

FROM THE EDITORS

“No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is the first special issue of its kind: a hybrid collection of mo‘olelo—academic research, creative work, and memoir—focused singularly on the lives, triumphs, and tribulations of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi who exist beyond cisheteronormativity. The vision for this issue is as expansive as our ancestral articulations of aloha, connection, pleasure, and desire. And for us, two queer(ed) Kānaka serving as co-editors, it is no small thing that this collection of work finds its home in *Hūlili*, Kamehameha Publishing’s premier journal on Hawaiian well-being, at a time marked by rising fascism, queerphobia, and state-sponsored suppression.¹

In this way, “No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is a pu‘uhonua, a sanctuary, for our lāhui to gather, reflect, and imagine otherwise. It is a lei of voices, woven from pain, persistence, and possibility, that refuses to wither in the desolate landscape of colonial hatred. And it is ka lā hikina, the darkness-cleaving dawn of renewal, emerging at a critical juncture in our collective struggle for a freer world, one that perpetuates ea in righteousness for all.

For too long, the dominant narrative in Hawai‘i—particularly within neoliberal, multicultural, rainbow-tinted imaginaries—has cast the so-called “State of Hawai‘i” or “The Aloha State” as a progressive melting pot, untouched by the violence and prejudice seen across the US. While this illusion of a social-cultural paradise slowly erodes, it still shapes public perception in powerful ways. Many contributors in this issue challenge these narratives by speaking directly to the discomfort, marginalization, and even hostility they have experienced as queer(ed) individuals within explicitly Hawaiian community spaces.

We use “(ed)” in *queer(ed)* intentionally: to signal that while settler logics often frame queerness as a fixed identity, for Kānaka, being labeled “queer”—as something inherently deviant or abnormal, *especially in our homeland*—has been an alienating act enforced by those very logics. As contributors Maile Arvin and Eliana Massey argue, Kānaka are queer(ed) not merely for our ‘Ōiwi desires and intimacies beyond cisheteronormativity, but because our ancestral *systems* of pilina—perennial networks of ‘Ōiwi relationships, heterosexual or otherwise—defy and threaten the norms imposed by colonial society. Our reminder, then, is that the multiplicity of ‘Ōiwi desire, pleasure, and aloha has always been—and will continue to be—the “norm.” And it is settler logics of heteropatriarchy that are *deviant* to our ‘āina.

This special issue enters at the intersection of queer(ed) Kanaka identities and embodiments²—and the settler logics that attempt to define them. Our contributors help fill a longstanding and urgent gap in scholarship and storytelling. Their words not only advance Indigenous queer studies and enrich Hawaiian history, but they also hold the potential to materially improve the lives of queer(ed) Kānaka who have been estranged to their own ancestral traditions. For many, this collection may be the first time they see themselves reflected in the mo’olelo of their people—as cherished ‘ohana.

The title of this issue, “No ka Pono o ka Māhūi,” builds upon the foundation laid by “No ka Pono o ka Lāhui,” *Hūlili*’s inaugural special issue. While the first collection centered our lāhui as a broader nation, this issue highlights those within the lāhui who have long been marginalized—the māhūi.

We chose this word with intention. “Māhūi” is not a historical term but a newly coined one, born from within queer(ed) Kanaka communities through the spirit of reclamation and joyful re-creation. It asserts two things: (1) non-cisheteronormative Kānaka (māhū, aikāne, punalua, po’olua, and keiki hānai, ho’okama, luhi, etc.) are integral—not deviant—to the lāhui; and (2) these queer(ed) Kānaka are bound together through pilina of shared kūlana and experience.

