

Interview Ka'imina'auao Kahikina

Summary

In this conversation, Kaimi and I discuss the importance of recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives of marginalized communities in the context of decolonization and creating a more nurturing future for generations to come. He shares his personal history of giving kōkua and mālama to his mother and grandmother, both who had illness and came from socioeconomic crises. We discuss the intersections of colonialism, queerness, and Hawaiian culture, and how kuleana plays a role in the healing of our path to self awareness. He also shares the concept of double queering, mo'olelo with pae māhū, and excerpts from his publication, Na Ka Māhūi Aloha: Unsettling Homo/Hetero -Nationalist Logics of Belonging. Ka'imi highlights being unmoored from colonial ways of thinking and emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and articulating the idea of belonging with opacity, in which māhū and indigenous people have the right to not be defined.

Duration of audio: 41:18

Outline

- Personal history, cultural identity, and community involvement.
- Hawaiian culture, language, and identity with a focus on personal experiences and family history.
- Caring for a mother with dementia and ballet training.
- Community college experiences and Hawaiian studies program.
- Distinctions between Kanaka Maoli Māhū and LGBTQ+ identities.
- Hawaiian culture and LGBTQ+ identity, embracing traditional practices and kuleana.

- Hawaiian history, colonialism, and LGBTQ+ rights.
- The concept of belonging in Hawaiian culture and its connection to erotics and relationality.
- Belonging, identity, and opaqueness in Hawaiian culture.
- Double colonization, contrasting epistemologies about erotics and its impact on Hawaiian identity and Māhū.
- Sites various mo‘olelo such as, Hi'iakaikapoliopole and recites except from Moses Manu's "He Moololo Kaa Hawaii no Laukaieie."
- Parallels with mo‘olelo and Māhū today.

Interview

Ka'imi: My full name is Ka'imi Na'auao Clay Kahikina, formally Cambern. I am from Manoa, born in Honolulu, raised in Manoa, between Manoa and Waianae. My mom's family comes from Waianae and then my auntie, our family is really pili - you know, my auntie who hanaied my brother and I - is pili to Manoa Valley.

Kanani: What would you say your role and kuleana is in your community? What do you feel kuleana is for you, whether it's your academic community, or any of the communities you're in?

Ka'imi: I kind of belong to two communities right now. And I'm really grateful to be a part of them. One would be in the academic space. I'm a PhD student in indigenous politics. So I work with Kumu in indigenous politics like Noe Noe Silva and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua. They have been mentors to me in many ways.

So that's the community I participate in, in a lot of the work that I do. It is really about pulling knowledge from the archive, particularly knowledge around how our ancestors thought about the world, viewed the world and then contributed, so how our ancestors produced knowledge from that genealogy of thought, and then trying to reconnect the newer generations into producing knowledge in similar ways, right? I think a big part of that is how opaque that way of thinking is. And I think particularly when we're thinking about colonialism, it's really important to practice in opaque spaces. You know, a big part of our resistance in history is that our resistance was not translatable to missionaries, but then there's their descendants. So I think that that is a big part of my kuleana. It seems like it's not a lot now, but I think eventually, when I do bring this discourse out, via my research, talking, working in the community, particularly with younger generations, I feel like that kuleana will really make itself known at that point.

Kanani: I can feel it happening already. You know, you don't just wake up and it's there, it's a long long long road.

Ka'imi: (Laughter) It's a lonely road. It is, until such a time when people are ready to talk more about it. There's a lot of resistance. I feel like even from people in our lahui, to thinking differently, because we all have an idea of what Hawaiian is and what Hawaiian thinking is. And we're not always aware of how, I think, coercive colonialism has been in the way we think about the world, right? And so sometimes some things that we think are really Hawaiian are actually not and they're imported, right, and so a part of recognizing what is imported is also a big part knowing where to unmoor ourselves from colonial ways of thinking.

