

Haunani-Kay Trask's Struggle for Psychological Decolonization of Native Hawaiians

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Abstract

Haunani-Kay Trask, a Native Hawaiian activist, educator, scholar and poet, strove to empower Native Hawaiians who had been deprived of their language and culture. This paper examined how Trask struggled for *psychological decolonization* of Native Hawaiians as an educator. Trask fought against cultural and educational colonialism by revitalizing Hawaiian culture and language at the university, encouraging the students to transform knowledge into power. Her strategy was to turn native culture into the core of resistance. From Trask's classes, psychological decolonization had begun, which contributed to making Native Hawaiians develop a sense of self-esteem. She succeeded in nurturing the next generation as leaders and activists in the community. Furthermore, Trask had to fight against systemic discrimination, intersecting with race, gender, ethnicity, and colonialism. Ultimately, Trask provided Native Hawaiians with hope and the possibilities for social change, empowering and nurturing generations of Native Hawaiians who would devote themselves to their Hawaiian community.

Introduction

Haunani-Kay Trask (1949 - 2021), a Native Hawaiian activist, educator, scholar and poet, strove to empower Native Hawaiians who had been deprived of their language and culture. She served as a leader of the sovereignty movement in Hawai'i, and she especially fought against *psychological colonization* of Native Hawaiians as a political theorist and professor at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). Trask was the most prominent and influential indigenous Hawaiian scholar of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century.¹ Trask claimed that Hawai'i has been a colony of the United States of America since the early 19th century.² Because of American colonization of Hawai'i, not only the land but also culture was subordinated to America, which made Hawaiians feel and survive as

“inferiors” and “a conquered people.”³ Trask considered such a colonial mentality as *colonization of the mind* or *psychological colonization*. In particular, language and education were targeted so that all Hawaiian language schools were closed and English was elevated as the only official language in 1896. Trask considered the deprivation of linguistic rights as one of the most serious problems contributing to the psychological colonization of Native Hawaiians.

Trask analyzed American colonialism from the indigenous perspective, in other words, from that of the oppressed and colonized. Furthermore, she fought against educational colonialism and became the first indigenous tenured professor in Hawaiian Studies at UHM. Trask devoted herself to the empowerment of Native Hawaiians who had lost their pride as indigenous people. This paper examines how Trask struggled for *psychological decolonization* of Native Hawaiians, mainly focusing on her roles as an educator. First, this paper explores how Trask fought against cultural and educational colonialism, focusing on her battle against double colonialism and her efforts to revitalize Hawaiian culture and language at UHM. Then, it analyzes how Trask’s ideology and efforts have influenced Native Hawaiians, especially the students at UHM. This paper also illuminates what strategies Trask used for struggle against psychological colonization.

Trask contributed to psychological decolonization of Native Hawaiians through her fearless efforts to fight against educational colonialism as an educator, empowering and nurturing generations of Native Hawaiians who would devote themselves to the Hawaiian community. This paper focuses on her work and activities during the 1980s and 1990s, a significant time for enhancement of Hawaiians’ self-esteem as indigenous people.

Trask’s Background

Haunani-Kay Trask was born in 1949 and grew up on the island of O’ahu in Hawai’i. Trask studied in the mainland U.S. from the 1960s, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in political science in 1976 and a doctorate in the same field in 1981 at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. While studying there, Trask also participated in student protests against the Vietnam War and in the civil rights movement. Moreover, Trask also fought for a Black studies (now African American studies) program during the civil rights movement.⁴ Through these experiences, she began to develop theories about how capitalism and racism sustained each other, which contributed to shaping her political and ideological principles.⁵

In 1981, just after completing her Ph.D, Trask began teaching at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa (UHM) as an assistant professor in the American Studies department as an expert in feminist

theory and indigenous studies. Trask battled against gender and racial biases to secure tenure at UHM. After a five-year struggle, she became the first indigenous tenured professor at the university in 1986. At that time, the department's curriculum lacked racial, ideological, and gender diversity. Trask protested and founded the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at UHM. She ultimately served as a tenured member of the UH faculty for more than 30 years.

Trask was also a founding member of Ka Lahui Hawai'i, a sovereignty and cultural rights organization formed in 1987. Its goal was "the creation of a state within a state, a nation to be governed by native Hawaiians."⁶ Trask was a fearless and bold advocate for Hawaiian sovereignty.

Psychological Colonization of Native Hawaiians

In a book published in 1999, Trask pointed out that the Native Hawaiians' "socioeconomic, health, and educational profiles are depressingly poor."⁷ First of all, the U.S. military presence in Hawaii caused tremendous suffering for Native Hawaiians, because the military controls huge land areas for bases and settlements. Annie Nakano described the miserable situation of Native Hawaiians in 1993, stating that about 30 percent of Native Hawaiians lived in poverty and they were the most likely to be imprisoned, sick, undereducated, and landless.⁸ Due to alcoholism and criminal behavior, 46 percent of adults and 66 percent of youths were in jail. The mortality rate for Native Hawaiians was 34 percent higher than the average American in 1993.

