What Does It Mean to Be Queer in Hawai‘i?

‘Ihilani Lasconia

This polemic essay explores how white notions of queerness have dominated what is commonly identified as queer culture. Rather than being truly queer and deviating from the status quo of heteropatriarchy, white queerness largely operates in tandem with this system. This type of collusion produces new variations of settler colonialism within the queer community in Hawai‘i. The hegemonic nature of white queerness intentionally obfuscates the many other ways queerness can be lived out, performed, and practiced. I draw upon my lived-experience and observations—as someone who is queer and Kanaka ‘Ōiwi—to identify how white queer culture has permeated Hawai‘i’s multiethnic queer community.

CORRESPONDENCE MAY BE SENT TO:
‘Ihilani Lasconia
Email: cierak21@hawaii.edu

Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being Vol. 12 (2026)
Copyright © 2026 by Kamehameha Schools.

Queerness is vibrant and expansive. It is bound to no single person, place, or period in time. Queerness is a horizon (Muñoz et al., 2019) whose light transforms our present and our future while reshaping how we come to know the past. Queerness can be possessed but not contained, articulated but not canonically defined. Queerness is joy, a riot, a belonging. Above all else, true queerness is the antithesis and rejection of heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy is a social system where cis straight men maintain dominance and control over every aspect of our lives. This power is sustained through violence against women and queer people. Heteropatriarchy conditions us to believe in the myth that this hierarchy is normal and necessary to our survival when it in fact harms everyone. In the context of Hawai'i, I have come to understand heteropatriarchy as the social blueprint for colonization. It is the system that has made (1) private property possible, (2) the ownership of women seem logical, and (3) violence against māhū acceptable. As a queer Kanaka 'Ōiwi feminist fighting for a de-occupied Hawai'i, I believe that queerness holds many answers to how we can free ourselves.

I have seen many movements for decolonization unknowingly replicate the harms of heteropatriarchy and anti-queer violence. I have also been in queer spaces that don't recognize the violent impact of settler colonialism in Hawai'i. To be a queer Kanaka in Hawai'i is to navigate these difficult intersections and contradictions daily. It is from this experience that I now understand that exercising the full potential of queerness as a relationality and analytic of power—rather than mere aesthetic or sexuality—is how we can put an end to this perpetual harm. Furthermore, by decolonizing the way we look at queerness, we can use this modality to create a world more closely modeled after the ones our kūpuna walked in. My hope is to show others a different way to think about what it means to be queer in Hawai'i and how it is connected to our collective liberation.

What comes next is not a scholarly review but a polemic essay where I explore my own personal relationship to queerness. My analysis and practice of queerness is deeply informed by reading across a diverse scholarship relating to queerness and indigeneity while also being deeply reflective of my own personal experience as a racialized, queered 'Ōiwi person living under patriarchal and colonial domination. I have chosen to explore these ideas in a polemic form—rather than an explicitly academic form—for these reasons. In doing so, I have chosen to include a short list of literature and scholarship at the end of this essay that have informed this work and my life.

The Evolution of "Queer"

When traced etymologically, "queer" can mean odd, peculiar, or to deviate from the norm. The term queer is thought to have come about in sixteenth-century Germany. At that time (and very much still today), the norm in Germany and the west was heteropatriarchy. With the creation of heteropatriarchy in Europe came the very conditions for capitalism and colonialism to exist. This is because heteropatriarchy set the conditions for the creation of private property that then made these systems possible (Lerner, 1986, p. 22). Those who rebelled against the normalized violence of early heteropatriarchy—and its successive systems—were ostracized for not dissolving themselves into the status quo. On many occasions, these people were often labeled as "queer." Today, these people may be identified as anti-capitalist, neurodivergent, atheistic, and/or LGBTQ+.

By the late nineteenth century, the term "queer" was used more concretely to identify homosexuality. Perhaps one of the most poignant pieces of evidence is the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde, an Irish playwright, poet, and critic convicted of twenty-five counts of gross indecency—charges largely stemmed from homosexual acts (Bristow, 2022, p. 199). Throughout the trial, terms like "queer" and "queer snobs" were used to describe Wilde and his male sexual partners. Following this trial, using "queer" to identify homosexuality became increasingly widespread.