Kanani: You know, when people tell me things like, *oh, I've decolonized*, I think that's huge. It's not so simple. You have to start with how you perceive the world, and how that family culture that you had [perceived the world] within a world that has already been colonized. So there's a lot to it. So as a child, if you have any memory of it, it can be as simple or as complex as you want to share, but if what you can recall, what was your idea of kuleana, or your kuleana, as a child?

Kaimi: As a child, I think the first kuleana that I really had was to be a sort of, you know, a caregiver to my Makuahine. So my mom is a wonderful woman, but she comes from a generation that is super traumatized. Yeah. And you know, my mom, my auntie, they all come from that generation, super traumatized, super disconnected. But they wanted to be connected. And there just was no access at the time. It was really hard to find Hawaiian language, hard to find hula; they eventually did.

Kanani: This was in what year?

Ka'imi: My mom was born in 1960

Kanani: Ah, yes, it wasn't until 1970 [Second Hawaiian Renaissance]

Ka'imi: Exactly, but even in 1970, it was just starting. Yeah. So you know, there were certain families that maintained 'ōlelo Hawaii and traditions; my family was not one of them. So my mom's mother, her mother passed away when she was around 12 from tuberculosis, so my grandmother was put in foster homes. So just to give you a little background, my grandmother was raised in foster homes, very disconnected from her Hawaiian side, right, and not knowing much about that.

Kanani: I can resonate with that.

Ka'imi: You can resonate with that. There's just these very deeply rooted Hawaiian behaviors that my grandmother had as well that I recognized as very Kanaka. But then my mom folks were raised very poor, grew up in Waianae, Mā'ili, you know, went to Waianae elementary and high school.

Lived in Kauai for a little while, my family comes from Kauai before that. And so getting out of the crisis, the socio economic crisis that led to just really hard conditions of an upbringing was the first and most primary thing for them to focus, the survival, and so things like culture, language, were frivolous at best, but you know, really a privilege for them.

So they didn't have that access. So my mom comes from that and she found her way into hula. She danced for a Hālau Hula 'Omaiki, and then she learned ki ho'alu, or slack key guitar, from Aunty Alice Nāmakelua. And then she learned, just by herself, she would go down to the beach, go find a fishing string and you know, string her ukulele and stuff like that. She's totally like that, backyards-kind-lady.

She was very resourceful, very resourceful. Yeah, and so she did dance hula, she loves her music. She's an incredible musician. You know, but unfortunately, my mom currently suffers from dementia. I don't know the science behind dementia, but I do definitely feel like there's a relationship between the

hardness of her upbringing and her mental health issues in her 20s and 30s, into now, where it's just a lot, the care has amped up.

So as a child, there were early signs of dementia that I think we weren't aware of because there wasn't really a language around it. So a lot of my childhood was caring for her emotionally, right? So a big part of my upbringing was being very sensitive to my mother's needs. And just being there for her 100%. Which is very, it was, very difficult.

There was a lot of great things about it too, because you know, you asked about religion and my mom was a very spiritual person, I think very open to the other world, the world of the ancestors, she was always seeing ghosts, but you know, really teaching me how to see into that space, into that world. You know, not like ooh hookie dookie, but really just having a sense of the presences around us. She'd always say, *Be aware of others*, but really like others, like in the next world but also this world.

So my mom was always in touch with that side. And I think her music really comes from that world. Her voice is beautiful. Her guitar, which is very crisp, comes from that space, I think, that other world.

And I think my kuleana to my mother really became apparent when I moved home from New York City. And I came back to Hawai'i to to malama my tutu and my mom.

Kanani: What took you to New York?

Ka'imi: Oh, I was a classical ballet dancer. I danced ballet. I started dancing ballet as a child and hula around the same time, well, hula later. And then I went to Philadelphia where I trained at a school called the rock school for dance education. And the training was awesome, loved it. Some of the teachers were quite abusive, or one in particular, but it was a great experience. And from there, I got into a ballet school in New York City called Ellison Valley Professional Training Program, and they're excellent. My teacher, Mr. Ellison, I

still think of him fondly, a lot of his lessons on life and discipline, the lessons that I have now come from him. So, I graduated from Ellison ballet, I think it was in 2013, and I got into the Tulsa Ballet, Oklahoma, it's a company there. They're fabulous, the dancers are really, really good. A lot of my friends dance there. I'm in the second company, which basically is a trainee company.

