

Ensuring the family home: The responsibilities of queer scholarship

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Abstract

This article is an updated synthesis of the opening keynote address presented at the inaugural national Rainbow Research conference, *Rainbow Studies Now: Legacies of Community*, on the 23 November 2023 at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington. It examines the experience of queer silencing as a cultural phenomenon and a condition within and beyond the academy. After considering an example of self-selective silencing within New Zealand’s queer history that caused us to lose our subcultural language, it examines instances of repressing queer research both nationally and internationally. Such silencing has included arson attacks on queer archives and the practice of banning queer literature. The article then considers the design and development of Ia~, a research dissemination portal recently launched at Auckland University of Technology. It argues that such initiatives constitute an act of resistance against queer invisibility. The importance of such projects lies in meeting the requirements of New Zealand’s 2020 Education and Training Act and in countering national and global acts of suppression that continue to target the generation and dissemination of queer research.

Keywords: book burning, Ia~, intellectual refugee, queer scholarship, selective silencing

What is a family?

On the bookshelf in my parents' house there is a battered copy of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. It defines a family as "Members of a household, parents, children, servants (or) all descendants of a common ancestor, house, lineage, race, group or people of common stock" (Fowler & Fowler, 1964, p. 436). Just above the bookcase is an old photograph taken in 1959. It shows my sisters and me in dress up clothes (Figure 1). It's not a very flash photo. It was taken in Pukeatua by my grandmother on her Super Silette camera. We are standing in front of our weatherboard state house. The picture looks a little odd. But it is also a little queer. At the time it was taken both adjectives could be used to describe such a photograph, but in subsequent decades it was the second word that came to have special meaning. My sisters grew up to be lesbian women and I - a gay man.

Figure 1. Family photograph.



Note. Welby, Katrina and Suzanne Ings (1959).
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Our family had a goat, a dog, two cats, a mother, a father and a grandmother. It looked like an ordinary rural phenomenon. However, away from the heartland at this time the term 'family' could also describe gay, lesbian and trans people. The word formed part of an underground language that was known on the street but rarely understood outside of queer culture. You could hear this slang if you hung out with the queens, the sexworkers or the bog cruisers. In England the language was called Polari (Baker, 2002), in South Africa, Gayle (Cage, 2003) but on Karangahape Road, Vivian Street and on the wharves of New Zealand's main ports, it was called Code or Palarey (Ings, 2015a). Palarey was distinguished by its savage wit, its borrowings from other underground slang, and its rich metaphoric clusters (Ings, 2015a). Although the language used the same grammar and syntax as standard English, it featured distinctive levels of gender neutering, rugged humour and angry defiance. For almost a hundred years in New Zealand, it was used to communicate, protect and facilitate unique forms of subcultural bonding.

So, what exactly did *family* describe? Well, being family meant belonging to a small community of known, trusted queer people. Last century, these groups often replaced the biological families that no longer supported queer individuals, many of whom had been disowned or had exiled themselves because life

where they had grown up had become untenable. These queer families had a distinctive language, social norms and expectations (Baker, 2002; Ings, 2012, 2015*b*; Livingston, 1991) and inside these, they offered “protection, identity and sites of cultural inculcation” (Ings, 2015*b*, p. 739).

Although Baker (2002) and Partridge (2002) note that the word *family* in gay slang was borrowed from thieves’ cant, in New Zealand in the middle decades of last century, *family* referred specifically to being homosexual. Within the construct of a family there were specific positions. A ‘*sister*’ was an intimate gay male friend who was generally not a lover (Wedding, 2004). A ‘*house*’ described an organised safe unit of family members under the care of a designated mother or father (Bailey, 2011; Livingston 1991; Mackley-Crump, & Zemke, 2019). A ‘*mother*’ referred to an older adult who acted as an educator, confidant, advisor or protector of younger queer individuals (Ings, 2004). The word *mother* was also used in American queer slang of the period. Jonathan Lighter defined this person as “an effeminate homosexual man who befriends a younger person” (1994, p. 593) and Laud Humphreys described a *mother* as a “homosexual mentor” (1981, p. 47). In addition to sisters and mothers, in New Zealand, an ‘*auntie*’ was a derogatory term used to describe an older homosexual man whose approach to life was considered conservative (Ings 2004, 2012). However, the word was in wide use in queer communities internationally. In the US Eric Partridge records *auntie* as far back as the 1930s (2006, p. 53), Ken Cage notes its use in South Africa (2003, p. 54) and Paul Baker lists it in his UK lexicon of gay speech (2002, p. 163).