Queerness was policed by heteronormativity through criminalization and deep social stigma. As a result, many queer people cosplayed heteronormative lives to survive within society. Yet, amidst this rampant queerphobia were folks who resisted erasure and fought for visibility and dignity. Figures like Virginia Woolf and Edward Carpenter, among many others, continued to produce literary works as evidence of queer existence, allowing queerness to evolve into an identity and culture of its own. This history set the foundations and emergence of white queerness.

The specificity of white queerness in this historicization is done intentionally. I wish to call attention to how white queerness celebrates freedom of sexuality while largely ignoring the colonial context from which it was born. When I say "white queerness," I do not mean white people that are non-heterosexual; I reference the subsect of the queer community that invests in capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy—essentially furthering white cultural hegemony. Let us not forget that

the emergence of the category "queer" and the need to combat homophobia is largely produced in a western and colonial context. It is important to remember that for much of the non-western world, homophobia was not inherent but rather introduced through colonization.

Forced assimilation into heteropatriarchy was deliberately done to destroy intricate family and social systems for the purpose of conquest and exploitation (Anderson, 2021, 87). In the context of Hawai'i, ushering in Christianity violently dismembered intricate family structures and condemned anything not heterosexual, including being māhū. Breaking up the traditional kauhale system meant that there was virtually no place for queer and māhū members of the 'ohana. Beyond altering the web of Kanaka relations, this shift into heteropatriarchal nuclear households lessened community interdependence and favored individualism and increased consumerism.

In and Beyond White Queerness

While this essay argues that both white people and people of color can embody white queerness, the historical and cultural pathways that lead each group to this performance are substantially distinct. Now given this context, I challenge readers to understand white queerness not as a mere category, but as a product and extension of colonialism.

Although the term "queer" has roots in the west, queerness both literally and semantically has developed its own culture and subcultures to include folks of varying ethnic and class backgrounds. Today, the term "queer" is not reserved for white folks; it is for anyone who resonates with this identity. The adaptation of this word in urban queer culture is clearly seen in New York's Black and Latino queer communities, especially in the late twentieth century with the rise of ballroom culture. This community of self-identified "queers" included a consciousness around racism and classism in addition to fighting back against homophobia and transphobia. A crucial example of this is during the Stonewall Uprising of 1969, where many LGBTQ+ people of color were not only fighting to end police raids of queer spaces, but to also improve living and working conditions in the inner-city (Jacobs, 2020). Histories like Stonewall are a testament to the vibrancy of queerness and how this identity is not just about sexuality, but the determination to live freely in all aspects of one's life. Stonewall also reminds us that queerness is about resistance, refusal, and the courage to revolt from the violence of the status quo.

However, because the world is hegemonically oriented by white supremacy and colonialism, white queerness today has largely dominated what is considered "queer culture." So much so, that the anti-racism and critiques of classism embedded in queer people of color's understandings of queerness are often overlooked. The Stonewall Uprising of 1969 is a salient example of that. This crucial moment in queer history often gets remembered as a spontaneous riot—not a highly orchestrated series of acts to bring attention to the racism, classism, and queerphobia that many folks were experiencing simultaneously. In many ways, this type of historical erasure posits freedom of sexuality as the only struggle queer people are fighting for.

Although antagonistic towards western concepts of heteropatriarchy, white queerness lacks the capacity to be anti-colonial and anti-capitalist. This is because the performance of white queerness complies with white hegemony and benefits from this political system—despite experiencing harm from it. An example of this in queer history is the struggle for marriage equality in the United States. This movement was centered on individual rights and privileges rather than dismantling the colonial structures that produce homophobia. In this case, personal choice was both the foundation and apex of this movement. This struggle did not aspire to dream beyond the system that disenfranchised those afflicted. Rather, the movement sought to reform this system where it could gain incremental power within it. This "power" can be rescinded at any time, and over the last few years it has been more vulnerable than ever. For this reason alone, marriage equality will never save us. Until there is a collective push to dream beyond recognition, our "right" to exist will rest in the hands of a system that does not care if we live or die.

What's More Queer Than Being Kanaka ʻŌiwi in Hawaiʻi?