Around the same time, during my graduation, my grandmother came to watch me, so my tutu, my auntie, and uncle and brother and sister in law all came, it was such a treat to show her the world I came from. But, we were having dinner one day in New York City, and she just never cries, but my grandma broke down because she was taking care of my mom, and was just like, *I can't do it anymore*. She was around 88 at the time.

And you know, the house wasn't prepared for someone with the needs that my mom had. So my grandma would drag her up the stairs, roll her into the tub, bathe her once a week, and then bring her down [the stairs] because my mom can't walk or anything like that. So things like that, you know, and she's just using her Social Security to pay for her food. My auntie was super busy at the time, she gave my mom a place to live, but you know, we weren't and grandma wasn't capable of fully taking care of her. But she did a great job, I will say *thank you, grandma*. So I came home because of that concern, but also it shocked me. I didn't realize everyone had been protecting me from what was really going on. That's how he came back to Hawai'i, from New York City.

Kanani: Wow. That's amazing.

Ka'imi: Yeah, and then jump into a world of care right after, the kuleana of taking care of family, cooking, cleaning, you know, but really, just that sort of being a parent to a parent sort of thing started to really take shape. Grandma during that time, she was diagnosed with bone cancer and passed away about a year later. So both mom and grandma needed care at the same time. And my auntie, you know, we both were really working around the clock to just take care of them. It was about a year after I had moved home that my grandma

passed away. So I came out right at the tail end, and I wouldn't have changed it for anything. The signs were pointing to this, this is the right path for you.

Kanani: Is that when you went back to school?

Ka'imi: That's a funny thing. You know, I didn't complete high school. I think I did 10th grade. I think I didn't even finish 10th grade. I was doing online school, and it's expensive. And I wasn't doing my assignments, and my dad was like, we can't afford this. So make a choice. You're going to do it, or are you not? And I'm like, No, I'm not gonna do it. I'm gonna just focus on Ballet. So I didn't have a high school diploma. So when I came home, no high school diploma, and was working for my Aunty's snackshop. Aunty was like, *You got to go to school brother, if you're going to live in my house, you gotta go to school.*

...I enrolled into the community college, aunty just dropped me off, like okay, go figure it out (laughter)...

...It was one of the best educational experiences I've had outside of ballet... But yeah, that started my, my, my journey in Hawaiian studies. First I was like, That's right to cloud law. Oh, and I started taking all the law Javi and I started reading more. My Aunty has this incredible library because she's a hula dancer, kumu hula. So she has incredible books, just from all the years of her studying and research. I would just attack her library.

Kanani: How did that feel, when that started, and when you started taking Hawaiian studies classes?

It felt so good. I think I already, growing up in a world of hula, I had a base understanding, you know, a foundation, but there were so many things, particularly around history that I wasn't very familiar with, or at least I had a very warped understanding of Hawaiian history. And very much influenced by the internal white supremacy, the internalized white supremacy within our family, right? Because you know, my family we're all Kanaka but raised at a time of heightened Americanization, statehood, and all that stuff. So, you know, the

ideas about our ancestors, our kupuna, that I was raised with were super super warped. I kind of had a feeling but I think once I started reading a book, I was like, Holy shit, it's a very, very different history. It was kind of like a homecoming for me. Just feeling like I've been robbed in so many ways, but then also being like, okay, I don't know enough at all. I need to keep going, I need to keep reading, I need to keep writing. I need to keep myself involved in this space. And so against the wishes of my family, who were like, get a business degree, get something that you can work with, I went full speed into it, and my compromise was political science...