Psychological colonization was also a serious problem for Native Hawaiians. According to Trask, colonization deprived Native Hawaiians of indigenous culture, and suppression by settlers brought about not only language banning but also family disintegration and cultural exploitation.⁹ First of all, the instructional use of Hawaiian language was prohibited in Hawai'i Schools from 1896 to 1986. Trask considered deprivation of language during colonization as a violation of linguistic rights since language is one of the means to express cultural values and identities.¹⁰

According to Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, Hawaiian culture, arts and history were denigrated as primitive and savage in American schools so that "Hawaiians were made to feel ashamed of their faces, the color of their skin, their names, and of their very identity."¹¹ This shows that imperialism is not only a set of economic, political and military phenomena, as John MacKenzie states, but also a complex ideology which has wide-spread cultural, intellectual and technical expressions.¹²

In an article published in 1984, Trask pointed out that Native Hawaiians lacked critical consciousness toward psychological colonization, despite the miserable situation. Moreover, she stated that the process of psychological decolonization was slower in Hawai'i than in other Pacific

nations.¹³ Trask analyzed the reason for the lack of critical consciousness. Hawai'i became the 50th state of the United States in 1959, and "the myth of American democracy" made people think that "Hawai'i cannot be a colony and rather it must be an integral part of America."¹⁴ More specifically, America has been advocating itself as the country of democracy so that people considered that becoming the part of the US means Hawai'i's statehood is the equal of other states. However, Trask considered "the myth of American democracy" as merely "the justifying ideologies of imperialism."¹⁵ Trask argued that Hawai'i is actually a territorial possession that is geographically and culturally distinct from America.

Furthermore, Trask pointed out that the primary reason for the Hawaiians' lack of critical consciousness is simply that "colonization has taken its toll."¹⁶ Tourism is one example. Trask used the term "cultural prostitution" in reference to tourism in Hawai'i. She employed the term "prostitution" to convey the complete degradation of indigenous culture and Native Hawaiians under corporate tourism.¹⁷ Many Hawaiians, however, see tourism as providing jobs rather than as part of their colonization or as a form of cultural prostitution. Most importantly, Trask pointed out that Native Hawaiians have been colonized too deeply to be aware of their own oppression. It is not until people are aware of their own oppression that critical awareness can begin. This is the first step of psychological decolonization.

Fight Against Educational and Cultural Colonialism

Based on her ideology on issues related with psychological colonization of Native Hawaiians, Trask felt the necessity to awaken them by fighting against educational colonialism. She claimed that rejection of assimilation is critical, stating that Native Hawaiians should "assert their color and culture and its agonizing history" instead of denying themselves, as assimilation demands.¹⁸ This section examines how Trask fought against educational and cultural colonialism, focusing on her battle against white supremacy and her efforts to revitalize Hawaiian culture and language at UHM.

White Supremacy at UHM

In 1981, Trask started her career at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) as an assistant professor of American Studies. At first, as the colonized indigenous female educator, Trask had to fight against educational colonialism based on white supremacy and patriarchy which had degraded women. White male supremacy was accompanied by the spirit of colonialism, which Trask called

“double-colonialism.” Colonialism deprived Native Hawaiians of their linguistic rights and cultural identity, and the issue of gender was intertwined with colonialism. In 1989, the tenured faculty was 70 percent white, a majority of whom were male. Hawaiian tenured faculty made up only 1.5 percent of the 26 percent minority tenured positions.¹⁹

From the 1980s through the 1990s, Trask suffered from discrimination and suppression at UHM because of her race, gender, and “radical” political view. From 1981 through 1985, Trask lived through a five-year battle against all manner of oppressive and exploitative conditions.²⁰ According to Trask, the chief of the department of UHM was a white male who had the authority to decide whom the department would hire for a new position.²¹ Trask described him as a representative of white male supremacy which placed Native Hawaiian women at the bottom of society. Furthermore, Trask suffered from suppression of her political views at the university. More specifically, her radical stance was questioned at faculty meetings focused on discussing whether she should be hired as a professor at the university. Not only was Trask an indigenous leader in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, but her “critical stance on the U.S. as an imperialist power in Hawai‘i and around the world”²⁶ was considered potentially dangerous if students were affected by her ideas.

Trask was one of the very first Native Hawaiians to openly speak out against white supremacy at UHM. She battled against gender and racial biases to secure tenure at UHM with the support of students, faculty union, and the community. Finally, Trask won her five-year battle and she became the first indigenous tenured professor at UHM in 1986. Trask’s success was attributed to her efforts to include everyone who shared her cause and willingly supported her. In that sense, this victory was significant not only for herself but also for native Hawaiians, especially indigenous women. When male supremacy was intertwined with colonialism, oppression toward indigenous women was intensified. In this sense, Trask’s battle against gender and racial discrimination at UHM had a significant meaning for the people who suffered from “double-colonialism” in both the educational institution and the community.

Furthermore, Trask described Hawai‘i as not only the land of the white man but also the land of the white woman. Between 1981 and 1984, the chair of the department at UHM was a white woman. Trask described the white female supremacy in Hawai‘i as follows:

Her belief that there existed a correct way - a culturally correct way - of speaking and behaving made it clear to me how white hegemony in Hawai‘i and on the campus would mean a tight constraint on *my* cultural behaviors. I was to start acting, as we say in Hawaiian, as a *ho‘haole*, someone who behaves like a white person. I was shocked, bemused, furious, and depressed.

