A Queer(ed) ʻŌiwi Manifesto

Māhealani Ahia and Aaron Kiʻilau

The ongoing attacks on LGBTQIA+ education curricula in Hawaiʻi and abroad are also an attack on māhū, aikāne, and other queer(ed) kinships. Given Hawaiʻi's violent and oppressive history—marked by military occupation, settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and cultural and linguistic genocide—our integration of *EAducation* (liberatory learning) is most urgent for our lāhui's future. In the pursuit of liberating our ancestral systems of relations, as we (1) recover ancestral terms surrounding gender and sexuality, (2) debate their meanings and usage, and (3) innovate new words, it is the kuleana of those who identify in such positions to lead the collective to deeper respect and understanding. How might our lāhui and allies collaborate toward liberation for our māhūi and queer(ed) kinships?

Invoking the symbolic number of forty—a kaʻau or full measure that is used in sacred offerings—this manifesto names, illuminates, and enacts forty points of ea (breath, life, sovereignty) surrounding Hawaiian gender and sexuality that we intend to breathe life into, manifest, and offer to future generations of ʻŌiwi.

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This document was initially envisioned and presented by Māhealani Ahia at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's English Department Colloquium in response to an invitation to offer a graduate-student perspective to LGBTQ+ issues in the department. Rather than amplifying one voice, Māhea insisted on a collaborative response speaking "with"—instead of "for"—other queer grad students. Therefore, her working document was expanded through collaboration with Aaron Ki'ilau and contributing writers of the *Hawai'i Review.*

If pilina (relationality) is foundational to 'Ōiwi values, then community projects (1) resist the neoliberal and individualistic merit-based rewards of academia and (2) co-create the alternative futures we dream into being. Beyond binaries and resisting monogamous heteropatriarchy, our manifesto illuminates the nuances and complexities of Hawaiian relations from ancestral times to today. What was once the norm in our society for relations, embodiments, and intimacies has been over time plagued with misunderstanding, exoticization, and demonization. The recovery of our relational practices—related to gender, sexuality, desire, and intimacy—is an example of relational sovereignty. Our manifesto is grounded in 'Ōiwi ancestral mo'olelo as well as contemporary lived experience.

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Forty Points of Ea

He kaʻau no ka māhūi

I. Mai Ka Pō Mai
In honor of ancestral darkness

1. Aloha, ola, ea, and pilina shape our culture, especially our queer(ed) kinships.
2. ʻŌiwi kinship emerges from the Pō and the Moana. Māhū emerge from the Pō and the Moana.
3. We recognize at least three genders—wahine, māhū, and kāne—and affirm all ʻŌiwi embodiments across and beyond these genders, whether distinct, liminal, fluid, or otherwise.
4. We celebrate our māhū ancestors named in *He Kumulipo*, including the following: ʻuku koʻakoʻa, uhu, ʻamaʻama, hīnālea, moi, ula, mōlī, and plantcestors limu, ʻōhiʻa lehua, koa, kalo, etc.
5. We honor māhū body-lands of all colors, shapes, sizes, and abilities.
6. Like the ʻāina, aikāne relations are intimate, sexual, and asexual.
7. Punalua relationships of multiple partners cultivate ethical kuleana among all involved.
8. We collectively protect a poʻolua; a child of a punalua relationship is benefited by calling on multiple genealogies for mana, material support, and community.
9. Caring for all the partners and their respective children and extended kin is a beautiful inherited practice.
10. We elevate queer(ed) ʻŌiwi voices of those most marginalized and invite those closest to the piko, and those with the most kuleana, to share their storied wisdom first.

II. Hānau He Kanaka
In honor of human relations

11. Wāhine, māhū, and kāne are a kauhale in a collective kinship with each other. We commit to building hale to house our pilina as Hawaiian kinship expands.

12. Bring food, nourishment, and aloha when visiting the kauhale of māhū and queer(ed) ʻŌiwi.

13. Communal values and community well-being are valued over individualism.

14. Māhū practice our own forms of community recognition, refusal, consensus, dissensus, and accountability.

15. We affirm māhū self-determination to affirm, reject, and problematize the relationship to LGBTQIA+.

16. We are queered until we are not.

17. We have the right to define and defend ourselves.

18. We choose what language suits our needs, political or otherwise: ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi, Pidgin, haole, nonverbal, silence.

19. We work in solidarity with other queer Indigenous folx.

20. We practice and perpetuate ancestral care culture and accountability.

III. E Kū Ana Ka Paia
In honor of structured boundaries

21. Respect queer(ed) ʻŌiwi ways of knowing and being, even if you don't understand them.

22. Prioritize the lived experiences of the māhūi.

23. Prepare to be accomplices in the difficult work of challenging māhūphobia—and all forms of oppression.

24. We strive to create *safe enough* or *brave spaces* for queer(ed) ʻŌiwi to bring our whole selves and be fully present in our vulnerability and superpowers.

25. We proactively create ʻŌiwi-centered protocols for safety, reporting harm, centering survivors, and supporting those who cause harm to take accountability.

