schools. Ka‘ōpua’s treatise sets forth a framework for pursuing radical politics of alternative literacies within the charter school system, which is regulated by the settler state of Hawai‘i. Lisa

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Schulman, “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing’,” *New York Times*, November 22, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html?_r=0).

Kahaleole Hall, whose work on indigenous feminisms have brought mana wahine<sup>12</sup> into the fold of academic literature, has informed my outlook on Native Hawaiian wahine around me. Many of her indigenous feminist conceptualizations inform my critique of settler patriarchy. Hall, like Andrea Smith and other indigenous feminists, relates capitalism and the settler state to gendered and sexualized violence, both directly and indirectly. In my research, I explore the gendered and sexualized violence the settler state of Hawai‘i commits against queer(ed) (and) Native Hawaiian bodies, primarily through relating settler private ownership and the tourism industrial complex to settler patriarchal domination.

Perhaps most prolific of the Hawaiian scholar-activists who have directly influenced my research is Kumu Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu,<sup>13</sup> whose writings have been at the forefront of exploring and defining the mähū identity, both historically and contemporarily. Kumu Hina, who has published writings in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* and *Mana Magazine*,<sup>14</sup> as well as spoken in the 2001 documentary *Ke Kūlana He Māhū*, is an outspoken advocate for Native Hawaiians and people who engage in aikāne relationships.<sup>15</sup>

In my preliminary identity development as a non-Native scholar, I came across a book called *Asian Settler Colonialism*, edited by Professors Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The book was divided into two parts—Native and Settler — and featured scholarly pieces about Native Hawaiian sovereignty movements and the role of

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<sup>12</sup> mana wahine: female em/power/ment.

<sup>13</sup> “Kumu” is a Hawaiian term of respect that denotes a teacher or mentor. I refer to Kumu Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu throughout this paper by her more common abbreviated name, Kumu Hina.

<sup>14</sup> *Mana Magazine* is a bimonthly magazine that focuses on Native Hawaiian identity. Its name, Mana, comes from the Hawaiian word for “em/power/ment.”

<sup>15</sup> Kumu Hina defines aikāne as “[a]n intimate friend of the same sex” in her blog post, “Do Not Use Aloha in Vain.” (Published November 3, 2013.)

diasporic East Asian settler colonists in reinforcing and invisibilizing the persecution of Native Hawaiians, particularly through inclusionist model-minority-rooted rhetoric. The book was an eye-opening starting point for me in that it names the invisible hierarchy of power and privilege in which Asian settlers like myself are completely entrenched and entangled: Asian settler colonialism. Methodologically, the book privileges ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i<sup>16</sup> and Maoli scholars by separating the book into two primary sections: first Native, then Settler. While none of the pieces in *Asian Settler Colonialism* spoke explicitly about queerness and the Maoli identity, the same methodologies used by Fujikane, Okamura, and the Hawaiian scholars in the book inform my analyses of gay settler colonialism.

Scholarship by settler activists that has sought to decolonize anti-oppression movements has also been central to this paper. In particular, Scott Morgensen’s 2011 monograph *Spaces Between Us* was foundational to my theoretical frameworks in “decolonizing” what is often termed radical gay activism. Morgensen looks critically upon the Radical Faerie movement of the 1970s and discursively unsettles the back-to-the-land primitivism and appropriation of the berdache (now two-spirit) identity by white gay men in the Radical Faerie movement. The cultural appropriation Morgensen chronicles in his book is an extension of the disappeared Native’s culture, embodied and enacted through gay white settlers upon settled Native lands. Morgensen dares to critically examine and queer the intersection of the gay identity and indigeneity, privileging the publications by indigenous gay activists in response to problematic behavior by gay settlers.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i: the Hawaiian language.

Similarly, Adam Chang's article "A Non-Native Approach to Decolonizing Settler Colonialism within Hawaii's LGBT Community," published in the *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* in 2013, effectively situates queer and Native-centered methodologies in Hawai'i and its gay political community in particular. Chang, the first scholar to address gay settler colonialism in the context of Hawai'i, cites both Morgensen and Goodyear-Ka'ōpua in his thesis. My work, while similar to Chang's work, seeks to continue the conversation and use the discourse from Hawai'i's 2013 special session on same-sex marriage as a case study. One key difference I see between Chang's and my work is the fact that Chang writes as a recent settler; I write as a settler whose "local"<sup>17</sup> family first came to Hawai'i through the trans-Pacific labor trade nearly a century ago. In my work, I hope to continue the conversation started by Chang and simultaneously inject my own piece, as someone who was born and raised on O'ahu.

My scholarship on decolonization is continuously pushed toward new directions by a 2012 article titled "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," written by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. In their article, published in the journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Tuck and Yang make the case that it is not enough to speak about decolonization-as-metaphor; rather, critiques of settler activism must incorporate discussion about the role of the activist group with respect with the settler state and about the land upon which the activist group is settling. Interpersonal relationships are fraught with settler colonialist power dynamics, wherein settler activists—even settler activists for causes related to social justice—have invisibilized Native

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<sup>17</sup> As explained by Haunani-Kay Trask, the term "local" finds its roots in the 1970s, a time of shared economic and political security by people of color in Hawai'i. "Local" refers to people of color who live in Hawai'i. "Local" is very much constructed in opposition to "haole"—the former to describe East Asians and Polynesians, the latter to describe white settlers, particularly if their family hails from the continental U.S. For more information, Trask wrote extensively about the topic in her article "Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony: 'Locals' in Hawai'i" in the anthology *Asian Settler Colonialism* (2008).



people on their own lands, completely ignoring Native struggles for sovereignty as it relates to the settler state into which the marginalized community is seeking assimilation.

Many works of critical indigenous and queer of color scholar-activists draw heavily from Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics, or the politics of premature death. Mbembe raises two points that I find to be important to current discourse. First, Mbembe defines racism in Foucauldian terms: it is "above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower, 'that old sovereign right of death.'"<sup>18</sup>

In speaking about racism, I am less interested in examining allegations of racism from individuals who associate with dominant racial identities. I am far more concerned with the consequences of structural racialized oppression on the politics of life and death for peoples and cultures. To quote Mbembe, "in the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state."<sup>19</sup>

Like other Native scholars such as Andrea Smith and Haunani-Kay Trask, I push the boundaries of what constitutes death from Mbembe's seminal essay. For the purposes of this essay, I view the settler colonial state's participation in death and genocide to not only include biological death, but cultural and linguistic genocide and death of community. Hawai'i has a history of colonialism that goes back to the eighteenth century. Attempts to assimilate Native Hawaiians into a Christian European mould led to the near-extinction of the Hawaiian language and the widespread death of rich Hawaiian oral tradition.

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<sup>18</sup> Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003): 17, accessed March 20, 2014, doi:10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

<sup>19</sup> Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 17.

The politics of premature death, however, did not end with the decline of Euro-American Christian missions in Hawai‘i. As explored in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, the rise of Asian settlers to power signaled political inclusion through model minority-based rhetoric. With power and privilege came a lack of regard for Native Hawaiian people’s struggles for sovereignty, which is still felt today. The Democratic Party of Hawai‘i, which currently controls both houses and the governorship, has historically found its ethnic roots in the Japanese American and Filipino communities, with white voters historically tending to support the state’s small Republican Party. However, with the passing of Senator Daniel Inouye, new white progressive settlers have challenged the Japanese Democratic establishment in particular. Still, in this new era of politics, left out of the conversation were Native Hawaiians. In fact, as I explore in the coming sections, Native Hawaiians have been caught in the crossfire, castigated for asserting their agency within legal settler state apparatuses.



## The Racialized Struggle for Political Power

“[W]hat remains of Inouye’s mostly Japanese American political machine is fighting for supremacy against a younger and whiter progressive wing that is trying to become Hawaii’s new ruling class.”

— “Hawaii Senate primary is dividing Democrats along ethnic and generational lines,” *Washington Post*<sup>20</sup>

One of my Hawaiian interview participants spoke to me about her work on the campaign that happened on the ground for marriage equality called Hawaii United for Marriage, or HUM.<sup>21</sup> She lauded her coworkers’ progressivism with regard to LGBT issues, including trans issues and pronoun usage, which are almost universally unacknowledged in Hawai‘i. The work of HUM, however, was extremely whitewashed, perhaps due to its affiliation with homonationalist national organizations, in particular the Human Rights Campaign.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, “HRC is a proud founding member of Hawaii United for Marriage.”<sup>22</sup> A few participants I interviewed also signaled to me that Hawaii United for Marriage is a project funded heavily by the Equality Hawaii Action Fund, a political action committee founded by Equality Hawaii “dedicated to advancing candidates who support equality for Hawaii’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families.”<sup>23</sup> The boards of Equality Hawaii as of February 2014 are overwhelmingly representative of white men, many of

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<sup>20</sup> Philip Rucker, “Hawaii Senate primary is dividing Democrats along ethnic and generational lines,” *Washington Post*, January 1, 2014, accessed January 2, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hawaii-senate-primary-is-dividing-democrats-along-ethnic-and-generational-lines/2014/01/01/fba07e98-7236-11e3-8def-a33011492df2\\_story.html?wpmk=MK0000200](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/hawaii-senate-primary-is-dividing-democrats-along-ethnic-and-generational-lines/2014/01/01/fba07e98-7236-11e3-8def-a33011492df2_story.html?wpmk=MK0000200).