Kanani: Now, moving more into questions about māhū, would you say there are distinctions between the roles and kuleana of being māhū and LGBTQ, when it comes to the kuleana of reclaiming as a Kanaka Maoli as māhū?

Ka'imi: Yeah, this is a really complex sort of issue, right? Because when we kind of abstract things, we forget that we're talking about people and communities. And so it's really hard, I think sometimes for me, to make this distinction, because I don't want to cause hurt, right. I think one of the greatest things about the LGBTQ+ community is this emphasis on community and this emphasis on finding your family, and being who you are, expressing yourself wholeheartedly and insisting that you are visible in a world that has historically made you invisible.

And so as a Kanaka, I resonate with that. But as somebody who is both queer and māhū, I resonate with that on many different levels. However, I think that we have to also recognize that the LGBTQ+ umbrella, and you know, the discourse surrounding it, but also its histories descend from a very different genealogy of thought, right? A very different world of thought that via colonialism, it has sort of subsumed māhū into its sort of way of thinking. Because of our proximity to colonialism, māhū can identify as LGBTQ+, right, and they do, but they're māhū first. I mean, if that's how they feel, I feel definitely, first Hawaiian and their orientation to this 'āina is the first thing. Then also recognizing that there is a whole world of māhū history here in Hawai'i coming from a pacifica way of thinking. Then a specifically Kanaka Maoli way of

thinking about māhū, that there isn't enough that has been brought out from the archives and there isn't enough that has been passed down, because coming with colonialism are the norms of heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and hetero patriarchy, which has historically silenced māhū. So, you know, in mo'olelo, māhū are almost non-existent, and so we have to really dig deeper and be more analytical when we are looking at mo'olelo to find my māhū in the mo'olelo, and they're there. They're there.

So that is really, really important to the distinction, is that we're dealing with different genealogies of thought, but because of globalization, that does not mean that they are mutually exclusive. There is an exchange of knowledge between māhū and LGBTQ+, particularly because Kanaka live in both worlds, right Kanaka who are māhū also in many cases live with the LGBTQ+ world as well.

I think particularly around kuleana and māhū as a kulana, and as a relational sort of embodiment. So māhū is not necessarily an identity because you don't identify with it, you are also recognized as it. Your ohana sees you for it growing up, I was always called māhū boy because they knew already that I was māhū, and they just got it. You're treated differently, not necessarily in a terrible way, but sometimes it wasn't great. You're just put in a different place, you're organized in their mind in a different place. So the kuleana also that comes with that is you're often in, in sort of spaces that are wahine led and you learn about leadership from the wahine around you, because wahine are the backbone of a Hawaiian family period, exclamation point.

So you learn your kuleana from those places. So I think that is one of the greatest gifts about being māhū is that your access to your mother, to your grandmother, often is that your relationship is so strong, so pa'a for many of us. We learn a lot of arts, the arts of being, I don't want to say maternal, because I hate that word, but the arts of being intimate and connected, and, you know, expressive, and the arts of caring, and the arts of healing, and the arts of maintaining, and the arts of doing introspection, and really connecting to sort of those deep well waters inside that kind of make us move the way we do, we

recognize that. Also, you learn how to observe others, and others, because you always have to be aware of them, you know, again, coming back to my mother being like, you know, be aware of others, that sort of knowledge set.

I think I've noticed, kane in my family don't possess that, they don't have that, really, they don't have the introspection. They also don't always have the greatest sort of awareness of others, and an ability to kind of kilo or observe the psychology of somebody, but also just their behavior, and they don't know how to necessarily navigate within those places. So that's a big part of māhū today, that part of that genealogy that has passed down, there is just a certain sort of understanding in our family, and especially in Hawaiian families.

I've heard some really strange things from settlers about māhū, especially local settlers. Recently, I was talking to a friend, she's not kanaka, but she was like, *Oh, I always thought that, you know, in Hawaiian families when Hawaiians wanted a daughter, but they only had boys, they made one the daughter*, and I've heard this before. It's interesting, because they don't, they don't get it, they don't see that the signs of māhūness are in the child and instead of fighting it, the family then embraces it, because there is a place for it in Hawaiian ways of thinking in, in the family system.

