Book Review


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*Ka Po’e Mo’o Akua: Hawaiian Reptilian Water Deities* by Marie Alohalani Brown along with her book on John Papa ʻĪʻī establishes her as one of the key scholarly figures in Hawai‘i in our time involved in what she describes as work, ‘Recovering and reconstructing ‘ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge)’ (26). Brown joins several contemporaries who have been working to bridge that long break in formally transmitted cultural knowledge and analysis through the use of our country and cultures’ archival and newspaper repositories that were created by ‘Ōiwi scholars in the mid-late 1800s and early 1900s.¹

The ‘Ōiwi zeitgeist of the mid-late 1800s is described and exemplified through the writings of Joseph Kānepu‘u and Joseph Poepoe in Noenoe Silva’s work where Kānepu‘u states, ‘o na nupepa a pau i pai ai ma ka olelo Hawai, a i lawe ia e a’u mai loko mai o na aoao a pau, e hiki no ia‘u ke humu Buke, a e hoili ia no, no na hooilina’ (trans.: all the newspapers published in the Hawaiian language, which I have subscribed to from all sides, I can take and bind into books, and they will be bequeathed to heirs) (Silva 2017: 22–23). Silva details that Hawaiians knew the importance and value to future generations that publishing their stories would provide. Aboriginal Hawaiians took literacy and the technology of newspaper production as new cultural tools, publishing stories, legends, and information of all types and varieties, creating an enormous archive of information. Puakea Nogelmeier who helped make digitally accessible and searchable a portion of this record states,

¹ ‘Ōiwi is the term Brown uses to speak about aboriginal or ethnic Hawaiians that was also used in the 1800s by aboriginal or ethnic Hawaiians to describe themselves. I use the terms ‘Ōiwi and Hawaiian interchangeably throughout this review.
From 1834 to 1948, Hawaiian writers filled 125,000 pages in nearly 100 different newspapers with their writings... knowledge was intentionally recorded in writing. Editorials pleaded for those with expertise to submit material for publication so that it would be available for those of the future... less than one percent of the whole has been translated and published... The rest, equal to well over a million [1.5 million] letter-size pages of text, remains untranslated, difficult to access in the original form, unused, and largely unknown. (Nogelmeier 2010: xii–xiii)

After the dismantling of the Hawaiian Kingdom government and the U.S. imposition of policies proscribing the Hawaiian language and nationality, this Hawaiian language-based repository of knowledge went virtually unaccessed for several generations.

Through this work on Moʻo Akua, Marie Alohalani Brown recovers ‘ike kupuna through exposing our current generations to some of this long sequestered knowledge that in some cases hasn’t been seen by most in a century or more. She also interrogates and builds upon some of the premises from the English language-based works that have long been considered the sole authoritative accounts during the era of sequestration. Brown shows us how one can reconstruct ‘ike kupuna by researching and connecting Hawaiian language-based source material with existing oral accounts, and other sources, and then render analysis and insight. She manages this process in a way very few, if anyone else, can achieve at this moment in time. And Brown accomplishes all of this work while exposing us to the amazing world of Moʻo Akua (reptilian deities) as our kupuna (ancestors) understood it, and as she now walks us through to comprehend.

Brown opens her work with detail about reptilian traditions in other cultures and then in relation to Polynesian traditions reminiscent of the way that Martha Beckwith, a non-Hawaiian author, conducted comparative analysis on Hawaiian stories in the most dominant English-language text on these subjects from the sequestration era entitled Hawaiian Mythology. This part of her work marks Brown as a world class analyst in comparative mythologies and instructs up-and-coming scholars in the breadth of knowledge necessary to the undertaking of moʻolelo (story) analysis. This hoʻoulalā i ka manaʻo (broadening of thought) is after all an ‘Ōiwi tradition that stands out when one starts to sift through the catalogue of moʻolelo in Hawaiian language newspapers, and finds an extraordinary number of worldly texts translated by Hawaiians for a Hawaiian audience. The record shows our kupuna were broadly well educated. Brown’s moʻo discussion and comparison with other Polynesian stories has an obvious logic rooted in our shared genealogies, cultural traditions, and languages. Here Brown shows us Polynesian story similarities in moʻo creatures as ‘fearsome’ and
‘sacred’, and she shows us similar stories of chiefs with mo’o ancestors like Pili to Savea in Sāmoa, Heimoana to the Tui Tonga, and Mo’oinanea and Kihawahine as mo’o progenitors of the Maui chiefs. Brown details similarities in saurian forms and symbols, gaurdian and guide actions, and mo’o relationships with water.