<sup>21</sup> In their publication materials, HUM and other gay settler organizations omit the ‘okina (the glottal stop, represented by the symbol ‘) in their names. I purposefully omit the ‘okina in “Hawaii United for Marriage” and other organizations’ names with the understanding that the omission of the ‘okina reflects a lack of regard for the Hawaiian language.

<sup>22</sup> “HRC Local: Hawaii,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.hrc.org/states/hawaii/>.

<sup>23</sup> “Equality Hawaii Action Fund: Our Mission, Vision & Purpose,” Equality Hawaii Action Fund, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.equalityhawaiiactionfund.org/pacmission>.

whom moved to Hawai‘i in recent years. One biography of a board member reads that he “was born and raised in California, but calls Hawaii home after moving to the islands in 1999.”<sup>24</sup> Another member’s biography reveals that they moved to Honolulu in 2002. The biography of Executive Director Donald L. Bentz almost exclusively focuses on his work with “organizations dedicated to equality” in Tampa, Florida.<sup>25</sup> The ability for settler colonists to call a plot of land “home” reveals the extent to which settler colonialism is normalized.

From my knowledge and information gathered from self-authored biographies, only two of the thirteen members of the Equality Hawaii Foundation Board were actually born and raised in Hawai‘i. The board of the more political Equality Hawaii Action Fund is even less representative of women, Native people, and people of color. Only one female member and perhaps two legible people of color sit on the ten-member board of the PAC.<sup>26</sup>

Without even simple representation of people of color, the style of political organizing by the Equality Hawaii Action Fund was noticeably rooted in white patriarchal ideas of domination and entitlement. The political organizing that the Equality Hawaii Action Fund spearheaded through Hawaii United for Marriage was less about grassroots engagement and more about importing activists, community organizers, and lobbyists from the mainland in order to push through the marriage bill (Senate Bill 1) during a special session called by Governor Neil Abercrombie. The large sums of money and large number of people who were flown in from the mainland in order to work on Hawaii United for Marriage were successful in the short run.

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<sup>24</sup> “Meet Equality Hawaii Foundation's Board...” Equality Hawaii Foundation, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.equalityhawaii.org/c3board>.

<sup>25</sup> “Meet Equality Hawaii Foundation's Board...”

<sup>26</sup> “Meet Equality Hawaii Action Fund's Board...” Equality Hawaii Action Fund, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.equalityhawaiiactionfund.org/pacboard>.

Senate Bill 1 passed both houses of the legislature in two weeks, and Governor Abercrombie signed it into law the morning of November 13, 2013.

According to Lehua Kinilau-Cano, Office Manager for Representative Jo Jordan and Native Hawaiian activist during the marches commemorating 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, the gay settler community flew in lobbyists and activists from the mainland. Presumably, these lobbyists' and activists' tickets to Honolulu were pricey—likely pricier than grassroots outreach to the residents of Hawai'i. Indeed, this is perhaps indicative of the financial privilege the homonationalist community enjoys in the age of neoliberal inclusion. For Kinilau-Cano, outreach would have been more meaningful had the proponents of marriage equality reached out to those who would be affected by the measure being introduced and vetted during the special session. Kinilau-Cano noted that, while the opposition to marriage were busing in folks from around the island or even flying in folks from the neighbor islands, she was taken aback by the sheer magnitude of resources allocated to fly in people from the mainland in order to work on the Hawaii United for Marriage campaign—the same folks my Hawaiian interlocutor worked with during special session.

During the 2000s, I grew up under the impression that white people were conservative, a judgment that stemmed from my experiences with white tourists, retirees, and military personnel. The politics of the 1990s and 2000s was a grab for Hawaiian land and power from the political right. Gentrification was fueled primarily by the escalation of wars and increase in military personnel stationed in any of the many military bases across the state, as well as the growing number of wealthy baby-boomer retirees who were able to afford mansions in affluent areas priced well above \$1 million per plot of property. This resulted in the first election of a

Republican governor of Hawai‘i, Linda Lingle, in 2002. Lingle belongs to the Cutter family, a wealthy white Jewish family that owns a number of automotive dealerships across the state. The election was historic because it was the first time in the history of statehood in Hawai‘i that the electorate voted affirmatively for a Republican for the governorship.

In 2010, Governor Lingle was term-limited and stepped down. In her place, the electorate voted for former Democratic Congressman Neil Abercrombie. Abercrombie, a member of the political left, spearheaded the passage of both same-sex civil unions in 2011 and same-sex marriage in 2013. A striking difference between Linda Lingle’s governorship and Neil Abercrombie’s governorship is the rapidly expanding populace of white progressives who have inserted themselves into Hawai‘i politics. The election of Governor Abercrombie was a first in that no other ethnic group has had two consecutive, democratically re-elected governors in the history of Hawai‘i as a state.

Whether under the Japanese Democratic régime spearheaded by the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye or the white progressive wing of the Democratic Party defined and redefined by politicians such as Governor Abercrombie or his U.S. Senate appointee Brian Schatz, the political state has obscured Native struggles for independence and instead opted for expanded military presence and the growth of a tourism industry that commodifies and adulterates Native Hawaiian culture in order to turn a profit. The result of these policies is an integration into the U.S. settler state at the cost of any short-term prospect of an autonomous state of Hawai‘i being able to become economically independent.

In addition to the election of former Congressman Neil Abercrombie to the governorship in 2010, the death of Senator Daniel Inouye in 2012 revealed tensions between the incumbent

Japanese American Democratic establishment and the rising white progressive Democrats. Senator Inouye in his will stated his final wish was for Japanese American U.S. Representative Colleen Hanabusa to fill his seat in the U.S. Senate. The Democratic Party of Hawai‘i nominated Representative Hanabusa, Native Hawaiian progressive and Office of Hawaiian Affairs Chief Advocate Esther Kia‘āina, and white Lieutenant Governor Brian Schatz to fill Inouye’s vacated seat. Going against the final wish of Senator Inouye as well as going against a Native Hawaiian candidate dedicated to realizing a decolonized Hawai‘i, Governor Abercrombie appointed his lieutenant governor, Brian Schatz, to fill Hawai‘i’s vacated Senate seat. This decision further weakened the political clout of the Japanese Democratic establishment fostered by the late Senator Inouye and solidified a new era of white progressives working to dominate the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i.

Understanding, then, that Hawai‘i’s political scene is dominated by white progressives and Democratic settlers of color, it is important to explore what a Hawaiian politics looks like or should look like. Central to this discussion must be a history of the imposition of modes of production, ethics, and moralities upon the Hawaiian people by settler colonists, beginning with the missionaries of the 1820s.





## Is queerness hewa?<sup>27</sup>

“In these challenging times, convoluted views of our native culture are being appropriated for other purposes. Hawaiians need to be consistent. Choose your water source and stay there. If you would like to drink the holy water from the Christian chalice, then that is your choice. If you would like to drink from the punawai [water spring] of the wai a kane [water of Kāne, water of life], then that, too, is yours to pursue. The problem occurs when Hawaiians want to have it both ways, drawing water from the wai a kane to further the goals of Christianity, enabling its proselytizers to continue perpetuating the wrongs of the past.”

— Kumu Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, “Hawaiian Values Differ from Western Traditions”<sup>28</sup>

Before contact with European voyagers and missionaries, Hawai‘i was a group of islands settled by Polynesian people whose descendants today are the Hawaiian people. The islands were visited by Captain James Cook in 1778, who was killed by Hawaiians the year after in a fight. His crew’s chronicles of Kānaka Maoli included stories of aikāne,<sup>29</sup> or men who would have intimate sexual relationships with chiefs.<sup>30</sup> Professor Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa, current director of the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, explains in the documentary *Ke Kūlana He Māhū: Remembering a Sense of Place*, “if you didn’t

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<sup>27</sup> hewa: mistake, fault, error, sin, blunder, defect, offense, guilt, crime, vice. Hewa is often used within sovereigntist writings to describe the occupation of Hawai‘i. The name of the film *Noho Hewa* translates to “wrongful occupation.”

<sup>28</sup> Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, “Hawaiian values differ from Western traditions,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, October 30, 2013, [http://www.staradvertiser.com/editorialspremium20131030\\_Hawaiian\\_values\\_differ\\_from\\_Western\\_traditions\\_.html](http://www.staradvertiser.com/editorialspremium20131030_Hawaiian_values_differ_from_Western_traditions_.html).

<sup>29</sup> Aikāne comes from the words *ai* (“sex”) and *kāne* (“men”).

<sup>30</sup> *Ke Kūlana He Māhū*. Directed by Kathryn Xian and Brent Anbe. Honolulu, HI: Zang Pictures, 2001.

sleep with a man, how could you trust him when you went into battle? How would you know if he was going to be the warrior that would protect you at all costs, if he wasn't your lover?"<sup>31</sup>

Needless to say, Euro-American Christian missionaries of the 19th century found this philosophy to be contrary to the word of God. Those missionaries—including missionaries who once attended Oberlin College<sup>32</sup>—traveled across Polynesia and Asia in a crusade to Christianize and civilize the Orient. For Hawai'i, this meant that 'ōlelo Hawai'i was at one time forbidden, capitalism became the sanctioned mode of production that propelled commerce and trans-Pacific trade. Native livelihoods under kapu,<sup>33</sup> such as 'ohana,<sup>34</sup> ahupua'a,<sup>35</sup> māhū, and aikāne became forbidden and stigmatized.