Selective silencing

So what happened to the lexical distinctiveness that gave *family* a voice? In New Zealand, the language largely disappeared from the streets across two decades. Although discernable in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s it was in decline and by the 1980s palarey was almost gone (Taylor, 2004, Ings, 2004). Today a few terms remain recognisable because across time they moved into overground lexicons. Indicative of these are words like *scarper* (to flee), *cruise* (to seek sexual partners), *ogle* (to look at), and perhaps *naff* (tasteless) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Overground use of queer palarey.



Note. Christmas shopping poster distributed through the Westfield malls in New Zealand in December 2010, showing the use of the palarey word *naff* as an adjective in the overground. © Photograph, property of the author.

But today, a story told in palarey in the 1950s about the arrest of two men is largely indecipherable:

Aunt Nell Dears, it's all cackle - all shudder. You know those dolly aunties in Tits - well they were nabbed in their latty. Mm hmm. Seems some manky old fish, ajax apparently, screeched to Hilda and the demons descended in a noshy raid. Poor dears. Still in the doss they were. Everyone knows it's Tootsie trade, but I reckon they'll be in for quarter stretch.

The account may be loosely translated as:

Listen to this scandalous news. Those lovely, elderly gay men in Titirangi were arrested at home. It seems a woman neighbour reported them to the police and the detectives picked them up in a dawn raid while they were still in bed. There was nothing exotic about their sexuality, but they are likely to face a three month prison sentence.

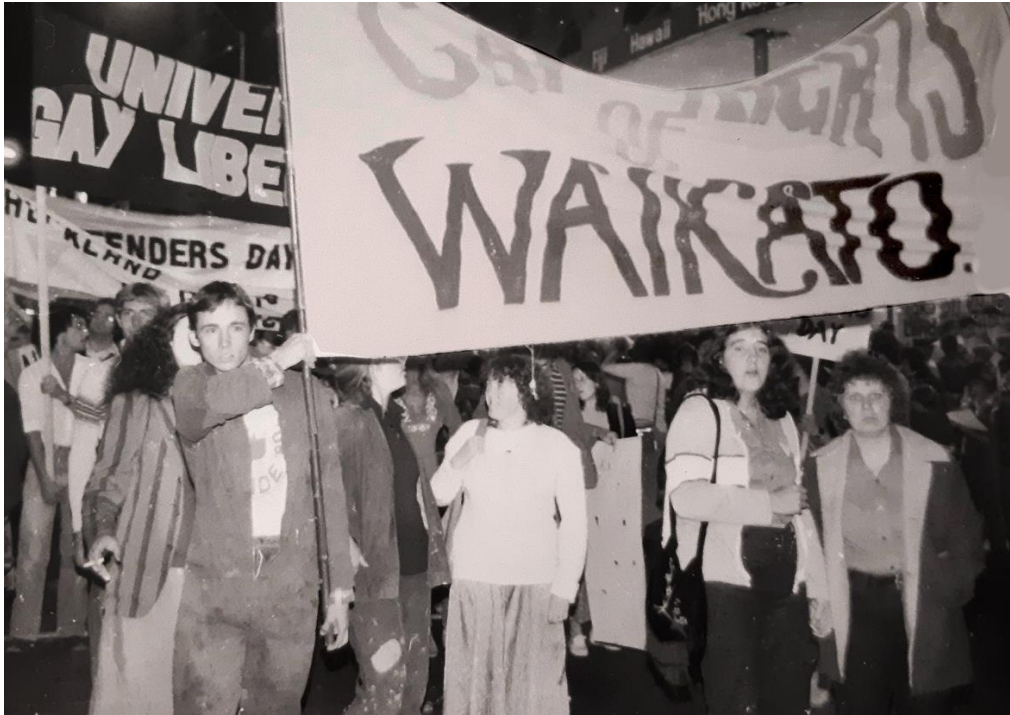
Across the 1950s and 60s, in mainstream New Zealand, this language remained a largely invisible code despite the fact that its British counterpart (polari) seeped into Kiwi's living rooms when the BBC radio programme *Round the Horne* was broadcast on Saturday nights between 1968 and 1970. Although audiences laughed along with Julian and Sandy, the two screamingly camp Queens who were the heart of the show, the meaning of their polari dialogue was largely elusive.

