

# Pen of Molten Fire: Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask's Writing as Indigenous Resistance

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We will plant songs where there were curses.

—Joy Harjo, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*

The poetics of Indigenous resistance is a thread that weaves our collective stories together. We know that our stories are power, and as Malea Powell reminds us, they are so powerful “they have the power to make, re-make, un-make the world.”<sup>1</sup> Our lives, histories, and futures are all tied to our stories—both those passed down and those waiting to return. For Indigenous Pacific peoples, including those from islands and from coastal regions, it is the ocean that carries our stories through the currents that connect us. Epli Hau’ofa explains, “We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places.”<sup>2</sup> Following Hau’ofa’s assertion that “we are the ocean,” this article centers on the work of Haunani-Kay Trask and looks to the Pacific not as a place of separation, but as a place of connection—one whose depths run deeper than any colonial system can imagine. Like our ancestors who navigated using stars and waters through ancestral knowledge and teachings, current generations of Indigenous people do the same to navigate the settler systems that have been imposed upon us. In 2023 and beyond, the teachings of Haunani-Kay

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Trask remain a necessary component of navigating these systems—and to exist as Indigenous people beyond these settler systems.

I grew up knowing about Trask as a fierce Indigenous woman who stood up for the lands, waters, and sovereignty of her Kānaka Maoli. My family was part of Indigenous resistance to environmental desecration and militarization of Indigenous lands and waters on the California coast. Coming from a tribe still fighting for our sovereignty, I knew well the ways in which capitalism and urban development ate away at our sacred sites, polluted the waters, and displaced my people further. Having Trask as a role model inspired me. Indigenous women have always been strong leaders in our communities, but our voices have been largely excluded from dominant society. Trask's voice called across the ocean to fellow Indigenous people subjected to settler colonial occupation and violences. My uncle John Trudell had modeled for me the power of our voices and how poetry is a tool for both inspiring and resisting. Trask further modeled for me the use of Indigenous women's voices in poetry. As a young Indigenous person, I felt her voice and words to the core of my being.

This essay discusses Trask's poetry and other literary work as a form of Indigenous resistance. I will discuss poems from *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*—the first book of poetry of hers I read while in high school—as well as select pieces in *From a Native Daughter*. By reflecting on her poetry and other literary works, we can see how her pen of molten lava has helped inscribe Indigenous resistance across space and time. In alignment with Trask's subversion of settler colonial and imperial dominance, I am not capitalizing the names of settler nations that have participated in violence toward Indigenous people. This is a rhetorical choice based on Malea Powell's discussion of the ways in which capitalization is used to “insinuate itself into systems of dominance.”<sup>3</sup>

## CROSS-PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

The stir of the currents through our canoe paddles awakens our links to ancestors and our cross-Pacific connections. I remember when the Hōkūle'a crew made their stop in the Santa Barbara area my sophomore year of high school. We hosted Kānaka Maoli on our Tribal lands in what is currently called Gaviota—lands that have since been seized by settler systems again. During that visit, I remember my dad and uncles talking with the crew about ancestral travels and ties to each other. My dad and uncles had helped bring back our ocean-going tomols (Chumash plank canoes) in the 1970s and navigated the coastal waters for the first time in at least one hundred years. They talked about star maps and our language similarities. One of the crew members told me my name reminded him of the circle of light around the moon. These rekindlings of ocean connections glistened in the eyes of those who understood the power of moving across the ocean through song, story, prayer, and ancestral guidance. That visit has stuck with me all these years, coming and going at different points in my life, much like the ocean tides.

During my doctoral program, I listened to Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner talk about the devastation of climate change on the Marshall Islands at the 2019 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> I thought of the erosion of cultural sites and the shores of my

peoples' small islands off the California coast. I had visited our islands with my dad, brothers, and children for the first time earlier that spring. While you could see the shore in the distance, being on Limuw (Santa Cruz Island) was fresh in my mind. Jetñil-Kijiner played videos of some of her poetry, reminding us that being part of the ocean is as much as the land itself in what it means to be a Pacific person.<sup>5</sup> As I listened to her words, I reflected on a moment standing on the top of one of the trails of Limuw, surrounded by the sway of the ocean and away from everything but the Pacific. I understood in that moment that our Pacific connections ran as deep as the ocean itself.