These colonial impositions still manifest in Hawai'i's indigenous community today. In an article titled "10 Faces of Hawaii's Gay Marriage Debate" by Diane Lee in *Honolulu Magazine*, Lee chronicled ten activists in both the pro- and anti-same-sex marriage spheres. One interviewee against same-sex marriage named Kealahaleikapo Taua is legibly Hawaiian, if not more broadly Polynesian. His section read as follows:

Kealahaleikapo Taua, 48, calls himself "a spiritual messenger for Hawaii." He disagrees with the legislative proposal to allow gay couples to wed in the state.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ke Kūlana He Māhū*.

<sup>32</sup> "RG 38 - Miscellaneous Missionary Records," Oberlin College Archives, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG38/scope.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Kapu refers to the code of conduct that ruled Hawai'i until its abolition in 1819. The English word "taboo" etymologically stems from the Polynesian cognates for "kapu" (cf. Tongan "tabu"; Māori, Rapa Nui, Samoan, Tahitian "tapu").

<sup>34</sup> While today 'ohana connotes a nuclear family in non-Native discourse, 'ohana traditionally referred to relatives, even in the form of extended family or hānai (adoptive) family.

<sup>35</sup> Wehewehe defines ahupua'a as a "[l]and division usually extending from the uplands to the sea, so called because the boundary was marked by a heap (ahu) of stones surmounted by an image of a pig (pua'a), or because a pig or other tribute was laid on the altar as tax to the chief."

“Marriage is between man and woman. [...] Gay marriage is not hawa [sic], or not pono, not right.

Don't come here to disturb our [Hawaiian] culture and laws,” he says.<sup>36</sup>

There is a direct tension here between Hawaiians and gay rights activists in this case: according to Taua, a heterosexual Hawaiian man, same-sex marriage is hewa—it is sinful or immoral. The specter haunting this spiritual message by Taua and conservative Christian Hawaiians alike, however, is the historical reverence of the mǎhū and the importance of mǎhū in Hawaiian society under kapu. Conservative Hawaiian Christians like Taua as well as former Lieutenant Governor Duke Aiona are implicated in perpetuating European Christian settler ideologies, even if they occupy a Native Hawaiian identity. This illuminates a complication in traditional identitarian politics, whereby those who occupy Native Hawaiian identities may advocate ideas in the name of Native Hawaiian traditions, even if the traditions to which they refer are rooted in European Christian missions. Neither Taua nor Aiona advocate a critical Hawaiian politics—not as the Native wahine scholar-activists to whom I referred in my literature review.

It is understandable that the mǎhū identity haunts the conservative defense of “our Hawaiian culture and laws.” To acknowledge the historical cultural reverence of māhu and aikāne renders their argument incomplete and incorrect. If either the mǎhū identity or the practice of aikāne were hewa, their practice would not have been sanctioned or esteemed by Hawaiians throughout Hawai‘i pre-European contact. That being said, there has also been little to no discussion in the political sphere about mǎhū among gay settlers, which I consider to be

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<sup>36</sup> Diane Lee, “10 Faces of Hawaii’s Gay Marriage Debate,” *Honolulu Magazine*, October 2013, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.honolulu.com/Honolulu-Magazine/October-2013/10-Faces-of-Hawaii-Gay-Marriage-Debate/>.

consequential due to the discursive erasure of māhū people while discussing political identities that relate both to queerness as well as Hawaiian culture.

Kumu Hina critiqued conservative Christian Hawaiians in a piece she wrote for the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. The *Star-Advertiser* is Hawai‘i’s largest newspaper and is thus one of Hawai‘i’s largest sources of journalistic knowledge production. Kumu Hina exposes the flipside of Taua’s argument in her article in the Island Voices section:

Kanaka Maoli have been conditioned for so long to think and act like foreigners that we have allowed the meaning and intent of our words, traditions and philosophies to be replaced by neo-Christian beliefs and used to further a Western political agenda on our islands.<sup>37</sup>

Kumu Hina, a Native Hawaiian teacher and mentor, is also openly māhū. The article she wrote for the *Star-Advertiser*, “Hawaiian values differ from Western traditions,” was one of the only pieces published in mainstream news sources that I viewed to be critical from both queer and indigenous perspectives. Kumu Hina’s argument flips Taua’s argument upon its head: it is not *queerness* that is foreign, but rather *the neo-Christian beliefs* propagated by evangelical churches that is foreign.

Interestingly, Kumu Hina roots her argument in morality by situating her argument as being motivated by values rather than traditions. The oppositional construction of values and traditions perhaps illuminates that, for Kumu Hina, “traditions” are rooted in a colonized premodernity; “values” are rooted in an uncolonized historicity, or even a decolonized modernity or futurity.

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<sup>37</sup> “Hawaiian values differ from Western traditions.”

Taua’s original statement in *Honolulu Magazine* illuminates the construction of the foreign<sup>38</sup> around “gay marriage.” In saying, “Don’t come here to disturb our [Hawaiian] culture and laws,” Taua constructs Hawai‘i’s gay community as originating from the outside. The verb “to come” implies directionality, there existing an implicit or explicit “from” and “to.” In the context of Taua’s case, the gay settler activists have come *from elsewhere to Hawai‘i* to disturb Hawaiian culture and laws. Although misguided, Taua’s construction holds some validity. The most vocal and visible members of the gay activist community are recent settler colonists. As I explained in the previous section, the majority of gay political activists in Hawai‘i are white. More importantly, they have demonstrated a form of advocacy that reinscribes a more modern form of Euro-American imperialism. However, queer relationships and identities are far from foreign in Hawai‘i, even though the gay advocates for the Euro-American practice of “marriage” may be.



**figure b:** Lilikalā Kame’eleihiwa (left) and Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu (right), two of the leading Kanaka Maoli scholar-activists defining the māhū identity both historically and presently. Photo courtesy of Aaron Yoshino for *Mana Magazine*.

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<sup>38</sup> In utilizing “the foreign,” I point to its oppositional construction to “the sovereign.” Sovereign was merged from Old French *soverain* (ultimately from Latin *super*, “above”) and Middle English *reign* (“rule”). By association with sovereign, “foreign” was the product of the merge of *soverain* and Old French *forain* (ultimately from Latin *foras*, or outside). As “the sovereign” denotes rule from above, “the foreign” denotes rule from outside.



## The Marketing of Aloha and the Displaced Native

“Perhaps because Hawaii is one of the world's great melting pots, where people of many races and beliefs live in relative harmony with each other and nature, Hawaii is amazingly open and welcome to gay and lesbian visitors.”

— John Fischer, “Gay and Lesbian Travel in Hawaii: Hawaii Welcomes All to Paradise”<sup>39</sup>

“Hawaii’s gift to the world is the Aloha spirit embodied daily in the beautiful people of many races living here in relative harmony. [...] It is not in keeping with the spirit of Aloha for the government to give one racial group [Native Hawaiians] land or money or special privileges or preferences from which all other racial groups in Hawaii are excluded.”

— William Burgess, neoconservative haole attorney and founder of “Aloha 4 All”<sup>40</sup>

From a Native Hawaiian standpoint, the Asian and the Euro-American settler régimes are not different in that neither will actively challenge the neocolonial state and advocate for Hawaiian independence. However, with white American settler colonists in control, there is a tension that stems from American exceptionalism and Orientalism that was arguably less pronounced under Asian Democratic rule.

This complex clash of ideals was visible in the tensions around the same-sex marriage debate in Hawai‘i in 2013. Layers of colonial ideology compounded each other. On the one hand, white progressives positioned themselves as ethically superior, deploying rhetoric such as “stand[ing] on the right side of history” or statements such as “liberty and justice for all,”

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<sup>39</sup> John Fischer, “Gay and Lesbian Travel in Hawaii,” about.com, accessed March 8, 2014, [http://go.hawaii.about.com/cs/allislandsgay/a/gay\\_lesbian.htm](http://go.hawaii.about.com/cs/allislandsgay/a/gay_lesbian.htm).

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Okamura, “Ethnic Boundary Construction in the Japanese American Community in Hawai‘i,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, eds. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 247.



reminiscent of the highly nationalistic Pledge of Allegiance.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, social conservatives flocked to the Capitol to protect “traditional marriage” and position themselves as the true arbiters of morality in the name of a Christian God. Almost absent from this discussion was the role of Native Hawaiians on this issue and the role of the remnants of European religious imperialism from the 19th century in the Native Hawaiian community.

In ignoring the role of queer Hawaiian gender identities and same-sex relationships, gay settler colonists uncritically deployed the terms “aloha” or “aloha spirit” to celebrate the passage of Senate Bill 1. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) released a statement, reading:

“At last, Hawaii has extended its Aloha spirit to all couples and families,” said Wilson Cruz, GLAAD’s national spokesperson. “It’s good to see the state come full circle on marriage equality and join so many other states in treating all its citizens equally.”<sup>42</sup>

With the statement, GLAAD released a minimalistic graphic reading “Aloha Marriage Equality,” celebrating the passage of marriage equality in Hawai‘i. GLAAD was not the only organization deploying aloha discourse and equality



**figure c:** GLAAD graphic highlighting the “aloha spirit” in passing SB1.

discourse. A blog post by Steve Siebold was published in the Huffington Post titled “Hawaii Says ‘Aloha’ to Same-Sex Marriage and Equality.”<sup>43</sup> The HRC similarly posted an article titled “Say

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<sup>41</sup> “Senator Ruderman: Marriage equality ensures ‘liberty and justice for all,’” Hawaii United for Marriage, last modified September 26, 2013, <http://hawaiiunitedformarriage.org/senator-ruderman-marriage-equality-ensures-liberty-and-justice-for-all-2/>.

