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# From Uē to Kū'ē: Loss and Resistance in Haunani-Kay Trask's *Night Is a Shark Skin Drum* and Matthew Kaopio's *Written in the Sky*

Uē and kū'ē, or grief and resistance, are themes that pervade much of contemporary[1] Kanaka Maoli literature[2] because uē and kū'ē also punctuate our most recent history as a nation occupied by the United States for over a hundred years. Our occupation has entrenched American colonial ideology into nearly every aspect of our everyday lives. From the time we are born, to the time we die, and even beyond that, to the time our bones are held within our āina, our land, we are regulated by American law and cultural standards. We are a people who know loss profoundly and deeply, and in many ways we have come to be defined by this loss – loss of country, of governance, of land, of traditions, of language, of history, of genealogies, of ancestors, of family, of our self-respect. Certainly, these losses are a consequence of our colonial situation, and we number among the many casualties of American Empire. Still, this knowledge of our loss is precisely what compels us, as Hawaiians, to continue the struggle of recovering what was and maintaining those cultural traditions that have continued despite our colonization. It is in this grief that we find our will to resist.

In his Introduction to *On Being Hawaiian*, John Dominis Holt describes the inheritance of grief through Hawaiian cultural memory as sensing "a greatness, something intangible yet powerful and enduring once belonged to our people". However, Holt frames this loss as reparable through our continuance as native people: "[Hawaiians] know that some of this lives on in us. We are links to the ancients: connected by inheritance to their mana, their wisdom, their superb appreciation of what it is to be human".[3] Thus, our continuance as a people means the continuance of our ancestors. Recognizing this is resistant in and of itself, as a critical part of the colonial project is to sever our connection to our kūpuna, our ancestors, and consequently, our history and identity as sovereign people.

This paper examines two prime examples of Kanaka Maoli literature that frame the present moment of uē and kū'ē, Kanaka Maoli loss and resistance, by emphasizing cultural and ancestral continuance: Matthew Kaopio's novel *Written in the Sky* (2005) and Haunani-Kay Trask's poetry collection *Night is a Sharkskin Drum* (2002). I begin by contextualizing the politicization of the Kanaka Maoli text to then examine both texts in terms of their representations of loss and resistance. I conclude by situating these texts within the contemporary Kanaka Maoli Literary Movement, which I assert is reflective of our ongoing sovereignty as a people.

[1] I define 'contemporary' Kanaka Maoli literature as our written *and* oral literature from the 1960s, particularly after John Dominis Holt's *On Being Hawaiian* (1964), often credited as spurring the 'Hawaiian Renaissance' to the present.

[2] Of course, in offering the 1960s as a periodic division, I also recognize that our contemporary literature is a mo'opuna, or descendant, of our earlier oral and written literature and must be situated within the larger, older framework of Kanaka Maoli literature, which is largely orature.

[3] John Dominis Holt, Introduction, in *On Being Hawaiian* (Honolulu: Kū Pa'a Press, 1976), 9.

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## The Politicized/Political Kanaka Maoli Voice: Speaking and Writing our Sovereignty

Because Kānaka Maoli are colonized people, nearly every example of our literary production, every rhetorical action – arguably, every effort to speak or write – disrupts the colonial ideological narrative and defies the severity of our colonial silencing. Edward Said asserts that the "enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea of having an empire* … and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture; then in turn imperialism acquires a kind of coherence, a set of experiences, and a presence of ruler and ruled alike within the culture".[4] In this way, narrative functions as the vehicle for colonial ideology. Thus, the United States, following suit with its fellow European colonial counterparts, uses narrative largely in the service of colonial efforts. As identified by Said, these themes are often "premised upon the subordination and victimization of the native" and may include:

> an ideological rationale for reducing, then reconstituting the native as someone to be ruled and managed[;] … the idea of Western salvation and redemption through its 'civilizing mission'[;] … the security of a situation that permits the conqueror not to look into the truth of the violence he does[; and] … the process by which, after the natives have been displaced from their historical location on their land, their history is rewritten as a function of the imperial one.[5]

In accordance with this, the colonial narrative is culturally hegemonic[6] and made to appear normative. Newspapers and other forms of media become weaponry used by the state to maintain the ideological hegemony created by the dominant power. Through the media, the state is able to continue colonization and oppression while also obtaining a measure of consent from the colonized/oppressed, who are then led to believe (often through repetition of state ideology) that their oppression is normative.