When Jetñil-Kijiner said the nuclear bombs that hit the Marshall Islands were launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base, which is on unceded Chumash territory, those connections became deeper.<sup>6</sup> I will return to these assertions of military occupation and disregard for our peoples' sovereignty in a later section. While the connections to militarization between Pacific Islands and Coastal Chumash lands was not new, knowing how these missiles—launched from my peoples' lands—have impacted the Marshallese people (to this day) left my heart heavy. The back and forth of the currents—the back and forth of missiles—the back and forth of Indigenous people displaced—the back and forth of who has a say—all remain present. There is no past tense in our continued occupation.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that the way that imperialism looks and feels for Indigenous people and its continued presence is often coded as postcolonialism.<sup>7</sup> Yet settler colonialism is still very present in new forms of imperialism. Smith writes, "The imperial armies assemble under the authority of the United Nations defending the principles of freedom, democracy and the rights of capital."<sup>8</sup> These exploitations of Indigenous bodies and lands are an extension of long-standing settler impositions from contact and the continued desire to extract and consume all we hold sacred. Settler systems do not fit with our cosmologies and ways of being with our lands and waters. In the context of Hawai'i, Trask explains that Captain James Cook "brought an entirely foreign system into the lives of my ancestors, a system based on a view of the world that could not coexist with that of Hawaiians. He brought capitalism, Western political ideas (such as predatory individualism) and Christianity. Most destructive of all he brought diseases that ravaged my people until we were but a remnant of what we had been on contact with his pestilent crew."<sup>9</sup> Settler systems and ideologies are destructive and will always be a threat to our existence.

Much like the Kānaka Maoli, the Coastal Chumash people faced disease at the hands of colonizing explorers, specifically the Spanish. Disease warfare was not new by the time California and the Hawaiian Islands were colonized. Indeed, the way disease spread was known by then. Our bodies were, and are, targeted and viewed as a casualty of colonization. Andrea Smith asserts, "Native bodies will continue to be seen as expendable and inherently violable as long as they continue to stand in the way of the theft of Native lands."<sup>10</sup> The illegal occupation of Indigenous lands depends on our continued erasure, both literally and through the legal system. Part of this erasure depends upon disregard for our sovereign rights by settler colonial systems.

## THE CONTINUED FIGHT FOR SOVEREIGNTY

In the united states, Tribal sovereignty is tied to treaties and federal recognition. It assumes that the u.s. validation of sovereign rights reigns supreme—an assertion embedded in the u.s. constitution itself. Omitted from this system are Indigenous nations that remain under forced occupation, those whose lands were considered conquered along with their sovereign rights. My people, the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation, along with the vast majority of mission-impacted Tribes of California experienced colonization in ways that erased our sovereign rights in the eyes of u.s. law and policy. We are among the hundreds of unrecognized tribes in California.

This disregard for our sovereign rights and existing political systems is similar to that of the Kānaka Maoli. Squatters in both the Nation of Hawai'i and in California first came bearing the symbol of the cross as a means to justify their occupation of our lands. The abundance of resources cultivated and cared for by Indigenous people became a prize to possess. Our ways of being and knowledge systems were reduced to myths of the past and a threat to the colonizing forces. The mission-impacted region of the california coast and the Hawaiian Islands became areas prized for military opportunities as well, with only thirty-three years separating the Indigenous California and the Hawaiian Kingdom from being absorbed into the settler nation of the united states.

The lack of treaties and use of force to occupy lands before asserting statehood was not an accident. The settler state silenced the political voices of the Indigenous people whose lands they occupied and had little regard for the impact on sacred sites, burials, existing villages, or for the lasting effects of colonial occupation. Trask remained critical of the united states and other colonial forces for ignoring the voices and sovereignty of Kānaka Maoli. She asserts, "For us, Hawaiian self-government has always been preferable to American foreign government. No matter what Americans believe, most of us in the colonies do not feel grateful that our country was stolen, along with our citizenship, our lands, and our independent place among the family of nations. We are not happy Natives."<sup>11</sup> Land theft for plantations, the tourist industry, and military testing continues to weigh heavily on Kānaka Maoli lives, lands, and paradigms. This is not a joyful exchange for the rights to self-governance and self-determination.