If the lāhui is a circle, the māhūi is a concentric circle within it, holding space to honor the relationships and kuleana between the lāhui and its non-cisheteronormative Kānaka. Māhūi reasserts that Kānaka who carry these types of kūlana, like any other kūlana (mahi’ai, lawai’a, kahuna, etc.), are Kānaka first, and that they share the same piko as the people they come from. As Ka’imina’auao Kahikina writes:

Beyond the creative and witty conjoining of two ‘ōlelo Hawai’i words, māhū and lāhui, the word māhūi, as it has developed, articulates a response to the conditions of a queered Kanaka Maoli experience. It operates as an epistemological plug-in to the notion of Kānaka belonging in conversation with a queer modernity I refuse. (Kahikina, 2024, p. 515)

Building on Kahikina’s articulation, we use *māhūi* more broadly to both (1) challenge the weaponization of the word “*māhū*” within the *lāhui* and (2) confront the alienation produced by queer modernity. Rather than grouping individuals together based on what settler logics deem queer, *māhūi* is a distinctly Kanaka way of creating and maintaining community—one that centers genealogy and *kuleana*, not merely sexual or gender identity. It invokes ancestral modes of relationships within and between the *māhūi* and *lāhui*, repairing and renewing our ‘upena of intimacies (Osorio, 2021) *mai ka pō mai*.

Māhūi is our direct response to settler ideologies that seek to sever these threads of relation or refashion them into static identities within an imagined singular and monolithic LGBTQ+ community. In such spaces, our Indigenous terms are often treated as open-source language: decontextualized, commodified, and ripe for settler taking (Morgensen, 2011). With this in mind, we intend to make clear that “*māhū*” is not a catch-all for any queer(ed) Kanaka practice of *pilina*—such as *aikāne*, *punalua*, *po’olua*, *lawe hānai*, *ho’okama*, or others. Rather, we fortify *māhūi* as a *pu’uhonua* for any queer(ed) Kanaka seeking refuge within a settler society that wages war against Kanaka existence.

Unsurprisingly, the word “*māhūi*” has been met with both celebration and critique. To those who question its use—asking, “Why a fake word?” or “Why add separation between *māhū* and the *lāhui*?” or “Why not use the term *māhū*, or appeal to a broader sense of *aloha*?”—we offer this: Our language, like our people, lives and evolves in the ‘āina and in the bodies of those who speak and shape it. Though not a traditional term, “*māhūi*” is as real and necessary as the people it shelters. Until the day where queer(ed) Kānaka can be celebrated in Kanaka spaces—free from colonial queerphobic violence and recognized first and foremost as Kānaka with *kuleana* to the *lāhui*—we will continue to assert “*māhūi*” as a *kāhea* to all Kānaka to unlearn colonial violence and relearn ancestral *pilina*.

But what is this ancestral *pilina* we speak of? How do we see, through our *kūpuna*’s eyes, to celebrate—and not separate—differences among Kānaka? One answer lies in the words of nineteenth-century Kanaka philosophers Davida Kahalemaile and Joseph Nāwahī, who remind us to acknowledge all Kānaka as ‘āina itself: as divine, not deviant; as flourishing, not freakish; as paramount, not perverse. Why? Because, just as our chiefly ‘āina protects the life of its Kānaka, we, as descendants of ‘āina, are also entrusted with sustaining the *ea* of our people, the very breath that defines us as a *lāhui*.

In 1871, Kahalemaile defined “ea” as the breath of all things: the ea of fish as water, the ea of humans as air, and the ea of the planet as humanity itself.³ His words remind us that the vitality of our planet—and our nation—lies in the hands of every one of us: kāne, wāhine, māhū, and all who live between and beyond. Just as a fish cannot live without water, and Kānaka without air, our lāhui cannot fully breathe without *all* its Kānaka.

In 1895, Nāwahī expanded this theory of relation in his own newspaper, *Ke Aloha Aina*, describing the earth as humanity’s eldest matriarch:

O na lahui a pau loa e ola nei, a e hele nei ma luna o ka honua, mai ia Adamu mai a hiki i keia la, he mau hunahuna lepo lakou, a he mau mahele hunahuna materia o ka aina a ke Akua i hana ai. Nolaila, ma kekahi olelo pololei ana ae; ke ola nei, a ke hele nei no ka aina maluna o ka honua: Ke ola nei a ke hele nei na keiki aina, na moopuna aina, na lahui aina, maluna o ko lakou makuahine nui, ka Honua...Owai kou makuahine? O ka aina no! Owai kou kupunawahine? O ka aina no!... O ka Honua, he kino aina makuahine oia i hoopuka mua loa mai i ke kino kanaka lepo mua loa Adamu. He makuahine ka Honua e hoohanau mai ana i na mea ulu, i mea ai na ke kanaka lepo aina e ola ana. No laila, ua loaa ke ola o keia kanaka, keia lahui, mamuli o na huaai i hoea mai loko mai o ka makuahine Honua. (para. 7)