The degree to which this colonial narrative (and its variations) affects the colonized is tremendous. In *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*, Haunani-Kay Trask asserts that Hawai'i, as an occupied nation, has become so entrenched in American colonial ideology that "we cannot understand our own cultural degradation because we are living it .... we are colonized to the extent that we are unaware of our oppression".[7] For this reason, the role of the Kanaka Maoli writer to disrupt and overturn the colonial narrative is key to sustaining Hawaiian sovereignty and decolonization because "just as culture may predispose and actively prepare one society for the overseas domination of another, it may also prepare that society to relinquish or modify the idea of overseas domination"[8] as well as to "clearly define the people, the subject of [the colonized writer's] creation"[9] despite colonial silencing of these counter-hegemonic efforts.

Our writing has arguably always struggled against some semblance of colonial silencing, starting with missionary censorship (shortly after the introduction of writing by missionaries in Hawai'i) in nineteenth century Hawaiian language

[4] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 11, emphasis mine.

[5] Ibid., 131–132.

[6] Antonio Gramsci refers to "cultural hegemony" as the process whereby a dominant class contrives to retain political power by manipulating public opinion, creating what he calls the "popular consensus". For more, see his *Prison Notebooks,* ed. by Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1992), 233-238.

[7] Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1993), 145.

[8] Said, *Culture*, 200.

[9] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York City: Grove Press, 1963), 163.

newspapers[10] to the ignoring/erasure of Kanaka Maoli literature by the media and publishers, as well as within Hawai'i's school system, that continues today. This silencing makes evident the threat posed to the colonial narrative by Kanaka Maoli writers. However, as Haunani-Kay Trask rightly claims, the writing of all Hawaiians –

> whether we write *mele* (songs) or *oli* (chants) or essays or speeches or poetry or scholarship – is a continuing refusal to be silent, to join those groups of indigenous peoples who have been disappeared .... Hawaiians are still here, we are still creating, we are still resisting.[11]

Thus, the political role of contemporary Native Hawaiian writers in relation to Hawaiian people and culture is largely to counter the colonial narrative and its ideological hegemony, but also to serve decolonization and Hawaiian nationalistic efforts.[12]

For this reason, much of contemporary Kanaka Maoli literature focuses on our cultural losses and expresses how American colonization affects us as indigenous people. As such, it reflects our concern with overturning racist stereotypes and colonially-imposed narratives of our history, which have been used to justify our ongoing occupation. But perhaps most significantly, our contemporary literature emphasizes how we have survived, how our connections to our kūpuna have remained strong, as well as how we may recover what we have lost. Thus, our writing represents a powerful site of resistance, or kū'ē, by expressing both our profound sense of loss, our uē, and our processes of healing and recovery, as can be seen in both Matthew Kaopio's *Written in the Sky* and Haunani-Kay Trask's *Night is a Sharkskin Drum*.