Very depressed.²²

This represents *imperial domesticity*. According to Amy Kaplan, while the United States strove to nationalize and domesticate foreign territories and peoples, “annexation threatened to incorporate non-white foreign subjects into the republic in a way that was perceived to undermine the nation as a domestic space.”²³

In the case of UHM, the white female chair forced Trask to follow their cultural rule, that is, cultural norms for white American middle class women. In addition, Trask’s academic freedom was violated. She was told what to teach and what not to teach in her required reading course at UHM. It was the same white female chair of the department that exercised the power of imperial domesticity. In her classes, Trask had included sections on racism and capitalism as basic American institutions and ideologies. The chair pressured her to remove those sections and supplant them with a unit on the family and Christianity. Trask refused, but “the disagreement left a bitter feeling”²⁴ between them. Even in the academy, racism and sexism were apparent and Trask claimed that they were the evil within.²⁵ The white female chair played the role of activator in imposing white middle class cultural values on Trask. This represents white-female supremacy over the indigenous people by neglecting their cultural values.

Hawaiian Studies at UHM

Trask found that the state university in Hawai‘i was still under the influence of colonialism when she became the first tenured professor in Hawaiian Studies at UHM in 1986. According to Trask, for example, the department did not offer courses concerning the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the women’s liberation movement in the U.S., which means that a “pro-capitalist, pro-empire perspective”²⁷ prevailed throughout the university. Trask made it clear that American imperialism forced Native Hawaiians to give in to American culture in which white male supremacy was evident. Furthermore, it was white men that decided “what is taught, who can teach, even what can be said, written, and published.”²⁸ Trask considered the violation of academic freedom as educational colonialism in which *haole* (white) values replaced Native Hawaiian values at UHM, where Hawaiian culture was ridiculed and American culture was praised. Frantz Fanon, whom Trask respected, states, “Colonialism is not satisfied with merely holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”²⁹

In resistance to such educational colonialism, Trask founded and directed the Center for Hawaiian Studies, which emerged out of the university's American Studies program after a long struggle. According to Kekiloa Perry, the creation of the center focusing on the study of all things Hawaiian was significant since it would be "the catalyst for positive changes to the university's poor record of supporting Hawaiians and minorities on campus."³⁰ After years of efforts, Trask and an indigenous educator, Gladys Kamakakuokalani Brandt, made it possible to build a permanent home for the Center for Hawaiian Studies in 1997. It is now called the Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies.

Understanding "Native cultural alternatives" is critical in peeling apart a forced way of behaving, which is the first stage of resistance.³¹ Trask pointed out that "layers of engineered assimilation begin to come loose" when students face the alternatives.³² Trask considered this process to cause tremendous psychological tension, but deemed it essential for Native Hawaiians to reject not only "cultural habits first ingrained by a colonial education" but also "a foreign language, and a fearful daily relationship with the dominant, white class."³³ Trask was considered a fearless advocate for the sovereignty movement, but this shows that fighting against white supremacy in everyday life seemed to take up a lot of her energy. Strong will and determination must have been necessary to continue struggling for cultural revitalization at the university. However, this is an indispensable step in undertaking the task of psychological decolonization.

The purpose of the Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies was clearly stated in its 2000 vision statement: "The Center for Hawaiian Studies inspires academic excellence, cultural integrity and political strength rooted in the *Ea* of our ancestors."³⁴ *Ea* means "life, sovereignty, political independence, divine power to control the Heavens and the Earth" in the Hawaiian language.³⁵ This shows that the center represents the Hawaiian perspective and offers an original curriculum. Interestingly, the mission statement of the center includes not only the pursuit of knowledge concerning the Native people of Hawai'i, their origin, history, language, literature, religion, arts and sciences, but also the importance of interactions with their oceanic environment and other peoples. This is because it is necessary and critical for students to understand the experiences of Native Hawaiians in the context of all indigenous peoples around the world. Moreover, this knowledge is considered applicable not only to Native Hawaiians but also to the betterment of all peoples.³⁶ Trask considered that the solidarity with other indigenous peoples is critical to solving the problems caused by colonialism. Furthermore, the statement emphasizes the importance of presenting "the interplay of history, culture, politics, and the importance of interconnectedness of all knowledge, both contemporary and ancestral."³⁷

More importantly, according to the mission statement, Kamakakūokalani provides education for the nation, empowering students' identities and preparing them to lead Hawai'i into the future. It emphasizes the necessity of nurturing young generations to pass on their indigenous world views and practices. More specifically, the statement makes it clear that Kamakakūokalani should provide an educational experience that will transform their students into responsible community leaders, teachers, and scholars who will make positive contributions for Native Hawaiians.³⁸

Noteworthy is the fact that a Hawaiian student service center called Kani'aupi'o was created in 1988. It has three major goals: to increase Hawaiian student admissions, retain Hawaiian students through the duration of their education, and create Hawaiian student placement opportunities in the private and public sectors.³⁹ For Native Hawaiians, education is the key to surviving and improving institutional access. Moreover, the student service center aims to foster Hawaiian identities and cultivate Hawaiian scholarship. Three mottos are utilized: "Growing Hawaiian leaders", "Strengthening Hawaiian research" and "Empowering the *Lāhui* (nation, race, tribe, people)."⁴⁰ As an educator, Trask transformed curricular practices at UHM into institutional change, which would in turn bring about gradual change among Native Hawaiian students. Throughout her career at UHM, she strove to empower Native Hawaiians not only for students themselves but also for the Native Hawaiian community, and finally for their dream of sovereignty. Even though Trask retired as director in 2010, she continued teaching "native political movements in Hawai'i and the Pacific, the literature and politics of Pacific Islander women, Hawaiian history and politics, and third world and indigenous history and politics" as an emeritus faculty member.⁴¹ Trask never ceased to help empower Native Hawaiian students, knowing that knowledge would be their strength in fighting for their heritage as indigenous people.