As Nāwahī articulates, our planet births us from her soil: The food she provides shapes our bodies, and the matter we consume becomes us. Thus, all Kānaka—kāne, wāhine, māhū, and beyond—are lineal extensions of ‘āina, our bodies composed of the same elements as our islands, mountains, and waters.

If we are ‘āina itself—its breath, its descendants, its lineage made flesh—and if ‘āina reveals herself in endless forms of beauty, function, and fruitfulness—‘āina momona, māhuahua, kāpa’ipa’i, kelekele, lanipō, lipolipo, lupalupa, nu’anu’a, ohaoha, pulapula, uliuli, uluwehiwehi—then so too must we honor the diverse ways Kānaka inherit and embody the traits of our shared grandmother. We do not flatten mountains into plains or force rivers into stillness; why, then, should we deny the living expressions of ‘āina reflected in its queer(ed) descendants?

“No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is a response to the previous question, an invitation to all descendants of our ‘āina to join us in this intimate, necessary work to (1) reflect—together—on our pasts, presents, and possible futures here on this ‘āina; (2) see and mālama each other as ‘āina itself; and (3) liberate our lāhui from colonial violence. Our ‘āina cannot breathe free until its own breath, each and every Kanaka, exhales liberation. As issue contributor Kamalani Johnson reminds us:

Māhū issues are not just for māhū to solve. If all Kānaka—kāne, wāhine, māhū—are extensions of ‘āina, and if all Kānaka are part of the lāhui, where kuleana is the economy that fuels its existence, then māhū issues are kāne and wāhine issues; kāne issues are wāhine and māhū issues, and so on. Because as Kānaka, we will always have the kuleana to show up for ‘āina—in all its forms—and mālama its needs so that our lāhui survives. So, we must remember that we all have kuleana to each other, as ‘āina, and must mālama each other if we are to continue the life of our lāhui.

And if we want to embody a lāhui like our kūpuna did, then we need to address issues as a lāhui—at both community and systems levels. Problem-solving in silos will birth change only within the limits of that silo. If we want the lāhui to honor māhū as ‘āina, then we must teach our kāne and wāhine how to do so, not just other māhū. (2023)

Echoing Johnson’s sentiment, “No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is a declaration, asserting that our queer(ed) ‘ohana deserve more than tolerance—we deserve to be loved, celebrated, and remembered as integral to our lāhui. It holds space for Kānaka to not only learn how to honor queer(ed) Kānaka, but to relearn how to mālama all Kānaka—as ‘āina. And if the spotlighting of māhū lives and voices makes you uncomfortable, if the creation of new language and space for our queer(ed) ‘ohana unsettles you, then perhaps this moment calls not for critique, but for self-reflection.

Above all, “No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is a promise: Regardless of acceptance in mainstream Hawaiian spaces, we—the māhū and queer(ed) Kānaka among you—will continue to “Ho‘oulu Lāhui” beyond the confines of heteropatriarchal imagination. Our existence does not betray Kalākaua’s vision for a multitudinous people—it fulfills it. We will continue to live, build, create, foster, inspire, and love on this ‘āina. We will birth new worlds, raise future generations, advance our language, and realize the futures our ancestors dreamed for us.