However, inside the queer underground of New Zealand's port cities, palarey offered a discreet means of communication. But, it was dying because of cultural self-silencing. In the 1970s, when in Britain and New Zealand gay liberation groups began to lift queer culture into the overground and communities moved towards the potential decriminalisation of adult homosexual acts, palarey was seen by queer activists as perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Baker, 2019; Ings, 2004). Its camp brutality, misogyny and criminal references were thought to work against the potential for wider acceptance of more 'mainstream' queer identities. The palatable lesbian ladies and nice gay boys next door were a long way from the underground culture depicted in this language. By the late 1970s and early 1980s within the queer community, censoring anxiety had focused on the queens, transsexuals, sex workers and gay men who sought sex in public spaces. These groups were among the most marginalised of the marginalised. In their worlds you could still hear the underground language because they were often socially isolated and spent proportionally more time in jail, where palarey merged with prison argots (*'boob slang'*) (Baker, 2002; Looser, 2004).

Gradually in the overground, palarey began to disappear. You don't see it on the placards of the middle class, university-educated gay liberation activists, and it didn't ornament their public protest speeches (Figure 3). Palarey was not the rhetoric of the queer political lobbyists, and it wasn't the language selected to permeate the airwaves of talkback radio or accompany the news features broadcast into the homes of middle New Zealand. Palarey and the parts of our culture that it represented were deemed to be an embarrassment.

As a people, we selectively silenced this part of our culture.

Figure 3. 'National Offenders' Day' demonstration.



Note. The author carrying a banner for Gay Rights of Waikato during a 400-strong night protest march on Queen Street Auckland on Friday 28 March 1980. The rhetoric of such marches was normally activist and liberationist and photographs of the period rarely showed the diverse social spectrum of queer people who appear in contemporary parades. © Photograph property of the author.

The agency of flames

So why would we bring this up?

Well, last year I began researching a documentary that will unpack some of the unaccounted stories surrounding the struggle in the 1980s for homosexual law reform in New Zealand. There is urgency about such initiatives because some of the people who sacrificed their safety and reputations at this time have died and others are living in retirement homes. Some remember only fragments of what happened, others don't want to recall incidents and attitudes that injured them - but a few have memories as sharp as tacks.

One of the reasons we have to quickly gather first-hand accounts of our histories is the need to push back on smoothed out, revisionist narratives that often litter the internet and sanitise what was a complex and fraught period of our history. One way that we can do this is to uncover embodied experience. Sometimes this evidence can be found in letters and photographs held in people's personal archives. But often such things do not survive death. Although some important material has been stored in the Kawe Mahara Queer Archives Aotearoa, or accounted in PrideNZ interviews, other histories are isolated and, when attempting to follow up on recollection, we encounter ashes.