Revitalization of the Hawaiian language

After the annexation of Hawai'i as a territory of the United States in 1898, the Hawaiian language came to close to extinction although it is one of the oldest known languages in the world.⁴² More specifically, the language was officially banned from use in schools and government "as part of the efforts to colonize the islands and alter the Hawaiian people's world view."⁴³ English was elevated to the only official language in 1896.⁴⁴ Prohibition of the instructional use of the Hawaiian language in schools continued from 1896 to 1986. More seriously, "those caught speaking Hawaiian language in schools, students and educators alike, were severely punished."⁴⁵ As a result, an entire generation grew up in a predominantly English-speaking world. By the mid-1900s, only the oldest Hawaiians

remained as fluent speakers.⁴⁶

Trask considered the deprivation of linguistic rights as one of the most serious problems contributing to psychological colonization of Native Hawaiians. Therefore, Trask insisted on the necessity of resisting the superiority of the English language as a start, putting emphasis on the significance of Hawaiian language since "language, in particular, can aid in decolonizing the mind."⁴⁷ Legal constraints against using the Hawaiian language continued until 1986. However, the renaissance of Hawaiian culture and politics in the 1970s brought language revitalization into focus.⁴⁸ In the mainland U.S., Native Americans had been earnestly addressing concerns about language loss and endangerment. In Hawai'i, indigenous language and customs had been slowly resurfacing. As for the historical background of revitalization of indigenous language, consciousness toward the universal human rights of linguistic minorities had been heightened in the 1980s in the international community. Most importantly, the Native American Languages Act was enacted in 1992 "to assist Native Americans in assuring the survival and continuing vitality of their languages."⁴⁹ The act primarily recognizes the importance of native languages and declares it to be the policy of the United States to preserve, protect and promote the rights and freedom of native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages.⁵⁰ The greatest benefit of this act is to support programs which promote the reacquisition of Native American languages.

Furthermore, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1993 as International Year of the World's Indigenous People, the aim of which was to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.⁵¹ Both the Native American Languages Act and International Year of the World's Indigenous People contributed to promoting revitalization of Hawaiian culture and language. Trask was part of this Hawaiian renaissance, and she was heavily involved in the revitalization of the Hawaiian language by "advocating for its use in education, media, and public spaces."⁵² Trask helped the Native Hawaiians start to regain their own language in order to liberate themselves from the colonized mind.

Trask explained the several steps necessary for psychological decolonization. First, "thinking in one's own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one's own world view."⁵³ Thinking in English is different from thinking in their native language since language reflects culture. Hawaiian cultural values are totally different from American cultural value, so Trask considered that conceptualizing a world view in the Hawaiian language would "lead to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology."⁵⁴ Trask expected that Native groups would begin to create cultural artifacts that reflect Native history, values, and hopes, which would be "the products of decolonizing minds."⁵⁵

Furthermore, she regarded such groups as likely to heighten their consciousness, which would lead to nationalist political movements. She considered revitalization of the Hawaiian language as a kind of challenge and resistance, which would proceed to larger, more political resistance such as antimilitary activity, efforts to preserve wetlands, forest, and other wild areas, and finally, a political struggle for self-determination.⁵⁶ As an activist struggling for sovereignty as well as an educator, Trask put native language as a priority in starting to awaken Hawaiians. Enhancing self-esteem and pride would eventually nurture the spirit of self-determination.

With the efforts of the other faculty and staff, the University of Hawai'i awarded the first master's degree completed entirely in the Hawaiian language in 2002. A 2016 Hawai'i state report noted that there were over 18,000 Hawaiian language speakers, making it the fifth most widely spoken language in Hawai'i.⁵⁷ Most importantly, in 2022 the state formally apologized for banning the Hawaiian language in schools for 90 years. The education-based nonprofit 'Aha Pūnana Leo had pushed for the apology, hoping that "the resolution leads to more action in support of *'ōlelo Hawai'i*, (the Hawaiian language)."⁵⁸ This demonstrates that efforts to revitalize the Hawaiian language still need to continue.

