

# MĀ‘AWE PONO

## A HAWAIIAN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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### PART I:

*Mā‘awe Pono* is a Hawaiian research methodology that emerged gradually over the past three decades, awakened into consciousness through intense, heuristic contemplation, extensive, in-depth, informal study, and meticulous, rigorous action research spearheaded by the Kū-A-Kanaka Indigenous Research Institute, involving thousands of Native Hawaiian co-researchers. The term *mā‘awe pono* was carefully chosen, after months of prayer, reflection, and ceremony. Hawaiians believe that words have a powerful ability to influence and impact outcomes, as expressed in the proverb, “*I ka ‘ōlelo nō ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo nō ka make*. Life indeed is in words; death indeed is in words” (Pukui 1983, 129).

*Mā‘awe* in Hawaiian refers to a narrow path or trail. *Pono* is everything that is good and right from a Hawaiian perspective. The term *mā‘awe pono* according to Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui refers to the (right) track of honor and responsibility (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972, 19). This name was chosen for several reasons. For one, just like the ancient trails constructed from smooth river rocks enabled our ancestors to move across miles and miles of rough ‘*a‘a* lava terrain, so does *Mā‘awe Pono* aim to provide a path for Hawaiian researchers to find solutions to current obstacles and issues, restore justice, and bring about *pono* (righteousness).

Moreover, all involved in the research process must purposefully choose to walk the narrow trail of honor and responsibility to ensure that all aspects of the research journey are ethical, or *pono*, and congruent with Hawaiian cultural values and beliefs. Indeed, *Mā‘awe Pono* holds both the primary researcher, as well as all of the co-researchers, to the highest ethical standards. Specifically, *Mā‘awe Pono* encourages all involved in the research to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors and follow their teachings to the point where Hawaiian values and practices permeate all aspects of the research process. This type of research can be defined as *mo‘okū‘auhau* (genealogy) as methodology, since it implies the honoring of the past, which Hawaiians call *ka wā imua*, or the time before us.

This paper begins with an exploration of the philosophical and ethical foundations of *Mā‘awe Pono*, deeply rooted in a traditional Hawaiian worldview. This view is reflected in hundreds of Hawaiian proverbs (*‘ōlelo no‘eau*), which inform both the theoretical, as well as the practical aspects of *Mā‘awe Pono*. This chapter introduces the methods that make *Mā‘awe Pono* unique and provides a detailed explication of the eight phases of *Mā‘awe Pono* that constitute the research design, and ends with a brief overview of the evolution of *Mā‘awe Pono*, and the process of morphing from a mixed methodology into to a distinctly Hawaiian research method. The hope is that it will inspire the next generations of Indigenous researchers, in Hawai‘i and beyond, to create new, culturally driven research methodologies, aligned with native worldviews and designed to advance native people, protect our land, and perpetuate our languages and cultures.

### **Ethical Foundations**

*Mā‘awe Pono* constitutes research for Hawaiians, by Hawaiians, using Hawaiian ways to advance things Hawaiian and to protect and perpetuate Hawaiian assets and resources, including Hawaiian land, culture, and language. Fortunately, as the motto of Kū-A-Kanaka states, “When Hawaiians thrive, everyone benefits!” While the research is Hawaiian-focused, the outcomes are anticipated to benefit all of Hawai‘i. As a Hawaiian research methodology *Mā‘awe Pono* is aligned with the philosophy of *kū-a-kanaka*, which

can be translated as “to stand as a Hawaiian,” or “to be Hawaiian.” This means that our research is reflective of and aligned with the actions, attitudes, and lifestyles of those who identify as Hawaiian and purposefully, actively, and openly perpetuate the traditions and values of our Hawaiian ancestors in this modern age. While this population is quite diverse, basic tenets shared include participating in Hawaiian arts and sports, speaking the language, practicing Hawaiian protocol, eating from the land and the sea, and striving toward an independent Hawai‘i.