Ashes take various forms. During the AIDS pandemic that spread through this country in the midst of the struggles for decriminalisation and human rights protection, increasing numbers of our activists died. Often their bodies were brought back into biological families for funerals and we were asked to stay away from the ceremonies. Many parents told their neighbours that their sons had died of cancer. They didn't want identifiable evidence of their child's queerness turning up at the church. This was very tough. At this time, even if we had lived in longstanding relationships with our partners, we had no legal claim in a will,

no protected 'family visitation' rights in hospitals and little say over a family's claim to retrieve and bury the body of their son. In an effort to protect themselves from the fear and prejudice surrounding AIDS at the time, biological families often burned personal letters, diaries and photographs so that evidence of their child's gayness was reduced to ashes. Instead, what was preserved was a photograph on the family mantelpiece, the single, smiling young bachelor who died too young. This memento had its cultural equivalent the previous generations, in the portraits of the 'maiden aunts' whose 'constant companions' were cut out of the picture, and whose personal mementos, photo albums and diaries were incinerated.

Smoke and ashes

Fire is a historical ensurer of invisibility. The idea that queerness can be purged with flames has many manifestations in the last hundred years but perhaps the most notorious occurred on 6 May 1933 when the German Student Union attacked the library of Magnus Hirschfeld's *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute of Sex Research). This was the only library of its kind in the world. It housed hundreds of volumes on sexuality and a substantial collection of biographies and patient records. The organisation also provided shelter for trans people who had come to Berlin seeking help (including Lili Elbe and Dora Richter). At the time of the attack, Dora was living and working in the institute as a paid housekeeper (Stroude, 2021). But on that night in May 1933, some four months after Hitler came to power, a mob ransacked the building and seized Hirschfeld's records. Although Hirschfeld had already fled to France, Dora was still there – then she disappeared.¹

It's not known how many people were murdered after the institute's records fell into the hands of the Gestapo and the police. The looted material was burned on the street outside the institute and anything that wasn't destroyed was later, gathered up and taken to Bebelplatz Square just outside Humbolt University. There, on 10 May these remnants were fed into another fire alongside books by Karl Marx, Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, Karl Kautsky and a plethora of other thinkers. The footage of this second burning was projected on cinema screens around the world. This is the fire that became history.

Although in the public mind, this second burning is populated with jackbooted SS officers, the conflagration was actually organised by the same students who attacked Hirschfeld's library. If you look at their faces in photographs of the period they are chilling because these could easily be kids from down the street (Figure 4). Whipped up by fear and propaganda, a month earlier their German Student Union (DSt) had proclaimed a nationwide literary purge or 'cleansing' (*Säuberung*) by fire. These student groups conducted public burnings of books across 34 university cities. Their attacks were closely followed by raids on bookstores, libraries, academic collections and publishers' warehouses, where material that did not align with the Nazi Party's values was seized and destroyed.

¹ For many years it was assumed that Dora had died either onsite or during interrogation. However, in April 1934 there is a record of her applying for a legal name change that was granted by the president of Czechoslovakia and it is thought that she may have lived in Ryžovna working as a lace maker until 1946. Currently, the most comprehensive sources of material relating to her life and fate are available here: <https://lili-elbe.de/blog/2023/04/dora-richter-baptism/> and here: <https://lili-elbe.de/blog/2024/09/dora-lived/>

Figure 4. German Student Union book burning (10 May 1933).



Note. University students gathering to burn material deemed “*Ungerman*” at Bebelplatz, Berlin.
Photographic collection: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-14598. CC-BY-SA 3.0.

The literature selected for these burnings had been compiled into blacklists by the librarian Wolfgang Herrmann. Before this material went up in flames, the students shouted lines from the *Fire Oaths* “Against decadence and moral decay! For discipline and decency in the family and the nation!” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d., para. 5).

Ninety years later, such rhetoric is not unfamiliar.

While the burnings were being filmed, Erich Kästner, a blacklisted ‘bachelor’ author, was watching unrecognised in the crowd as copies of his book *Fabian* were reduced to ashes. He described the night as ‘*Begräbniswetter*’ (funeral weather), because the rain was so heavy that the flames kept going out and the fire brigade had to be called in to pour petrol on the blaze.