HE OLI MELE NO KA MĀHŪI: CHAPTERS IN THE MĀHŪI'S MELODIES

Mokuna 'Ekahi

Kau ka Pūnohu 'Ula i ke Kai, Hānau he Pae Māhū: The Ancestral Foundation of the Māhūi

Mokuna 'Elua

Kau ke Ao Pae Māhū i ka Pali Laumania: Contemporary Signs of Māhūi Politics

Mokuna 'Ekolu

Kau ke Ao 'Ōnohi i ka Hālāwai: Portending Māhūi Futures

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The collection is divided into three mokuna or sections, each representing our māhūi's past, present, and future, respectively. Drawing on the Hawaiian divination research of Ka'imina'auao Kahikina—and echoing his use of cloud metaphors in his contribution to the issue—the section titles are named after ancestral cloud formations (Poepoe, n.d.). This naming honors the divine signs our kūpuna observed to predict and interpret shifting political landscapes. Within this collection, these cloud forms become symbols of our queer(ed) political past and present, as well as our collective future as a lāhui, shaped by the choices we make today.

While many pieces speak across these temporal and thematic boundaries, this structure offers a path for readers entering these narratives and analyses for the first time—guiding them like island-bound clouds across the horizon, from memory to movement, from reflection to action.

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Mokuna 'Ekahi, “Kau ka Pūnohu 'Ula i ke Kai, Hānau he Pae Māhū: The Ancestral Foundation of the Māhūi,” brings together works that analyze and articulate ways of being and relating—ways that stand as the kūkulu (pillars) of the māhūi and lāhui. The title draws from the opening of the mo'olelo ka'ao “Lā'ieikawai,” in which Waka, grandmother and guardian of the titular protagonist, envisions a red mist over the sea—a pūnohu 'ula.⁴ This omen foretells that her daughter, Malaekahana, will not bear the male heir Malaekahana's kāne, Kahauokapaka, so desperately desires to inherit his chiefly line. Instead, the pūnohu 'ula promises a succession of daughters, what the unnamed author writes as a “pae mahu.”

The term “pae mahu” appears in the source text without orthographic markings, leaving open several possible readings: pae mahu (a group of steam), pae mähū (a group of blandness), or pae mähū (a group of Kānaka whose sex or gender contradicts expectation in certain ancestral contexts).⁵ Following Ka‘imina‘auao Kahikina’s articulation, we interpret “pae mähū” as the most probable meaning, as it contextualizes Waka’s use of “mähū” to describe her unborn granddaughters—not as what western logics broadly equate as hermaphrodites, eunuchs, transvestites, *and* homosexuals—but as a grouping of children embodying a sex (female) contrary to the chief’s expectation (male).

We foreground this narrative to underscore that “mähū” is a complex term, one our kūpuna understood with far greater nuance than contemporary, colloquial use suggests. Today, mähū is often associated with trans individuals and feminine-presenting males. Yet, in this mo‘olelo, mähū signals a newborn body that moves against expectation—a birth that resists prescription. It marks difference as divine rather than deviant, framing deviation not as failure but as fulfillment of ancestral design. It was pō—the sacred darkness and generative will of the kūpuna—that both prized and produced this pae mähū, the sacred twin sisters Lā‘ieikawai and Lā‘ielohelohe, who would become deified fixtures across many mo‘olelo ka‘ao. Through research of this kind, we seek to decode such layered meanings and reacquaint ourselves with the ways our kūpuna conceptualized and lived what we label today as sex, gender, and relationality.

Mokuna ‘Ekahi opens with Lani Teves’s foundational essay, “Regulating Hawaiian Sexualities: Challenging Colonial Imposition to Reclaim Autonomy.” Teves examines how western legal and cultural frameworks, introduced during the formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom, constrained Kanaka expressions of sexuality and gender. She traces how these colonial impositions continue to shape what is considered morally “acceptable” in Kanaka relationships today. Her essay calls for a radical reimagining of Hawaiian history—one that centers ancestral forms of pleasure and intimacy beyond western norms, reclaiming them as the essence of Hawaiian genealogy.

While Teves reflects on the genealogy of Kanaka governance and relationality, Dan Taulapapa McMullin turns inward to trace their own queer(ed) Pasifika genealogy in “Fa‘afafine & Mähū.” Through lines of poetry, McMullin maps the origin stories of Pasifika terms of queer(ed) embodiment, connecting islands through the shared oceanic channels and histories between them.