## Matthew Kaopio's *Written in the Sky*

*Written in the Sky* relates the story of 'Īkauikalani, a fourteen-year-old Kanaka Maoli boy who is homeless and must live in Ala Moana Park after his grandmother dies.[13] Under the guidance of his grandmother, who visits him in dreams, 'Īkau struggles to survive as well as to search for his own identity and culture – all of which is made difficult by the often violent urban landscape of Honolulu. Homelessness is a key issue for Kānaka Maoli, as the majority of the homeless population is of Kanaka Maoli descent, a fact that highlights the colonial dispossession of our 'āina. Without houses, many homeless families must live on beaches, where they have access to a source of food, showers, and spirituality through our familial connection to the ocean and the land. Invariably, evictions from beaches become important sites demonstrating this colonial dispossession. However, they also exemplify Kanaka Maoli resistance to further displacement and our defiant survival by returning to the land for our sustenance.[14] Thus, 'Īkau, who used to live with his grandmother on a farm in Kahalu'u, becomes homeless as:

> [b]ills for dialysis and cancer treatments had run so high that the bank foreclosed on their homestead. Without any income, they couldn't afford the rent in Honolulu. When she was hospitalized, most of their things were taken to the dump by the angry landlord

[10] For a detailed examination of missionary censorship of Kanaka Maoli writing during the 19th century, see Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University, 2004).

[11] Trask, "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization", in Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, eds., *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (New York: Bowman & Littlefield, 1999), 20.

[12] Frantz Fanon uses "national culture" to describe the "collective thought process of a people to describe, justify and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong". *Wretched of the Earth*, 169.

[13] Matthew Kaopio, *Written in the Sky* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 2005). Hereafter referenced in the text as *WS*.

[14] In the poem, "I Not Homeless, I Jus' No Mo' One House", performed at the 2005 Hawai'i Book and Music Festival, 'Īmaikalani Kalāhele highlights how for Hawaiians, there is no "homelessness", just "houselessness", because Hawai'i is our home and the 'āina is where we will always belong.

…. Eventually, he'd found a place to sleep under a bridge near the fishpond at Ala Moana Beach Park. (*WS*, 2)

That ʻĪkau and his grandmother are evicted from their Homestead land (a Congressionally-mandated entitlement that is supposed to ensure Hawaiians have land on which they may live) highlights the irony that "space was appropriated from indigenous cultures and then 'gifted back' as reservations, reserved pockets of land for indigenous people who once possessed all of it"[15] and that this fails to adequately serve Hawaiians, who have no choice but to be homeless.

[15] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 51.

The use of the land after their eviction is later movingly questioned when he returns to Kahaluʻu and sees "his grandmother's once-thriving home in shambles. No one had bought it after the bank had foreclosed on it. The yard was overgrown and the house was boarded up…. The yard had become a dump where careless people threw their garbage" (*WS*, 147–148). This underscores the injustice of Hawaiian displacement and the colonial use of land as a "source of money. Land is now called 'real estate,' rather than 'our mother', Papa. The American relationship of people to land is that of exploiter to exploited".[16]

[16] Trask, *From a Native Daughter,* 143.

Despite his extreme poverty, ʻĪkau takes spiritual sustenance from the ʻāina, regularly practicing hiʻuwai, which "gave one the chance to spiritually, as well as physically, wash away the debris of the previous day to begin the new day fresh" (*WS*, 4). He also views sharing food with his dove friends, Pegleg and Two-Toe, as spiritual: "Although he would have preferred to eat the entire [sandwich], he enjoyed sharing his blessings. Not only was his stomach full, but so was his spirit" (*WS*, 105).

Also, because of his own cultural beliefs and respect for the ʻāina, ʻĪkau regularly picks up trash as part of his daily routine, a practice embodying aloha ʻāina or mālama ʻāina, the reciprocal aloha between kanaka, or person, and ʻāina. He is rewarded by finding what he calls the "Secret Garden", containing watercress, strawberry guava trees "weighted down with fruit", cherry tomatoes, and mangoes (*WS*, 98–100). Exemplifying how the ʻāina offers both spiritual and physical healing, ʻĪkau also finds kaunaʻoa to treat a fellow homeless man's gangrene, employing his grandmother's teachings of lāʻau lapaʻau, or Hawaiian herbal medicine: "From his grandmother he knew that it usually took five days to heal such a severe case of gangrene. Five was a powerful number in Hawaiian medicine. If the man was too far gone, the kaunaʻoa might at least provide him some relief" (*WS*, 99). Despite ʻĪkau's 'houselessness', he finds he can be sustained by the ʻāina, as well as by the human relationships he maintains with the other homeless people and friends – "Hawaiian", who is killed by gang members, but imparts his wisdom through a journal he leaves behind; the Samoan manager at McDonald's who gives him leftover food; and "Gladness", for whom he does yard work. Interestingly enough, when given the chance to live with Gladness or with family members on Kauaʻi, ʻĪkau chooses to remain at Ala Moana Park, a decision influenced by his special gifts that allow him an intimate connection with the ʻāina and reinforce his special kuleana, or duty, to heal others.