Knowledge as Power

According to Dean Jonathan Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio at UHM, Trask inspired "thousands of brilliant and talented Hawaiians to come to the University of Hawai'i."⁵⁹ Trask knew that higher education was critical for social transformation. Her efforts to change the curriculum imposed under the influence of educational colonialism at UHM had a great influence on Hawaiian students, showing knowledge as power. *Kālai Pō* and *Make'e Pono Lāhui Hawai'i*, which are native student organizations, are two examples of how Trask's classes influenced the students at UHM,

Kālai Pō

The birth of a Hawaiian student group called *Kālai Pō* was significant as the beginning of awakening among Hawaiian students. In the early 1990s, the movement started as resistance to racism on campus. Two indigenous Hawaiian sisters had challenged a white professor about his racist misrepresentations of Hawaiian history. According to Trask, the sisters protested against the professor's lies about Hawaiians committing infanticide and demanded that he provide historical evidence to substantiate his claim.⁶⁰ Trask explained that the sisters had learned that the allegation of Hawaiian infanticide in traditional times was a missionary fabrication when they took Trask's Hawaiian Studies class on "Myths of Hawaiian History." Then one of the sisters was removed from a

“Geography of Hawai‘i” class because she was considered disruptive for criticizing the professor.⁶¹ Resistance led to the creation of their group Kālai Pō, which not only “publicly protested the sisters’ eviction from class by holding rallies, challenging the racist professor on his evidence,” but also demanded a civil rights counselor from the administration.⁶² This was one example of a Hawaiian student group successfully seeking student government and finally attaining the presidency. Trask was pleased with the fact that the leadership of Kālai Pō had been predominately female. According to Trask, the struggle for sovereignty was a fight against white male supremacy and patriarchy, so it was natural that female students took leadership of the movement.⁶³ The strong indigenous female leadership had been nurtured through her class, transforming knowledge into power with solidarity with other Native Hawaiian students. This has significant meaning in that the indigenous female students started to have the power to change the way the educational institution had treated them. In that sense, they transformed knowledge they had received from Trask’s classes into power to change the discriminatory situation imposed by double colonialism.

Make‘e Pono Lāhui Hawai‘i

Make‘e Pono Lāhui Hawai‘i (Make‘e) or the Hawaiian Student Liberation Union (HSLU), which was born from struggle on the UHM campus, was formed in 1990. Its aim was to eliminate from UHM “all form of colonialism and vestiges of oppression and exploitation being suffered by all native Hawaiian students.”⁶⁴ Kekailoa Perry, who was a member of Make‘e when he was a student at UHM, stated that its ideology was influenced by the Center for Hawaiian Studies and its “iconic professor Haunani-Kay Trask.”⁶⁵ According to Perry, Trask provided the students in her classes with the opportunity to read the writings of Edward Said and Malcom X, which were not typically required reading in the 1980s.⁶⁶ In several courses which Trask had taught through 1998, students were challenged “to critically analyze history and present situations through an anti-colonial lens.”⁶⁷ It is necessary to transform the colonized views of their own history as written by those in the West to provide an alternative history. Trask demonstrated the importance of coming to know what actually happened through colonization of Hawai‘i from an indigenous perspective. According to Linda Smith, it is essential for indigenous peoples struggling for justice to tell their own stories, reclaim the past, and give testimony to the injustices of the past.⁶⁸ As Smith suggests, this is part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization, since “to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges.”⁶⁹

Perry considered Trask to be an atypical university professor in many ways, stating that “(her) courses inspired us to read more activist writers beyond the classroom setting.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, Perry pointed out that the students were attracted to these writers and the courses reawakened the students

who supported Hawaiian resistance to U.S. occupation and hegemony. Moreover, Trask's classes stoked the political flame, showing the students that "the university was a potential space for organizing revolutionary thinking."⁷¹

Another characteristic of this movement is that while Make'e had started at the university campus, Trask exposed students to the larger community so that it began to address issues concerning the broader Hawaiian community. Noteworthy is the fact that this student union extended its activity to the Hawaiian community, with guidance from professional organizers who used to be student activists at UHM. Make'e got involved in various issues such as "printing the Hawaiian language in the daily newspapers and challenging the Global Congress of Heritage Interpretation International" and "advocating for greater rights for underrepresented minorities."⁷² Trask attributed this to the fact that the Hawaiian Studies department was led by faculty who actively supported sovereignty. The students followed their teachers as role models, which got them to engage more in the Hawaiian community issues. Trask made the students realize various forms of colonial mentality not only in the classrooms but also in the Hawaiian community, encouraging them to use knowledge as power which would benefit all the Hawaiian people, especially underrepresented minorities.

As these examples show, Trask considered Hawaiian Studies as part of the larger Hawaiian sovereignty movement. She believed that Native Hawaiians had the right to control over their Native lands and Native communities. As an educator, Trask expected her students to come into the center of the movement, stating that "partly because we are engaged in the study of our culture and history but also because we are Native nationalists."⁷³ Trask considered that Native Hawaiian students who came to know the facts about their history and culture had the responsibility to change the oppressive situation. She explicitly stated that "...we represent Hawaiians in resistance at the University of Hawai'i, and we are consciously focused on training cadres for the nationalist front of our movement."⁷⁴

In order to succeed in the struggle for psychological decolonization, in Trask's case, being an educator could not be separated from being an activist. If students faced discrimination and oppression, they needed to fight against it as colonized and oppressed indigenous people. Trask advanced Native Hawaiian issues through activism and empowered generations of Native Hawaiians to engage not only in education but also in politics.