In her thinking on the terms mo’olelo and kaʻao, Brown draws from different sources to re-continue a theorization of the two terms that takes us beyond Beckwith’s short discussion on the same subject matter where mo’olelo about ‘aumakua (ancestral guardians) and akua (gods) is described as a ‘narrative about a historical figure, one which is supposed to follow historical events’, and kaʻao as a ‘fictional story or one in which fancy plays an important part’ (Beckwith 1970: 1). Brown pushes us to think about these two designations as markers of different genre and as ‘ʻŌiwi artistic-intellectual productions’. Brown is specific in her description of the intellectual work of her ancestors, and the work she is undertaking in a ‘genre studies’ of ʻŌiwi creative work.

The descriptor ‘artistic-intellectual’ for our genres is purposeful because it recognizes that ʻŌiwi aesthetics—the principles underlying composition, including ideas about what is pleasing and proper—guides their creation and that they are indeed intellectual products… Mo’olelo and ka’ao are rich examples of ʻŌiwi aesthetics because they share certain elements and often include yet other genres, which suggests that their structure is informed by a cultural sense of what they should contain. (26–27)

Brown traces a comparative analysis between mo’olelo and ka’ao starting with the ways in which they have been defined previously by Pukui, Andrews, and Parker, sources with which many of us using English language works would be familiar, and then she brings in discussions on these terms by Hale’ole, Ka’awa, Kamakau, Bush, and Pa’aluhi from nineteenth century Hawaiian language newspaper sources that have not been a part of our public discussion for several generations. These later sources add another layer of that ‘cultural sense’ of what these terms mean over time and broaden the discussion. Brown also pulls in the the theorization of John Charlot and the ‘form and redaction critical analysis tools’ he used to look at ka’ao and mo’olelo in Hawai‘i. A redactor might create ka’a by combining episodes or motifs from different mo’olelo, editing them, composing new data to join them, and then adding metadiscursive devices to this framework. In short, ka’a can be ‘new’ takes on ‘old’ topics, but they are rooted in tradition (31). Brown doesn’t declare a singular meaning, but gives us a sense of and a reconnection to a larger conversation that should have been/was at one time/and now continues through her work to be an ongoing process of accretion, where previously Hawaiian language source material was not
used. Here she does what she counsels us all to do in her guidance on how to carry out this kind of research and allows for a ‘multiplicity of Hawaiian intellectuality’.

‘Ike kupuna from our Hawaiian language newspaper repositories start as the foundation around which everything on Hawaiian culture, history, and politics should be re-evaluated. Brown is aware that her work product in Ka Po’e Mo’o Akua and the methodology that it represents is something that is still not in widespread use on the ʻŌiwi academic scene. She provides us with a list of ten things to keep in mind in order to carry out a process of centering Hawaiian language sources in one’s research. This section contextualizes further the feat that has been accomplished through this book. This section of the book, and the entire book itself, become a key mentoring guide on ‘how to’ delve deeper on any ʻŌiwi topic that someone wants to take seriously.