White queerness largely operates out of a person's singular experience as the totality of being queer. In other words, white queerness is so focused on one's personal identity that it often lacks the capacity to be critical of history or various structures of power that connect people's lives to a larger body of politics. This hyper-individualism obfuscates how being queer isn't just about sexuality but fighting to live outside of heteropatriarchy. For example, even though heteropa-

triarchy is a system of exploitation that produces homophobia, being critical and fighting against this system is often disregarded. In lieu of investing in the struggle to dismantle heteropatriarchy, white queerness prioritizes separating the fight for sexual freedom from other social and political demands, allowing queer sexual identity to be performed without surrendering one's proximity to whiteness. Within this framework, (white) queerness is not a riot or a revolt that attempts to radically transform the social and political structures that rule our lives. Instead, (white) queerness is a performance measured by one's ability to accrue social capital through how well they execute their perceived queer identity.

However, queerness is not simply a *sexual* orientation, but a political one. White queerness has focused so much on sexuality that it ignores the violence of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy that privilege white queerness. However, "queer" (as in a defiance of the norm) can be utilized as a tool to fight against the structural dominance of heteropatriarchal and colonial power. Furthermore, if queer is to deviate from the norm—and that norm is heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, and capitalism—then there is nothing more queer than choosing to live in the image of our kūpuna ʻŌiwi in Hawaiʻi. Our existence is antithetical to these systems; we do not thrive in them and never will.

Even when not explicitly identified as such, Hawaiians have done things—in order to survive colonialism—that could be considered queer. In the confines of this essay, I am not referring to pre-colonial gender norms or cultural practices, an expansive and complex history that deserves its own dedicated discussion. Rather, I am examining contemporary modes of survival under American occupation. Queerness is in the way we hānai; in our multi-generational households; in how we fish, hunt, and plant; and in how we share resources as a community. One might argue that there is nothing inherently "gay" about any of these practices. While that is true, I emphasize that my articulation of queerness moves beyond sexuality alone; it names the defiance of heteropatriarchy, the nuclear family, and consumerism. Thus, even when homophobia persists in our Hawaiian community, our lāhui's lived practices—by simply being Hawaiian—may be seen as "queer" because they continue to diverge from the normative structures of the average American family.

Even if folks do not think of it as such, many Hawaiians have resisted the forced American institutionalization of nuclear and heteropatriarchal families. Through conscious and subconscious acts of survival, our mere existence is a queering of our Americanization. If we can understand queerness in relation to how many of

us live under American occupation, we can then begin to understand the power of queerness when it comes to our struggle for freedom. A fully embraced understanding of queerness continually defies the US's attempts to conform us into nuclear and heteropatriarchal families. Understanding queerness in this way is imperative; without this analysis, we run the risk of being sovereign without true liberation from the mindset of our occupiers. Queerness offers us lessons on how to sever ties with colonial norms. Through this severance, we begin to unbind ourselves from colonialism and learn what it means to truly be free.

To utilize this productive understanding and function of queerness as a tool of resistance, we must first unpack how white queerness has maintained a sense of dominance within the queer community in Hawaiʻi. This pervasiveness is apparent in several aspects: local Pride events catered toward tourism; the assumption that a settler's *queer* identity can "cancel out" their positionality as a settler; and LGBTQ+ organizations fighting for freedom while ignoring Hawaiʻi's status as an illegally occupied country. Awareness of this dominance can transform how we understand and practice queerness within and beyond our lāhui.

White queerness has been adopted and performed in the queer community in Hawaiʻi, regardless of ethnicity, and we need to consider what is lost in this process. For example, there are many queer Kānaka who do not resonate with or feel included by the queer community in Hawaiʻi because of white queerness's domineering presence within this group. This dynamic functions as an aspect of settler colonialism; it centers the wants, objectives, and desires of non-Hawaiians when it comes to determining what queerness should look like in Hawaiʻi.

This loss of connection is felt beyond the queer community. There are so many straight Hawaiians who are turned off to anything "LGBTQ+" because they think it's haole. I suspect that the root of the "haoleness" that repulses them is more related to white performance of queerness than it is about gender and sexuality. Think about it: Almost every Hawaiian family has a gay uncle, ʻanagē (gay aunty), or māhū aunty/uncle/makua they grew up with. These identities have never left our family systems. In fact, many rely on us to take care of our keiki and kūpuna. So, what is it that makes ancestral aloha feel so foreign to our straight ʻohana? Since homo/transphobia remains a major issue in our lāhui, interrogating the complexity of why it exists—beyond the blanket answer of "colonization"—is critical to addressing it. Only then can queerness, as a tool for decolonization, become a more centralized aspect of our struggle for ea.