When we view the footage of these fires many people don’t realise that it was queer books that were the first destroyed, a queer research library was the first attacked, and it was queer people who struggled to protect the first research archive. But the assault on our culture became an obscure footnote.

Today, if you visit the site of the Bebelplatz burning you will find on the ground a glass plate set into the paving stones. If you look down, there is an underground room with white, empty bookshelves. Symbolically, they have space for 20,000 books, as a reminder of the estimated number of publications that went up in flames on the 10 May. If you glance sideways, embedded into the cobblestones you can see a small plaque. It contains an epigraph written over a hundred years before the book burnings occurred. It contains a line from the play *Almansor* (1821), by the German poet and essayist Heinrich Heine. He said, “*Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen.*” (That was only a prelude; where they burn books, they will in the end - also burn people).

He knew ... He knew.

Closer to home

Heinrich Heine would have understood the acrid smell of smoke when, 53 years later, on 11 September 1986, Phil Parkinson picked his way despondently through the debris of an arson attack on the Boulcott Street queer resource centre in Wellington, New Zealand. The assailants were from a new generation but, their actions rhymed. These early archives of queer heritage housed documents stretching back into the 1970s. The facility provided resources to support law reform, associated legislation, queer health and to push back on state censorship. The centre was nothing majestic, but it housed what no museum was interested in protecting.

The next day when more of our people entered the site, the charred residue hit like a club (Figure 5). The attack had all the strangeness of hate crime. This was no ordinary burning. The arsonists had lit six separate fires using cleaning fluid and pages from archived magazines (Parkinson, 1986). Then one of them had shat on the floor. Someone had also painted the word 'FAG' on the hardwood timber using white typewriter correcting fluid from a tiny bottle that had been located somewhere in the room.

Figure 5. Aftermath of an arson attack (11 September 1986).



Note. Photograph of Phil Parkinson in the Boulcott Street Resource Centre after the arson attack.
© Photograph by David Hindley. Used with permission.

Fire and smoke ... but also resilience. Out of such assaults grew a determination to preserve as much of our nation's queer heritage as possible. From a torched building that is now a ghost in Wellington's landscape, initiatives like the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand began to take form. Such community-based responses to protecting knowledge have many parallels in this country. When New Zealand's universities and museums were not reaching out to protect our knowledge, we had to do it ourselves. This is why even today, our most extensive repositories have their roots, not in universities and museums, but in initiatives that grew up on the streets; PrideNZ.com with its 800+ audio recordings of events and interviews, the Charlotte Museum with its ephemera and records of Lesbian Sapphic herstory, and the Kawe Mahara Queer Archives Aotearoa, independently collate and protect culture. Our people gather what we can and digitise what we can afford to. We know that there is no guarantee that our

repositories and storytelling will be safe from the flames. Whether it's arsonists torching the Tauranga RainbowYOUTH and Gender Dynamix building (Figure 6) or graffitiing a pink church in Greymouth and setting fire to a rainbow flag on the front lawn or ongoing attacks on drag queens reading children's stories in local libraries – the practice of *säuberung* continues.

Figure 6. Arson attack in Tauranga (16 June 2022).



Note: The RainbowYOUTH and Gender Dynamix building after the fire at the Historic Village in Tauranga.
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Indecent exposure

An illustration of *säuberung* was made evident when, on 8 April 2024, the American Library Association (ALA) released its State of America's Libraries report. This annual summary showed that between 2022 and 2023, the number of books targeted for censorship in the US surged by 65%, reaching the highest levels ever documented by the association. The study recorded 1247 attempts to censor materials and services at libraries, schools and universities in 2023.