Marie Alohalani Brown connects us intimately to the interdependence between mo’o and fresh water. She states that mo’o akua are akua wai. Wai (the Hawaiian term for fresh water) is universally important to sustaining life, while simultaneously holding potential for destructive roles. Wai is a central cultural-physical component in island resource life, and in the Hawaiian imagination. Wai becomes a symbolically meaningful root word for major concepts like wealth as ‘waiwai’ meaning to have fresh water in abundance, and the word for law, ‘kānāwai’. Andrews tells us kānāwai means belonging, or relating to the waters, ‘The ancient system of regulations for water courses contained almost everything the ancient Hawaiians formerly had in common with the shape of law’ (Andrews 1865: 257). Brown writes, ‘when investigating them [mo’o] we should keep the life-giving and death-dealing properties of wai in mind because as a collective they embody most if not all of its attributes’ (43). Wai is a shapeshifter, and there is a connection between water and regeneration. Brown indicates that the water cycle and its properties can be understood as a metaphor for continuity, and that mo’o as personifications of wai, can symbolize the same [regeneration]....

As reptilian dieties, mo’o also represent continuity and regeneration in the sense of an unbroken lineage, and thus mo’o are important symbols of mo’okū’auhau (genealogy), a foundational and organizational concept in Hawaiian religion and the culture.... (44)

Brown notes that mo’o are rarely known to change into specific water forms, although there are some exceptions, but mo’o are most well known for being associated with specific bodies of water or damp places. In the chapter on ‘Mo’o Akua and Water’ Brown takes us through her research methodology using a multiplicity of sources and various formats and genres. Starting with a strong foundation of

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kupuna-authored Hawaiian language resource works, Brown weaves in moʻolelo from ‘Ōiwi authors Manu, Hoolumahiehie, Nakuina, Kahiolo, Kauaililinoe, Wise, and Kihe, with English language Hawaiian stories, oral interviews, and other source materials to detail information, relationships, stories, and descriptions of moʻo akua and the bodies of water with which they are associated. She highlights Kuna, Piliamoʻo and Nohoamoʻo/Kuaua at Wailuku river in Hilo; an unnamed moʻo of Meyer’s pond at Keālia, Molokaʻi; another unnamed moʻo at Kapaʻahu in ʻālahi island; Moʻoinanea at Waiau on Mauna Kea, and Kalalau cliffs on Kaauaʻi; Kalamainuʻu in caves on Mauna Loa, and caves on Molokaʻi, Mokulēʻia and Waimānalo; ʻAnaʻewa at the Rain forest in Hilo, and Kihanuilūlūmoku at the Muliwai—ʻōlena river in Paliuli Hawaiʻi.

How does one know they are in the presence of a body of water inhabited by a moʻo akua? Brown shows the similarity of signs from across the source materials that speak of the presence of a moʻo in a wai related space. It is the ‘aʻamoʻo (lizard slime) that forms a film or coating on the water surface, closely related to the walewale, the slime-like slippery substance that exudes from the skin of a moʻo, and can be present on surfaces, and perhaps on a person under the spell of a moʻo. Leaves of trees in the area, especially hau trees will turn yellow, and their flowers will bloom when a moʻo akua is immediately present. The water may turn red as accounts say when Kihawahine shows up at Maulili Pool in Waikomo stream on Kaauaʻi. Brown ends her discussion on the connection of moʻo and their water-related mana, and moʻo as providers of fish with accounts on traditions where ‘Ōiwi called upon moʻo to help provide water for lands, and to help bring rain in cases of drought, and called upon moʻo to support an abundance of fish for local fishponds. In both cases moʻo akua were propitiated correctly by adherents through offerings of wai, and first catches of fish.

Brown’s two chapters on the kino lau (body forms) of moʻo akua are a paragon of what she can produce through the deployment of her research methods over years of patient investigation and analysis. Brown starts with the most complete rationale for kino lau to date in what she describes and names as a ‘Kino Lau System’.