Trask's Strategies

In the struggle for psychological decolonization, Trask seemingly used several strategies. One

was to turn native culture into the core of resistance. Trask considered knowledge as critical in dismantling the legacy of colonialism. In 1985, Trask made a speech in which she spoke on the “liberation of (her) people” and how culture needed to be the core of political resistance. “Cultural people have to become political. Our culture can’t just be ornamental and recreational...Our culture has to be the core of our resistance, the core of our anger, the core of our *mana* (divine power). That’s what culture is for! What drives independence in all of us today is resistance. To resist what they are doing to our islands and to us.”⁷⁵ As an educator, Trask employed the strategy of using knowledge as power. According to Smith, the master’s tools of colonization will not work to decolonize what the master built, and the need to tell indigenous people’s stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.⁷⁶ More specifically, as Newcomb points out, it is critical for colonized indigenous people to create new tools in order to decolonize the mind with indigenous tools which can revitalize indigenous knowledge.⁷⁷ This can explain why Trask made efforts to revitalize Native Hawaiian culture and language at UHM. In a sense, she endeavored to create new indigenous tools for psychological decolonization.

Another strategy Trask employed was to never follow the Western way of “respectability politics.” Respectability politics is a political strategy wherein members of a marginalized community consciously abandon controversial aspects of their cultural-political identity.⁷⁸ Trask intentionally refused to assimilate and gain the respect of the majority culture. She considered assimilation to be a form of psychological colonization. Trask never compromised and was considered one of “the loudest, most controversial voices in the sovereignty movement.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, she was never afraid of calling out injustice and colonialism, even “intimidating community activists throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.”⁸⁰ For example, she was never afraid of criticizing tourism, Hawai‘i’s largest industry. Moreover, she fought strongly against the U.S. military, which controls one quarter of Oahu island. Being a fearless advocate for Native Hawaiians, Trask “(shook) up the state’s economic and political establishment.”⁸¹

Another example of her disregard for “respectability politics” was demonstrated in a speech Trask made in front of Iolani Palace in 1993. She helped lead a march of Native Hawaiians who were calling for a return of native lands in Hawai‘i. 10,000 people marched to the Iolani Palace on the centennial of the overthrow of its last queen, Liliuokalani. At the podium in front of Iolani Palace, Trask proclaimed: “We are not American. We will die as Hawaiians. We will never be Americans.” She continued: “The Americans, my people, are our enemies, and you must understand that. They are our enemies. They took our land, they imprisoned our queen, they banned our language, they forcibly made us a colony of the United States.”⁸² She added: “We are not Americans. Say it in your heart, say it

when you sleep. We are not Americans. We will die as Hawaiians. Give up Christianity. Give it up because it tells our people *ho'oponopono*—make nice. I say *ku'e, ku'e, ku'e*. Fight, fight fight.”⁸³ As this speech shows, Trask refused to behave in a Western, Christian way. As an indigenous female activist, she never accepted imperial domesticity or male white supremacy and patriarchy. Instead of being nice to the oppressor, Trask insisted on keeping up the fight against colonialism. This speech awakened Native Hawaiians, especially female audience members. One of them was former Congresswoman Colleen Hanabusa, who stated “I remember hearing the words *ku'e* (fight) for the first time.”⁸⁴ However, some Native Hawaiians were shocked to hear her strong and aggressive words.

Later, Trask said in an interview, “People expect me to show up with spears or something...I’m a professor, I have a Ph.D. I’ve written books. I’m a trained political theorist. When I give a speech that’s finely argued, people are shocked, because the papers have said I’m crazy, vicious, a racist, a loudmouth.”⁸⁵ Trask was criticized for her aggressive speech because she had not followed “respectability politics”. Even though she was admitted as a scholar, having gained a Ph.D. in the Western academic circle, she was attacked by the media because of her rejection of respectability politics. Her sister, Mililani Trask, an attorney and the governor of Ka Lahui, said, “Haunani is an intellectual—she has the obligation to generate debate.”⁸⁶

In order for Trask to generate debate, she needed to reject respectability politics. She knew this was the better method in struggling for psychological decolonization. Trask felt a strong responsibility to awaken Native Hawaiians by drawing attention to controversial issues in the community and letting people know the historical facts as seen from the indigenous perspective. What was important to her was “not to be liked, but to be heard.”⁸⁷ The indigenous people were forced to be docile and subordinate beings in the colonized world, but Trask knew that calling out injustice was necessary in order to decolonize the minds of people. However, Trask knew that not all Hawaiians agreed with her. Trask stated, “My centennial speech was really startling to people. Many were unhappy. But it made people really think about their condition. It’s like the point of a spear—it’s very painful to be told the truth. But that’s my role.”⁸⁸ As these words show, decolonization of the mind is sometimes accompanied by pain since the oppressed people have to look back their own experiences and think about what they really meant for them. However, Trask considered that knowing the truth was essential for psychological decolonization to begin, however painful it might be.

