

## I ka mo'olelo nō ke ola: In History There Is Life

Na wai ho'i ka 'ole o ke akamai, he alahela i ma'a i ka hele 'ia e o'u mau mākua.

Why shouldn't I know when it is a road often traveled by my parents.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary Kawena Pukui, *Ōlelo No'eaun: Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1983), 251.

Liholiho's retort to yet another foreigner who praised his wisdom may have been uttered in exasperation while he was visiting London in 1824. We will never know if these flatterers were simply ingratiating themselves to royalty in the hopes of receiving a lavish tip, or if the praise was offered in earnest. Those who met Liholiho may have been genuinely astounded that a heathen king could be so intelligent, well-spoken, and well-fitted to appear in society. Liholiho, however, found fault with these intrusive statements of approval and replied in a tone that revealed his irritation. "*Na wai? Who?* is bereft of wisdom, for it is a path frequently traversed by my parents".

Liholiho's statement is a clear expression of sovereignty spoken from a place of confidence and mastery, assertive of his intelligence and chiefly status. The often traveled road that Liholiho described was more than a metaphoric reference to many generations of ancestors whose knowledge was tested through practiced application, refined through ingenuity and skill, and proven through political supremacy. Liholiho's statement was also a rebuke intended to remind the ignorant speaker of his lowly position in relation to Liholiho's high chiefly eminence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> My translation, "who is bereft of wisdom", provides a first tier of meaning, whereas Pukui's translation applies the basic phrase to the Chief's person – that becomes the basis for the rebuke: "Why shouldn't I know!"

In this brief essay I appropriate Liholiho's statement, offering a more expansive translation, one that might apply to my generation and those who follow. Na wai ho'i ka 'ole o ke akamai, he alahela i ma'a i ka hele 'ia e o'u mau kūpuna. Who of us is bereft of wisdom, for it is a road frequently traversed by my ancestors. My interpretation of this statement broadens Liholiho's claim of knowledge to include all Hawaiians – for as a people collectively we are the inheritors of rich wisdom traditions. These historical traditions have been passed down to us and to the world in oral, auditory, written, and published forms. Recognition of the scale of this inheritance has yet to permeate our communities, and has just begun to make an impression in scholarly discourse. Although it will be difficult to supplant the commonly recognized signifiers associated with Hawai'i that have made it a popular global tourist destination, this new scholarship will supply new and important understandings of Hawai'i's history. This work is currently being engaged across disciplines and in communities both at home and around the world. It is work that needs to be done in order to get at the deeper currents of Hawaiian knowledge, which I believe has much to offer the world.

Here I suggest that the future of Hawaiian historical scholarship lies in the careful interpretation of a vast untapped reservoir of Hawaiian-language source

---

material. I will also share a few of my own techniques for interpreting sources premised on Hawaiian ways of thinking and speaking, which I have been calling a kaona-conscious historical method.<sup>3</sup>

Due to innovations in American print culture in the early nineteenth century – and due in large part to the printing presses brought by the missionaries to the islands, the educational imperatives of the chiefs, and the overwhelming response of the people – Hawaiians began to write and publish Hawaiian histories, genealogies, chants, stories, prayers, and traditions less than a decade after the death of Kamehameha I and the arrival of the missionaries in 1820. Because of these developments, continuity in the passing on of Hawaiian oral historical and cultural traditions into writing and print may be unparalleled in the history of native peoples in the Pacific and United States. Add to this cultural treasure trove the daily reportage, news, opinions, advertisements, manuscripts, journals, business records, legal documents, and all the papers necessary to govern a kingdom, and a complex and important ‘record’ of native peoples’ lives produced in a native language begins to emerge.<sup>4</sup> Hawai‘i arguably has the largest literature base of any native language in the Pacific, perhaps all of native North America, exceeding 1,000,000 pages of printed text, 125,000 of which were Hawaiian-language newspapers published between 1834 and 1948.<sup>5</sup>