<sup>42</sup> Ross Murray, “Marriage equality is coming to Hawaii,” GLAAD, last modified November 12, 2013, <http://www.glaad.org/blog/marriage-equality-coming-hawaii>.

<sup>43</sup> Steve Siebold, “Hawaii Says ‘Aloha’ to Same-Sex Marriage and Equality,” HuffPost Gay Voices, last modified November 13, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-siebold/hawaii-same-sex-marriage\\_b\\_4267720.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-siebold/hawaii-same-sex-marriage_b_4267720.html).

Aloha to Marriage Equality”<sup>44</sup> accompanied by the postcard-styled graphic I reproduced in figure (a) reading, “Aloha from the newest marriage equality state!”

The invocation of the “aloha spirit” has historically been politically beneficial for settler colonists and organizations alike. Nicknamed “the Aloha State,” many landmarks such as the Aloha Stadium and the Aloha Tower were named so to invoke a welcoming liberal-multicultural openness of the geography of the Hawaiian Islands. The political invocation of “aloha,” used as a greeting or salutation (hello) or as love and inclusion, reinforces the invisibilized oppression of Native Hawaiians through shaping the geography of Hawai‘i as a place welcoming to settlers and natives alike from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

This depiction of Hawai‘i as a loving, welcoming place where all of its citizens should be treated equally is harmful in that it obscures and excuses the injustices committed by the colonial state against Native Hawaiians. Take, for instance, the letter of reprimand issued by House Speaker Joseph Souki to Hawaiian Representative and kupuna<sup>45</sup> Faye Hanohano. The letter of reprimand, issued after Representative Hanohano allegedly conducted herself with “a lack of respect and courtesy,”<sup>46</sup> concluded that “[House] Leadership will monitor your conduct for the remainder of this Legislative session; and [i]f it is confirmed by me that a future incident of this nature has occurred, whether at the Capitol or elsewhere, I will immediately remove you from all committee assignments.”<sup>47</sup> Among the “disruptive” behavior on the part of Representative Hanohano was asking an employee if “he or she ‘agreed that land was stolen from many

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<sup>44</sup> “Say Aloha to Marriage Equality,” Human Rights Campaign, last modified November 13, 2013, <https://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/say-aloha-to-marriage-equality>.

<sup>45</sup> kupuna: elder, grandparent.

<sup>46</sup> “Letter of Reprimand to Rep. Faye Hanohano,” last modified March 6, 2014, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/211093256/Letter-of-Reprimand-to-Rep-Faye-Hanohano>.

<sup>47</sup> “Letter of Reprimand to Rep. Faye Hanohano.”

Hawaiians.”<sup>48</sup> Representative Hanohano in one instance “refused to translate from Hawaiian to English during an exchange with Vice Speaker Rep. John Mizuno,”<sup>49</sup> even though Hawaiian is one of the official languages of Hawai‘i, not to mention the indigenous language of the land. Among one of Representative Hanohano’s most controversial remarks, which happened in the 2013 legislative session, was when she allegedly used words such as “Pākē,”<sup>50</sup> “Jap,” and “haole” to refer to the non-Native artists of the artwork sent to her office.<sup>51</sup> Her primary grievance was that there wasn’t as wide a selection of art by Hawaiian artists as there was Japanese, white, and Chinese artists.

In this particular situation, Representative Hanohano, as a Native Hawaiian woman in power, threatened the status quo by naming the settler colonial state in Hawai‘i as an oppressive force, and political leadership of the settler state reprimanded her through surveillance and censorship for speaking her truth to power. Interestingly, the primary actors in this situation are all Democrats. This is but one instance of more radical forces for decolonization on the left clashing with settler colonist actors on the center-left.

Textually, the language of Speaker Souki’s letter utilizes the politics of respectability in order to bring shame to Representative Hanohano’s politics of decolonization. By describing Representative Hanohano’s behavior as being without “respect and courtesy,” Speaker Souki and

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<sup>48</sup> Chad Blair, “Hanohano Says She’s Not a Racist, Just Doing Her Job,” *Civil Beat*, last modified February 20, 2014, <http://hawaii.news.blogs.civilbeat.com/post/77308428184/hanohano-says-shes-not-a-racist-just-doing-her-job>.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Pereira, “Rep. Hanohano prevails in language flap,” *KITV*, last modified March 6, 2014, <http://www.kitv.com/news/hawaii/rep-hanohano-prevails-in-language-flap/24839996>.

<sup>50</sup> pākē: Chinese. While Pākē is viewed as being derogatory in Pidgin, Pākē simply means “Chinese” in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. According to Wiktionary, Pākē is derived from the Cantonese word 伯爺 (baak3 je1), historically used to address an honored or elder third-person man.

<sup>51</sup> Rick Daysog, “State lawmaker accused again of racism and abusive behavior,” *Hawaii News Now*, last modified February 20, 2014, <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/24770972/new-hanohano-controversy>.

virtually all mainstream media outlets that have reported on this case render invisible the context within which the remarks were stated. By obscuring the potential for non-Native actors to be responsible for perpetuating violence against Native Hawaiian people, leadership within the settler state has effectively rendered its own broader actions and existence invisible in the situation. Indeed, in rendering itself discursively invisible, it leaves little room for any critical discussion of settler colonialism to take place.

Moreover, the reprimand of Representative Hanohano has broader implications besides its discursively destructive ones. Representative Hanohano is one of a small minority of Native Hawaiian representatives in either house of the legislature. Without Representative Hanohano's perspective in challenging the settler state, little space if any will be carved out to focus on self-determination for Hawaiian people.

What happened to Representative Hanohano, however, is not an isolated event but rather an individual manifestation of a larger structural issue of violence against Native Hawaiian people. Native Hawaiians throughout the state are incarcerated by the police in disproportionate numbers. Native Hawaiians, just like queer people, are disproportionately likely to live in poverty and to be homeless than their settler counterparts. Settlers, in particular newer white settlers, are directly implicated in the gentrification of Native Hawaiian neighborhoods and the displacement of Hawaiian people. Along the Wai'anae Coast,<sup>52</sup> a predominantly Hawaiian stretch of land on the western coast of O'ahu, the population of homeless people rose to approximately

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<sup>52</sup> The Wai'anae Coast is defined by four main census-designated places—from northwest to southeast: Mākaha, Wai'anae, Mā'ili, and Nānākuli.

1,000 by 2006,<sup>53</sup> out of a population of 43,609 by the 2010 census, or a homelessness percentage of 2.3%.

On the Wai‘anae Neighborhood Board, Japanese American chair Calvin Endo suggested bringing police officers into the Wai‘anae public schools in order to police illicit activity,<sup>54</sup> reminiscent of the school-to-prison pipeline that has proliferated in Black communities on the mainland. An article by Indian Country Today Media Network reported that “Native Hawaiians make up nearly 40 percent of those imprisoned by the state, 41 percent of the parole revocations but only 24 percent of the population.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the State of Hawai‘i has a contract with the for-profit private entity Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) in Saguaro Correctional Center in Eloy, Arizona, where Native Hawaiian inmates are flown due to overpopulation of Hawai‘i’s own prisons.<sup>56</sup> The CCA has been critiqued by prison abolition as well as prison reform activists for its for-profit corporate model, by which it commodifies the mass incarceration of people, a disproportionate number of whom are men of color. For-profit prisons are a hallmark of neoliberalism, an economic system in



**figure d:** A Native Hawaiian inmate at Saguaro Correctional Center, in Eloy, Arizona, blows a conch shell to honor the Hawaiian season of Makahiki, a season historically associated with Lono, the god of peace and fertility.

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<sup>53</sup> Janis L. Magin, “For 1,000 or More Homeless in Hawaii, Beaches Are the Best Option,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2006, accessed April 1, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/05/us/05hawaii.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/05/us/05hawaii.html?_r=0).

<sup>54</sup> Kirk Matthews, “Would police officers on campus provide extra safety?” *KHON2 News*, last updated February 10, 2014, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://khon2.com/2014/01/29/would-police-officers-on-campus-provide-extra-safety/>.

<sup>55</sup> Cliff Matias, “Addressing the Native Hawaiian Inmate Issue,” *Indian Country Today Media Network*, January 23, 2013, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/01/23/addressing-native-hawaiian-inmate-issue-147136>.

<sup>56</sup> “New Hawaii Prison Opens in Eloy, Arizona,” *Hawaii News Now*, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/6714968/new-hawaii-prison-opens-in-eloy-arizona>.

which the value of an industry is dependent upon how much profit it generates. The settler state's version of what Michelle Alexander terms "the new Jim Crow" is the incarceration of Native Hawaiians. Only through disappearing the state's Native population is neoliberal-multicultural Hawai'i able to exist in "aloha" and harmony.

Having explored the workings of the settler state upon Native Hawaiians, the next question to explore is: how is the gay or LGBT community implicated in enacting settler colonialism and neoimperialism? To answer those questions, I look to two situations in which the white-dominated LGBT community in Hawai'i is accountable for refusing to be critical of their positionality as white settlers: the justification of imposing policy based on Orientalist constructions of ideology, and the justification of same-sex marriage through appealing to the expansion of the tourism industrial complex.



