

PEOPLE, PLACE AND IDENTITY

Chair:

Pearl Tan

MĀHŪ SCREEN AESTHETICS: QUEER ECOPOETICS AND ALOHA 'ĀINA IN NEW HAWAIIAN CINEMA

In November 2021, Red Hill – a decaying military depot near Pearl Harbour – started leaking jet fuel into the freshwater aquifer beneath O'ahu, progressively destroying the surrounding ecosystem and forming yet another front in the US military's violent exploitation of Hawaiian 'āina (land) and wai (water). Coming to light during the COVID-19 pandemic and alongside Indigenous-led resistance to the Thirty Meter Telescope at Mauna Kea, Red Hill serves as a flashpoint in ongoing Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) struggles for land under military occupation. Through analysis of Tiare Ribeaux's ongoing short film project *Pō'ele Wai* (2022–2023), this paper explores how contemporary Kānaka Maoli filmmakers challenge American colonisation through a queer lens. Contrary to its mistranslation as 'homosexual,' the Hawaiian term 'Māhū' refers to "a third or intermediate gender category referring to individuals with a mixture of male and female attributes" (Hamer and Wong-Kalu 2022, 263) often connected to healing or spiritual roles in Hawaiian society, whereas 'aloha 'āina' encompasses both patriotism and an intimate, reciprocal relationship of care between Kānaka and 'āina (Osorio 2021, 11). Produced through collaboration with a team of Māhū/non-binary multidisciplinary artists, *Pō'ele Wai* resists the ecological violence of colonisation by centralising queer bodies in states of transition to form intimate bonds between Hawaiian bodies and the land. Drawing upon interviews with the filmmakers, this paper explores how queer bodies and aesthetics meld to enact resistance and reform intimacies with place.

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