Products of White Queerness

Out of aloha for my queer ʻohana, it is with the utmost grace and care that I consider the following as products of white queerness: aesthetic standards of queerness, the pressure to be non-monogamous, and sexuality as the epitome of being queer. Although these aspects of identity have been positioned as dominant pillars of queer culture, it does not mean we have to accept them uncritically. The following are my general observations and critique on how the attributes of white queerness operate in Hawaiʻi's queer communities.

Keeping Up with Aesthetics of White Queerness

Like gender, being visibly queer is heavily based on performance. This performance is not necessarily ingenuine; rather, it is a way to express oneself to a wider audience (Teves, 2018, p. 32). Expressing queerness by way of appearance through fashion and aesthetics can be incredibly affirming. In many ways, queer aesthetics have functioned as a means of communication and identification between queer folks in a heteropatriarchal world. Queer aesthetics include but aren't limited to fashion, hairstyle, and piercings. The joy of expressing queerness is not what I am problematizing or calling into question. Rather, I am interrogating who gets to define what has been deemed as queer aesthetics and how these standards of visible queerness are often rooted in whiteness.

Paying to Play

Because our world is largely oriented under a white supremacist logic, white queerness has justified its own domination and possession of defining a "queer" aesthetic. Dyed hair, mullets, shaved heads, piercings, quirky tattoos, Doc Martens, and overpriced vintage clothes have all been named as staples of a "queer aesthetic." These are all material things that people have adorned to express themselves to a wider audience. Feelings of belonging and connection can be evoked by this performance. However, the upkeep of this queer aesthetic is not attainable nor desirable for everyone who identifies as queer. The cost of being visibly queer now contradicts the class politics queerness once challenged. Rather than deviating

from the norm of consumer capitalism, queer fashion has become a multibillion-dollar market. Consequently, people think they can buy their way into being seen as queer if they adopt perceivable aesthetics defined by white queerness.

The kind of queerness I am pursuing is not interested in this kind of performance. I want to dream bigger than this binary of (in)visibility. Rather, I am invested in seeing how queerness can be used to liberate all of us from the pressure of making ourselves legible under patriarchy. Even if white queer aesthetics push back against heteronormativity, it still replicates ideas of territory, ownership, and belonging that stem from colonialism and capitalism. I do not want queerness to become another category under the umbrella of our current reality; I want it to reshape our world until queerness is no longer marginalized. Moving past aesthetics and into liberatory politics is how we get there.

Possessive Investment in White Queerness

American and Black Studies scholar George Lipsitz identifies what he calls a "possessive investment in whiteness." Lipsitz argues that "white Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. vii). Over time, this "investment" was perceived by many Americans as whiteness being synonymous to power. This conflation compels individuals to conform to standards of whiteness to gain social, political, and economic capital. Within this context, striving to meet Eurocentric beauty standards has been identified as maintaining a possessive investment in whiteness. Applying this understanding of a possessive investment in whiteness to white queerness, I am compelled to think about how white queerness has been invested in possessing and controlling what it deems as "looking" queer. This is done through dominating the narrative and definition of queer aesthetics and positing it as the *only* way to be queer. In doing so, non-white queer folks feel the need to invest in queer aesthetics that are rooted in whiteness, power, and control. The need to adapt and perform this type of queerness can be from conscious or subconscious choices.

These choices, especially subconscious ones, can be best understood through looking at the hegemonic nature of white queerness. Knowing that there is a certain hegemony attached to white queerness allows one to understand the following: Part of white queerness's power is found in its elusive ability to seep into public consciousness and be internalized as the unquestionable norm. So much

so, that even if one does not actively think about white standards of queerness as being associated with power, recognition, and belonging, one may still aspire to perform them in order to be included in queer communities. It is not my objective to eliminate or demonize these elements of queerness. Rather, the function of this work is to give these standards a history and foster awareness of how one might exist in relation to them.