Among the other prominent themes of loss within the novel are ʻĪkau's loss of identity, culture and family. His loss of identity is most prevalent in his early ignorance of the meaning and genealogy of his name, "which he was ashamed of and never used" (*WS*, 2), as "most people could not pronounce [it] properly" (*WS*, 27). As if to demonstrate the importance of a name to identity in the Hawaiian context, Kaopio frames the novel in the third-person, regularly referring to ʻĪkau as "the boy", until ʻĪkau learns the significance of his name from his estranged grand-aunt, Mariah Wong. Through her, he learns he is named for his great-great-grandfather who was a kahuna and a descendant of priests who used lāʻau lapaʻau to heal others and could read omens in the sky. She also gives ʻĪkau the gift of knowing his moʻokūʻauhau, or genealogy (*WS*, 125–126).

From then on in the novel, ʻĪkau shares his name proudly, which is also reinforced by Kaopio's use of his name. Empowered by the knowledge of his moʻokūʻauhau, "the meaning of his name: ʻĪkauikalani. The answer is placed in the heavens" (*WS*, 127) and the understanding that he continues his family's gift of healing and reading the clouds for hōʻailona (signs), ʻĪkau further sees himself as the continuation of his kūpuna, which gives him a sense of purpose:

> He was ʻĪkauikalani, a direct descendant of ancient Hawaiian chiefs and powerful priests. And nothing anybody said or did would change that fact. As long as he lived, his ancestors lived. As a descendant of chiefs, he had a responsibility to care for those around him who were in need, and he accepted this calling and vowed to honor the legacy. (*WS*, 134)

While this knowledge of his name, and thus his identity, is empowering for ʻĪkau, the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of names in the Hawaiian context is also shown to be tragic in the case of the character, Hawaiian. Though Hawaiian's real name is "Clarence Kealiʻi Holomaikaʻi III", he uses the name Hawaiian – perhaps illustrating an every-Hawaiian character, but also maybe negating his given name, which means "The Chief who Travels in Righteousness", as penance for "killing three people while driving drunk in a stolen vehicle" (*WS*, 28). However, as a homeless man, Hawaiian's name and identity are subsumed when he is killed: "With no hope of identifying the killers, the Honolulu Police Department officers wrapped up their investigation of the homicide of the homeless John Doe" (*WS*, 34). Thus, he dies, renamed with an Americanism that signifies namelessness.

Loss is also expressed through the passing of ʻĪkau's grandmother and Hawaiian, and his Aunty Mariah Wong; however, throughout the novel, this loss is negated as his grandmother's, Hawaiian's, and his aunt's spiritual presences remain with him. His grandmother visits him in his dreams, protecting him and guiding him toward Mariah Wong. These dreams are "always so vivid. They seemed real, and his real life the dream" (*WS*, 92). Before she dies, she gives him a lock of her hair telling him that the "strands hold [her] thoughts … [her] memories of what [she] know[s]. Of happy times … with [him]" (*WS*, 129). Similarly, Mariah Wong visits ʻĪkau in the form of a pueo after she dies.