So, that is a big thing in Hawaiian culture and a major distinction. Often in the LGBTQ+ community there are really awful histories of queer folk being completely just pushed out of their communities, you know, people who once loved them now their love is conditional. Even in Hawaiian communities, in Hawaiian families, who have embraced that colonial thinking, or who have been completely just torn away from Hawaii ways of thinking, and it's not their fault, also engage in those behaviors, and it really breaks my heart. I think that what comes from us connecting back to māhū histories and our ways of thinking is sort of a humuhumu ho, just like resewing our connections to each other and recognizing this otherness has a place, a historic place and a traditional place. Once we have a place, we have a kuleana, once you have a kuleana, we just thrive in those spaces. Everyone should have a kuleana I think,

it's a reason to get up in the morning. It's a reason to show up every single day and to participate in life.

Kanani: I want to ask, and maybe this could segue into the mo'olelo, about this idea of belonging. Belonging came up in your research, and you just mentioned how the family embraces a māhū child, instead of opposing it, and this is a kānaka way of thinking about belonging. Are there any mo 'olelo that you want to share, that can tell that kind of story about belonging?

Ka'imi: The idea of belonging is something that I want to start with, that idea. It's something that was understood there wasn't a word for it, right. So now we have to do the work now of articulating what belonging is.

Kanani: I want to apologize, I'm sorry, but I don't feel like I should be the one to apologize, but there's so much work to do now, especially for Māhū, and there shouldn't be so much work. (Ka'imi laughs) But, I think for any of us who are working towards decolonization, or working towards just having a future that we feel is more nurturing and safe for the generations to come, who are kānaka or kama'aina, it's important work.

Ka'imi: Thank you for sharing that. There is a lot of work to be done still yet, yeah. Belonging is something that I think about often. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, her work was very influential in thinking of belonging in her chapter called Gathering Stories of Belonging. I absolutely loved that chapter. That's when I really started to think about this idea of belonging. So I wanted to just mahalo her and her work first, because I wouldn't have thought about belonging in the way I do now, if it weren't for her work.

But we have to do this work, right, now, like citing how we belong, yeah (laughter). Particularly the issue is because there isn't a lot published. I've had conversations with people who are like, māhū were irrelevant, like it wasn't a big deal. Like, everyone's just minding their own business. I'm like, no, not necessarily, we have the word for it, there's a history to it.

So belonging and Mo'olelo, I have noticed, particularly around our heroes in mo'olelo, that they're looking for a belonging. Often they look to belong to something right. So you know, in the story of Keaomelemele, there is a history of, or a story of trying to belong to the hula or belonging to the hula, in some way; Lauka'ie'ie similarly; mo'olelo of Hi'iakaikapoliopele, there are all these dynamics of belonging, and relationality of belonging. There's a lot to glean from mo'olelo about that.

I think particularly with māhū there are examples, but they're very scant. But the fact that they're in there means that they belong to our ways of thinking. And so a part of my work on belonging is just to remind people that once we recognize that māhū have always belonged, we will belong in a stronger way to our community. And we will show up in stronger ways to our community, and do the hard work of unmooring these really haole and hurtful ways of thinking from the fabrics of our family and our community. But that means, though, that we need a heightened access to 'ōlelo Hawai'i, we need a heightened access to Hawaiian ways of thinking, and start to really produce knowledge from Hawaiian places and Hawaiian ways of thinking, moving forward, we need to continue to do that really hard work.

So it takes literacy, right, and it takes time, and it takes effort. People don't have time and effort. So some of the work that I'm doing is trying to not package it, but trying to create a way of talking about it, or at least starting the discourse, a discourse on māhū belonging that relies on our ways of thinking to explain that.