While a handful of historians and anthropologists have drawn on Hawaiian-language sources in their work, many scholars have relied upon a small pool of previously translated Hawaiian-language materials that are available, leading to what Anthropologist and Hawaiian Language Professor M. Puakea Nogelmeier termed “a discourse of sufficiency”.<sup>6</sup> The translation of works that have become known as the ‘canon’ consists of manuscripts as well as serialized entries from the Hawaiian-language newspapers on history and traditional religious practice by Hawaiian intellectuals living in the nineteenth century. These translations of newspaper articles make up a large collection, known as the Hawaiian Ethnological Notes (HEN). Ethnographers and folklorists, who worked at or were in some way attached to the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, commissioned or undertook these translations from the 1890s through the 1950s as sources to fuel their writings on Hawaiian history and culture. Most of these scholars worked with Hawaiian experts who helped them translate and interpret the cultural and religious content of the texts. The canon includes the work of the ‘big four’ Hawaiian intellectuals: Davida Malo, Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, John Papa Ii, and K. Z. Kepelino Keauokalani.<sup>7</sup>

For all of the technical and theoretically sophisticated work of historians, anthropologists, legal historians, political scientists, and religious scholars writing about Hawai‘i, many have remarkably underutilized the most important tool available to the scholar: language. While many historians writing native history have had to create innovative methods to deal with a dearth of native language source materials,<sup>8</sup> historians writing about Hawai‘i and its global and oceanic connections during the nineteenth and early twentieth century do not face this difficulty because sources written and published in Hawaiian are not lacking. And yet, despite the huge amount

<sup>3</sup> I develop kaona consciousness to some extent in my essay, “Navigating Uncharted Oceans of Meaning: *Kaona* as Interpretive and Historical Method”, *PMLA*, 125.3 (2010), 663–669.

<sup>4</sup> It will take some effort to move Hawaiian historical scholarship out of strip-mining for ethnographic momi, meaning the preference for digging for cultural pearls (momi) in the source material. Reading sources as examples of authentic tradition and culture is the norm rather than analyzing them in order to construct history.

<sup>5</sup> For a more in-depth description of the size, format and number of papers published per year over this span of time see M. Puakea Nogelmeier, *Mai Pa‘a i ka Leo: Historical Voice in Hawaiian Primary Materials, Looking Forward and Listening Back* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Nogelmeier, *Mai Pa‘a i ka Leo*, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Two of these authors, Malo and Ii were advisors to the ali‘i, and were trained in priestly traditions as keepers of different aspects of Hawaiian culture and oral tradition. Both men served in the court (aloali‘i) of Kamehameha I. See M. Puakea Nogelmeier, *Mai Pa‘a i ka Leo*, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the*

*Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History from Indian Country* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> The number of scholars across disciplines currently working with Hawaiian-language sources is increasing. See for example the work of Carlos Andrade, Noelani Arista, Cristina Bacchilega, Leilani Basham, Kamanamaikalani Beamer, John Charlot, Malcolm Chun, Kihei de Silva, Kahikina de Silva, Keola Donaghy, Kauanoe Kamana, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, Craig Howes, Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa, Kekuhi Kanahale, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada, Larry Kimura, Lalepa Koga, Kale Langlas, Kapali Lyon, M. Puakea Nogelmeier, Kapā Oliveira, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, Hiapo Perreira, Kalena Silva, Noenoe Silva, Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman, Ty Tengan, No'eau Warner, Pila Wilson, Laiana Wong, and Kanalu Young..

<sup>10</sup> These scholars are indebted to the fine work of our kūpuna (elders), Mary Kawena Pukui, Edith McKinzie, and Rubellite Kawena Johnson. I am unable to provide the names of all of the native speakers (mānaleo), kūpuna, whose knowledge guided us, because the list would be too long to include here.

<sup>11</sup> Anishinaabe, Wampanoag, Ojibwe, Māori, and Hawaiian scholars and linguists in the coming years will re-cast histories of encounter through the skillful interpolation and interpretation of native languages sources. See the

of written and published Hawaiian-language material, the majority of histories produced about Hawai'i have been written as if these sources do not exist. If the last two centuries of Hawaiian historiography has been characterized by 'sufficiency', the future of Hawaiian history will be shaped by the scholarship of those who are adept at researching, reading, and interpreting Hawaiian-language source material.