Over countless generations, our ancestors have closely interacted with and scrutinized their island environment, accumulating extensive knowledge about the similarities between natural phenomena, features, flora, and fauna in terms of form, markings, color, and habit. Based on these observations and their understanding of their akua, they devised the kino lau system. ‘Kino’ (form, body) ‘lau’ (many, multiple) refers to the forms that akua—greater and lesser—assume or with which they are symbolically associated and may reflect an akua’s function, realm, or name. (65)

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Brown gives us examples using different akua well known to Hawaiian readers. ‘Pele is our volcanic deity. Her function is to create land, her realm is the volcano, and lava is one of her kino lau. “Pele” means “lava”—Pele is lava, and she also controls it’ (65). Brown aptly notes that in the Hawaiian kino lau system, what we are examining is a ‘product and record of Hawaiian philosophy’. The kino lau system, Brown explains is not a relic of the past, but still exists today. Using hula and Laka as examples and citing Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahele she further illustrates how the kino lau plant forms of Laka the primary deity of hula are draped over the kuahu (altar) in honor of Laka. Quoting Kanahele, “Laka is the plants and the plants are her…. Inspiration for hula is received when the plants are present and when the dancer wears the plants for hula… people connected to a deity through a practice will consider its kino lau sacred…” (66). Brown holds that this idea of sacredness ‘holds true for those linked in some way to mo’o akua’ as she turns her analysis to mo’o kino lau.

Brown distinguishes between ‘general kino lau’, and ‘specific kino lau’ for mo’o akua. ‘General kino lau’ being the body forms that many or most mo’o could more readily appear as, and ‘specific kino lau’ being unique body forms associated with specific, individual mo’o akua. Four general mo’o kino lau she details include ‘the mo’o (lizard), the ‘īlio mo’o (brindled dog), the ‘o’opu (goby fish), and the nanana/lanalana (spider). These kino lau are sacred to all mo’o’ (66). Before Brown delves in to these four general kino lau, she details mo’o akua form concerning size and the ability to change size, and she touches on mo’o akua body colors. Looking at Mo‘oinanea in the ‘Aukelenuia‘ikū and Ha‘inākolo traditions, and Kihanuilūlūmoku in the Lā‘ieikawai and Kekalukaluokēwā traditions Brown illustrates the matter of larger mo’o size and the ability to grow large. Mo‘oinanea is ‘large enough to eat two men one after the other’ (67) and can be large enough to stretch across islands. Kihanuilūlūmoku is large enough that its mouth forms ‘a cave into which ten warrioors wandered in and were destroyed’, and can hide its large size, which is also reputed to be so large that its tongue alone can transport adherents across great lengths of Hawai‘i island. Kihanuilūlūmoku’s skin is said to be shiny, varigated yellow skin. Brown notes that yellow is a color linked to mo’o, which is why ‘Ōiwi will use ‘kapa ‘ōlena (tumeric colored bark cloth) in mo’o related rituals’. Mo‘omomi, or shiny pearly white scales are also a major scale/skin color, as well as illuminated red, black, shades of yellow, and shades of white.

Brown states that the lizard kino lau is the primary kino lau of Hawaiian reptilian water deities. Citing Kamakau’s 1870 work in ‘Ka Mo‘olelo Hawai‘i’ as ‘the only sustained and systematic discussion
on these deities’, she notes that there is a difference between ordinary lizards and moʻo akua. The little lizards that most people see are not moʻo akua,

but, their bodies recalled the long and frightening forms of these gods.... The ordinary lizard is a symbolic kino lau of moʻo akua... because it recalls the great reptilian form of moʻo akua not because these deities turn into an ordinary gecko or skink. (72)

For the most part moʻo bodies are enormous. Kamakau is further cited as saying that moʻo akua were about two anana long, about twelve to fifteen feet. Brown transitions from lizards forms to goby fish (ʻoʻopu). Because of the streaked and speckled features that goby fish have that resemble a moʻo look they are a natural kino lau of moʻo akua. ‘Oʻopu is a fish species that are able to move upstream through the use of suction cup like features and in some cases they can move vertically up stream rocks and water falls. they use their pectoral fins to raise themselves on rocks and hop from one to the other looking very much like moʻo while doing so. Brown illustrates the connection between moʻo and ‘oʻopu through several stories ‘Ai‘ai, Kahīnano, and Luhiā. The brindled speckled pattern is also found in the brindled dog, named ‘ilio moʻo in Hawaiian, where Brown states, ‘the status of an ‘ilio moʻo as a general kino lau is informed by the similarity between the markings of lizards and this kind of dog’ (81). The stories of Luhiā and Paʻe provide examples of akua moʻo interactions and associations with and as ‘ilio moʻo. For the nanana/lanalana (spider) kino lau, Brown uses works from Pukui, and Manu’s story about Moʻoinanea and Waka using spider webs and features in a battle against Pele to show nanana as a moʻo akua kino lau.