Fittingly, we then brave the tempestuous Ka'ie'iewaho channel to arrive at Hā'ena, Kaua'i, where Hau'oli Lorenzo-Elarco examines the mo'olelo ka'ao, "Kamaakamahi'ai." His analysis focuses on two mähū antagonists who wield hohoa against the titular protagonist. Like the multifacetedness of mähū, these hohoa embody striking duality—as both kapa beater and war club—hinting at the layered kuleana that mähū may have held in pre-missionary Hawai'i.

Remaining at Hā'ena, we turn to another mo'olelo rooted in this wahi pana, where the akua Pele summoned the winds of Kaua'i, Ni'ihau, Ka'ula, and Nihoa to demonstrate her deep relationship as kama'āina of the region. Inspired by Pele, Hope Matsumoto's "Waikōloa" and "Māunuunu" invoke the chilling breezes of Honouliuli, 'Ewa—from the sacred summit of Mauna Ka'ala to the silent sands of Pu'uloa—to honor the intimate relationships Kānaka maintain with the elemental forces that sustain us. Her piece's connection to Hā'ena affirms a shared understanding: that to know our winds, as Pele did, is to treat them as living kin whose movements bind our islands and our people together.

These entwining winds carve a path through the rest of 'Ewa o ka i'a hāmau leo, where Anuheia Nihipali's "makapō" honors the akua Kapō, Pele's sister. Nihipali reflects on her own genealogy and the darkness from which her Kānaka identity emerges, exploring how ancestral presences flow through both place and body, much like the winds themselves.

The sacred flight of Kapō then carries us to Hawai'i Mokupuni, where the Hu'elepo wind of Ka'ū guides us through the epic mo'olelo "Ka-Miki." In this final piece of the mokuna, Kamalani Johnson demonstrates how this mo'olelo stands as an archive of ancestral pilina, a kīpuka where we can learn how kūpuna used ho'opāpā to negotiate intimacy, boundaries, and consent.

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Mokuna 'Elua, "Kau ke Ao Pae Mähū i ka Pali Laumania: Contemporary Signs of Mähūi Politics," identifies divine signs that reveal the political trials and tribulations faced by queer(ed) Kānaka today. The title draws from this section's opening essay, an oral history titled "Ahuwale ka Paeki'i: He Lei Moana nō Ia." In this piece, Ka'imina'auao Kahikina captures the formative memories of Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, tracing how her kūpuna continue to shape her kuleana as a lāhui leader and educator. Kahikina likens Wong-Kalu to a pali laumania—a majestic yet solitary cliff—adorned by clouds, her kūpuna, who bring life-giving rains to nourish, shape, and sustain her.

We extend this metaphor to the māhūi as a whole: a reminder and validation for those who may feel isolated or weathered in their struggle to be safe, seen, and celebrated within Kanaka spaces and beyond. Just as clouds embrace and give life to the cliff, our kūpuna surround us with guidance and sustenance, both seen and unseen. They affirm that we are ‘āina itself—never *deviant*—and that our existence continues the line of our ancestors, carrying forward their legacy and vision for generations to come.

Poets Léuli Eshrāghi and ‘Thilani Lasconia echo this sentiment—and the ‘eha embedded in standing as a solitary pali laumania—through their respective performance poems, “tagata a nu‘u po‘o tagata a fagu‘u” and “Kū Māhū Hina.” Eshrāghi offers a contemporary fa‘amalama to their Sāmoan ancestors, spirits, and guardians, casting haunting light on the Christian shame imposed on ‘Ōiwi bodies and relationships since the 1830 arrival of missionaries in Sāmoa. Lasconia’s mele pāleoleo, composed for Lā Ho‘iho‘i Ea, calls for lāhui liberation through the unlearning of colonial notions of independence and the relearning of interdependence among all members of the lāhui—those that embody Kū, Hina, and all expressions in between and beyond.