## Unsettling Gay Settler Activism

“Racism is, further, the vehicle that transports white gays and feminists into the political mainstream. The amnesia at the basis of the sudden assertion of a European ‘tradition’ of anti-homophobic and anti-sexist ‘core values’ is less a reflection of progressive gender relations than of regressive race relations.”

— Jin Haritaworn, with Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem, “Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the ‘War on Terror’”<sup>57</sup>

“The gay community’s emphasis on the similarities of experiences between (white) heterosexuality and lesbian/gay homosexuality, through a shared racism against brown folk, has helped white gays and lesbians to assimilate and become part of the white heterosexual nation.”

— Priyank Jindal, “Sites of Resistance or Sites of Racism?”<sup>58</sup>

This chapter of my story begins at a rally at the Hawai‘i State Legislature on the same day DOMA was overturned. I had been demoralized by the previous day’s proceedings, when the Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) had gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Pundits and colleagues of mine forecast (correctly, as it unfortunately turned out) that the voting rights of low-income people and people of color nationwide would be chipped away slowly, but surely. At the rally, however, there was no mentioning of *Shelby*, not a whisper about racism, only immense joy at the Court’s rulings on same-sex marriage. Jo-Ann Adams, former GLBT Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i, inaugurated the celebrations triumphantly: “It’s a great day for civil rights, isn’t it?”

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<sup>57</sup> Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem, “Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the ‘War on Terror’,” in *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness / Raciality*, eds. Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake (York: Raw Nerve Books, 2008), 72.

<sup>58</sup> Priyank Jindal, “Sites of Resistance or Sites of Racism?” in *That’s Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 40.



Adams was the only woman who spoke publicly at that rally (the rest of the speakers were men), but she was one of a long line of white cis people who spoke, each time about love, equal rights, and civil rights. Even beyond these individuals, large national publications have reproduced similar rhetoric. Adam Liptak of the *New York Times* hailed Justice Anthony Kennedy, saying that *Windsor* and *Perry* “collectively represent a new chapter in the nation’s civil rights law” with no mention of Kennedy’s joining Roberts’s majority opinion in *Shelby*.<sup>59</sup> The question then follows, *civil rights for whom?* For people of color and young people living in North Carolina, a state that has since enacted one of the most restrictive voter-ID laws in the country,<sup>60</sup> *Shelby*, decided just the day before, codified a constitutional sanction of policies that would render the right to vote even more distant and inaccessible. It was hardly an event for me to celebrate, much less in the name of civil rights.

It is important to note that *Windsor*, *Perry*, and *Shelby* were all different cases that treated different issues. *Windsor* and *Perry* were both seen as victories for gay rights, as one rendered the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause, and the other held the district court verdict that same-sex marriages should be allowed to resume in California after the passage of Proposition 8. *Shelby* was a case that dealt with voting rights, in particular the constitutionality of voting rights laws that were passed almost 50 years ago during the Civil Rights Movement. Discursively, however, all three cases were all framed as “civil rights” cases. In saying “it’s a great day for civil rights,” Adams emphasized the phrase “civil rights.” In doing so, she publicly announced the victory of civil rights without mentioning that a key piece of civil

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<sup>59</sup> Adam Liptak, “Surprising Friend of Gay Rights in a High Place,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/us/surprising-friend-of-gay-rights-in-a-high-place.html>.

<sup>60</sup> “Voting Laws Roundup 2013,” Brennan Center for Justice, last modified November 4, 2013, <http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/election-2013-voting-laws-roundup>.

rights legislation had been gutted the day before. It stunned me that the aspect of civil rights related to voting rights was completely glossed over through the discourse of “civil rights” on that day. It triggered me to think—whose civil rights are important to the gay rights movement in Hawai‘i and elsewhere?

Existing at the intersection of queerness and brownness, I have found myself unrecognized by the white-dominant LGBT community in Hawai‘i. To them, I have been a helper, another body in the arduous and, at times, disheartening fight for civil unions. Even as Asian Americans generally have been hypervisible in Hawai‘i more broadly in comparison to Kānaka Maoli and other people of color, queer Asian Americans and other queer people of color have been almost entirely shut out of Hawai‘i’s official “LGBT advocacy” groups, with a few exceptions (most notably former House Majority Leader Blake Oshiro, Japanese-Okinawan legislator and author of Hawai‘i’s civil union bill). As I mentioned in the first section, “The Racialized Struggle for Political Power,” the board of one of Hawai‘i’s largest LGBT advocacy organizations was composed of two or three members of color of the fourteen-member board as of December 2013. All of the board officers were white.

In Hawai‘i, the political paradigm that has been crafted by “progressive” or “LGBT” organizations has been intensely racialized: the progressives and arbiters of moral progressivism are coded almost universally as being white and from the mainland.<sup>61</sup> People of color from all backgrounds are viewed as a political mosaic, with most communities of color being assumed to be predisposed to be more conservative or non-progressive (Koreans, Japanese, Filipinos), even as the of color majority leans heavily Democratic. According to a queer Filipino-Japanese

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<sup>61</sup> Perhaps ironically, conservatives and evangelicals are also often coded as being white and from the mainland, although conservative Christian advocacy groups engage with a multicultural settler politics to advance the cause of “traditional” heterosexual marriage, arguably more so than many LGBT-rights organizations in Hawai‘i.

community organizer I spoke with, this assumption leads to a lack of community outreach, especially to the heavily Roman Catholic Filipino community, which is often ignored by the gay community, even though there are many people who live at the intersection of being gay and Filipino.

Even further, the small group of white mainland progressives who demand policies such as same-sex marriage have implicitly expressed the viewpoint that “locals”—the settler term for Asians and Polynesians who were born and raised in Hawai‘i—are to be educated and may be pushed around in order to gain political rights. According to an interview I conducted with Tambry Young and Suzanne King, a prominent mixed-race “local” gay couple in Hawai‘i’s LGBT politics, leaders within the state’s most powerful LGBT organizations in Hawai‘i have referred to “locals” as “stupid.” This type of language and activism signal that white gay settlers view themselves as more developed, intelligent, or progressed than Hawai‘i’s communities of color and indigenous communities.

This paradigm of a progressive Occident and a backwards Orient is perpetuated by white-dominated media. On the Hawai‘i Travel section of About.com, white author John Fischer writes that “it is important to recognize that a large number of Hawaii’s people have Asian roots where cultures may be less accepting of alternative lifestyles.”<sup>62</sup> Because this paradigm positions the Orient as oppositional to the sexually exceptional and progressive Occident, the paradigm allows for neoimperialist power dynamics to unfurl between white gay settlers and residents of color.

Nowhere was this exceptionalism as pronounced as the battle between Michael Golojuch, Jr., a white gay settler and Chair of the GLBT Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i, and

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<sup>62</sup> “Gay and Lesbian Travel in Hawaii.”

the O‘ahu Democratic Party. According to the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, the largest daily newspaper in Hawai‘i, Golojuch “filed complaints against 11 state House and Senate Democrats who sponsored or co-sponsored a constitutional amendment on traditional marriage,” but “dropped the complaints against all but two of the lawmakers”—Senator Mike Gabbard and Representative Sharon Har—on August 5.<sup>63</sup> Five days later, on August 10, the O‘ahu Democrats announced they had refused to reprimand Senator Gabbard, and Golojuch subsequently withdrew his complaint against Representative Har.<sup>64</sup>

The political question at the core of this battle was the degree of adherence to the party platform. The platform of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i states: “We support the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex community to equality before the law, including the right to equal relationship recognition including but not limited to equal marriage rights both at the State and Federal level.” The O‘ahu Democrats, in trying to remain a “big-tent” party, declared with their ruling that strict adherence is not necessary in self-identification as a Democrat. Democrats come from a wide range of political beliefs, and have room to support some aspects of the Democratic platform and to not support other aspects of the platform.

In speaking with both Young and King, it became clear to me that there were cultural differences behind political activism. Young and King told me about an incident where an important figure in Hawai‘i’s LGBT community told an unwitting legislator that their<sup>65</sup> son was

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<sup>63</sup> Star-Advertiser staff, “Gay activist drops complaints against 9 Democratic legislators,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, last modified August 6, 2013, [http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/breaking/20130805\\_Gay\\_activist\\_drops\\_complaints\\_against\\_9\\_Democratic\\_legislators.html](http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/breaking/20130805_Gay_activist_drops_complaints_against_9_Democratic_legislators.html).

<sup>64</sup> Derrick DePledge, “Oahu Democrats refuse to reprimand Sen. Mike Gabbard,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, last modified August 11, 2013, [http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/breaking/20130810\\_Oahu\\_Democrats\\_refuse\\_to\\_reprimand\\_Sen\\_Mike\\_Gabbard.html](http://www.staradvertiser.com/news/breaking/20130810_Oahu_Democrats_refuse_to_reprimand_Sen_Mike_Gabbard.html).

<sup>65</sup> I use singular “they” to refer to non-gendered subjects. In this case, I seek to obscure the legislator’s gender in order to honor the legislator’s privacy and anonymity in the public sphere.

gay due to heir disagreement with civil unions. The logic behind this was that the legislator would have to vote for civil unions because their son would be affected by their vote. The practice, known as outing, has been controversial within the gay community nationally. In Hawai‘i, the approval of what the activist had done fell cleanly along racial lines. Young and King said that in the subsequent GLBT Caucus meeting, they and the two other people of color were the only ones who disapproved of the outing. The other members expressed their approval, congratulating the activist for doing what they thought had to be done for the cause of gay rights. Ironically, the legislator channeled their anger into garnering opposition for civil unions. As a result, the bill died in the Senate.