Though not a family member, Hawaiian also appears to ʻĪkau in a dream and remains to guide ʻĪkau largely through his journal, which regularly "[feeds ʻĪkau's] equally hungry soul with words of nourishment" (*WS*, 58). Kaopio's use of the word "feed" is significant, as not only is there a figurative use of the word "feed", framing "words" as food for the soul, but there is also the reference to hānai, feeding or adoption, which in the Hawaiian context establishes a sense of ʻohana between people. It is a reference to Hawaiian's hānai-ing of ʻĪkau before his death, but also his continuous hānai-ing of ʻĪkau by showing him where to get food and how to survive being homeless.

Significantly, Kaopio frames cultural loss, not in terms of total loss or irreparable disconnection, but in terms of lack of practice or ignorance of the ways in which we continue to practice traditional culture. For example, ʻĪkau, though unaware that he is descended from a line of seers, is nevertheless innately aware of his ability to read signs in the clouds: "The sky turned orange, and the sun's final rays flashed green along the ocean's horizon ... The boy knew this was a good omen. But as the sky darkened, so did his visions ... the dying sun's final rays made the boy think of splattered blood" (*WS*, 23). This sign foretells the meeting and subsequent murder of Hawaiian by the gang members. Similarly, when ʻĪkau sees the following hōʻailona of a double night rainbow, he knows his grand-aunt has passed away: "Clouds parted above him, revealing a bright, full moon that cast a pale-blue glow. The moonlight formed a rainbow, and he stared at it with wonder" (*WS*, 144).

This continued practice of his culture can also be seen in his attention to his dreams wherein he recognizes his ʻaumakua, "a Hawaiian owl, a pueo, the guardian spirit of his grandmother's family … [and in reverence] quietly, the boy chanted several lines of greeting and thanks he had learned from his grandmother" (*WS*, 51). That he believes in the dreams demonstrates that this traditional cultural belief continues to be taught and practiced from one generation to the next. However, that there is "a fresh pile of bird droppings with what looked like fur and bones in it … [and] several large owl feathers" (*WS*, 54) by him when he wakes up, also demonstrates how ʻĪkau's dream (and thus, dreaming for Hawaiians) is real. Kaopio privileges the Hawaiian perspective of dreams as hōʻike na ka pō and the spiritual belief that our ʻaumākua give us knowledge in the night and also inspire us in our dreams.[17] George Kanahele describes dreams, in the Hawaiian context, as:

> visions of another reality, parallel to those seen in the waking world. That is, the mind in dream produces symbols which have causal or purposive meanings, with some definite relationship to reality … dreams were caused usually by the movements of one's ʻuhane, or spirit, or by the ʻaumākua. Hōʻike na ka pō (exhibits by the night) – wisdom given through dream.[18]

Rather than an instance of 'magical realism', as perhaps it would be framed within a western literary critical context, "the world of dreams and nature's responsiveness to human beckoning, and vice versa, are often integrated without self-consciousness

[17] For a detailed discussion of this belief, see Mary Kawena Pukui, "Moeʻuhane, Hihiʻo, a me Hōʻailona: Dreams and Symbols", in *Nānā i ke Kumu,* vol. 2 (Honolulu: Hui Hānai, 1979).

[18] George Kanahele, *Kū Kanaka: A Search for Hawaiian Values* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 1986), 46.

into the waking world of Hawaiian belief and action".[19] Thus, the affirmation of his Hawaiian cultural practices and beliefs are powerful sites of identity for ʻĪkau, exemplifying how the practicing of Hawaiian culture and beliefs can be empowering for Kānaka Maoli.

[19] Richard Hamasaki, "Mountains in the Sea", in Paul Sharrad, ed., *Readings in Pacific Literature* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 1993), 196.