Across the ocean, the same is true for Coastal Chumash people. Coastal Chumash territory spreads from around Malibu to just north of San Luis Obispo, an area of close to two hundred miles along the coastline. Colonization of this area came in three waves, rapidly deteriorating the political autonomy of Coastal Chumash people. Over the span of eighty-one years, these settler waves began with Spain, followed by Mexico, and then the United States.<sup>12</sup> The presidios (military posts) constructed on Coastal Chumash lands by the Spanish provided a blueprint for continued military occupation once the United States declared statehood for California. Several operating military bases are still in Chumash territory as are decommissioned military stations.

Because of its location, the Hawaiian Kingdom was heavily sought after as a Pacific line of defense by the United States as well as for economic exploitation by plantation owners. Trask describes the infiltration of the Hawaiian Kingdom as an extension of

settler manifest destiny approaches, as indicated by the 1842 statement of a “virtual right of conquest” by the u.s. House Committee on Foreign Affairs.<sup>13</sup> This conviction set the stage for the illegal occupation and annexation of the Hawaiian Kingdom, leading to the heavy presence of military bases. Currently, over ten military bases are in operation in the Hawaiian Kingdom, signaling the “right of conquest” through continued armed occupation. There are clear parallels in the tactics used to strip the sovereign rights of Kānaka Maoli and of Coastal Chumash people. As Trask explains:

Because of the overthrow and annexation, Hawaiian control and Hawaiian citizenship were replaced with American control and American citizenship. We suffered unilateral redefinition of our homeland and our people, a displacement and a dispossession in our own country. In familial terms, our mother (and thus our heritage and inheritance) was taken from us. We were orphaned in our own land. Such brutal changes in a people’s identity—their legal status, their government, their sense of belonging to a nation—are considered among the most serious human rights violations by the international community today.<sup>14</sup>

The impact of the illegal takeover of the Hawaiian Kingdom was not a surprise to the settler nation; rather, it knew all too well from what happens when settler colonial nations impose citizenship, stripping Indigenous Californians of their political autonomy. In California, the succession of settler colonial nations enabled the invasive powers to avoid a treaty-making process with Indigenous nations. After Mexico acquired control of California from Spain, Indigenous people became Mexican citizens—following the established pattern for Mexico. The next colonial force negotiated conditions in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which granted u.s. citizenship to anyone considered a Mexican citizen.<sup>15</sup> This practice meant that Indigenous Californians were automatically granted u.s. citizenship—whether they wanted it or not. This scheme was effective, and an enormous amount of land was stolen from Coastal Chumash people and other Indigenous California nations. Because Indigenous people could not be both u.s. citizens and a sovereign nation at the same time during this era, our sovereign rights were trampled upon and disregarded in order to fuel economic growth and the militarization of the Pacific coastline. The same effect Trask describes were felt by Indigenous California people. We did not ask for u.s. citizenship, nor was it more significant than our own nationhood. By the time the United States used this approach with the Hawaiian Kingdom, it was fully aware of what would happen to the kingdom’s sovereignty. u.s. citizenship was used as a weapon against our people.

In matters of sovereign rights and militarization, our lands are not only occupied and developed in the name of capitalism, but also subjected to military testing and use. In what is now the state of Hawai‘i, military testing has included, but is not limited to, nuclear testing, multiple bomb type testing, biological weapons testing, seismic testing, and drone weapons tests. In Coastal Chumash territory, seismic testing underwater by the military has resulted in the death of marine mammals, threatening our relationships and connections to our relatives in the water. In Chumash cosmology, dolphins are very directly linked to our people and are considered our direct relatives

in the ocean. Otters, whales, sharks, and other marine animals are all impacted by this testing. The lack of sovereignty for both Kānaka Maoli and Coastal Chumash people limits our ability to intervene in military testing on our unceded lands and waters that amount to direct attacks on our entire cosmologies.

Some of Trask's activism that I grew up following centered around nuclear disarmament and demilitarization, especially in the Pacific. Trask does not hold back on the consequences of the u.s. military occupation, asserting, "[u]nited [s]tates control has meant land dispossession, economic dependency, cultural exploitation, and, in many cases, death and disease for America's captive Native peoples. Such disregard for Native self-determination explains the presence of so many national movements in *all* the [u.s.] possessions."<sup>16</sup> Say over what happens on Indigenous lands in the Pacific and beyond does not include Indigenous voices or concerns. Sacred sites, marine relatives, burials, and medicine plants are all harmed by colonial encroachment. Additionally, military zones create access barriers to access sites and plants for Indigenous people. In some cases, complete removal of Indigenous presence and access is the result.