Trask was sometimes considered as a controversial figure because she was unafraid of criticism with “her incisive rhetoric and impassioned oratory character.”⁸⁹ She clearly proclaimed in her speech in 1993, “I am so proud to be here, I am so proud to be angry. I am so proud to be a Hawaiian.” Trask regarded anger as an obligation in response to long-standing injustice. It was also “a necessity for a

nation that was in deep, deep pain.”⁹⁰ In an interview conducted in 2004, Trask said:

Of course, the educational class I occupy—a Ph.D. and a professor—is the top of the occupational pyramid for Hawaiians. My people, on the other hand, are at the bottom of the economic and educational ladder...Both in terms of respect and in terms of obligation, I am expected to contribute to our people's welfare. In Hawaiian culture...my educational and political position carries a large obligation to the *Lahui*, the nation. This is partly because we are a nation, a people, and we are poor, oppressed, and in need, dire need.⁹¹

Trask felt a strong responsibility, as an educator, to liberate native Hawaiians from their oppression. Most importantly, Trask identified herself as a Native Hawaiian rather than an American. That is why she made it her mission to devote herself to the betterment of her people and the community. Her attitude comes from Hawaiian cultural values in which people help with each other as *ohana*, extended family, which is totally different from Western individualism.

Conclusion

Trask fought against cultural and educational colonialism by revitalizing Hawaiian culture and language at UHM, which had a great influence on both the students and the larger community. As Smith points out, the colonizer had designed education especially “to destroy Indigenous cultures, value systems and appearance.”⁹⁴ Moreover, educational colonialism is a direct cause of psychological colonization. In order for psychological decolonization to begin, as Collins states, it is necessary to dismantle the legacy of formal colonialism and to imagine its replacement.⁹³ Furthermore, the struggle over knowledge itself constitutes an important site of resistance since knowledge has been of crucial importance to colonial rule and postcolonial explanations of it.⁹⁴

Trask encouraged the students to transform knowledge into power. Most importantly, Trask made it her mission to fight for Native Hawaiians rights, encouraging the younger generation of Hawaiians attending UHM to embrace their culture and language as their own heritage. Trask herself fought against the deep-rooted injustice perpetrated on Native Hawaiians and greatly contributed to instilling self-esteem and pride in the students. From Trask's classes, psychological decolonization had begun, which contributed to making Native Hawaiians recover themselves and develop a sense of self-esteem. Moreover, Trask succeeded in nurturing the next generation as leaders and activists in the community.

Furthermore, Trask had to fight against structures of racism, sexism, and colonialism as an indigenous female educator, who was considered powerless under the influence of white supremacy and patriarchy. Trask made it clear that racism, sexism, and colonialism intersected. As Collins points out, by bundling the ideas of gender, race, and indigeneity together, intersectionality can build on and potentially extend the initiatives.⁹⁵ As an indigenous female educator, she knew how to fight against the long-standing forms of domination by white male and female supremacy. In order to be heard, she rejected “respectability politics”, which she regarded as an assimilation into Western white culture.

Even though Trask was criticized by whites for her “radical” ideas and movement, she struggled to regain the human dignity as one of the female Native Hawaiians who had been marginalized by American colonialism. As Smith states, “Indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced”⁹⁶ so far so that it was necessary for Trask to explicitly criticize the discrimination and oppression Native Hawaiians have suffered tremendously from. Trask chose her own way with pride as a Native Hawaiian instead of using respectability politics. In that sense, systemic discrimination, intersecting with race, gender, ethnicity, and colonialism, made Trask reject respectability politics. It is noteworthy that Trask never fought by herself. She shared the causes with faculty, staff, students and community members in the struggle for psychological decolonization. Ultimately, Trask provided Native Hawaiians with hope and the possibilities for social change, empowering and nurturing generations of Native Hawaiians who would devote themselves to their Hawaiian community.

Notes

¹ *UH News*, “Haunani-Kay Trask Receives National Recognition for Scholarship for the Public Good,” November 12, 2019, <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2019/11/12/trask-awarded-davis-prize>.

² Haunani-Kay Trask, “Hawaiian, American Colonization, and the Quest for Independence.” *Social Process in Hawai'i* 31, (1984): 101.

³ Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵ Annabelle Williams, “Haunani-Kay Trask, Champion of Native Rights in Hawaii, Dies at 71,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2021.

⁶ Annie Nakao, “Native daughters: The Trask sisters take on the ‘aloha’ myth,” *San Francisco Examiner, Image*, June 20, 1993.

⁷ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 49.

⁸ Nakano, *Native daughters*, 12.

⁹ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 142.

¹¹ Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, "The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement," in *Islands in Captivity: The Record of the International Tribunal on the Rights of Indigenous Hawaiians*, ed. Ward Churchill and Sharon H. Venne (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), xix.

¹² John MacDonald Mackenzie, *Imperialism and the Natural World*, (England: Manchester University Press, 1990)

¹³ Trask, "Hawaiian, American Colonization, and the Quest for Independence," 108.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶ Ibid., 108.

¹⁷ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 140.

¹⁸ Trask, "Hawaiian, American Colonization, and the Quest for Independence," 106.

¹⁹ Kekiloa Perry, "Make'e Pono Lahui Hawai'i," in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Ikaika Hussey and Erin Kahunawaika'ala Wright (London: Duke University Press, 2014), 270.

²⁰ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 152-153.

²¹ Ibid., 155.

²² Ibid., 160

²³ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire: In the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 26.

²⁴ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 160.

²⁵ Ibid., 159.

²⁵ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 160.

²⁶ Ibid., 159.

²⁷ Ibid., 153-154.

²⁸ Ibid., 160.

²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 210.