Kaopio's novel represents an important counter-hegemonic effort to overturn this damaging negation of Hawaiian-ness, by privileging distinctly Hawaiian ways of knowing and doing, thereby resisting colonial ideology seeking to discount Hawaiian epistemology. Thus, ʻĪkau is alone, yet he is never alone, as the ʻāina raises him alongside his kūpuna to learn what is pono, i ka wā pono (at the right time). Essentially, it is his knowledge of Kanaka Maoli cultural traditions, beliefs and spirituality and his knowledge of his place and purpose or kuleana within that cultural framework which empower ʻĪkau. His separation from his Hawaiian culture is not irreparable, but a matter of remembering the teachings of our kūpuna: "He could hear his grandmother's voice so clearly. With her death, he'd lost everything: his name, his history. But he was recalling it now" (*WS*, 131).

## Haunani-Kay Trask's *Night is a Sharkskin Drum*

Another significant site of counter-hegemony, Haunani-Kay Trask's *Night is a Sharkskin Drum* is a collection of poetry sectioned into three parts.[20] The first section, "Born in Fire", depicts five poems emphasizing her influences from our ancient orature, especially the moʻolelo telling of Pele and her sisters, Nāmakaokahaʻi and Hiʻiaka. The second section, "A Fragrance of Devouring", is comprised of several poems depicting Kanaka Maoli resistance to colonial exploitation and devastation. The collection concludes with the final section, "Chants of Dawn", whose poems largely emphasize cultural renewal and reawakening, especially through the erotic or sexual.

[20] Trask, *Night is a Shark Skin Drum* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2002). Hereafter referenced in the text as *NSD*.

Like all the poems in the first section, the poem for which the collection is named, "Night is a Sharkskin Drum", references the powerful moʻolelo of akua wahine, especially that of Pele and her sisters. The first stanza represents a kāhea to return to the "night", or pō, the ancient time of the gods (as depicted by the *Kumulipo*), ka wā kahiko, with the "sharkskin drum" calling, "sounding our bodies black / and gold".

The next two stanzas frame the entrance of Pele, as "All is aflame / the uplands a *shush* / of wind. // From Halemaʻumaʻu / our fiery Akua comes". Then the following oli is offered to announce her coming:

> E, Pele e,
> E, Pele e,
> E, Pele e. (*NSD*, 5)

The repetition of these lines in the oli, which are used in traditional mele performed in honor of Pele, in effect, builds the mana of the words, while also welcoming her presence. The use of the 'ē' (shown in the original without the diacriticals) following

Pele's name, also denotes tremendous respect and affection for her, as it serves to emphasize her name. In naming her collection for this poem, then, Trask emphasizes myth as a powerful site of decolonization.

This can also be seen in the poem "Nāmakaokaha'i", which is written for Pele's older sister and enemy. As a "mo'o woman of kuapā", or the dashing waves, Nāmakaokaha'i is represented in traditional mo'olelo as being in continual conflict with Pele, the goddess of the volcano. However, here, Trask emphasizes their mana wahine, or feminine power, as sister akua who share the same powerful mo'okū'auhau instead:

> Born from the chest
> of Haumea, …
> lizard-tongued goddess …
> sister of thunder
> and shark –
> Kānehekili,
> Kūhaimoana –
> elder of Pele,
> Pelehonuamea. (*NSD*, 7)

Like Pele, Nāmakaokaha'i has "eyes flecked with fire" as she "summon[s] her family / from across the seas", creating "sharks in the shallows, / upheaval in the heavens". As a result of her "summoning", the "Woman of the Pit" arrives:

> Pele, Pele'aihonua,
> traveling the uplands,
>
> devouring the foreigner. (*NSD*, 8)

Trask's reference to Pele'aihonua, or Pele-the-land-eater, as opposed to Pelehonuamea, or Pele-of-the-red-earth, emphasizes Pele's power, often in anger, to destroy by "devouring". That the foreigner is being "devour[ed]" is, of course, of primary significance here – the foreigner is both the object of anger and, thus, rejected by the land, which Pele embodies. This highlights how the use and depiction of traditional mo'olelo can be used politically in contemporary literature. As a strong display of literary mana, therefore, "legends and myths do not simply belong to the past. This is not to deny that myths and legends come from the past, but to attend to what these stories do in the present".[21] Trask's depiction of Pele'aihonua's angry consuming of the foreigner represents her own outrage at the foreigner's presence, which, after the earlier poems depicting the mo'olelo of the akua, seems particularly invasive.