In Coastal Chumash territory, Vandenberg Air Force Base is one of several military bases in operation. One of the most significant missile testings launched from Vandenberg was the testing of nuclear bombs on the Marshall Islands. Smith describes the devastation of these bombs, stating that "after World War II, the U.S. exploded a bomb that was 1,300 times more destructive than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; this test was the first of 66 nuclear tests conducted on the Marshall Islands."<sup>17</sup> As mentioned, I first learned in 2019 that my peoples' homelands were the site from which the nuclear missiles that hit Bikini Atoll were launched, creating a cascade of lasting devastation for the Marshallese people. Not only have the Marshallese people been displaced as refugees, but they also face severe health impacts such as cancer, reproductive issues, and high rates of stillborn. In her poem "Anointed," Jetñil-Kijiner asks the Marshall Islands, "How shall we remember you? You were a whole island once."<sup>18</sup> Her words remind us of the magnitude of the nuclear bomb testing on these islands and the ensuing grief Marshallese people carry. It weighs heavy on me that these bombs were launched from my people's lands.

Like Chumash territory, the Hawaiian Kingdom was forcibly absorbed into the settler state to be used as a space to test weapons on other Indigenous lands in the Pacific. The nuclear arming of Indigenous lands to cause harm to other Indigenous people to display colonial power is alarming. The nonconsensual relationship with Indigenous lands and waters, especially connected to the Pacific, as testing sites reflects how Indigenous lands have been deemed conquerable and worthy of exploitation. As Trask points out, these undertakings are u.s. political posturing at the expense of Indigenous people.<sup>19</sup> Trask was a fierce activist calling for the demilitarization of the Hawaiian Islands through much of her life, often citing the exploitation and risks faced by Indigenous people due to military occupation. Trask argues, "Increased militarization of the region holds the potential for increased dispossession of Pacific Islanders as bases, ports, storage and testing sites, and residential areas are taken for 'defense' purposes. This is how the 'interests' of the United States continue to mean degradation, suffering, and often death to Native peoples whose friendship and trust are

always betrayed in the end.”<sup>20</sup> Much like the Southern California coastline, the Pacific Islands have been continually occupied and subjected to colonial demands for military use. Without the protection of recognized sovereignty, as limited as they can be at times, Indigenous people have little recourse to protect our lands, waters, and sacred sites. These overlaps in militarization and testing between the Coastal Chumash and Kānaka Maoli cannot be overlooked.

HUANANI KAY TRASK AS A POET AND RESISTER:  
*LIGHT IN THE CREVICE NEVER SEEN*

Just like settler colonialism has exploited our Indigenous lands and waters and forced our separation from them, destruction is carried out on our connections to our bodies, gender identities, and sexualities. The violence of militarization and colonial occupation has catastrophic impacts on our bodies. A significant body of scholarship describes the connections between violence against Indigenous lands and violence against Indigenous women. In addition to sexual violence, this abuse has shamed Indigenous women’s sexuality. Trask’s poetry offers a form of resistance to that shame and a reclamation of Indigenous sexuality in ways that are grounded in culture and connection to lands, and honor relationships with ancestors.

I remember first reading Trask’s poetry while in high school. As a poet and young person who grew up understanding the power of our voices, especially through poetry, I was deeply drawn to her words. *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* offered me the perspective of an unapologetic Indigenous woman. I was captivated by Trask’s weaving of Kānaka Maoli connections to land and sovereignty with the power of brown women’s sexuality. Her words spoke to me as a young Indigenous person whose lands and waters were occupied by missions and militarization. They also spoke to the shame reinforced by colonial teachings about sexuality. She modeled for me what it meant to unapologetically be an Indigenous woman who speaks truth about settler colonialism. Trask’s words told me I was not alone in the world. This section will discuss three of Trask’s poems from this collection that highlight her poetry as resistance to colonization of Indigenous lands and bodies.