Young and King provided some insight into the cultural dynamics behind outing. In Asian American and Polynesian culture, family is generally highly valued. Critiquing someone through criticizing their family dynamic is perceived as highly offensive because it is viewed as oppositional to what Hawaiian scholar-activist ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui terms “Kanaka Maoli cultural values”—specifically, collectivism and humility.<sup>66</sup> For the vast majority of people of color in Hawai‘i, attacking others’ families is seen as insensitive to others’ collective units as well as a manifestation of a lack of humility in activism. This type of activism carried out by white gay activists further positions white activists as arrogant and confrontational enactors of neoimperialist politics.

More importantly, however, these incidents shed light on the fraught tensions between white settler gay activists and people of color in Hawai‘i. The tensions are not new, nor are they unique to Hawai‘i. There is a common misconception within communities of color on the

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<sup>66</sup> ho‘omanawanui, “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Was My Land,” 119.

mainland that gay people are white, due to the hypervisibility of white gay people in gay media and to the lack of awareness about queer of color identities.<sup>67</sup> The omnipresence of white gay activists within LGBT-rights organizations in Hawai‘i have led on the one hand to the exclusion and invisibilization of queer people of color, and on the other hand to a political foundation that is unable to effectively unsettle itself.

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<sup>67</sup> *Milk* (2008), *Prayers for Bobby* (2009), *Bridegroom* (2013), and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) are just four of the many critically-acclaimed “gay-themed movies” that center around the narratives of white, young, and often conventionally attractive gay cis men.



## The Tourism Industrial Complex and the Commodification of Paradise

“They called it paradise / I don’t know why / You call someplace paradise / Kiss it goodbye.”

— Eagles, “The Last Resort” (1976)

“It’s the great weather, it’s the warm water, it’s the beautiful scenery. And it’s also the aloha spirit.”

— Sumner La Croix, economist at the University of Hawai‘i<sup>68</sup>

Rhetoric of civil rights and equality aside, one of the strongest political arguments in the eyes of any capitalist settler state is the case of economic benefit. The normalization of the commodification of Native people, lands, and culture, I argue, is one of the hallmarks of the entwinement of homonationalist activists and the neoliberal state. Ironically, I remember speaking with my Hawaiian boss about three years ago about the issue and asserting that marriage equality is good for the state in terms of expanding our economy through tourism. In retrospect, I have become critical about that myopic argument. In this section of my paper, I write critically of classical economic arguments from the standpoint of Native Hawaiian liberationist scholarship.

Slightly larger an industry than the U.S. military,<sup>69</sup> tourism is an industry that Hawai‘i has been dependent upon since the 1950s. The dependence on external tourists for economic health has put Hawai‘i in a precarious position in terms of Hawaiian liberation. Scholar activists Haunani-Kay and Mililani Trask argue succinctly:

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<sup>68</sup> Molly Solomon, “Could Hawaii Become a Same-Sex Wedding Destination?” *NPR*, last modified December 2, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/12/02/247979583/could-hawaii-become-a-same-sex-wedding-destination>.

<sup>69</sup> “Major Economic Activity,” *Enterprise Honolulu*, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.enterprisehonolulu.com/index.php/economicoverview/majoreconomicactivity>.



The commodification of Hawaiian culture includes marketing native values and practices on haole terms. These talents, in Hawaiian terms, are the hula, the aloha—generosity and love—of our people, the u'i or youthful beauty of our men and women, and the continuing allure of our lands and waters. Tourism converts these attributes into profit.<sup>70</sup>

Both Haunani-Kay and Mililani approach the issue of tourism from an indigenous feminist perspective. Just like other indigenous feminist scholars, Haunani-Kay and Mililani understand and argue that indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to the violence enacted by settler colonialist industrial complexes.

Waikīkī, one of the largest neighborhoods dedicated to tourism in Honolulu, is frequented by tourists. It is readily apparent by the presence of high-end retailers in Waikīkī that tourists are a boon to the economy of Hawai'i. However, in an instance of vacationing in Waikīkī, I recall realizing for the first time that none of the visible waitstaff personnel at any of the restaurants we went to were legibly Hawaiian, and very few were of color. Yet, they donned apparel that caricatured a primitive sense of “Hawaiianness”—coconut bras, grass skirts, and plastic flowers in their hair. This disregard for and disrespect of Hawaiian culture are a direct product of the tourism industrial complex.

As a scholar who studies on the settled continental U.S., I've also had the unfortunate privilege of witnessing white post-racial liberals' casual racism. In early March 2014, I witnessed a party in an open space for the Jewish celebration of Purim. At the party, tiki torches were lit, party lei and brown grass skirts were donned by partygoers, and some organizers chose to wear orange Afro wigs and Panama hats. The school's predominantly white steel drum organization

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<sup>70</sup> Mililani Trask and Haunani-Kay Trask, “The Aloha Industry: For Hawaiian women, tourism is not a neutral industry,” *Cultural Survival* 16:4 (1992), accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/the-aloha-industry-for-hawaiian-women-tourism-not-a-neutral-industry>.

played as well. In expressing concern about Jewish diasporic celebrations partaking in caricatures of “tropical” or “exotic” garb and people, I was met with a defensive reaction by a liberal Jewish friend and participant: “How is this racist? Is anyone offended besides you?”

The Purim party, as is often the case with Halloween, illuminates white Western perceptions of racialized others, albeit by Jewish leaders. The settler state of Hawai‘i, through its promotion of tourism, is intentional in the work it does for the benefit of haole settler capitalism.

Judy Rohrer explains in her book *Haoles in Hawai‘i*:

[T]ourism and militarism have taken [plantation agriculture’s] place with strangleholds on the political economy. Tourism accounts for at least one-third of all jobs and 26 percent of state revenue, with the Department of Defense coming in second as the major source of income in the state. Hawaiian culture was transformed from “sin” to tacky commercialism once tourism began to take off in the decades after annexation. Government and corporate forces have carefully molded Hawai‘i into a major tourist destination, simultaneously obscuring its status as the most militarized “state” in the nation.<sup>71</sup>

Hawai‘i’s tourism industry constructs the “tacky commercialism” Rohrer refers to by commercializing a haole perception of Hawaiian culture as primitive as well as sinful or exotic.

An article by USA Today described a marriage between two men from the mainland:

They chose the perfect wedding location and style for them: sunset on a Hawaiian beach dotted with black lava rocks plus a native officiant to add such island touches as the blowing of a conch shell and the mingling of sand to represent the union.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Judy Rohrer, *Haoles in Hawai‘i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010), 30-31.

<sup>72</sup> Candyce Stopen, “Hawaii says aloha to same-sex marriage,” *USA Today*, last modified January 30, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/dispatches/2014/01/30/hawaii-same-sex-marriage-legal/4939453/>.

The article fails to mention the sacredness behind blowing the conch shell and rather refers to it as one of “such island touches.” In framing it in such a way, the blowing of a conch shell becomes quaint or atmospheric rather than substantive. Moreover, the singular mention of the “native officiant” demonstrates the subservient role of Native Hawaiian people in the gay settler conquest for marriage. The officiant is never given a perspective or a name in the article. In the article, the unnamed officiant’s role is to legally wed the two men, David and Michael.

The tourism industrial complex constructs Hawai‘i as being a land of perfection, paradise, and even legality. An article in NPR titled “Could Hawaii Become A Same-Sex Wedding Destination?” mentions a wedding planning company called Perfectly Planned Hawai‘i, led by wedding planner Keane Akao. In selling his service to a couple, he tells them, “You can use the beach for pictures, and this is actually called Secret Beach.”<sup>73</sup> From reading Maoli professor Haunani-Kay Trask’s numerous pieces on Native Hawaiian identity, it is understood that land plays a large role in Native Hawaiian identity, genealogy, and nationhood. Trask begins her essay “Settlers of Color and Immigrant Hegemony”:

As the indigenous people of Hawai‘i, Hawaiians are Native to the Hawaiian Islands. We do not descend from the Americas or from Asia but from the great Pacific Ocean where our ancestors navigated to, and from, every archipelago. Genealogically, we say we are descended of Papahānaumoku (Earth Mother) and Wākea (Sky Father), who created our beautiful islands. From this land came the taro, and from the taro, our Hawaiian people. The lesson of our origins is that we are genealogically related to Hawai‘i, our islands, as family. We are obligated to care for our mother, from whom all bounty flows.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Molly Solomon, “Could Hawaii Become A Same-Sex Wedding Destination?” *NPR*, December 2, 2013, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2013/12/02/247979583/could-hawaii-become-a-same-sex-wedding-destination>.

<sup>74</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask, “Settlers of Color and Immigrant Hegemony,” in *Asian Settler Colonialism*, eds. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 45.

For Trask and other Native Hawaiian activists, ‘āina<sup>75</sup> by way of Papahānaumoku is a sacred feminine motherly force. ‘Āina is she who gives life and nourishes her people. For Akao, however, land is to be used for picturesque scenery.<sup>76</sup> Akao’s encouragement to the couple to “use the beach” can thus be read as an encouragement to use or exploit what is constructed as sacred and feminine in Native Hawaiian lore for private settler gain. In praxis, this means that tourists are empowered to not only *use* Native lands, goods, and services, but *purchase* them for private ownership or profit, purchasable through capitalist commodification. Capitalism, in its quest for domination, acts oppositionally to the ‘āina by enacting patriarchal settler masculinity whose survival depends on dominance and ownership of the ‘āina and her people.