26. When (not if) harm happens, we commit to addressing such erasure, tokenization, macro- or micro-aggressions, gendered or sexual violence, and lateral bystander harm.

27. We celebrate leaders, teachers, organizers, and kiaʻi who model support for those queer(ed) ʻŌiwi experiencing harm, and who courageously point out abuses of power dynamics, gaslighting, silencing, and retaliation.

28. We create healthy boundaries, especially around emotional labor for our māhūi, which is often invisible and/or silenced.

29. We acknowledge that coming to consciousness may be un/settling and we hold space for our māhūi to process the complex and layered historical and intergenerational trauma.

30. We encourage everyone to stand and speak from your own hale and positionality, instead of speaking for a queer and/or ʻŌiwi position that you yourself do not inhabit.

IV. Ua Ea, Ua Ao
In honor of ea and enlightenment

31. *EAducation* implies "a'o aku, a'o mai" and learning together with the māhūi within and beyond institutional spaces.

32. Queer is an invitation to accountability and kuleana, not a claim to innocence. Being queer (and similarly, being ʻŌiwi or Indigenous) does not excuse someone from being transphobic, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, or otherwise oppressive.

33. Educators ʻauamo (carry) essential liberatory kuleana.[1] Queer Indigenous study means Black study means abolition means decolonization means celebrating our activist and feminist genealogies, for these literatures worldbuild liberatory futures.

34. In education, we expect to see ourselves represented at the highest levels of leadership.

35. More queer and BIPOC educators must be hired, especially queer Indigenous faculty who embody intersectional positionalities and who have a stake in their scholarship as well as their communities.

36. As queer(ed) ʻŌiwi students, we demand to see ourselves represented in the curriculum we are exposed to. Even in classes not explicitly queer themed, māhū inclusion is critical, and it must move beyond cis gay/lesbian stories to include trans, bisexual, asexual, and ʻŌiwi forms of embodiment, including māhū, aikāne, punalua, poʻolua, etc.

37. We extend aloha to our allies who must learn and practice the real work of leveraging their privileges to support ʻŌiwi agency and to increase our collective ea.

38. When restoring ea to queer(ed) ʻŌiwi, it's important to avoid discourses and initiatives that repeat white saviorism, rehabilitation, multiculturalism, or diversity fulfillment.

39. We urge allies to do their homework first before approaching queer(ed) 'Ōiwi and extracting our time and labor to teach you, to plan events, to validate your efforts.

40. Sing, dance, drag, laugh, love, kiss, cry, live, liberate yourself and others. Eō e ka māhūi!

REGARDING AIKĀNE:

Aikāne is a relationship between two individuals of the same sex, which may be platonic, sexual, or both. Aikāne is a relationship, not necessarily an identity category—one is an aikāne to another when both maintain kuleana to sustain their shared relationship; one cannot be an aikāne alone.

REGARDING ANCESTORS:

One of our cosmogonic chants, *He Kumulipo*, teaches that the first humans were siblings La'ila'i (wahine/woman), Ki'i (māhū), then Kāne (kāne/male/god). We interpret Ki'i as māhū in the following line: "o Ki'i ka mahu."[2] Since La'ila'i mated with Ki'i first, this senior line holds more mana, and it means most of us are the product of a wahine-māhū union. Therefore, māhū are technically not the third gender, but the second.

Without romanticizing the past, we celebrate the attitudes and practices of our kūpuna. However, it is important to acknowledge the violent history of homophobia, policy, and policing during the nineteenth-century Kingdom era. Under Kamehameha III (Kauikeaouli), the 1859 Penal Code Chapter XIII law began criminalizing all deviant sexual behaviors (anything outside of Christian heteronormative and monogamous relations).

REGARDING MĀHŪ:

Māhū has no English equivalent. An early definition in Hawaiian-English dictionaries was "hermaphrodite." Unfortunately, relying solely on dictionaries and archives is problematic because those in positions of power to define what is and is not Hawaiian were Christianized and lacked vocabulary to explain the diversity

of māhū experience. Today, māhū has also been associated with kāne who have same-sex attraction. Moreover, although less common, the twenty-first century has seen more wāhine who have same-sex attraction self-identify as māhū. Some patriarchal confusion and pushback have occurred due to the prevalent usage by and for kāne.

REGARDING MĀHŪI:

Māhūi (Kahikina, 2024) is a contemporary term that combines "māhū" and "lāhui" to describe the kuleana- and experience-based connections between māhū and other queer(ed) ʻŌiwi within the lāhui. It is an affirmation to the lāhui that (1) the māhūi is a ʻŌiwi collective within—and belongs to—the lāhui; (2) every member of the māhūi, as a member of the lāhui, is as integral and accountable to the lāhui as any other Kanaka; and (3) the lāhui has kuleana to show up for and take care of all its members, which includes the māhūi. When all three conditions are renormalized, it is possible that "māhūi" is no longer needed as an assertion.