[21] Cristina Bacchilega, *Legendary Hawai'i and the Politics of Place* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 25.

In the second section, "A Fragrance of Devouring", Trask largely depicts the "foreigner" as the devourer of both Hawaiian culture and land. Highlighting this, she states in "Writing in Captivity":

> In the midst of this ferocious suffering, I feel both rage and an insistent desire to tell the cruel truths about Hawai'i. These are bitter tales of falsity, of travesty: tourism and the

prostitution of a people and culture; Christianity and the racism of its ideologies and clergies; American greed and arrogance and the embrace of violence; the constant erosion of a people's self-respect through a colonization of the mind and the elegant spirit that once sustained it.[22]

[22] Trask, "Writing in Captivity", 19.

Thus, in the first poem in this section, "The Broken Gourd", which is kaona, a literary device employing symbolic cultural meaning, for the 'dead',[23] Trask contrasts the wā kahiko, or the time of our kūpuna before western contact, with the current onslaught of colonial destruction and devastation:

[23] George Hu'eu Kanahele writes of kaona in *Kū Kanaka* that a Hawaiian "had to be bilingual: … speak[ing] his native tongue … but also 'speak'[ing] the language of symbols". The gourd "in dreams symbolized man: the filled gourd is the living man, and the broken gourd is the dead" (46-47).

Long ago, wise kanaka…
hauled hand-twined
nets, whole villages shouting
the black flash of fish.

Wāhine u'i …
nā keiki sprouted by the sun
of a blazing sky …

Each of us slain
by the white claw
of history: lost
genealogies, propertied
missionaries, diseased
haole. (*NSD*, 11–12)

This devastation manifests itself in the land through "pockmarked maile vines, / rotting 'ulu groves" caused by the "damp stench of money / burning at the edges" from the east and the "din of divine / violence, triumphal / destruction" from the west, leaving only "the bladed / reverberations of empire" (*NSD*, 11–13). Though American colonialism is deemed the hand of violence here, Trask also asserts that the east, through tourism, is also a part of the colonial enterprise that exploits and degrades the land.

Essentially, all tourists to Hawai'i, in supporting the tourist industry, also contribute to Hawai'i's "environmental degradation, low wages, land dispossession and the highest cost of living in the United States".[24] Thus, the poem "Kona Kai'ōpua" references "long- / forgotten ali'i, entombed / beneath grandiose hotels / mocked / by crass amusements / Japanese machines / and the common greed / / of vulgar Americans" (*NSD*, 16–17), while the poem "Tourist" describes the "glittering knives of money, / murdering the trees" (*NSD*, 20).

[24] Trask, *From a Native Daughter,* 144.

Furthermore, in "Dispossessions of Empire", Trask compares the tourist industry's exploitation of Kānaka Maoli to prostitution: "Even prostitutes know / their professions, but natives? // The empire degrades / through monetary exchange, / leaving quaint Hawaiians / dressing as 'natives,' / in drag for the 10 o'clock // floor show … // hoping for tips / after the French kisses" (*NSD*, 35). However, she also contrasts the falsity of tourism's colonial narrative of the happy and sexually alluring native with the extreme poverty in which many Kānaka Maoli live:

An orphaned smell
of ghettos in this tourist
archipelago: shanties
on the beach, slums…
and trash everywhere. (*NSD*, 35–36)

Her poem ends with what is "gained" by both Hawaiians and foreigners through tourism:

For the foreigner, romances
of "Aloha,"
For Hawaiians,
dispossessions of empire. (*NSD*, 36)

Her description provides a rich example of counter-hegemony to the "racist ideology that claims we are better off as American citizens than we ever were as citizens of our own independent nation of Hawai'i".[25]

[25] Trask, *From a Native Daughter,* 87.