“Missionary Graveyard” is dedicated to Trask’s father, Bernard Trask, and foregrounds the tension between the tourist industry and corporate takeovers of Hawaiian lands with the experiences of poverty and historic trauma of Kānaka Maoli.<sup>21</sup> This poem was one of my favorites in high school for the imagery as well as its powerful message. Stanza two describes the beloved Hawai‘i as the graveyard:

graveyard Hawai‘i Nei:  
coffin building, concrete parking  
lots, maggot freeways  
smell of death  
smeared across the land  
killing in the heart.<sup>22</sup>

Much like other poems in this section of the book, Trask uses the image of decay and death to illustrate the double impact on Hawaiian lands and people. Kānaka Maoli watch as this takeover of large hotels and buildings, roadways, and structures eats away at the heart of the lands. The threat to sacred sites and disruption of Indigenous graves for the expansion of the tourist industry have been and continue to be a long-standing issue. Trask describes this process as a slow death, a “killing in the heart,” which can be understood as a form of historic trauma due to colonization.

Historic trauma is compounded by continual displacement. “Missionary Graveyard” also brings up homelessness, which Indigenous people often feel as double removal from their lands. The first removal is to make space for hotels and businesses, and the second is from the homes they have, which for some means leaving one’s homelands entirely. In the fourth stanza, Trask writes:

our arteries have burst  
darkening the beaches  
immigrants scrambling  
over us, and us  
leaving for California.<sup>23</sup>

Indigenous people continue to be priced out of their own occupied homelands in Hawai‘i and other areas due to capitalism and continued colonization. The 2021 documentary *Dear Thalia* is an example of this continued pricing out of Kānaka Maoli into current times.<sup>24</sup> The film highlights the strain of the tourist industry coupled with failed support programs as long-standing issues, much like Trask evinces in her poetry, speeches, and activist works. The description of burst arteries in “Missionary Graveyard” is another way Trask uses a slow death and painful process to describe the experiences of Kānaka Maoli being forced from their homelands.

Similarly, in “Chant of Lamentation,” Trask uses death to reference the experiences and future of Hawaiian lands while also bringing in hauntings and ghosts.<sup>25</sup> The poem starts by pointing out the emptiness and wounded lands, waters, and sky. Trask then writes:

I lament the black  
and naked past, a million ghosts  
laid out across the ocean floor  
who journeys from  
the rising to the setting  
of the sun?<sup>26</sup>

This stanza points out that the impacts of development due to colonization and tourism have created a sense of disconnect and trauma for Kānaka Maoli. In explaining the poem, Trask discusses “rising to the setting of the sun” as a connection to ancient times and ancestors.<sup>27</sup> Asserting that the ancestors remain yet to question who will keep those connections going illustrates the degree to which colonialism severs those connections. The present-day population of Hawai‘i drives Trask’s point even deeper,

showing the continual removal of Kānaka Maoli allowing non-Native people to become the dominant voice on Hawaiian matters. The Ancestors remain buried in the depths of the ocean, pulled closer to home with each tide, resisting the colonial takeover of the Hawaiian Islands, waiting to be called back again.

The disconnect and colonial violence toward Hawaiian lands and bodies is also discussed in “Colonization.” The title itself points out that Hawai‘i is being actively colonized. Trask uses the recognized phrase “Hawaiian at heart” to illustrate how the tourism industry uses it to absorb non-Native Hawaiians into the cultural identity while exploiting lands and culture.<sup>28</sup> In the second stanza, Trask writes:

Hawaiian at heart:  
nothing said  
about loss  
violence, death  
by hundreds of thousands  
followed shortly after by  
a whole people  
accustomed  
to prostitution  
selling identity  
for nickels  
and dimes  
in the whorehouses  
of tourism.<sup>29</sup>

These lines reflect how the genocide and removal of Kānaka Maoli quite literally made space for tourists and settlers. The absorption of what colonizers think it means to be Hawaiian fuels the tourism industry at the expense of Indigenous people and their connections to lands, waters, and culture. Trask further developed the trope of Hawai‘i as a prostitute in her speeches and in *From a Native Daughter*, discussed later in this essay. Trask ends “Colonization” with:

Ruling classes  
living off  
natives  
first  
land  
then  
women  
now hearts  
cut out  
by our own  
familiar hand.<sup>30</sup>

This short set of lines brings in elements of land theft, sexual exploitation, and internalized oppression driven by colonial interests and control. Numerous Indigenous feminist scholars discuss the connection between violence to Indigenous lands and bodies. Trask's poem also points out that our own Indigenous communities can be complicit in these issues. This interpretation is different from dominant framings of sexual violence that do not look at the accountability of our own people. Trask points this out very explicitly.