The Pressure to Be Non-Monogamous

A foundational aspect of how queerness is understood is in how it operates outside of and against heteropatriarchy. One of the key elements of heteropatriarchy is compulsory monogamy. We see this in how heteropatriarchy champions the institution of straight marriage that is recognized by the state. This type of monogamy is coercive and seeks to benefit colonialism and capitalism through the proliferation of nuclear households that are highly profitable and useful towards maintaining private property and heteronormativity (Zaretsky, 1976, p. 36).

In an effort to outwardly reject heteropatriarchy, white queerness has identified non-monogamy as the ultimate solution to rejecting heteropatriarchy. So much so, that non-monogamous queer individuals are often seen as "more queer" and more radical, and if a queer individual chooses to be monogamous, it is because they haven't fully come into their queer identity. Or, it is assumed that they are clinging onto any available privilege provided by replicating some shred of heteropatriarchy. There is also a notion that monogamy is only for individuals who are too insecure to be in an open or polyamorous relationship. As a result of these assumptions, a queer hierarchy has been constructed, stigmatizing monogamy as being less queer and privileging non-monogamy as the "final boss level" of achieving maximum queerness.

One may wonder how the pressure for non-monogamy in queer relationships is connected to heteropatriarchy. This can be especially confusing because queer non-monogamy and heteropatriarchy appear antithetical to one another; either repels the other's prescription of sexualities and relationship structures. While they may be seemingly different, what I aim to identify is that the pressure from both systems to perform a particular type of relationship and sexuality is rooted in faux hierarchies of how relationships *should* be. Perceptions and standards of rela-

tionships are different, yet both hierarchies produce a sense of status and exclusion if one does not meet respective standards based on identity and community. So, while non-monogamy seems like a complete redirection from nuclear heteropatriarchy, the pressure to perform this dynamic reflects the same rigid and hierarchical nature of the system it seeks to deviate from.

Additionally, the existence of compulsory monogamy does not negate the existence of healthy monogamy. Many cultures across time have practiced forms of monogamy that are not produced by heteropatriarchy. Hawaiʻi and the Philippines are two examples of cultures where some people practiced monogamy before colonization aimed to institutionalize it. Furthermore, the existence of compulsory monogamy does not mean that its opposite—non-monogamy and polyamory—defaults as the anticolonial alternative. Using an either-or, monogamous/non-monogamous binary reduces our analysis, limiting understanding of intimacy, both romantically and platonically. Every form of relation, monogamous or not, possesses potentialities for both generativity and harm. Rather than rejecting one relationship type for another, we must see the abundance in both. In doing so, we are reminded that there are ways to be in monogamous partnerships that are rooted in fulfillment and expansiveness rather than adherence to heteropatriarchy.

Heteropatriarchy Disguised as Decoloniality

The pressure to be non-monogamous can also be felt within straight relationships. Just as there are fabricated tiers to reaching this faux epitome of queerness, there is also a falsely constructed tier system to being the most decolonial in our intimate relationships. Often, the pressure to be non-monogamous in straight relationships derives from misogyny and heteropatriarchy—disguised as decoloniality. For example, some straight Hawaiian cis men will deploy the trope of wanting to practice "decolonial love," pushing for open relationships and accusing their partners of being "colonized in the mind" if these men are met with resistance. Men will "cite" moʻolelo and the absence of marriage in pre-colonial Hawaiʻi as evidence that they have the cultural right to be in open relationships. This is often coupled with their sheepish pleas of wanting to exercise a healthy Native masculinity. It is hilarious that such individuals believe they can jump into the non-monogamous part of decolonization before beginning to unpack how inundated they are with their own investment in patriarchy. This same pattern of faux decolonial rhetoric can emerge in queer relationships as well.

Pilina as the Foundation and Precipice of All Relations

I believe that some of the functions of heteropatriarchy are to (1) sever sex from intimacy and (2) prioritize pleasure without accountability to those who provide that pleasure. This same logic underpins both the non-monogamy championed by white queerness and the faux decolonial love espoused by straight Hawaiian men. Both prioritize personal gratification while failing to engage with the deeper responsibilities of meaningful relationships.