This expansion of embodiment carries forward into Kapeliela Gilbert’s essay, “He ‘Ōlelo na nā Mākuahine ‘Elua: (Re)conceptualizing L2 Hawaiian Speakerhood Through Kanaka Maoli Kinship Epistemology.” Gilbert critiques contemporary purist pedagogies of ‘ōlelo makuahine that privilege traditional native speakers as the sole authentic parent of today’s Hawaiian language. He urges us to move beyond the constraints of the nuclear family model and reclaim our ancestral understandings of non-exclusive parentage, applying them to language acquisition. In Gilbert’s vision, our mother tongue is a child of two mothers: a language birthed and shaped in tandem by yesterday’s mānaleo and today’s haumāna, each holding equally authentic and familial kuleana to their shared keiki.

So too do the works of Leinā‘ala Mahi and Lehuauakea, though separately born, speak to one another as if of shared parentage. Their kākau and kapa entwine like the hands of two mothers shaping a single child, nurturing art into being that binds māhū across generations—from kūpuna to mo‘opuna. In her poem “An Honor,” Mahi contemplates the complexities faced by Pasifika people navigating embodiments that defy western categorizations of queerness. Lehuauakea translates this tension into a visual form, merging traditional kapa with vibrant rainbow patterns, a striking cultural dissonance that speaks to a queer(ed) Kanaka experience.

Finally, this section concludes by widening our ‘upena of intimacies to embrace solidarity across the vast shores of Moananuiākea, linking Seattle, Guåhan, and central Oceania. From Niue and Aotearoa, Phylesha Brown-Acton offers shelter for queer(ed) Kānaka with “The Birth of MVPFAFF+: Western Labelling and the Dismantling of Such Abusive Practices,” a term she and other Pasifika activists coined to address the incongruities experienced by queer(ed) and trans Pacific Islanders (QTPI) under queer modernity. This sheltering extends into “Mamfok I Talayan Hinemlo’: Weaving Resistant Relationalities to Promote Queer and Trans Pacific Islander Well-Being,” which shares twelve interviews with QTPI living in Washington. Led by Santino Camacho and a team of scholars and community activists from the University of Washington and UTOPIA Washington, this project correlates how cultural identity and connectedness profoundly shape the well-being for diasporic QTPI, underscoring the power of pilina to sustain individuals navigating life far from ancestral homelands

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The third and final mokuna, “Kau ke Ao ‘Ōnohi i ka Hālāwai: Portending Māhūi Futures,” invites us to gaze toward the clouds on the horizon—long regarded by our kūpuna as a place where signs of the future have appeared since time immemorial. Just as our ancestors looked to the shifting forms of the natural world for guidance, we too turn to the past to discern what lies ahead. In this spirit, this section begins by journeying back to mid-twentieth-century Hawai‘i, to the reformatory schools where ‘ōpio ‘Ōiwi were incarcerated under the guise of “industrial” education.

In their essay, “Practicing Pilina on Incarcerated ‘Āina: The Power of Queer Relationships of Kanaka Maoli Girls at the Kawaihoa Training School,” Maile Arvin and Eliana Massey unearth the violent histories buried within these institutions—violence experienced by their own kūpunawahine. These schools sought to sever Kanaka youth from all that defied colonial social values: their Indigenous pilina with one another, their ‘āina, their communities, and their culture. By recovering these hidden stories, Arvin and Massey reveal how, even within spaces of confinement, Kanaka connections—queer(ed) by western society, heterosexual or otherwise—endured as acts of care and resistance, offering visions of freedom that ripple into our present and future.

Breaking the chains of colonial confinement, the next three contributions invite us to unlearn, re-member, and re-think about how western societal expectations shape our lāhui’s actions and relationships today.

Léuli Eshrāghi's poem "Unlearning A Greco-Roman Alphabet," reimagines the missionary-imposed Sāmoan alphabet by assigning Indigenous Sāmoan words to each letter. In doing so, Eshrāghi strips away the Christian shame encoded into the written word and reimbues their mother tongue with primordial sacredness.

Kamakani Albano's "Re-membling Māhū Is a Love Letter to Creation" brings readers into the intimate struggle of feeling trapped within a māhū body constrained by colonial gender expectations. Rather than concealing their scaly skin—'ili 'e'epa imbued with mana māhū—Albano submerges themselves into the muliwai, the estuarial meeting place of wai and kai. In the space between, they shed their skin and emerge in a kino ka'apahu,⁶ a wondrous form that defies and transcends western logic.