The careful use of Hawaiian-language sources<sup>9</sup> in the writing of history, as well as innovative ways of interpreting these and other sources thus mark an important shift in the writing of Hawaiian history.<sup>10</sup> The work produced on Hawai'i will also make a significant contribution to writing on the history of encounter between foreign and native peoples since linguistic and cultural analysis of materials written by Hawaiians and others can add much to how historians approach histories of encounter.<sup>11</sup> Hawaiian history may also ironically provide one of the broadest testing grounds to begin to answer the oft-asked question "how *did* natives think?"<sup>12</sup>

Cultural literacy and linguistic fluency are necessary skills for all historians to cultivate. This statement would not be considered revolutionary if I were writing about historical scholarship in fields where the source language has some political power and contemporary cultural cache, or of languages that are thriving as the language of government or the *lingua franca* of capitalism. Simply put, Hawaiian is an indigenous language, one of innumerable languages almost eradicated towards the end of the nineteenth century through complex processes of global imperialism. Yet I find that I still have to continually make the argument (for what should be an obvious statement!) that cultural and linguistic fluency in Hawaiian is necessary in order to write Hawaiian history.

Linguistic facility, however, is not sufficient for the task of writing history. Training oneself to read, interpret, and translate sources is a constant endeavor. When first approaching a source, I pay attention to the genre of writing that I am focused upon: is the piece a mo'olelo (history, story), is it a mele (song), or any different number of chant or prayer forms – ko'ihonua (creation, genealogy), kanikau (lament), mele inoa (name song), etc.? Very often I need to familiarize myself with a particular genre by locating other productions or compositions similar to the one I am studying. Through a process of comparison, I am able to apprehend the conventions of any given genre. Once I feel comfortable identifying some of these conventions, I go back to the source I was looking at to see if the composer or writer has followed any of these conventions, if the piece is highly innovative, and to what extent it plays with or seems to violate these conventions. These are standard literary techniques employed by scholars who interpret texts.

After paying attention to genre, I isolate words and rhetorical or idiomatic phrases that seem specific to the literary form. Here is where my practice considers the Hawaiian cultural particulars governing a text. If the piece is a kanikau (lament), I expect to see certain kinds of imagery, somewhat standard allusions: the enumeration of wind, rain, and place names, or embodiments of grief – in the bowed limbs of a tree sodden after a heavy rain, for example. Chants and prayers to certain deities, like Pele the akua wahine (goddess) of the volcano, employ particular sets of words

---

descriptive of her connection to home places, the ‘geography’ of the volcano and her volatile temper and loves.<sup>13</sup> Some pieces of writing relevant to my work participate in the ever expanding nineteenth-century public sphere, authors’ contributions to political and genealogical debates, diplomacy, law, economic discussions, and trade. Writers of these subjects employed particular sets of words, phrases, and modes of idiomatic expression that are fixed, but that repeated with variation over time. They also experimented with and engaged British and American literary conventions of the time. Linguistic facility is simply the baseline necessary to begin my work: cultural literacy or rather cultural frames of vision and interpretation need to be constantly honed if the end result is to be a rich contribution to our knowledge of worlds past.

In order to increase my facility to interpret sources, I isolate phrases and words that stand out in the piece I am studying. I train my ear to listen for these words and phrases, as a means to understanding the weight, gravity and import of words people used to describe or communicate any given situation. Instead of using these sources to understand how Hawaiians thought in the moment, I seek literacy in Hawaiian modes of thought and action in order to better engage my sources. To facilitate this process, I search the online Hawaiian-language newspaper database to locate the word or phrase as it has been deployed in other written texts, as a way to gauge the range of meanings words and phrases carry and how they resonate in relation to others. Importantly, these include oral traditions that have subsequently been published or written down. In addition to understanding speech acts or writing in the context out of which they were produced, I try to locate the important word or phrases in other ‘texts’, manuscript or published sources that precede or are subsequent in time to the source with which I am working. After amassing a number of examples, I try to figure out when a word, phrase or concept has been introduced into Hawaiian discourse. Note that this information does not simply refer to publication date, since many times writers are recording spoken transactions that occurred years if not generations before. These spoken transactions differ from summaries or reconstructed descriptions and are often preceded by aural/oral mnemonic cues that point to a history or story being passed down *mai loko mai o ka waha* (from mouth to mouth).<sup>14</sup> Common cues I have identified are ‘wahi a’ (according to), and ‘ua ‘ōlelo ‘ia’ (it was said). Paying close attention to seemingly innocuous phrases like these can also help us avoid the mistake of conflating multiple oral ‘texts’ or traditions into a single source.