REGARDING ʻŌIWI:

ʻŌiwi here refers to Kānaka ʻŌiwi/Kānaka Maoli/Kānaka Hawaiʻi/Kānaka/Native Hawaiians/Indigenous peoples of the Hawaiian Islands and our genealogical descendants. Hawaiian culture values both multiplicity and variation; therefore, we have many terms, definitions, descriptions, and understandings based on different family lineages. While contradictions may appear, differences between knowledge sources are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For dictionary definitions of Hawaiian words, visit https://wehewehe.org/.

REGARDING PUNALUA AND POʻOLUA:

Punalua, a common practice among our ancestors, describes non-monogamous relations. We interpret its meaning—puna (spring) and lua (two)—as a relationship where multiple partners drink from a shared puna, and/or where one drinks from several puna. Hawaiians did not practice what the west typically defines as marriage—a legally recognized union between two people, often associated with lifelong monogamy. Among aliʻi (chiefly class), strategic mating served to acquire and maintain the highest possible mana and rank for royal progeny as extensions of the larger dynasty. Further, a child born to a chiefess who mated with two chiefs

was considered poʻolua, or "one of two heads," enabling the child to claim both paternal genealogies. Once heirs were born, however, aliʻi were free to engage with other partners as desired. An important element of this relational system—often labeled "polyamory" in western frameworks—was its emphasis on ethical relationality and care for all involved. Jealousy and spite were frowned upon.

REGARDING QUEER:

Queer is an English umbrella term to refer to non-normative genders and sexualities; it is not equivalent to māhū. Moreover, our ancestral culture did not adhere to strict heterosexual monogamy, thus, our liminal and expansive embodiments of gender and non-monogamy were the "norm." Thus, the effort to (re)normalize our sophisticated relational practices today can create linguistic tension: If queerness denotes non-normativity, yet ʻŌiwi relational practices were normative to our ancestors, are we truly queer—especially when reclaiming our birthright to pilina with ourselves and each other? This tension may explain why many ʻŌiwi do not identify with "queer."

Even so, queer as a term and an embodiment carries political currency as resistance. While we honor the reclamation of our ancestral terms, some of us also recognize the strategic value of "queer" as a shared vocabulary that sparks critical dialogue and enables solidarity. Acknowledging that the genealogy of this term has non-white roots, we choose to elevate queer resistance rooted in Black feminist movements, where it has long functioned as a challenge to normative yet oppressive power. To address these tensions and complexities, we choose queer(ed) in its verb form to show the fluidity and movement of its usage.

At the same time, the movement for same-sex marriage reveals how some queer(ed) ʻŌiwi, in seeking legal recognition and equal rights within the American state, have adopted settler colonial family values: what scholars describe as homonormativity. This pursuit of legitimacy through marriage, domesticity, and upward mobility—e.g., the promise of the American dream, the white picket fence, and the insistence on being "just like you, but gay"—has and continues to affect our ʻŌiwi communities. While these choices reflect strategies of survival within a colonial legal framework, they also raise questions about the costs of recognition.

Ultimately, we reserve the right to recognize and determine our identities, intimacies, and futures on our own terms, with our own language, and within our lāhui.

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About the Authors



Māhealani Ahia (she/her/ʻo ia) is a Kanaka ʻŌiwi scholar-activist, educator, songcatcher, and storykeeper committed to advancing interdisciplinary projects empowering Indigenous, feminist, queer, disabled, decolonial storytelling. A UC Berkeley graduate, a Henry Roe Cloud Fellow at Yale University, and a UH Mānoa PhD candidate in English (Pasifika literatures) with a graduate certificate in women, gender & sexuality studies, she has published in *American Quarterly, Biography, Shima, An Ocean of Wonder: The Fantastic in the Pacific,* and *Feminism and Protest Camps*. She directs the decolonial history walking tour called "Seeking Asylum: A Mad Detour," examining institutional, medical, and cultural trauma experienced by those with disabilities and mental health issues at the territorial-era (1930) Hawaii State [Mental] Hospital. Māhea is a co-founder of Mauna Kea Syllabus Project, Puʻuhuluhulu University, Hale Wahine and Hale Māhū.



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Notes

1 Queer-of-color critique and queer Indigenous study are projects of futurity. The study of the future necessarily imbricates us as writers, scholars, educators, thinkers, organizers, artists, researchers, scientists, caregivers, culture workers, and more as people who must 'auamo this kuleana. Queer-of-color critique and queer Indigenous study are (re)generating (k)new forms grounded normativity (Simpson, 2017, pp. 119–44) that demand disruption, the "something-to-be-done" (Gordon, 1997) of settler colonialism's biopower-lined closet. Honoring knowledge production, application, and analysis as a holistic practice of ea must be the terms of settler and Indigenous academics on this Pae 'Āina. And to use less theoretical language: Queer aloha 'āina means taking a stand even when that front is not popular. That means listening to queer Indigenous people and following their lead. Even the ones you don't like or those who you think "don't know their place."

2 *He Kumulipo* is one of our cosmogonic-genealogical chants reciting the origins of life forms from Pō, the source of primordial darkness, until the birth of chiefs. While there are varying Hawaiian publications and English translations, we follow Kawena Johnson's (1981, 2000) record as written in line 731, "O Kane a Kapokinikini ka pou, o Ki'i ka mahu."