³⁰ Kekiloa Perry, "Make'e Pono Lahui Hawai'i," 271.

³¹ Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies – Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge. <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/hshk/kamakakuokalani>.

³² Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 89.

³³ Ibid., 90.

³⁴ Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies – Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge.

³⁵ Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, "The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement," xxix.

³⁶ Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies – Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge.

³⁷ Mission–Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/hshk/kamakakuokalani/mission-op>.

- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Native Hawaiian Student Services, <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/nhss>.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ “2018-19 University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Catalog Hawai‘iniuiakea School of Hawaiian Knowledge Kamakakūōka lani”. www.catalog.hawaii.edu.
- ⁴² Hawaiian Language Revitalization, <https://www.hawaiian-study.info>.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 16.
- ⁴⁵ Katrina-Ann R. Kapā‘anaokalāoikeola Nākoa Oliveria. “E Ola Mau ka ‘Olelo Hawai‘i: The Hawaiian Language Revitalization Movement,” in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, ed. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Ikaika Hussey and Erin Kahunawaika‘ala Wright (London: Duke University Press, 2014), 80.
- ⁴⁶ Hawaiian Language Revitalization, <https://www.hawaiian-study.info>.
- ⁴⁷ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 43.
- ⁴⁸ Hawaiian Language Revitalization, <https://www.hawaiian-study.info>.
- ⁴⁹ Hinton Leanne, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization* (California: Academic Press, 2001), 48.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 45.
- ⁵¹ UN Online, “First International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People (1995-2004),” *Department of Economic and Social Affairs Indigenous Peoples*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/second-international-decade-of-the-worlds-indigenous-people/7276-2.html>.
- ⁵² Shari Nakata, “Language Suppression, Revitalization, and Native Hawaiian Identity” *Diversity & Social Justice Forum*, Volume 3, (2017): 23.
- ⁵³ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 43.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Hawaiian Language Revitalization, <https://www.hawaiian-study.info>.
- ⁵⁸ Ku‘uehi Hiraishi, “State Formally Apologizes for Banning Hawaiian Language in Schools for 90 Years,” *Hawaii Public Radio*, April 28, 2022. <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2022-04-28/state-formally-apologizes-for-banning-hawaiian-language-in-schools-for-90-years>.
- ⁵⁹ Moanike‘ala Nabarro, “In memoriam: Haunani-Kay Trask, Exemplary Native Hawaiian Scholar,” *University of Hawai‘i System News*, July 3, 2021
- ⁶⁰ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 189.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Ibid., 190.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 192.
- ⁶⁴ Kekiloa Perry, “Make‘e Pono Lahui Hawai‘i,” 267.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 268-269.

⁶⁸ Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2021), 38.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kekiloa Perry, "Make'e Pono Lahui Hawai'i," 278.

⁷¹ Ibid., 267.

⁷² Ibid., 269.

⁷³ Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 189.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁵ Watson Trisha Kehaulani, "The Passing Of Haunani-Kay Trask And The Uplifting Of A Nation," *Honolulu Civil Beat*, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2021/07/trisha-kehaulani-watson-the-passing-of-haunani-kay-trask-and-the-uplifting-of-a-nation>.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 38.

⁷⁷ Steven Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*, 3rd Edition, (Fulcrum Publishing, 2008) quoted in Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2021), 22.

⁷⁸ Pitcan, Mikaela, Marwick, Alice E and Boyd, Danah, "Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 23, no.3 (April 6, 2018): 165, <https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/23/3/163/4962541>.

⁷⁹ Annie Nakao, *Native daughters*, 14.

⁸⁰ Trisha Kehaulani Watson, "The Passing Of Haunani-Kay Trask And The Uplifting Of A Nation". *Honolulu Civil Beat*. (July 4, 2021), <https://www.civilbeat.org/2021/07/trisha-kehaulani-watson-the-passing-of-haunani-kay-trask-and-the-uplifting-of-a-nation>.

⁸¹ Annie Nakao, *Native daughters*, 12.

⁸² Annabelle Williams, "Haunani-Kay Trask, Champion of Native Rights in Hawaii, Dies at 71,"

⁸³ Annie Nakao, *Native daughters*, 14.

⁸⁴ Mark Ladoa and Peter Boylan, "Activist, Retired University of Hawaii Professor Haunani-Kay Trask fought for Hawaiian Rights, Causes," *Star Advertiser*, July 4, 2021, <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2021/07/04/hawaii-news/activist-retired-university-of-hawaii-professor-haunani-kay-trask-fought-for-hawaiian-rights-causes>.

⁸⁵ Annie Nakao, *Native daughters*, 14.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁹ Matthew Dekneef, "15 Extraordinary Hawai'i Women Who Inspire Us All," MAR 8, 2017, <https://www.hawaiimagazine.com/15-extraordinary-hawaii-women-who-inspire-us-all>.

⁹⁰ Trisha Kehaulani Watson, *The Passing Of Haunani-Kay Trask And The Uplifting Of a Nation*.

⁹¹ Cynthis Franklin and Laura E. Lyons, "Land, leadership, and Nation: Haunani-Kay Trask on the Testimonial Uses of life Writing in Hawai'i," *Biography* 27.1 (Winter 2004): 247.

⁹² Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 22.

⁹³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality: As Critical Social Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 109.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 180.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 32.

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