This process enables me to perceive a larger conversation, in a way that Hawaiian intellectuals participating in an oral tradition would have *heard* it. For these intellectuals were responsible for maintaining oral traditions from the deep past and their own presents drawing upon their historically trained memories as a repository from which they could provide important information on demand, advice to ali‘i for example, based on past utterance and present sense. At times they were called upon to craft ‘new’ traditions in the form of *mele* (songs), *oli* (chant, prayer), and *mo‘olelo* (history, story.)

work of Anton Treuer, Heidi Bohaker, and Jessie Little Doe Baird.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook For Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> See ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, “Pele’s Appeal: Mo‘olelo, Kaona, and Huluhia in ‘Pele and Hi‘iaka’ Literature (1860–1928)”, PhD Thesis (Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> More discussion needs to occur in order to better understand the pedagogical discipline that went into training the Hawaiian aural/oral intellect. See Mary Kawena Pukui, “How Legends Were Taught” (Honolulu: HEN Ethnographic Notes 1602-1606. Nd. Bishop Museum Archives).

---

<sup>15</sup> See also Arista, “Histories of Unequal Measure: Euro-American Encounters With Hawaiian Governance and Law, 1796–1827”, PhD thesis (Waltham, Brandeis University, 2010) and “Navigating Uncharted Oceans”.

The ‘proofs’ or models for this method of reading and hearing that I am developing come from multiple sources.<sup>15</sup> As an active chanter for Nā Wa‘a Lālani Kahuna o Pu‘ukohola from 1998 to 2004, I had been tasked with the responsibility of introducing groups presenting ho‘okupu (offerings and gifts) before the ali‘i at yearly Ho‘oku‘ikahi ceremonies. The process required me to accept a group’s descriptive kāhea (call) to enter and come before the assembled kāhuna (priests) and ali‘i (chiefs). Their chant included information about where a group came from in poetic terms that often included genealogical information, and wind, rain, and place names – all important terms of connection between a particular place and group of people. In my chanted response, only if I paid close attention to what was being said to me in the kāhea would I be able to produce an artful and intelligent reply drawing upon important key names, words, and poetic allusions that stood out in the original chant. From that information, I was expected to haku (compose) an equally eloquent chant introducing the group, along with their gift to the ali‘i. This chant would link places, people, families, and gods, drawing upon the information presented to me, but was expected to be interspersed with poetic flourishes featuring linked phrases of related significance. This activity cultivates an ability to isolate words, immediately identify their significance in a web of relation to places, important ritual allusions, and genealogy. This practice presupposed a lot of previous knowledge in literature, religion, genealogy, and place, and in the year between ceremonies, chanters would practice and study in order to be ready for next year’s event. Historically, stacking the incidents of usage of a key word or word phrase sheds light upon the broadest and narrowest ways in which a word was employed. By stacking usage in this way, I not only come to an understanding of the different meanings and valences which adhere to a given word, but I am now empowered to start mapping out a web of associated meanings in which the word or phrase is embedded and lives. A simple example of this can be expressed if we consider the word wai and a portion of its web of meaning. The word wai means fresh water, and not surprisingly is also symbolic of health and life. The Hawaiian word for wealth is a reduplication of the word, waiwai, and so if I were to consider the ways in which the word was deployed in discussions regulating access to water, or kānāwai, as opposed to its application in terms of monetary or property rights, we would have some idea of the way in which usage in various discourses can tell us something about the particular meanings of a term or concept and its deeper significances in political and economic discussions.

The meanings of any words and word phrases are constructed by their relation to one another and to other words that orbit this web. Words in Hawaiian share resonance with other words. It is this associative way of constructing thought through the power of words that has inspired my methodology on writing Hawaiian history, and the history of encounter in particular. This approach to understanding language helps me to interpret the verbal and written Hawaiian exchanges between Hawaiians, and between Hawaiians and foreigners, in a very new way. Words can no longer be taken at face value. This process allows me to keep building cultural

---

history over time, by tracking the changes in fields of meaning over time. A new project undertaken by Harvard University and Google allows scholars to track the appearance of a word in works digitized on Google Books in English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese. With this program researchers can see the passages in books in which a word appears demarcated by time period; the program also tracks changes in usage over time providing a visual representation of how often any given word appears in print. Historians using this information can hypothesize about the different causes of a word's popularity. For example, it is no surprise that the word 'Hawai'i' skyrockets in popularity in English publications during WWII and shortly thereafter. Hawaiian scholars like me are left to catalog these incidents using their own range of reading and cataloging as a baseline.