A more radical approach to address this lack of intimacy lies in understanding and cultivating pilina. Pilina is not simply *knowing* someone. Pilina is the choice to maintain a relationship and reciprocal accountability with a person or place. Pilina is a commitment to growing together. Pilina is not a static relationship; it's shaped by how well intimacy is maintained, romantic or otherwise. I am not perfect in this by any means, but my politics are shaped by the belief that practicing pilina is how we fight for a better future without losing the joy of living in the world right in front of us. For me, pilina is returning to our ʻohana loʻi in Heʻeia, because if I don't, the weeds in our plot will prevent the next loʻi from getting water. Pilina is calling out the misogynistic behavior of the kāne in my life—no matter how "good" they seem in comparison to others. Pilina is committing—by both my partner and me—to be a part of each other's ʻohana and not live in the comfort and isolation of our own relationship. Pilina is learning the delicate rhythm of how to build a life on two moku without letting the sea of what-ifs consume us. Pilina is placing every gifted lei on my papa's altar because I have learned the heavy lesson that parents don't stop being parents—if you choose to understand what it means to love each other from both realms.

It is because I have fought for this kind of pilina that I'm less interested in an ill-strategized orchestration of mental gymnastics to justify hookup culture, and more inspired to learn how to be in community in the long run. How we show up in our romantic partnerships is reflective of how we show up for ourselves and others. I do not claim to have all the answers to how this can be done, but I am compelled to believe that there is much more to the process of queering and decolonizing our relationships beyond instantly reverting to "moe aku, moe mai" just because *some* of our kūpuna once did.

Sexuality as the Epitome of Queerness

Sexuality is a fundamental component of queer identity; so much of the history of queer liberation includes fighting for non-heteronormative relationships and the right to exist without facing violence. To be dignified in whom and how we love, while living through colonialism, has been a tireless struggle where many have dedicated their lives. I do not intend to undermine that labor or history. Rather, I look back and up to queer and Black feminists who remind us that queerness is so much more than whom we sleep with.

This distinction is crucial because there has been a culture of measuring queerness by disclosing and performing sexuality. However, reducing queerness to whom you sleep with is a fickle metric. Being queer in our sexuality does not make us incapable of enacting heteropatriarchy, misogyny, or queerphobia. To rebuke the amalgamation of these systems is one thing; to dismantle their strongholds, especially ones that shaped our upbringing, will be a lifelong process—one that requires patience, grace, and the ability to discern embodied queerness from static queer performance. At its core, queerness is about the ways one intentionally chooses to reject heteropatriarchy and colonialism—and how they have conditioned one to live.

Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic"

By not fixating on sexuality as the epitome of queerness, we can become more serious about practicing and experiencing love in a more intimate way. In Audre Lorde's essay, "Uses of the Erotic," she describes eroticism as a profound source of power—one that is not limited to sexuality but acts as "the nurturer of our deepest knowledge" and "a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence" (Lorde, 2020, p. 42). The power of the erotic comes from forming deep and meaningful connections with others and ourselves through shared joy, intellect, emotion, and vulnerability (Lorde, 2020, p. 44). The power of the erotic possesses the ability to be romantic and platonic. The erotic's power can involve sexuality, but it is not the erotic's all-encompassing nature. Unfortunately, just as eroticism has been merely conflated with sex, queerness has also been conflated to whom one sleeps with. This flattening of such powerful tools is a testament to the pervasiveness of heteropatriarchy in every aspect of our lives.

Returning to the radical roots of queerness and the erotic requires rejecting the idea that sexuality is the only form of intimacy that matters. To fully harness the power of the erotic and queerness, we need to actively fight for and practice eroticism and queerness in a way that is antithetical to heteropatriarchy's isolating definition of sex as the highest form of relation. Existing in the potentiality of queerness and the erotic is more about the process of returning to our bodies than inattentively over-extending ourselves to others. This is not the condemnation of sex; it is an invitation to reconsider how we love—both ourselves and others—in a way that is holistic and expansive. Queerness should not be relegated to the realm of sex alone but embraced as a practice of deep, intentional, and liberatory connection to all that surrounds us.