So that is kind of slightly different from Heoli's work, but it is along the same sort of, you know, sort of genealogy of, you know, looking at desire, looking at belonging, looking at erotics and relationality, and trying to bring those ways of thinking back into our relationships of pedagogy between different generations, where the conversations are being had from, you know, elders to opio about erotics about relationality about love, about the mysteries of expression and relationality, and the magic of that, right. It's not happening anymore, because everyone's so shame to talk about those things. But when we can have open conversations about māhū and that is no longer is a queer

issue, that's when I think we'll really blossom. I think the idea of belonging will really blossom. Once we can start, it starts with that conversation.

Kanani: I think belonging is very complex, especially for a māhū, and anyone who has been removed in some way, violently or even just in the subtle things that happen and you feel that displacement, you know. I think for everyone it's a little different. For me, true belonging is that I can express who I am and maybe that won't be compatible with you, but you will still love me. That can be complex, too, depending on, you know, generations. You were just mentioning the different generations and how they relate to each other. There was this weird void that I grew up in and so now this is my way to come back, to come back home, and to understand where I come from, to understand who I am, but also know that I'm this unique person in this time...

...So, belonging, I can be my unique self, but I can be accepted and be loved by you even when I might not be aligned with all of your ideas or your worldview.

Ka'imi: That's super important. One thing I've learned from, particularly from black scholarship, is this idea of opacity. Right? And, you know, I'm thinking about Edward Gleason's work on Poetics of Relation. It's fabulous, fabulous work. But you know, Gleason wrote for different reasons. It's a very different context, but there's some ideas that I think are really beneficial, and one thing I recognize about Hawaiians is in our mo'olelo, there is an inspiration, an awe inspiring feeling when confronted with difference.

So when in mo'olelo, when we see something kupaianaha (surprising or strange) there are so many hua'ōlelo (words) for seeing something, so out of this world, you've never encountered it before. But there's a word to describe it and in so many cases, it's so manafu, right? So there's so much value to having these experiences.

In Keaninuokalani, I was reading it with my partner, the beginning of the mo'olelo, and Kuahailo when he's shape shifting in this cloud form, you know, being observed, there's this sense of fear, but also awestruck inspiration. So for Hawaiians it is like, the intangible is an exciting thing, right? The intangible belongs in because of how exciting it is, we, you know, we have words to describe it. So I like to think of māhū, again, as being intangible. And in my paper I talked about this too, you can't just clock māhū as like, this is it. Because the word is used to describe something very expansive and uncapturable, right, and opaque.

And so this idea of opacity is important because it's a right to not be translatable, to not fit in a box. So it really helped me in thinking about belonging as recognizing that I don't have to understand you in order to see you and to love you and to want to be around you and experience you. Right. So that's how opacity has helped me think about belonging in that way, but also helped me think about Hawaiians this idea of queer in Hawaiian way of thinking.

Kanani: I read about this idea of double queering in your paper.

Ka'imi: Yeah, the double queering, it's a thing. It really is a thing. And it's not my idea, you know. I first heard about double queering from Stephanie Nohelani Teves. Hey, Lenny Tevez, in her book *Define Indigeneity* she pulled on some of Morgansen's work on queer theory, which I also pulled on in the paper, but, you know, really got me thinking about this double queering and then I read Kehaulani Kauanui's, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, and she talks about the double colonization. Then earlier is [I talked about Haunani-Kay Trask in my paper] Haunani-Kay Trask talking about a double colonization and so they're talking about, this train of thought with this doubling of disenfranchisement on different levels.

Let me think about how to describe double colonization: One being because of our kānaka-ness, our proximity to our 'āina, which is a desired space, because of our very different genealogy or non-whiteness, all of those things are conditions when colonialism or colonial thought comes in. In order to

disenfranchise us you [colonizers] bring a whole knowledge set that is foreign to this place and the laws that come from that knowledge that are foreign to this place and you queer the people, right, and relegate them to certain darker spaces, underbellies, and subaltern spaces.