I undertake this training because if a researcher is not able to confidently evaluate the words and actions of the Hawaiian actors in any history, then she cannot write an accurate history. If I am missing an apparatus to interpret, for example, what constitutes authority and power (mana), or how Hawaiians consulted mo'olelo of historical events or evoked past utterances as a means to gain insight into resolving difficulties in their present, then how indeed can I know how to tell the story? What will I use for the basis of what constitutes logical action for the historical actors I am seeking to understand?<sup>16</sup> These questions should spur thought-provoking discussions about how scholars proceed to write histories of encounter, colonization and imperialism.

My method of understanding sources is premised on an important idea, that Hawaiians had their own history and constructions of the Hawaiian past. It seems impossible to write about Hawaiian history without acknowledging this simple idea: that the Hawaiian actors in any history compared themselves and their own actions in relation to and in accordance with their own sense of history and their place in it. This is a simple idea that I think many historians overlook when writing native history, often imposing an a-historic logic upon a past alien to them. How can the actions and words of Hawaiians be understood if these are separated from Hawaiian formulations of the past? Hawaiians acted and spoke in ways that were consonant with their own sense(s) of history, which completely diverged from Euro-American visions of history or the world at the time.

I have lately applied this thinking and my approach to words and stacking usage to historical contexts.<sup>17</sup> Meaning is also constructed to some extent from the (historical) contexts in which a word phrase or utterance appears or is often evoked. But what I want to draw attention to here is the way that I go about understanding a phrase or word by excavating the historical context in which it is spoken or deployed.

A quick example of this can be found if we consider the famous 'olelo no'eau (proverb),

I ka 'olelo nō ke ola, i ka 'olelo nō ka make  
In speech there is life, in speech there is death.

<sup>16</sup> Logic is inclusive of not just a thinking process, but also worldview, religious practice, ritual and belief, and a number of other discrete ontological Western categories that are not commensurable in Hawaiian whose parameters are just beginning to be rediscovered.

<sup>17</sup> In "Histories of Unequal Measure", I reconsider an 1825 kapu (ban) on women going to ships for prostitution by locating historical moments when kapu were applied to a woman's or women's bodies. Most historiography dismisses the kapu as missionary imposition, rather than legitimate Hawaiian religio-legal construct.

---

Although I have not conducted a full search of historical incidents where this proverb has been evoked, of the examples that turned up, one was an important trace of the Hawaiian phrase in English as used by American Board missionary Rev. William Richards before an ‘Aha‘ōlelo (chiefly council). In my essay, “Navigating Uncharted Oceans of Meaning: *Kaona* as Interpretive and Historical Method”, I provide a fuller analysis of this episode and its context. Here, however, I am interested in describing how this find made me further investigate the multiple and diverse applications of what has become stabilized as ‘proverb’ in Hawaiian language discourse. Richards’ proper evocation of the phrase before this council, undoubtedly in Hawaiian, was deployed as an ingenious means of defense. In 1827, Richards met with the chiefs to answer questions about a charge of libel brought against him by the English Consul in the islands. The chiefs were split as to whether or not Rev. Richards should be turned over to the Consul who demanded that Richards be tried by the English. One chiefly faction believed strongly that this was an affair that should be settled between foreigners, and that the council should take no part in it.

Gauging that these chiefs might gain the upper hand, Rev. Richards sought to place himself under the protection of the chiefs sympathetic to him by claiming that he was not a foreigner, but instead their subject.

It is for you to deliver us over to such hands as you see proper, for you are our chiefs. We have left our own country and can not now receive the protection of its laws .... If I am a bad man or have broken the laws of your country, it is for you to try, and acquit or condemn me – you alone are my judges – it is for you to send me from your shores, or protect me here. *With you is my life, and with you my death.* The whole is with you.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> William Richards to Jeremiah Evarts, 6 December 1827, (ABCFM–Hawai‘i Papers), emphasis is my own.

Here Richards clearly refers to what has become one of the best known Hawaiian proverbs, both at home and internationally. Today, this proverb is interpreted in many different ways and is generally applied to individuals, suggesting that one’s good words will produce good results, whereas words of negative connotation can cause the speaker or others, or some activity connected to that speech, to come to bad ends. The phrase has also been used to valorize the efforts of teachers and students teaching, learning and speaking Hawaiian, and to respect the mana (power, authority) of Hawaiian language by fostering its longevity.