'Ihilani Lasconia's "What Does It Mean to Be Queer in Hawai'i" then challenges readers to recognize how white queer aesthetics have permeated local expressions of queerness. Lasconia implores us to re-establish 'Ōiwi forms of embodiment and intimacy—ones rooted in ancestral ways of relating—so that our relationships with one another are shaped by our own genealogies rather than by colonial definitions of queerness.

From here, the mokuna turns to water—its depth, movement, and transformative power—as a throughline for queer(ed) embodiment and collective resurgence. Just as Albano immersed themselves into the muliwai, Hope Matsumoto's "Splayed; Water-Worn" returns to the running waters of the lo'i to reflect on grief, transformation, and the porousness of both land and body. In these works, water becomes a sanctuary, revealing how queer(ed) bodies, like streams and tides, are continually made and unmade, never the same from one moment to the next. Māhū embodiment, then, resists fixed definition: Each iteration, each body, is its own unique expression, shaped by currents of ancestry, experience, and kuleana.

From these intimate currents, No'u Revilla's "poi mouth" becomes the river-mouth where Albano emerges. As Albano's mentor, Revilla offered protection as a mo'o—a divine guardian of wai—creating sanctuary for Albano to rise in their own scaly splendor. Just as wai and kai converge to nourish communities, so too does the fruitful exchange between kumu and haumāna. Yet, for Revilla, the tides of her lyricism—swelling with desire and ancestral connection—pour out as acts of resistance, blurring the boundaries between lover and land, feeding and being fed, embodying a sovereignty that pulses through lineage and 'āina.

Amplifying this reclamation of intimacy, Tatiana Kalani‘ōpua Young and Sami Akuna’s “Three Principles of Māhū Leadership: Le‘a, Aloha ‘Āina, ‘Ohana,” shift the focus from the individual body to the collective. Inspired by a māhū gathering in Wai‘anae honoring homegrown drag-legend Sasha Colby, Young and Akuna offer a vision of leadership rooted in le‘ale‘a, aloha ‘āina, and ‘ohana—ancestral lōina embodied through pleasure, politics, and pilina.

Finally, Māhealani Ahia and Aaron Ki‘ilau’s “A Queer(ed) ‘Ōiwi Manifesto” closes the section with a rising call to action. Like clouds gathering on the horizon, their mōhai ka‘au, offerings in the sacred measure of forty, signal what is to come, urging our lāhui and allies to protect and nurture our māhūi and queer(ed) kinships in coordinated action.

PUANA KE MELE NO KA MĀHUI: FOR A FULLER AND FREER LĀHUI

Across all three mokuna, the clouds hold. Mists of the past, tempests of the present, horizons of the future—each gathers moisture from story, struggle, and unwavering aloha ‘āina until the sacred cloud Kūlanihāko‘i overflows. May what descends from these pages be life-giving rain: to unlearn colonial harm, to relearn engaging Kānaka as ‘āina, and to nourish futures in which our māhūi is seen, safe, and sovereign. And let these skyborn tears remind us that liberation, like water, is always in motion.

To our contributors: We thank you for your courage, your brilliance, your joy, and your rage. Your stories expand our understanding of aloha and remind us of a simple truth:

Our Kānaka who exist beyond cisheteronormativity—our ‘ohana of māhū, aikāne, po‘olua, punalua, and keiki hānai, ho‘okama, luhi, and more—you are not outside our lāhui. You are—and have always been—its beating heart.

“No ka Pono o ka Māhūi” is our offering.

May it be a refuge.

May it call us all home.

Ākea Kahikina

Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ākea Kahikina is a child of the silencing sands of One‘ula, Honouliuli, and the summit-adorning mists of Kawēkiu, Kuli‘ou‘ou. He is a grandchild of the serrated cliffs of Nīnole, Hāmākua, and the mountain-eating waves of Ka‘a‘awa, Ko‘olaupā. He graduated from the University of Miami (BFA, musical theatre) and the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (MFA, Hawaiian theatre; MA, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i). He currently serves the lāhui as director of Kamehameha Publishing, where he also leads its editorial track for Contemporary Voices and ‘Ōiwi Scholarship.