Brown’s theorization process for what she calls a ‘kino lau logic’ provides us with a cutting edge premise in Hawaiian cultural analysis. When looking at ‘specific kino lau’, the body forms that are unique to one specific moʻo akua, Brown treats us to a process of theorization that only someone who has studied this material as extensively as she has could execute. Brown accounts for some of the possibly disparate kino lau specific to individual moʻo akua. In ‘Ōiwi thinking moʻo akua body forms are not unlimited. Moʻo akua can not change into anything they please, but how does one account for unique occurrences for only some moʻo akua having human, or demi-human forms, gender variations, and other ambiguous occurrences. In the most well thought out piece on kino lau, Brown explains her concept of ‘kino lau logic’:

This core principle is that kino lau always ‘makes sense’ because there is a rationale for their being linked to a deity. It may happen that we cannot
grasp a kino lau that perplexes us, but only because we cannot grasp the principles behind it…. I offer three hypotheses for variation in kino lau. First, given that the entire kino lau system arises out of countless generations of close interaction with and observation of the environment and the various relationships between natural phenomena, fauna, and flora, the most obvious reason for variation in moʻo kino lau is that at one point someone noticed something that someone else did not. Second, perhaps there were other traditions that attributed a certain kino lau to a moʻo, but these accounts were lost, which is why this one instance may seem an anomaly to us today. Third, notable exceptions could also be attributed to the artistic license of storytellers who were intimately familiar with the depth and breadth of moʻo lore. Even in this instance, however, such a kino lau, no matter how unusual, would make sense if we knew how to make connections. (86–87)

Brown then follows with an analysis of specific kino lau covering a wide range of variations; moʻo with demi-human and human kino lau, caterpillar, fish, bird, and various other elemental and geographical kino lau. Brown draws from an incredible array of moʻolelo and kaʻao from sources both more commonly known and rarely if ever publicly known today: Desha and Poepeʻe’s different versions of Hiʻiakaikapoliopoele; several moʻolelo from Hooulumahiehie including Hiʻiakaikapoliopoele, Haʻinākolo, Keakaoku, and Kamaakamahiai; Manuʻs versions of Keaomelemele, Pele and Waka, Laukaʻieʻie, and Kihaaipiilani; Wise and Kiheʻs moʻolelo Ka-Miki; Kāneʻuʻu’s moʻolelo Hamanalau; Nipoa and Kuhalaoa’s story Keamalu; and Hukilani’s 1864 treatise on akua. The list of characters and their exploits documented in support of Brown’s hypotheses is extensive, and introduces us to materials known and some rarely touched upon by even the most advanced Hawaiian scholar. She ends this chapter situating the epistemological importance of kino lau logic undergirding the kino lau system.

The importance of the kino lau system cannot be overstated—it emerges from ancestral ways of knowing and being and the modality by which our ancestors, over countless generations, conceived, understood, and made sense of their island world and everything therein…. To put it another way, the ‘Aikapu [Hawaiian religion around which Hawaiian life was organized including food and food consumption-related restrictions] was predicated on the kino lau system, and in turn, the kino lau system is a central component of Hoʻomana [religion and worship]. (113–114)

The chapter ‘Kinship and Antagonism between the Moʻo and Pele Clans’ is an important contribution toward ‘Ōiwi understandings beyond the English language version of the Pele epics. In thinking through the tension between both clans, Brown notes first that the genealogies and kino lau of both clans overlap and need to be examined further. This is
a detail Beckwith misses, but that kuʻualoha hoʻomanawanui explains in her recent groundbreaking work on the Pele and Hiʻiaka stories in *Voices of Fire: Reweaving the Literary Lei of Pele and Hiʻiaka* (2014). Brown expands upon Beckwith and hoʻomanawanui where both write about the tension between the two clans being rooted in their opposing elements of fire and water, and competing schools of life-dealing and death-dealing arts.