*Mā‘awe Pono* flows from and is rooted in this Hawaiian knowledge base of *kū-a-kanaka*, grounded in hundreds of Hawaiian *‘ōlelo no ‘eau*. These proverbs contain clear messages regarding the approach and the purpose of research, and of life. Until the last generation of *mānaleo*, or native speakers of Hawaiian, passed away a few decades ago, the use of proverbs permeated Hawaiian conversations. Today we are fortunate to be able to consult *‘Ōlelo No ‘eau—Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings* (Pukui 1983), an invaluable resource of almost three thousand Hawaiian proverbs, representing the collective wisdom of our ancestors, their dreams and aspirations, their values, standards, and non-negotiables. These proverbs, which are saturated with metaphorical language, convey our ancestral virtues and attitudes and constitute our behavioral guidelines, by telling us how to think, how to talk, and how to act. *Mā‘awe Pono* advocates that as twenty-first-century Hawaiian researchers it is our responsibility, or *kuleana*, to know our ancient proverbs and use them in daily conversations. We must also practice what they teach and apply the insights provided by these proverbs to our daily lives. *Mā‘awe Pono* also promotes using our Hawaiian proverbs as concrete guides to navigate the research process. By integrating the very poetic, very direct, and exceptionally witty and funny messages of our ancestors into our research we also assure that our methodology is and remains Hawaiian.

*Mā‘awe Pono* uses Hawaiian proverbs as guidelines for various aspects of the research process, starting with our general attitude about learning and seeking knowledge, which is captured in the proverb, “*He lawai‘a no ke kai pāpa‘u, he pōkole ke aho; he lawai‘a no ke kai hohonu, he loa ke aho*. A fisherman of the shallow sea uses only a short line; a fisherman of the deep sea has a long line. A person whose knowledge is shallow does not have much, but he whose knowledge is great, does” (Pukui 1983, 80). This proverb admonishes us to learn all we can about our native ways and advance them into the future. It also asserts that as researchers we must become well acquainted with the phenomenon to be researched. In addition, the proverb reminds us that engaging in research increases our connection to the deep sea of knowledge of our ancestors.

*Mā‘awe Pono*’s commitment to take things to the highest level, grounded in the Hawaiian proverb, *Kūlia i ka nu‘u*, which means “strive to the summit,” has been a standard for Hawaiians for many generations. In fact, this quest for excellence has resulted in widely recognized Hawaiian expertise in areas as diverse as voyaging, horticulture, functional arts, *le‘ale‘a* (gaiety), extreme sports, green technology, natural resource management, and island sustainability. For twenty-first-century Hawaiians, this ancient mandate to excel continues to fuel our work, including our research, as we strive to return to food sovereignty, economic sustainability, community-based resource stewardship, political independence, normalization of the Hawaiian language and Hawaiian cultural practices, and individual and collective happiness. The determination to implement positive change, no matter how large the problem, is in line with the teachings of our ancestors expressed in the proverb: “*A‘ohe pu‘u ki‘eki‘e ke ho‘ā‘o‘ia e pi‘i*. No cliff is so tall that it cannot be scaled. No problem is too great when one tries hard to solve it” (Pukui 1983, 25).

*Mā‘awe Pono* is also aligned with the Hawaiian philosophy of *makawalu*, which literally means eight eyes. The meaning of *makawalu* is explained in the proverb, “*Pe‘ape‘a maka walu*. Eight-eyed Pe‘ape‘a. One who is wide awake and very observant; one who is skilled. Pe‘ape‘a was the son of Kamehamehanui of Maui” (Pukui 1983, 288). *Mā‘awe Pono* fosters this propensity to be wide awake, very observant and skilled, and poised to see everything with eight eyes, or from multiple perspectives. This multidimensional perspective makes *Mā‘awe Pono* exceptionally flexible and fluid. It allows for the seamless ebb and flow from the past to the present to the future and back again. Another aspect of *makawalu* is the fact that it at once localizes and globalizes our knowledge base. While *Mā‘awe Pono* has

first and foremost a local, Hawai‘i-based focus, it also provides a viable tool to investigate some of the unique issues that affect Hawaiians on the continent and abroad. This population continues to grow, as a result of an increasing number of Hawaiians suffering economic hardship in our homeland.