Imagined ownership of land was also visible in Akao naming a beach “Secret Beach.” In doing a general search on Google for “Secret Beach Hawai‘i,” I came across many different beaches called “Secret Beach”—Kauapea Beach on Kaua‘i, Manini‘owali Beach on Hawai‘i, and even a beach on “Secret Island” near Kualoa on O‘ahu. ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s essay “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Was My Land” contrasts mainstream Asian settler (“local”) literature with Kanaka Maoli oral and written literature through representations and nomenclature of ‘āina. As an example, ho‘omanawanui explains the oral history of the naming of the island of Mokoli‘i off the coast of O‘ahu and contrasts that history with the settler story

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<sup>75</sup> ‘āina: land. E. S. Craighill Handy, Elizabeth Green Handy, and Mary Kawena Pukui explain the etymological significance of ‘āina:

*‘Āina* also conveys the sense of arable land. It is essentially a term coined by an agricultural people, deriving as it does from the noun or verb *‘ai*, meaning food or to eat, with the substantive *na* added, so that it may be rendered either “that which feeds” or “the feeder.” ‘Āina thus has connotations in relation to people as conveying the sense of “feeder,” birthplace, and homeland.

<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, Hawaiian critiques of settler environmentalism point to the intentionalities behind each ideology. Hawaiian critiques of environmental degradation are rooted in the belief that land is not to be exploited, but to be worked with to grow and sustain life. Hawaiian land-based literacy is a dialogue between two interlocutors. Settler environmentalists often root their advocacy in the preservation or conservation of scenery, completely free of human contact, thereby removing human beings from nature.

behind naming that same island “Chinaman’s Hat” or “Keoni’s Poi Pounder.”<sup>77</sup> In renaming geographical placemarkers, settler colonists disrespect and silence indigenous oral tradition. As Akao obscures the Hawaiian name, geographical context, and history of “Secret Beach,” Akao obscures Native Hawaiian mo‘olelo<sup>78</sup> and naming customs, and instead opts to use an English name constructed by settler colonists in order to market an imagined private ownership of Hawaiian lands to tourists, if only temporarily.

As a queer of color scholar who seeks to unsettle neocolonialist thought and practices, I view the tourism industrial complex as being entrenched in the patriarchal settler state. The tourism industrial complex furthers capitalist interests of ownership and consumption. Gay inclusion in the tourism industrial complex makes sense for a United States located both in the neoliberal era as well as in the nationalistic post-9/11 era. To have a destination wedding in Hawai‘i requires considerable wealth as well as a lack of critical regard for the tourism industrial complex, whose existence is predicated upon the exploitation and occupation of Native Hawaiian people and lands.

Certainly queer people, for our histories of violence from the cisheteropatriarchal settler state, can strive for better than inclusion into a state that enacts similar violences against its indigenous people. What is decolonization? What does a decolonized queer politics look like in praxis? If not through the marriage industrial complex or the tourism industrial complex, where will queer communities with less privilege, capital, and power find liberation in and beyond Hawai‘i? For the next part of my analysis, I attempt to deconstruct decolonization into various aspects to envision one possibility for a decolonized queer futurity.

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<sup>77</sup> ho‘omanawanui, “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Was My Land,” 133-4.

<sup>78</sup> mo‘olelo: hi/stories.

## Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor

“Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain. Thus, relying solely on postcolonial literatures or theories of coloniality that ignore settler colonialism will not help to envision the shape that decolonization must take in settler colonial contexts.”

— Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”<sup>79</sup>

There are three primary components that I have witnessed are integral to decolonization: remembrance, self-determination, and unsettlement. Remembrance is facilitated by storytelling, both formally and informally, written and oral. Remembrance grounds a people in their ancestry, land, and pre-colonial hi/stories. Self-determination allows for a *lāhui*<sup>80</sup> of Kānaka Maoli to regain control over their future. Unsettlement, drawing upon its dual meaning as (1) the act of reversing settlement, and (2) the act of making uncomfortable, is central to the decolonization process—it allows for geographical shifts of power back to Native people on Native lands. Together, remembrance, self-determination, and unsettlement—or as it is more commonly called in Hawai‘i, sovereignty<sup>81</sup>—can begin to decolonize Hawai‘i.

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<sup>79</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1:1 (2012): 5, accessed November 11, 2013,

<sup>80</sup> *lāhui*: nation, assembly.

<sup>81</sup> I have come to avoid the word “sovereignty” in order to highlight that a post-colonial Hawai‘i may not function best under a Hawaiian sovereign entity. As I explained in an earlier footnote, “sovereign” has its etymological roots in the Latin *super-* (above) and *reign* (rule). While the phrase “Hawaiian sovereignty” is used interchangeably with “Hawaiian independence” in Hawai‘i, the word sovereign alone denotes hierarchical rule, while independence denotes the lack of dependence upon an external subject.

## *Remembrance*

In a scene from the documentary *Ke Kūlana He Māhū: Remembering a Sense of Place*, Kumu Hina is shown teaching a class in Hawaiian studies, where she educates that kālā<sup>82</sup> is valued in Western colonial society over the human being. Capitalism is the cornerstone of Western society. In the words of Kumu Hina, “everything is about the dollar.”<sup>83</sup> Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa adds that before Euro-American settlement, Hawaiian society was less concerned with the investment of capital in more capital, and more concerned with the investment of natural resources in the workers who cultivated the land and their communities.<sup>84</sup> The extremely recent push for civil unions, and more presently, marriage equality, was less about remembrance of māhū or aikāne identity and more about the acquisition of *legal rights*—that is, the sanctioned ability to become incorporated into settler colonialist society.

Remembrance requires the recognition of haunting and ghosts, specters that lurk in the shadows cast by the hegemon. Underneath the surface of paradise is a struggle for self-determination and power shifts at the root. The glamorization of destination weddings on “Secret Beaches” obscures the large populations of homeless Native Hawaiians, displaced due to the settler state’s failure to adequately house Kanaka Maoli on Hawaiian land. Hawai‘i’s reliance upon tourism as an economy obscures the failures of capitalism for Hawaiian people collectively. In the economic positioning of the tourism industrial complex as important to the success of the state, settler colonists obscure any non-capitalist definitions of “success” as well as other activities that lead to “success.” The gay settler community in Hawai‘i paid no regard to the role

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<sup>82</sup> kālā: money; loanword from English *dollar*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ke Kūlana He Māhū*.

<sup>84</sup> *Ke Kūlana He Māhū*.

of Native Hawaiian liberationism, and in doing so reaffirmed the legitimacy of capitalist ownership of Hawai‘i.

Interestingly, through remembering Native Hawaiian history, visions for a queer(ed) Kānaka Maoli futurity are possible. The Europeans brought with them the imposition of capitalism, Christianity, and English as the lingua franca. Capitalism, Christianity, and English were neither organic nor indigenous to the Hawaiian Islands. The reclamation of māhū as a transfeminine, post-binaristic identity is one way of bringing Native Hawaiian history into a queer modernity. For many māhū individuals like Kumu Hina, self-identification with māhū is an assertion of both queerness and indigeneity. After all, Kumu Hina does not focus solely on rights to marriage, but advocates against the haole claim of inherent value in “capital.”

I believe that the survival of mana māhū<sup>85</sup> is in its nature a manifestation of resistance against the settler cisheteropatriarchy. Māhū activists such as Kumu Hina have resisted the long-held notion that capitalism is the optimal mode of production and that conservative Christianity with roots in European settler colonialism will save the Hawaiian people. Politics of decolonization can incorporate memory and history into a future of self-determination.

### *Self-determination*

The movement for marriage equality began in Hawai‘i in 1993, exactly one hundred years after the U.S.–European deposition of Queen Lili‘uokalani and overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. The year marked a time of political and social shifts from the political mobilization of Kānaka Maoli through marches and protests led by sovereignty group Ka Lāhui Hawai‘i to the Hawai‘i Supreme Court’s decision in *Baehr v. Lewin*, which declared the denial of a marriage

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<sup>85</sup> Māhū spiritual and political power.



license to a same-sex couple to be in violation of the Hawai'i State Constitution's Equal Protection Clause.

Decolonization-as-not-a-metaphor would require that the Hawaiian people be able to make their own decisions to determine the future of their land under a Hawaiian nation. In tandem with remembrance and radical literacies and educations, self-determination will provide Kānaka Maoli with the tools to effectively unsettle American colonialism and rebuild a Hawaiian nation that strives for the collective liberation of Hawaiian people.

On the ground, there is already work being done by queer Kānaka Maoli to build a gay or queer community in Hawai'i that unsettles the white-progressive-savior paradigm. During my time at home in Hawai'i, I was able to visit the Life Foundation, an HIV-prevention and support non-profit organization. The Life Foundation offers counseling services, HIV tests and contraceptives, primarily to the queer community. Most of the workers at the Life Foundation are people of color, and many of them are māhū.

I walked into the Life Foundation with a friend and she introduced me to the folks who worked there. They were friendly to me and offered me a seat in the waiting room, where there were pamphlets and magazines that centered around queer life and issues. On the wall, there were black-and-white photos of semi-nude tattooed people artistically positioned. As I spoke with the people who worked at the Life Foundation, many of them were disinterested in issues like marriage or destination weddings. Even more recent settler workers were dubious about the construction of Hawai'i as a paradise, understanding full well that labeling Hawai'i "paradise" renders invisible the U.S. occupation and oppression of Hawaiian lands and people. More so,

they were interested in providing community support and care for those who are often illegible or unrecognized by the state or healthcare systems in place.

