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Recovering and Reclaiming Queer and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx Identities

Paulina Abustan
Washington State University
Paulina.abustan@wsu.edu

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Recovering and Reclaiming Queer and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx Identities

As a Queer Pilipina scholar-activist, I call for Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs to remember and reclaim our origins and roots of a strong Feminist, Queer, and Trans past, present, and future. Through philosophical inquiry, I utilize numerous texts to demonstrate the ways in which Indigenous and Mestiza peoples are reclaiming their Indigenous roots, cultures, and practices through the validation, acceptance, and celebration of their Feminist, Queer, and Trans identities. The research and writings of Pilipinx and First Nation scholars are utilized to affirm strong Feminist, Queer, and Trans identities and practices that continue to survive and resist multiple forms of oppression today.

In *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous*, Leny Strobel (2010) highlights the strong Feminist histories and current practices of Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs through the stories of numerous Pilipina womxn who served and currently serve as *Babaylan* leaders, healers, and visionaries of their communities. Strobel (2010) describes the *Babaylan* as a community leader, healer, priestess, herb doctor, and mediator between the human and spirit realms. The highly respected and honored statuses of *Babaylan* womxn demonstrate the deeply ingrained practices of Indigenous Pilipinxs viewing womxn as highly esteemed leaders which align with Feminist practices of valuing the leadership, labor, intellect, and lived experiences of womxn and people of all genders.

Mxn dressing in womxn's attire to embody *Babaylan* womxn and taking on the labor and leadership roles of womxn affirms the gender and sexual fluidity of Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs. During Pre-Spanish years, gender was fluid when all Indigenous peoples referred to each other as *tao* or peoples (De Guia, 2005). Pilipinxs naming each other as *tao* affirms the ways in which Indigenous peoples did not believe in binary and rigid genders and gender roles.

Diverse gender and sexuality identities of *Babaylan* womxn and Trans womxn reflect the deeply ingrained Feminist, Queer, and Trans practices of Indigenous Pilipinx cultures. Mxn becoming *Babaylan* womxn leaders affirms the respected status of not only womxn, but Queer and Trans womxn.

Babaylans are protectors of cultures and traditions and are thus not only leaders of their communities, but are warriors when actively resisting systemic forms of oppression that seek to erase or devalue Indigenous peoples, cultures, and practices (Strobel, 2010). According to Strobel (2010), “The *Babaylan* spirit of the warrior is in us when we speak up and openly for justice and risk the consequences of the powers-that-be and society at large (p. 22).” Through the activist endeavors of Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs, the Feminist, Queer, and Trans spirit of the *Babaylan* continues to resist oppression today. *Babaylans* are a testament to the strong Feminist, Queer, and Trans identities and practices of Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs because *Babaylan* womxn led revolutionary struggles against Spanish and American colonizers and continue to lead struggles for freedom today.

In *Coming Full Circle*, Leny Strobel (2001) highlights current movements taking place to retrieve Indigenous Pilipinx memories, knowledges, and practices. Strobel (2010) defines *Indigenous* as people whose memory of belonging is defined by relationship to the land or ancestral domain with the importance of place, land, and time. As a Queer Pinay of the diaspora, I seek to reclaim my Indigenous and Mestiza roots of Feminist, Queer, and Trans power, pride, and resistance. Although I was not born in the Philippines, my memory of belonging is strongly connected to the islands, cultures, and practices of Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific, which include Feminist, Queer, and Trans hxstories, identities, and practices.

I relate to Strobel (2010) as she describes her own experiences with colonial trauma and how she is on the path towards reclaiming her own Pilipina identity. As Strobel (2010) recognizes narratives and legacies that perpetuate systems oppressive towards womxn and people of color, I expand on her analysis to include the ways in which narratives, legacies, and current practices of colonialism is connected to perpetuating struggles for Queer and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs. Colonialism continues to perpetuate systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and more which not only continue to oppress Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs, but Queer and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs along with Queer and Trans Indigenous peoples all around the world through the silencing and degradation of Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza identities.

In *Decolonizing the Queer Native Body*, Chris Finley (2011) highlights the ways in which pressures to conform to white colonial hetero-nuclear family continues to be internalized by Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples continue to internalize thoughts of their own inferiority when Indigenous peoples are viewed to be bodies, without intellect, incapable of self-governance (Finley, 2011). The bodies and sexualities of Native womxn are depicted to be in need of white male control and management while Native mxn continue to be seen as a sterile dying race in need of rescuing from a white superior race (Finley, 2011). The past, present, and current colonization of Indigenous peoples continues to perpetuate hierarchies of inequity which privilege white, male, cis-gender, and heterosexual bodies and intellects while degrading Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous identities.