Brown notes that Beckwith is limited in what she can see because she only uses the English language version of the Pele Legend written by Emerson in her work, and for that reason, Beckwith can not see that these clans are closely related. hoʻomanawanui, who Brown notes has read and analyzed over ten different versions of the Pele and Hiʻiaka stories, develops further the opposing elements discussion from Beckwith, and adds to it that the two clans are related and are two branches of a larger family. hoʻomanawanui also speaks to the rift in the family before Pele came over to Hawaiʻi, and that Namakaokahaʻi is a link between the two clans. Brown builds on these works showing us in greater detail how kinship and antagonism is revealed through a broad careful analysis of multiple, different stories and different versions.

We need only be aware of and read these traditions to retrieve this information. The moʻo and Pele clans’ common ancestry is clearest in the genealogy Manu gives in his account of Pele and Waka, but their family ties are also evidenced elsewhere. Namakaokahaʻi is the means by which we can trace their kinship in the ‘Aukelenuiaʻiʻkū tradition. The Lāʻiehau tradition is notable in that it shows Haumea and Moʻoinanea are close relatives belonging to the same generation. Even the Hiʻiakaikapoliopelu tradition, which notoriously depicts moʻo unfavorably, reveals the kinship between their clans. (117–118)

In her analysis of the genealogical connections, Brown looks across several different Hawaiian language texts from the newspapers. Haumea is the head of the Pele clan, and Moʻoinanea is the head of the Moʻo Akua clan in three traditions written by Manu in Keaomelemele, Pele and Waka, and Laukaʻieʻie. ‘In the Pele and Waka account, Pele and moʻo clans have a common lineage. Haumea and Moʻoinanea are punalua (sharing the same partner) because they share a kāne (man, husband), Kānelūhonua (Earth-shaking Kāne)’ (118). In the Pele and Waka story and genealogy Moʻoinanea as Hoʻokumukahonua gives birth to Haumeanikoʻoi, who then with Kānelūhonua gives birth to the Pele clan. Moʻoinanea is the kupuna (grandparent) of the Pele clan. The two clans are directly and closely related. Namakaokahaʻi is shown to be a ‘nexus’ between the moʻo and Pele clans in the ‘Aukelenuiaʻiʻkū tradition. Aukelenuiaʻiʻkū and Namakaokahaʻi are the moʻopuna (grandchildren)
of Mo‘oinanea. Nāmakaokaha‘i is the older sister of Pele and Hiʻiaka. Brown details how further signs of the close relationship between both clans are their fire-related mana that are bestowed upon descendants to help them overcome adversity in the form of weaponized clothing. Mo‘inanea gives ‘Aukelenuia‘ikū a severed piece of her tail that she tranforms into a kapa lehu (cloak) that can turn anything it touches into ashes. Mo‘inanea gives Nāmakaokaha‘i her battle kāhili (feather standard) and her battle pāʻū (skirt) that can reduce any enemy to ashes. In some versions of Hiʻiakaikapiolopile, Pele gives Hiʻiaka a pāʻū imbued with lightening to destroy any foes. ‘Strictly speaking, Hiʻiaka’s and Nāmakaokaha‘i’s pāʻū and ‘Aukelenuia‘ikū’s kapa lehu are not kino lau; however, they owe their existence to the fire-related mana that the Pele clan and Mo‘oinanea possess’ (123). Brown also details that some of the Haumea forms of Kameha‘ikana and Walinu‘u have kino mo‘o (lizard body forms). This is detailed in two versions of Kamaakamahi‘ai one by Kaualilinoe, and one by Hoʻoulumahiehie.