The Life Foundation also sponsors GSA Hawai‘i, a network of gay-straight alliances throughout the state of Hawai‘i that enables high school students at different GSAs to be in conversation with each other about programming and ideas. I was able to attend the GSA Hawai‘i Youth Summit and engage with students at different high schools across the state who are working with their peers at their school GSAs.

This enactment of community care and support in the face of sickness and death leads to survival and, perhaps more importantly, vitality.<sup>86</sup> Some of the most profound political work that I have witnessed so far has taken place in organizations that are perhaps not explicitly “political”—that is, they combat normalized violence through grassroots action, not necessarily advocacy.<sup>87</sup> The Life Foundation is not explicitly a gay or queer organization, even though all of the staff members I met identified under the queer umbrella, and some understood themselves to have a queer politics. Notwithstanding, the work the Life Foundation does with the queer community in Honolulu has saved lives and proactively made health and wellness for seropositive and queer people more accessible.

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<sup>86</sup> Both “survival” and “vitality” share the same Latin root, *vivere* (verb, “to live”) and *vita* (noun, “life”). Both are etymologically positioned opposite the prefix *necro-*, itself coming from the Greek word for “dead body.”

<sup>87</sup> In this paradigm, I hope to point to the opposition of action/activism and advocacy etymologically; action and activism coming from the verb “act,” and advocacy coming from the Latin *vox* (voice, speech). Advocacy, while important, etymologically stems from the act of speaking. Action, ultimately coming from the Latin verb *agere*, shares roots with words such as “agitate” and “agency,” concepts that I view to be instrumental in effective political activism.

## *Unsettlement*

The gentrification of the Hawaiian Islands and the displacement of her indigenous people is directly related to settler colonialism in a very literal sense. Fueled by the tourism industry as well as the construction of a Hawaiian paradise, recent settler colonialism, like its more historical manifestations, is fueled by the needs and desires of capitalism. Capitalist constructions of land ownership and real estate in turn evict indigenous Hawaiians who are unable to “keep up with the Joneses,” both in a literal sense and in a trans-Pacific sense.<sup>88</sup>

Unsettlement has a dual meaning: in its literal sense, unsettlement would refer to the process of actually reversing settler claims of ownership over Hawaiian lands; in its more figurative sense, unsettlement would refer to a radical shift in settler ideology, realizing that the normal state of affairs is established upon normalized violence. Unsettling long-held notions of progress, freedom, and equality are crucial to a larger project of reversing settler colonialism, including the homonationalist agenda to include settler gay men and women in both the tourism and military industrial complexes. The project of decolonization unsettles the desires of the settler and centers the agency of indigenous people to organize their economies and societies, and to distribute power how they see fit. Discussions of decolonization are difficult precisely because they directly question the validity of settler ownership of land, historically a central tenet to European economic and geopolitical doctrine.

And yet, modern neocolonialisms often manifest in more subtle, albeit troubling ways. Gay settlers of Hawai‘i are not the *conquistadores* of the 21st century by any means. Yet, their

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<sup>88</sup> Literally, Hawaiians experience homelessness in Hawai‘i at disproportionately high rates. Trans-Pacifically, the population of Hawaiians living on the continental United States is growing due to an increasing inability to afford Hawai‘i’s gentrified cost of living. Hawaiians are also evicted through their incarceration and displacement to prisons like Saguaro Correctional Center in Arizona.

starting point in activism—that legal equality in marriage is a mark of progress—should be questioned, critiqued, and unsettled. For example, will legal equality address intersectional injustices? internal injustices? If gay folks can marry, how is the right to marry relevant to gay folks finding themselves at the margins of racialized, classed, and gendered gay circuits of desire? How is the married gay couple able to obtain healthcare coverage if neither partner is able to afford health insurance or given health insurance by their employer? How do gay marriage advocates carry with them racial and class privilege, whether acknowledged or not, and their continued privilege should be challenged through of queer of color and indigenous analyses.



## Conclusion

“Or, we might find ways of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting that are engaged and curious about ‘other people’s’ struggles for social justice, that are respectfully affiliative and dialogic rather than pedagogical, that look for the hopeful spots to expand upon, and that revel in the pleasure of political life.”

— Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*<sup>89</sup>

My goal is not to inspire white activists to adopt a more liberal, multicultural attitude towards inclusion of Native Hawaiians and people of color into the fabric of American society. This type of activism has historically reinforced the legitimacy of the settler state with the help of people of color in addition to the white activists who already occupy positions of power. Rather, I hope to push activists—settler and indigenous—to think critically about how they are implicated in reinforcing settler colonialism through their occupation and activism, and to ask them to think critically, and not necessarily embracingly, about the settler state.

One prong of my argument is that actors possessing certain identities are not exempt from enacting a counter-liberationist politics for either their own communities or other communities at the margin. The major actors in this paper belong to at least one identity group that has either historically faced or presently faces structural oppression. And yet, many of them through their words and political activisms are able to advocate a counter-liberationist politics. For instance, Akao, as well as Taua from earlier, may be of Hawaiian descent. Akao could possess a Hawaiian identity, but his words and actions run up against those of more radical Hawaiian scholars. Taua may also possess a marginalized Hawaiian identity, but due in part to his misunderstandings of queerness from centuries of Euro-American ideological imperialism, he constructs queerness as

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<sup>89</sup> Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality*, 88.

an identity imposed on Hawaiians by “the foreign.” Golojuch and Adams, too, as gay haole settler activists, have found the limits of single-issue gay activism in the embedded racism and Orientalism that they enacted against people of color. All of these activisms are unsatisfying—what is the point of political action if it ends up causing harm against other communities that have also faced oppression from the hegemon?

Another prong of my argument is that coalition-building can be politically sensible for both the queer political community and the Native Hawaiian community. Seeing as the less privileged sectors of the Native Hawaiian community and the queer community have faced similar issues—homelessness, sickness, mental illness—it makes sense from an intersectional standpoint to build coalitions between the two communities to address the root causes of these and other issues. The issues facing the queer community, as is the case with the Hawaiian community, will not disappear with the legalization of marriage or the inclusion into the settler state.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the act of collaboration forges trust and allyship more strongly than does the act of imposing single-lens ideology.

In his article, “Here Comes the Groom: A (Conservative) Case for Gay Marriage,” gay conservative Andrew Sullivan wrote that “a need to rebel has quietly ceded to a desire to belong. To be gay and to be bourgeois no longer seems such an absurd proposition.”<sup>91</sup> His proposition is troubling, to say the least—it signals a complacency with collective forgetting.

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<sup>90</sup> I find it important to note here that one of my main reasons in opposing queer inclusion into the U.S. military is the fact that the U.S. military is quite directly *the* iron fist of the United States that exerts terror onto othered bodies in Hawai'i and wherever else the U.S. military has a presence, directly or indirectly. The military industrial complex in Hawai'i additionally has a stranglehold on the state's economy, similarly to the tourism industrial complex.

<sup>91</sup> Andrew Sullivan, “Here Comes the Groom: A (Conservative) Case for Gay Marriage,” *New Republic*, 1989, republished in *Slate Magazine*, November 9, 2012, accessed April 17, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2012/11/gay\\_marriage\\_votes\\_and\\_andrew\\_sullivan\\_his\\_landmark\\_1989\\_essay\\_making\\_a.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2012/11/gay_marriage_votes_and_andrew_sullivan_his_landmark_1989_essay_making_a.single.html)

Gay settler bourgeoisie may not seem an absurd proposition to the average white homonationalist, but for the sectors of the queer community who aren't white, economically secure, able-bodied or able-minded, or cis, inclusion into the bourgeoisie (1) may not realistically be as easily attainable, and (2) will not eradicate the root problems that give rise to the violence their communities face, even if the community may indeed attain inclusion one day. Settler colonialist destination weddings still remain problematic, whether engaged in by heterosexual couples or queer couples. The military industrial complex continues to be an arm of U.S. imperialism, even if queer Americans are able to serve openly.

Of Sullivan and gay conservatives such as him, Lisa Duggan writes, "Sullivan's plan is simple. It involves focusing primarily on two issues—gay access to marriage and the military—then demobilizing the gay population to a 'prepolitical' condition."<sup>92</sup> The HRC, Equality Hawaii, and Hawaii United for Marriage all march toward a prepolitical condition, as is textually legible from the 1950s-styled HRC postcard, the sepia tones, the deserted beach with a lone hammock, and the ubiquitous red HRC equal sign. The nostalgia for a temporality of normalcy and nationalism walks hand in hand with the gay political mainstream of the 21st century. Perhaps the logic is that we can marry ourselves and bomb other countries into a gay futurity disconnected from the homophile movement, the Mattachine Society, and the queens (many of whom were of color) who fought the police at the Stonewall Inn.

In reality, our queer foremothers and forefathers in the historical struggles for liberation faced extreme violence at the hands of the heterosexual settler state. Forgetting their struggles is a rejection of cross-temporal affect. How should the queer community reconcile our continued

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<sup>92</sup> Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality*, 60.



history of oppression with the rise of heterosexual tolerance for cis gay people? Humbly, I put forth that we should respect our queer ancestors who lived and died at the margins by not becoming so absorbed in individualistic capitalist success that we reinscribe those same forms of violence onto differently othered bodies who continue to live and die at the margins of society.

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