In *Exploring Takatapui Identity within the Maori Community: Implications for Health and Well-Being*, Clive Aspin (2011) exposes the ways in which colonizer and imperialist states regulate the intimate lives and sexualities of Indigenous peoples that detrimentally impact the

mental, physical, and spiritual health of Indigenous Maori. Settler colonial and imperialist states continue to produce narrow-minded people, which include Indigenous peoples, who are prejudiced, judgmental, and exclusive (Aspin, 2011). Instead of remembering and reclaiming the views of their ancestors, Indigenous peoples practice the racist and heterosexist views of their colonizers. Pre-colonial celebrations of diversity and ancestral knowledge are suppressed when sexual expression is regulated to the hetero-marriage as normal with “other” sexual expressions seen as perverse (Aspin, 2011).

As Indigenous Maori peoples strive to dismantle internalized racism and oppression, Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs seek to resist and eradicate colonial voices and mentalities found within our own psyches. Due to the impacts of past and current forms of colonization, occupation, and imperialism, white heterosexist attitudes and actions continue to be practiced by Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs. It is critical for Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs to move away from harmful, degrading, and violent thoughts and actions that seek to further oppress communities of color and instead strive towards thoughts and actions which seek to include and respect all people which include Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinxs.

As demonstrated through the prestige of the *Babaylan*, gender and sexual diversity is an important aspect of Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx cultures and numerous cultures throughout the world. According to Aspin (2011), sexual diversity is an important component of Indigenous Maori society. *Takatapu*, a term for Queer Maori, serves as an inspiration to Indigenous Maori peoples to uncover their ancestors and families of diverse genders and sexualities. As Aspin (2011) highlights the critical need for Queer Indigenous peoples to seek alternatives to Western sexuality and for Indigenous peoples to reclaim Queer and Trans ancestral knowledge, I call for

the remembering of Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous Pilipinx ancestors and the honoring of current Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx.

Indigenous peoples throughout the world are challenging white heterosexist colonial systems that seek to further oppress communities of color. In *Two-Spirit Cherokee Reimagining Nation*, Qwo-Li Driskill (2011) highlights the ways in which Two-Spirit peoples challenge hetero-patriarchy through the creation of present and future inclusive spaces. According to Driskill (2011), Queer Indigenous peoples are uncovering the forgotten and ignored stories of their Queer Indigenous ancestors through “living and loving honestly” (p. 111). The everyday resistance of Queer Indigenous peoples is an act of resistance to white heterosexist colonial powers. Through the creation and maintenance of inclusive and healing spaces, Cherokee LGBTQ and Two-Spirit peoples seek to regain what was taken away from them (Driskill, 2011). I support the writings and activism of Driskill (2011) as I seek to resist white heterosexist patriarchy through the remembering and reclaiming of Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza identities and practices.

In *Unsettling Queer Politics: What Can Non-Natives Learn from Two-Spirit Organizing?*, Scott Lauria Morgensen (2011) emphasizes the power of Two-Spirit organizers who critique settler colonialism and strive to decolonize Native communities. Morgensen (2011) challenges non-Native peoples to investigate their privileges and inheritances from living in a colonial settler society. Morgensen (2011) encourages non-Native organizers to support the leadership of Two-Spirit peoples. As a Queer Pinay of Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx roots, I seek to examine my own privileges and benefits from living in a settler colonial state. I strive to be in collective solidarity with Indigenous peoples all around the world who desire dignity and respect through the reclaiming of lands, cultures, languages, and honored identities and practices.

De-colonizing Indigenous and Mestiza communities consists of re-visiting, validating, and celebrating our Feminist, Queer, and Trans hxstories and current practices that seek to dismantle white, heterosexist, and racist settler colonial states.

In *The Erotics of Sovereignty*, Mark Rifkin (2011) defines the *Indigenous structure of feeling* as the “sensation of belonging to a place and peoplehood excluded from settler governance”. Rifkin (2011) highlights the ways in which the assault on Native peoples is “naturalized, euphemized, erased, and displaced into the past”. Rifkin (2011) describes Native connections to be rooted with intimate connections to land, tradition, community, and history. It is critical for Indigenous peoples to challenge settler norms through the reclaiming of their bodily experiences to be rooted collectively in land and place (Rifkin, 2011). As a Queer Pinay, I am reclaiming my bodily experiences to be intertwined with land and place of the Philippine islands which is connected to the Pacific islands. Although, I acknowledge my different and complex identity, I practice Indigenous Pilipinx *kapwa* as I view myself in the other. According to De Guia (2005), *kapwa* is an Indigenous Pilipinx practice of viewing one’s self to be rooted in the identity of someone different from them. *Kapwa* is a practice of compassion, respect, and dignity for all people. We are an interconnected people rooted to multiple lands and places of rich, complex, and diverse hxstories and practices.

As a Queer Pinay scholar-activist, I call for multiple communities to organize as a collective to resist and dismantle multiple and interconnected forms of oppressions that not only detrimentally impact Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous Mestiza Pilipinx communities, but all Indigenous peoples and communities of color. I envision our K-12 and higher education schooling systems, media, and multiple communities taking collective strides towards the

remembering and honoring of Feminist, Queer, and Trans Indigenous and Mestiza Pilipinx identities, issues, and struggles.

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