One might imagine diverse reasons for challenging or banning the 4240 unique titles noted in the report. Perhaps they instructed readers on how to improvise munitions, torture victims or manufacture harmful drugs. Perhaps they celebrated genocide or gratuitous violence or they were manifestos full of hate-based racist ideologies. But no – these were not the issues at stake. The five most frequently challenged books in the US in 2023 were *all* targeted because they were about LGBTQ+ identity (American Library Association, 2024).²

While in New Zealand it might be comfortable to decry such anti-queer censorship, it is useful to remember that this country also has a history of queer censorship that reached its apex in the years

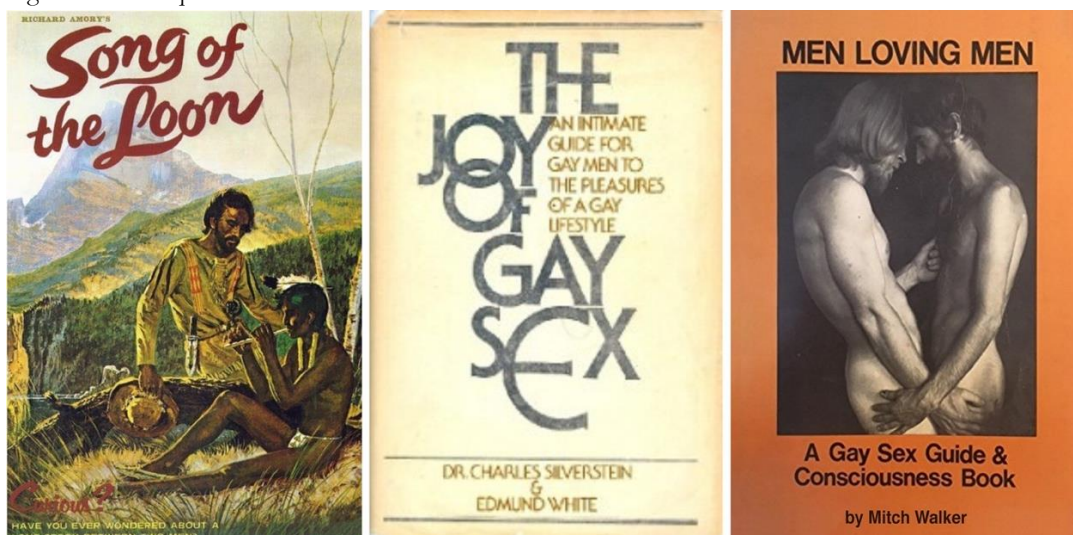
² Kobabe (2019), *Gender queer*; Johnson (2020), *All boys aren't blue*; Dawson (2015/2021), *This book is gay*; Chbosky (1999), *The perks of being a wallflower*; Curato (2020), *Flamer*.

leading up to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in July 1986. In 1993, a reflective New Zealand Indecent Publications Tribunal report noted that historically, even books:

... of non-erotic character were classified as indecent merely on the basis that they were intended for a homosexual market or that since homosexual acts were criminal offences, any matter dealing with them was dealing with crime and indecent on that basis. (Indecent Publications Tribunal, 17 December 1993. Decision no. 145/93)

In 1970 Richard Amory's gay frontier romance *Song of the loon* was deemed indecent and removed from bookshelves (Perry, 1980). Then in 1983 Mitch Walker's *Men loving men* and Edmund White and Charles Silverstein's *The joy of gay sex*, were also ruled indecent and banned (Figure 7). Even though the New Zealand Indecent Publications Tribunal described these books as "serious" and "restrained", they were also deemed to be "promoting and encouraging homosexual activity, which is of course a criminal offence in New Zealand, (and they were considered) liable to corrupt persons who might read them" (Indecent Publications Tribunal, 1983, Decision No. 1065). The banning of queer literature continued right up into the months directly preceding the decriminalisation of homosexuality. In 1985 at the height of the law reform protests, two more books, Clay Larkin's *A different love* and John Preston's *I once had a master* were ruled indecent because they were seen to "dwell on and glamorise the sexual side of homosexual relationships" (Indecent Publications Tribunal, 1985, Decision No. 4/85).