Colonization has created conditions in which Indigenous women's bodies are viewed as conquerable, something to be tamed. We are seen as objects of desire and disposable by dominant settler societies. In Hawai'i, this depiction manifests in how hula has been used to demonstrate the exotic as well as the prostitution of Indigenous women's bodies in the Pacific. This framework takes sexual agency away from Indigenous women, making it yet another area impacted by settler colonialism. As a result, silence around Indigenous women's sexuality has been completely normalized in our communities. Trask's poetry was the first time I read our sexuality celebrated rather than suppressed as a young person.

The entire section titled "Light in the Crevice Never Seen" is a celebration of Indigenous sexuality and desire through direct connections with lands and waters.<sup>31</sup> These images counter the master narrative by allowing Indigenous peoples to have sexual agency. Colonizers viewed (and often continue to view) Indigenous sexuality as backward, wrong, and uncivilized, which leads to attempts at erasing and silencing it. Trask's poetry is an example of sovereign erotics, wherein Indigenous people assert sexual agency and autonomy in ways that make sense culturally and that resist settler constraints around sexualities.<sup>32</sup> This poetry uses landscapes and cultural references to simultaneously celebrate Indigenous women's sexuality and the beauty of the lands and waters as intertwined. These poems offer a vision of fertility and futures for Kānaka Maoli. I use Trask's poetry in my classes to help students understand not only sexual and land exploitation, but also the reclamation of both by Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women.

## TEACHING THE RESISTANCE THROUGH HAUNANI-KAY TRASK: *FROM A NATIVE DAUGHTER*

I first used Trask's writings in the Indigenous Feminisms course I developed for our campus. I was not yet tenure track but was committed to offering Indigenous Feminisms. It was equally important for me to include the Indigenous feminist voices of communities still fighting for their sovereign rights so that students could understand our struggles as well as triumphs. Trask, of course, was one of the first people who came to mind when creating the reading list.

*From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* impacted students in ways I could not predict. Many of them had never read a Pacific Islander scholar. Trask's writings dispel myths about Hawai'i as an abundant paradise waiting to be explored. "Lovely Hula Hands" helped students understand the depth of the damage felt by Kānaka Maoli due to the tourist industry. The sex industry is not a new topic

in feminist studies and associated classes. However, Trask's use of prostitution creates a vivid imaginary for students to understand corporate tourism's impacts. Trask writes, "*Prostitution* in this context refers to the entire institution that defines a woman (and by extension the *female*) as an object of degraded and victimized sexual value for use and exchange through the medium of money. The *prostitute* is a woman who sells sexual capacities and is seen, thereby, to possess and reproduce them at will, that is, by her very 'nature.'"<sup>33</sup> As an Indigenous woman, Trask describes the same type of degradation of Hawaiian lands, cultures, waters, and people. The nature of the lands and waters render themselves available in similar ways to tourists. Trask often describes the tourist industry as the pimps or johns selling pieces of paradise until there is nothing left to give.

In Chumash territory, I have watched condos constructed and prices soar as tourists flood our lands and waters for a piece of Southern California charm locked in a romanticized vision of old Spanish fantasy. Celebrities and the elite buy up property to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. In the process, each piece of our territory is exploited and used until little space is left for us as Chumash people to exist. In all reality, our people have never left: three settler nations and a city plopped on top of our entire existence, and much like on the Hawaiian Islands, we had little say in what was happening. Trask's description of the prostitution of lands is relatable on multiple levels to me as an Indigenous woman.

Trask's essays on Hawaiian sovereignty, resistance, and the realities of settler colonialism—and the fact the United States is a colonial nation—offered much for the students in my class to discuss. The essay "Politics of Academic Freedom as Politics of White Racism" offered students an opportunity to discuss the threat we face in academia, especially without tenure. One section of this essay that I centered discussion on reads:

For Hawaiians, American colonialism has been a violent process: the violence of mass death, the violence of American missionizing, the violence of cultural destruction, the violence of the American military. Once the [u]nited [s]tates annexed my homeland, a new kind of violence took root: the violence of educational colonialism, where foreign *haole* values replace Native Hawaiian values; where schools, such as the University of Hawai'i, ridicule Hawaiian culture and praise American culture, and where white men assume the mantle of authority, decide what is taught, who can teach, even what can be said, written, and published.<sup>34</sup>

This passage offers an opportunity for students to dig deeply into their own understandings of institutional power and the long-term impacts of current structures. I ask students to think about their own experiences with education and to reflect on who is centered, who is othered, who is considered an accessory, and who determines what "legitimate" knowledge is. Trask offers a way for students to examine their own institutions from an Indigenous perspective and what happens when existing structures are challenged.