Conclusion—Ku'u Wahi Mana'o

Some may be quick to pass judgement on this polemic essay or assume that this work was ill-crafted to point fingers, throw shade, or otherwise complain about problems they believe do not exist. While not everyone may agree with what I have to say, it is undeniable that we all are living under the crushing thumb of a patriarchal world. In an era of rising fascism, our existence is at stake, and aesthetics and sex will not be enough to save us. If we wish to survive, we need to re-think what it means to be queer in Hawai'i. Not queer as in Waikīkī rainbow capitalism, performance elitism, or social opportunism masked as community. Queer as in Land Back. Queer as in aloha 'āina. Queer as in not American. At the precipice of a crumbling empire, we have the chance to build a new world. Now, we must ask: What are we willing to leave behind to make it through?

In summary, I sought to demonstrate the following three points of how we can reconceptualize what it means to be queer in Hawai'i:

1. Standards of white queerness have been pervasive in our understanding of what it means to be visibly queer. So much so, that many queer people of diverse ethnicities feel pressured to invest in the aesthetics of white queerness in order to be recognized within their own community.

2. A faux hierarchy of queerness has been constructed to posit non-monogamy as inherently more queer or decolonial than monogamy. This has placed being non-monogamous as the epitome of being queer, which is harmful as it fails to interrogate how heteropatriarchy can also be replicated in non-monogamous relationships.

3. Sexuality is not the totality of queer identity. While it is a foundational aspect, queerness is ultimately about the ways we intentionally choose to dismantle how heteropatriarchy and colonialism have conditioned us to live. Embracing and practicing the power of the erotic in all aspects of our lives is one way we can strive towards this kind of liberation.

There is no end to how one can think about and through this. My critiques of white queerness in Hawaiʻi are not out of spite, careless judgment, or a desire to ostracize anyone. Rather, they are upwelled from the gentlest parts of me that yearn to make my communities a little safer, a lot softer, and equipped with the ability to withstand colonialism's unrelenting presence in our lives. These expressions and observations do not claim to represent every queer person's experience in Hawaiʻi. I understand that there are many folks who are comfortable and even thrive within the current structures. But for those who find resonance in these words, know that my heart is with you—you are not alone. I offer this with humility to my lāhui, my ego on the floor, and an openness to dialogue, critique, and growth.

ʻAʻole i pau.
C.K. Hoʻomalu

References

Anderson, K. (2021). Multi-generational Indigenous feminisms: From F word to what IFs. In B. Hokowhitu, A. Moreton-Robinson, L. Tuhiwai-Smith, C. Andersen, & S. Larkin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of critical Indigenous studies* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 82–104). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429440229-5

Bristow, J. (2022). *Oscar Wilde on trial: The criminal proceedings, from arrest to imprisonment*. Yale University Press.

Jacobs, A. (2020, July 31). *Returning to Pride's intersectional protest roots*. Northeastern University Political Review. https://nupoliticalreview.org/2020/07/31/returning-to-prides-intersectional-protest-roots/

Lerner, G. (1986). The creation of patriarchy. Oxford University Press.

Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Temple University Press.

Lorde, A. (2020). *Sister outsider*. Penguin Random House.

Muñoz, J. E., Pellegrini, A., Nyong'o, T. A. O., & Chambers-Letson, J. T. (2019). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (10th anniversary ed.). New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2010.503518

Teves, S. N. (2018). *Defiant indigeneity: The politics of Hawaiian performance*. University of North Carolina Press.

Zaretsky, E. (1976). *Capitalism, the family, and personal life*. Harper & Row.

About the Author



ʻIhilani Lasconia is a Kanaka ʻŌiwi student, artist, and organizer from Waimānalo, Oʻahu. As a transnational feminist, ʻIhilani's work is rooted in dismantling patriarchy through decolonization and anti-imperialism. She is a doctoral student at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa in political science within the Indigenous Politics program. ʻIhilani's research looks at historical and contemporary connections between Hawaiʻi and Palestine. She has organized around the movement to protect Maunakea, the Red Hill fuel crisis, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Māhū in Hawaiʻi. As a creative, ʻIhilani explores the mediums of poetry, rap, and spoken word. She is an artist instructor at the Honolulu Museum of Art in the Soundshop program. Through this program, she teaches students in grades 4–12 the importance of self-expression and community pride through music. In 2023, ʻIhilani was the recipient of a Nā Hōkū Hanohano Award for her work on the collaborative album, *Hoʻokupu*. Her craft is rooted in the geopolitical landscape of Hawaiʻi and her experience being queer and Native in the twenty-first century.