Figure 7. Three queer books banned in New Zealand.



Note: It wasn't until 1993 that these books were ruled not indecent following a request for reconsideration from the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand Trust. (Indecent Publications Tribunal, 1993. Decision No. 145/93). © Photograph property of the author.

But such records of queer censorship reflect only the official picture. In the late 1970s I worked as the art director for *New Zealand gay news*. At this time our international updates on queer rights were smuggled through customs in magazines that were under constant threat of interception. At airports our luggage was checked, and if hidden between the covers of mainstream publications, magazines like *The Advocate* or *Camp Ink* were found, we faced seizure, humiliation and threats of prosecution. We were deemed to be importing indecent literature. Confiscation was a standard occurrence.

The nature of change

But of course when you are marginalised, accessing and disseminating information becomes a persistent endeavour. We may have moved a long way from the days when we were not allowed to advertise queer

events in newspapers (Laurie, Te Awekōtuku, & Glamuzina, 2018) and had to beg universities and polytechnics for permission to host our queer conferences – but the journey towards enablement continues.

On the surface, universities now appear to accommodate queer scholarship. The inclusion may be argued as part of a wider shift in thinking that is enshrined in the 2020 Education and Training Act, which in Section 268, outlines the five characteristics of a university. While the first of these emphasises the necessity to develop independent thought, the last two relate directly to queer safety. The fourth provision states that universities must be repositories of knowledge and expertise. They have to be the place where information can be kept safe, where knowledge can find its voice, and from whence it can be distributed. The fifth characteristic states that universities must “accept a role as critic and conscience of society” (Education and Training Act, 2020; Section 268 (2d, i).

Such characteristics are laudable and they look good in theory but universities have not always been good at these things. Historically they have expelled students suspected of engaging in same sex activities (Dilley, 2002; Graves, 2018; Renn, 2010). While such things may not occur in New Zealand universities today, queer students still report feeling ‘othered’ (Bullough et al., 2006; Evans et al., 2017; Garvey & Dolan, 2021; Ghaziani, 2011; Tetreault et al., 2013), and universities continue to reinforce heterop professionalism among staff (Davies & Neustifter, 2021), and organise themselves along gender binary assumptions (Pryor, 2017).

We are on a journey with universities. Our cultures of preservation have not been built within them but, many of our scholars seek to develop research skills inside their programmes. Universities also have access to unique resources and networks. The struggle we currently face is to shift institutional mindsets away from ally-signalling and on to tangible, funded support initiatives. This requires more than placing an institutional banner in a Rainbow parade, or hanging a coloured flag from a multistorey building. It is about funding scholarships, research assistantships, and mentoring. It’s about supporting cultural initiatives with targeted and accountable investment.

The birth of Ia~

Which brings us to Ia~. In discussing this initiative, I am not intending to promote one university over another. We are all making progress. However, Auckland University of Technology (AUT) is where I work and it has begun gathering statistical evidence of its commitment to queer scholarship. Currently 1996 of the university’s enrolled students identify as Rainbow, with over two thirds of these studying in bachelor’s degrees across Health, Environmental Sciences, Design and Technology. The demographically young, queer population has been increasing since 2019, with 71% of these students currently under the age of 24 (AUT Strategy and Planning, 2024). Twenty-five years ago AUT was the first university in New Zealand to develop a Rainbow Staff Network. It was the first to achieve the Rainbow Tick and to appoint a full-time Student Inclusion Manager (Rainbow). It also offers scholarships in partnership with the Rainbow NZ Charitable Trust (Salesa, 2023).