Trask also opens deeper conversations about Pacific Islands classified as "territories." Her discussion of settler exploitation and occupation through political and military

power in “Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination” not only analyzes the layered encroachment upon Indigenous lands in the Pacific, but also offers remedies to return sovereign rights to Pacific Islander peoples. In my class, Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry presents the perspective of Marshallese people fighting not only settler colonial control of their islands as territories, but also climate change. Jetñil-Kijiner’s poetry offers a raw look at the impacts of nuclear testing such as miscarriages and birth defects, cancer, diabetes, and more.<sup>35</sup> Yet, much like Trask, her words offer a powerful glimpse of Marshallese resistance and commitments to the future of their people. The title of her book *Iep Jältok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* presents a nod to Trask’s *From a Native Daughter*, further illustrating the layers of impact Trask’s writings have had. Coupling Jetñil-Kijiner with Trask allows students to learn more about Indigenous feminist resistance and power across generations.

The purpose of teaching Trask is not to become stuck in sadness or the realities Indigenous people face. Rather, it is an opportunity for students to learn how the choices Trask made did not deviate from her teaching as an Indigenous person and her commitments to her people, lands, and waters. I often tell my children that as Indigenous people we must continue to teach our ways to younger generations because we, as Indigenous people, will outlast the settler systems. Trask was the embodiment of this teaching. Using her writings and teachings in and outside the classroom is a way to teach the resistance to future generations.

## CONCLUSION: CREATING STAR MAPS

Ocean people are navigators. We follow stars, currents, land markers, wind patterns, clouds, ocean swells—all elements are our teachers and guides. Whether for travel or for teachings, the elements guide us. They are part of our memories and our collective futures. When discussing the politics in the Pacific Islands, Trask writes:

Native Hawaiians, like other Pacific Islanders, view the ancestral Pacific as the repository of their history, including genealogies of fearless navigators who made their journeys from island to island and hemisphere to hemisphere with nothing but the stars to guide them. More the children of the sea than the land, Pacific Islanders know their survival as distinct peoples depends on the survival of the Pacific itself. The First World nations must still learn what Pacific Islanders have known for millennia: upon the survival of the Pacific depends on the survival of the world.<sup>36</sup>

Here, I often stand on this edge of the Pacific—touching the water and feeling those currents that connect us. I reflect back to the Hōkūle‘a visit. I reflect on the stories of the tomol returning. I find the remnants of story waiting to be recovered in archives and hidden in translations. I feel the stir of the paddles travel across time through star-dust and ocean currents. As I stand on this edge of the Pacific, holding on to one side of our connections, I feel the power of Trask’s words offering that star map to each other and our rights to sovereignty. She left us a map through her words to continue to guide us, much like the ancestors before her did.

Trask and other ancestors left a legacy for us to continue to build upon as Indigenous people, especially those of us still fighting for our sovereign rights. During the first half of 2022, I was listening to part of my Uncle John's last public performance from October 2015 in Portland, Oregon.<sup>37</sup> During this section of his talk, he reminds us that power is in all of us. It is in our heartbeat. A month and a half after that performance, he lost his battle with cancer and became an ancestor. After listening to his speech again in 2022, I wrote a short poem that inspired this essay and titled it "Star Maps":

Like Uncle said, "power is in the heartbeat"  
Pounding across generations  
Collective rhythm  
Mapped through bodies  
Tapping feet and fingertips  
A song waiting to come back  
Heard and felt and sung  
In shadows and sunlight and moonlight  
Bursting into scattered stars  
To show us a way home  
To ourselves again.

Star Maps—the teachings of our ancestors. As researchers and aspiring researchers, we look to them and find ways to make sense of our worlds and create our futures. Those lessons remain for us all, and call to us, reminding us that despite settler colonial regimes, our sovereign rights will outlast them. Trask, Trudell, and so many other now ancestors will continue to guide us through the words they left behind so we can find our ways back to each other again.

## NOTES

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