So how do we account for the animosity between the mo‘o and Pele clans given how closely they are related and all that they share in terms of characteristics, mana, and impact? Brown details the events and characters using excerpts from mo‘olelo, and building a comparative chart that shows from each story the origin of the rift between the two clans, whether it was premigration to Hawai‘i or post migration, the type of conflict, the identities of the victims and perpetrators, and from which clans they hail. She then details how the rift spills out into postmigration resentment and feelings of injustice between the two clans in Hawai‘i, the clues for the origin of such resentment can be found even in the English language texts, but these passages are made more intelligible through use of the Hawaiian language text which was previously unaccessed. The work in this chapter spectacularly illuminates the story of both clans, and the reasons for their conflict.

Brown then finishes her work looking at the role of moʻo akua for ‘Ōiwi across time in the past and the present. For past times, she examines the role of such important figures as Mo‘oinanea and Kihawahine who were propitiated and held close by the Maui chiefs and eventually Kamehameha I as he took control of Maui. Kihawahine was shown by Brown to be believed by the high chiefs to be integral in the support needed by a chief to rule. In present times, Brown examines the role of mo‘o in relation to loko i‘a (fishponds), and in their role as ‘aumakua (ancestral guardian). Brown gives the reader information from her studies and experience that most ‘Ōiwi would find important to their present day personal search on these matters and speaks to the present day honoring of moʻo.
There are three main ways by which a family has an ‘aumakua. The first is to belong to a lineage that descends from a union between an akua and a human. That akua becomes an ‘aumakua for its descendants. The second is for people to pray to an akua with the hopes that at least one of them would recognize them as kin and become their ‘aumakua. The third is to entreat an ‘aumakua to deify deceased relatives by transforming them into another form such as a shark, a mo’o, etc. This ritual is termed kāku‘ai. (142)

Of impressive scope is the listing and detail that Brown provides in a ‘Catalog of Mo’o’ at the end of this book. Brown gives us 288 mo’o that she has come across through over ten years of research. She includes mo’o that are well known to those of us who study these things, mo’o we have never heard about before, and mo’o that are spoken about, but unnamed. Her details provide abbreviated story lines, some of the places that these mo’o are associated with, some sources for these names, and gender if known. It is the only exhaustive list and description of mo’o, or any kind of akua, or ‘aumakua class in existence like this. It is invaluable for both anyone interested in mo’o akua personally, and for those who wish to see how one may research and provide for the community and scholarly world a responsible reference from which to work.

Brown ends her formal written work with an appropriate mo’o perspective,

While it is true that the Hi‘iakaikapiolepele tradition depicts mo’o as evil, it should be remembered that this is the volcano clan’s perspective. From the mo’o perspective, Pele destroys their watery abodes and the rain forests in which they make their homes. Mo’o are also beneficent kia‘i loko i’a [fishpond guardians], an important economic resource. Mo’o ‘aumakua, kia‘i loko i’a, and so forth are examples of the life giving powers of mo’o. To perceive mo’o only as negative entities without acknowledging their positive aspects stands in opposition to ‘Ōiwi understandings about balance in the natural and spiritual world…. (173)

Brown’s work stands as the alternative perspective, the advocate for mo’o akua, in contrast to the way most people have been educated to view the mo’o and Pele clans from the English-language Hawaiian story catalogue. Her work on Ka Po’e Mo’o Akua is the ‘overlap’ many wish to see that provides a more balanced multiplicity of views on events, characters, practices and values. Her work is the text that exists as a comparative, different perspective to the Pele clan perspective in much the way Ha‘inākolo and Keanini‘ulaokalani work as different perspectives of the same/similar story.

Despite its length, there is a great deal of important detail that has been left out of this review and its commentary. It is because of the importance of this work on the academic scene that so much of the information in this review had to be addressed. The significance of Ka
Po‘e Mo‘o Akua as a scholarly endeavor cannot be overemphasized. It plays a major role in the ‘recovery and reconstruction of ‘Ike kupuna’. It plays this role in terms of the exposure of material written by ‘Ōiwi from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It plays this role through the mentoring Brown provides in how one must go about responsible scholarly research on things Hawaiian. It plays this role in the analysis Brown brings on ‘Ōiwi categories of thought, classifications of cultural objects, concepts, practices, and traditions, and it plays this role in terms of opening up further the complicated and intelligent ‘Ōiwi imagination.

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