Then the second colonialism that comes in is the erotics but also the sort of relationality within those spaces. So now then, the people are, through education, in this forced colonial education, are then torn from their relationalities and then start to reproduce colonialism in their relationships. So māhū who had been affected by that, but the double colonization, that's a double queering. So queered one way, queered as Hawaiians as these native savages, close to permissivity, and then queered again, as deviants, sexual deviants purely focused on the physical and relegated to the spaces. We have a long history of sex work in our māhū community because we've been relegated to those spaces. It's been very difficult unless you have a hui around you. A lot of my sisters, they don't have access to places where they're actually safe, where they can then really, you know, find a kuleana that is safer for them, if you know what I mean.

Kanani: Could you talk about the term o'ole'a and Pele'ula and Hi'iaka, in Hi'iakaikapoliopole?

Ka'imi: Yeah, that's a really a prime example of sort of the Hawaiian episteme sort of being porous. So you know, at a time when there are these really Victorian sort of ways of thinking about sexuality and erotics, that are kind of filtering into Hawaii at the time. Hawaiian writers like Poepoe, like Dusche, are bringing in a Hawaiian way of thinking, right, so the white episteme is coming down and it's porous, and then being printed onto the papers.

So there are these really erotic and sexual parts of the Mo'olelo that just wouldn't fly in a normal Victorian setting, right? Victorians are really weird about sexuality and very prudish, in many ways, but also, at the same time, as Foucault talks about this. But at the same time, there's this idea of Victorian prudishness but also a sort of hyper fixation on sex in you know, on an

institutional level, and on a discourse level, just particularly around the female body. In Hawaiian ways of thinking, sexuality didn't go through all of those forms of capture. So there's a free sexuality that runs through that is not connected to a hyper fixation on the body. So then Hawaiian relationality and sexuality is expressed through 'āina.

Kanani: Could you talk more about the relationality between our relationship and our relationship with 'āina, and how that connection is very similar?

Ka'imi: So again, I want to cite Kahikina de Silva, she talks about how mele aloha 'āina, mele, in general, we can think about mele and how we write mele of love, particularly love for somebody else, we're talking about the love of their 'āina, or the love of our 'āina to express our desire, our compatibility, our yearning for a particular person. In this time, you have the pua ahiahi, the pua lililehua, these sort of specific flowers, or even rains, they embody that person, because it's this idea that the person is of this place, their 'āina is what makes them. So therefore, the 'āina is this sort of ho'ailona, or a sign and symbol of who that person is. And so, when we write our mele, we're writing through those expressions of that land.

And we have many expressions from many different lands of all over Hawai'i and areas that a Hawaiian poet then uses and strings together and weaves this really incredible piece. And you see a lot of this in Hi'iakaikapoliopole, it's not confined by the same *Oh, that's a woman or that's a man, right? Not at all.* There's this again, pulling back to the sexuality thing, Pele'ula sees that she's surfing naked, she's in the presence of a kane who has seen her from head to toe, and you know, she can no longer accept that they want to have, you know, separate lodging. So Hi'iaka has to protect Lohi'au and his kapu that Pele has placed on him, lest trouble. So she's like, *oh, no, no, we cannot do that.* So they have this moment, and Pele'ula was like, I could accept that if we were a pae māhū, and we were all wahine in this, you know, in wahine energy, we were all in this space as wahine of similar attributes, you know, that sort of idea. But because of this o'ole'a presence that has seen me head to toe, it's not that I wouldn't do those, you know, be a pae māhū with you, folks, but it's that now I

have to kind of hone in my focus on to this person, because now the relationship is different, he's seen my body. So then they play this kilu, she intends to act on it, so that's why they played this game of Kilu. So there's just these, you know, little tidbits of Hawaiian ways of thinking in these kinds of structures, and you really have to do the work of sort of dissecting and piecing everything together. So that's where we see sexuality come in.