But Rev. Richards’ application of this phrase to his own person, “with you is my life, and with you is my death”, suggests a deeper meaning, one that has historical traction and gives us insight into *whose* words when spoken meant life or death. Richards’ use of the proverb in this context before the ‘aha‘ōlelo illuminates the companion phrase that is implicit and need not be spoken. (Aia) I kā ‘oukou ‘ōlelo nō ku‘u ola, (Aia) I kā ‘oukou ‘ōlelo nō ku‘u make: Everything, my life, depends upon your words, the words of the ali‘i. Richards’ ingenious use of one part of the proverb, undoubtedly triggered his chiefly judges to complete the phrase.

I use these literary and exegetical techniques to interpret documentary sources that are reporting what people said and thought. These techniques also raise to the

---

fore the cultural power of language, since the way to know that a statement or utterance has historical gravitas depends in large part not only upon whose mouth it comes out of, but also if the person is able to speak in a way that is received as culturally and politically authoritative speech. It is no wonder then that Richards, who had been in the islands for a mere five years when he spoke these important words before the ‘Aha, eventually resigned from the mission and contributed in important ways to the formation of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Stumbling upon this phrase *in English* in a mission report was a find I did not expect.<sup>19</sup> It assisted me in confirming a theory of mine, that the phrase has primarily a religio-legal basis, and that it could be applied directly to the speech acts and judgment of ali‘i in an official capacity in the institution of the ‘aha‘ōlelo. In early western historiography the idea that a chief could have the power of life or death over the people has often been deployed to denounce Hawaiian forms of political power and governance. American missionaries, as the first such historians, employed this argument regularly to belittle chiefly power, condemning it as tyrannical. But as Rev. Richards’ situation illustrates chiefly power could be mediated by the voices and council of *other chiefs* in the ‘aha‘ōlelo. The proverb we have freighted with cultural meaning in the twentyfirst century had a previous life as warning and bore vital information for our ancestors, information that many people today have no knowledge of. The ali‘i had the power of life or death over the people through their words, but words also included prayer, chant, commands, decisions, findings, and judgments. These pronouncements occurred in specific contexts and rarely stemmed from mere whim or impulse. Richards’ situation gives us a rare glimpse of what transpired in the meetings of an early nineteenth century ‘aha‘ōlelo, and this knowledge leads me to seek out other official and officious places where chiefs were likely to make pronouncements of such gravity: religious ceremonies in the heiau (temple), diplomatic meetings of different Hawaiian chiefly groups, and between foreigners and chiefs. What information this seeking will yield derives directly from my method of stacking usage, building webs of meaning and resonance that extend to the comparison of historical contexts in which words and word phrases were evoked.

The topic of sovereignty and its relationship to history is important, and I would argue that a sovereign sense of history would be one that pursues inquiry in all manner of sources in Hawaiian *and* English. For too many years, Hawaiian-language sources have been ignored by historians, while in Hawai‘i a backlash against the use of English-language sources and the writings of American missionaries in particular is currently in vogue. Hawaiians did not live their lives isolated or cut off from the outside world; beginning in the late eighteenth century, the worlds people lived in, they built together: native and foreigners of different class, ethnicity, and nationality.

I hope that I have illustrated the necessity for historians and students of history to cultivate their skill in the reading and interpretation of Hawaiian-language sources. The question of sovereignty is one of confidence, mastery, intelligence and power,

<sup>19</sup> I work comfortably with both English and Hawaiian-language sources, and in writing my dissertation, I used this technique to listen for important ideas and phrases that resonated with the histories of the American missionaries. Thus, I search not only for eye- but ‘ear’-witnesses to historical events.

---

and I believe that developing our own methods premised upon past and present practice is one step in that direction. I have not sought after a historical method that runs along this pathway well-trodden by our ancestors out of a need to make a superior claim to cultural authenticity, but for its obvious suitability to the modes of thought and inquiry that shaped the very sources that I must use as the basis for writing any Hawaiian history, or histories of encounter and imperialism. In writing good history we will discover the lives of our kūpuna: *I kea mo'olelo nō ke ola. In history there is life.*