His graduate thesis play, *Ho‘oilina* (2022), earned multiple continental awards under the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. His current passion project, *Ko Tūtū Hale*, is a digital ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i series that centers elders and puppetry to renormalize ancestral modes of learning between kūpuna and mo‘opuna. He also co-produces *Kūkā Kīkī* with his partner, Ka‘imina‘auao—a podcast dedicated to queer(ed) Kānaka, with its inaugural season highlighting the contributors of this special issue.



Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio is a Kanaka Maoli wahine artist/activist/scholar/storyteller born and raised in Pālolo Valley to parents Jonathan and Mary Osorio. Jamaica earned her PhD in English (Hawaiian literature) in 2018 from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Currently, Jamaica is an associate professor of Indigenous and Native Hawaiian politics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. In 2020, her poetry and activism were the subject of an award-winning film, *This is the Way We Rise*, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival in 2021. In 2022, she was

a lead artist and co-writer of the revolutionary VR documentary, *On the Morning You Wake (To the end of the world)*, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival 2022 and won the XR Experience Jury Award at SXSW 2022. She is a proud past kaiapuni student, Ford Dissertation (2017) and Post Doctoral (2022) Fellow, and a graduate of KS Kapālama, Stanford University (BA), and New York University (MA). She is the author of the award-winning book *Remembering Our Intimacies: Mo‘olelo, Aloha ‘Āina, and Ea*, which was published in 2021 by The University of Minnesota Press. She believes in the power of aloha ‘āina and collective action to pursue liberatory, decolonial, and abolitionist futures of abundance.

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NOTES

1 While this collection is deeply rooted in Hawai‘i, we offer deep gratitude to our Moananuiākea ‘ohana who have lent their voices to this work. In a world falling fast toward fascism—a world that seeks to erase those queer(ed) by gender, sexuality, race, religion, or origin—these mo‘olelo, found here at home and across our moana, offer strategies for survival. They model how to love and build in defiance of erasure, and how to create joy even in conditions not meant for our thriving.

2 We align with contributor Ka‘imina‘auao Kahikina’s articulation of how Kānaka embody kūlana, through community-centered action, rather than simply identifying with a label, through self-centered words: “Māhū is not a third separate being but an amalgamation of beings. It is not an *identity* but an *embodiment* oriented toward kuleana in multiple and complex contexts. The embodiment of māhū does not depend on heteronormativity to exist because it was not born in relation to it.” (Kahikina, 2024, p. 529)

3 While Kahalemaile (1871) points to humans as the breath of the planet, he makes clear that the planet also relies on non-human life-giving elements from the land and sea, reflecting humans as one part of the planet’s ea. “E uiui a e ninaninau mua kakou i ke ea e pili ana i na mea oia o ka honua a me kekahi mau mea e ae. 1 Ke ea o na i-a, he wai. 2 Ke ea o ke kanaka, he makani. 3 O ke ea o ka honua, he kanaka, koe nae na mea ola lua, ola i ka wai, ola i ka aina. 4 Ke ea o ka moku, he hoeuli, ka hoeuli o ke kanaka nana e pailaka kona noonoo, oia ka uhane. 5 Ke ea o ko Hawaii Pae Aina, nona keia la a kakou e olelo nei, e olioli nei, Oia no ka noho aupuni ana.” (para. 2)

4 “...he uku ana no paha ka loa o ka olua keiki kane. Ke hoike mai nei ka punohu-ula i ke kai he pae mahu wale ana no ka olua mau keiki ma keia hope aku.” (He Moolelo no Laieikawai, 1906)

5 We offer this description of māhū, not as a definitive prescription, but as one pōhaku that builds upon the linguistic and cultural kahua demonstrated by Ka‘imina‘auao Kahikina (2024, p. 534).

6 A traditional word to describe a particular moment of a mo‘o’s body: both godly and human, ethereal and earthly.