But then later on in my paper, I talk about the mo'olelo of Laukaieie and the māhū who descend from the mountains to come in to liven up aha hula (hula festival). Which is so funny, because there are still parallels with māhū doing the same thing today. What I love about this section is that they're not described in a physical sense. They're described really abstractly, described by the wind and the mists, and they're indescribable and that's what makes them so kupaianaha, and so interesting to read about, you know, the Hawaiian world is all about balance.

Ka'imi recites from his paper, *No Ka Māhūi Aloha: Unsettling Homo/Hetero Nationalis Logics of Belonging*:

More ambiguous, though, is the “pae mahu” mentioned in Moses Manu’s “He Moolelo Kaaō Hawaii no Laukaieie.” Manu describes a “pae mahu” who dwelled in the upland of Ko’olau, Kaua’i. This “pae mahu” were considered ‘ōlohe or masters in the arts of hula and oli. Manu sets the stage in the following passage for an introduction of epic proportions:

A oiai na mea apau e hoolohe ana i na lealea, aia hoi ua lohe ia aku la he halulu a me ka hu ana a ka makani ma ke kuahiwi o Kauai a me he mea la, he ekolu manawa o keia mea i lohe ia aku ai aia hoi, me he kapalili ana no ka lau o ko [ka] niu i ka makani ua hele ululu mai la keia poe kanaka kino ano pahohoa [sic] me he aka kinowailua ala e maalo ana imua o ka mea nana aku a nalo aku aka, aia nae he mau leo aheahe kupinai e wawalo ana me he kai hawanawana la na Kawaihae ka hone mai i ka pueone.

...Owai keia poe kino kupanaha e ike ia nei imua o ke kahua lealea oia la? ...O ka “Pae mahu” ua poe ala o na pali Koolau oia hoi ka poe Olohe.

The pae mahu enter the mo'olelo by descending from the uplands to join a lively and joyous 'aha hula (hula assembly). Like the fronds of the coconut shaking quickly in the wind, the pae mahu assemble, revealing their astonishing bodies. As quickly as they appear to the observer, they also disappear like the shadow of a spirit. As illusive as they may be, their gentle voices can be heard resounding like a whispering sea. Then suddenly, the pae mahu lead a procession of chanting and dancing, bringing the 'aha to heightened intensities. When they are finished, they ascend back up into the uplands hidden by the mountain mists leaving only their voices behind. Through Manu's magical conceptualizing of a "pae mahu," the important thing is not the gender or sexuality of the individuals of the pae māhū. Instead, it is the kuleana the pae performs at the 'aha hula, to magnify the le'ale'a of the event and lead the arts being performed. They are also again grouped in relation to each other as embodying similar characteristics in relation to wahine and kāne energies expressed through the "wawalo" of their "leo aheahe." Manu would also go as far as to identify this pae mahu as a "lahui kanaka" which is relevant to today's māhūi.

So in Hawaiian ways of thinking, there's this emphasis on balance. So you have Kū and Hina, you have Pō and Ao, the Hawaiian Universe is about balance. And so when things are out of balance and out of whack, that's when you see these paradigm shifts. So māhū in this expression, the way that the wawalo, the resounding it is, has that masculine or o'ole'a energy and then the leo aheahe, that soft, soft sort of sound on the wind, it just moves in very soft and gently.

So that is a Hawaiian way of thinking of this balance. They move between these pendulums, I guess you can say, they move back and forth between these energies. So they're not fixed in a place. And there's all this potential that comes from being able to move through those places, and that's why they're seen sort of as the mists, their bodies are described as a shadow or something moving in and out really quickly. Then I crack up because we are so this. All my māhū friends, you can hear them from a mile away, right? *(Speaks in a playful high pitch)* "Yeah like, yas, Mary", and then they come into the space and everyone's living their life, and then boom, they're out, there onto the next

place, and you didn't even know that they dashed, you know, and it's so true today. Anyway, so I get super excited when I see these in the mo'olelo, because something's just don't change about māhū.