Perhaps because the university is known for its investment in queer scholarship, in 2022 a number of our staff began discussing the increasing number of requests for research information that we were fielding. The inquiries came from very different sources. We were being emailed by people in retirement villages who were writing their memoirs, by parents seeking New Zealand research on raising trans or non-binary children, from students in secondary schools completing assignments, and from organisations wanting to gain current insights into queer identities. As we talked about how we might be more useful, an initiative

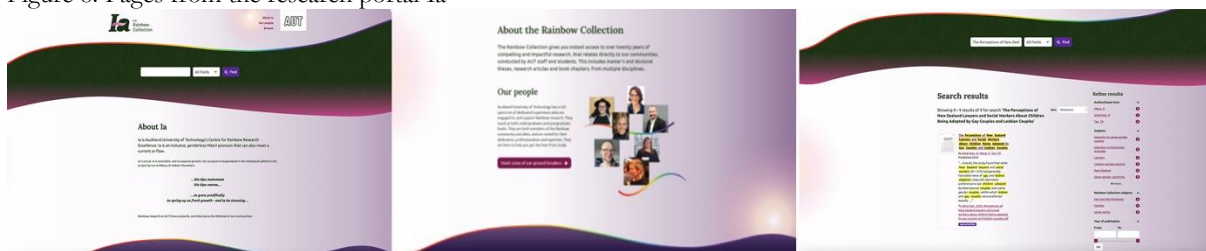
began to take form. We realised that substantial bodies of research generated within the university were not freely available and we were not operating effectively as a bridge to knowledge.

So we approached the university and proposed an ‘easy to use’ research portal that would give anybody in the world direct access to queer research developed inside the institution. In a first sweep of digitised postgraduate research we had found over 80 queer theses amongst the 6100 studies available. We knew that there was also a large body of relevant research dating back 20 years that had been published by staff in peer reviewed journals. We were aware that this content was potentially available because the university had migrated its research repository to open source software in 2008.

Working with library staff we designed a portal where queer academic pride might take physical form. We stepped away from the iconography of rainbow flags and cheering crowds and sought something deeper; something related to connection and outreach. We worked with Dr. Robert Pouwhare to find a name and deeper kaupapa for the portal. After consideration, he gifted us ‘Ia’. Ia is a beautiful word. It is a pronoun without gender that refers to all people (humanity), but it also means to flow or to move outwards.

We knew that to work effectively the portal had to be easy for non-academics to use. So we created a system that enables someone to type in what they are looking for. The portal will then automatically bring up any related queer thesis, published article, report, book or book chapter written by an academic inside the university. When you click on a research title, up will come a summary. The site will then locate similar items for you. Any of this research can be downloaded for free (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Pages from the research portal Ia~



Note. On the site you can also access a description of the collection and queer staff profiles. Currently Ia~ contains 106 items in its collection, including master’s and doctoral theses, staff research articles, chapters and books. The site can be accessed at: <https://ia.aut.ac.nz/vufind/>

Within one year of the portal’s release, it had accrued 111,971 file downloads and the repository had been accessed from more than 20 countries (including many that currently criminalise same sex relationships) (D Space Download Statistics & Google Analytics, 2024).

We see this ensurance of, and access to, queer research as important because New Zealand universities have increasingly become a preferred destination for intellectual refugees from countries where it is not safe to study as an openly queer person. These nations include 40 that currently criminalise private, consensual sexual activity between women, 64 that criminalise same-sex relationships between men, 12 that kill us, and 14 that legally persecute individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth (Human Dignity Trust, 2024).

As queer academics we know that the word ‘international’ represents a more constrained geography than what is experienced by our non-queer colleagues. There are countries that we can never visit, nations that ban our research and others where we will be in danger if we pursue a scholarly exchange. But from

where we stand, we find ways of preserving and enabling safety. We grow our people, we work to preserve access, and we push back against isolation. We have learned across generations that the agency of oppression is silence.

Silence is the sound of empty library shelves, it is the sound of under resourced opportunities ... and it is the sound of ashes.

In 1984 the black, lesbian poet Audre Lorde said, “My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you” (p. 41).

She was right.

We do not accept silence.

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