As mentioned earlier, the third section of *Night is a Sharkskin Drum,* "Chants of Dawn", is erotically charged, but also represents a return to the lushness and mana of the 'āina. Trask writes of the traditional usage of erotic metaphor in "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature":

> Because Hawaiian is a profoundly metaphorical language, and Hawaiians an openly erotic people, descriptions are always rendered with fertile imagery: the land is a fecundity of beauty; our traditional deities are gods of abundance, of plenitude …. It is commonplace in the Hawaiian worldview to see relationships as both political and erotic.[26]

[26] Trask, "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature", in Hereniko and Wilson, *Inside Out*, 167–182, 174.

Politically, Trask's depiction of the sexual relationship with regard to 'āina also resists earlier Christian missionary censorship of the Hawaiian voice, while simultaneously "repatriat[ing] … what had been suppressed in the natives' past by the processes of imperialism".[27]

[27] Said, *Culture*, 210.

In "Upon the Dark of Passion", the erotic is portrayed through lush images of the āina: "Let our shadows / swell into longing // between breadfruit / and palm, throbbing" (*NSD*, 48), alluding to male genitalia represented by the 'ulu, or breadfruit, and the niu, or palm. Similarly, in the final poem of the collection, "Into Our Light I Will Go Forever", the land reflects erotic, regenerative mana:

Into the passion
of our parted Ko'olau,
luminous vulva.

Into Kāne's pendulous
breadfruit, resinous
with semen. (*NSD*, 60)

Using a traditional trope of Hawaiian orature by then noting the lands along the ocean from He'eia to Hale'iwa, she notes the natural lushness of every place:

Into our wetlands
of He'eia,
bubbling black mud …

Into the hum of
reef-ringed Ka'a'awa,
pungent with limu … (*NSD*, 61)

These images also serve to emphasize the life within the land, its actions and its smells. She then ends the poem with the lines: "Into our sovereign suns, / drunk on the mana / of Hawai'i" (*NSD*, 62) highlighting at once how the mana of Hawai'i could never be anything but sovereign, but also that the land reflects how Kānaka Maoli, who are of the land, must also look toward "our sovereign suns", taking our strength from the tremendous life force and power that still exists within the 'āina.

## Conclusion

Both Kaopio and Trask represent the strong and vibrant force with which Kānaka Maoli directly subvert and combat American colonialism with our counter-narratives, which place Hawaiians "at the center of the creative endeavor …. The focus is not on that which is *Haole*, or foreign, but on that which Hawaiians value: the land, the sea, the people, and their intimate relationships".[28] As such, both also frame the politics surrounding Hawaiian loss and resistance, the movement from uē to kū'ē, as one of cultural continuance and resistance through cultural practice. For Kaopio, our Hawaiian culture is an innate part of who we are as Hawaiians; thus, we must commit ourselves to seeking knowledge of who we are through our ancestors. For Trask, we need only to seek cultural and spiritual guidance from the 'āina, which embodies and houses our kūpuna; we can learn from the 'āina in this way.

Yet, they are not alone in their effort to affirm our Hawaiian sovereignty through literature – nearly all of our literature carries themes of loss and resistance, whether through the call for a return to traditions or spirituality or the outright demand for Hawaiian independence. Kanaka Maoli literature is complex and thriving, reflective of us as a lāhui, a people and a nation. That our literature is flourishing is largely rooted in the inner drive for Kānaka Maoli to articulate our history, our colonialism, and its injustices, as well as the strength within our traditions and the rich fluidity of our culture. This includes Alani Apio's moving plays *Kāmau* (1994)[29] and *Kāmau A'e* (1997)[30] about an 'ohana torn between fighting American colonialism and having to earn a living by participating in the tourist industry; 'Īmaikalani Kalāhele's collection of resistance poetry and art *Kalāhele* (2002),[31] featuring several kū'ē poems; Māhealani Perez-Wendt's *Uluhaimalama* (2008),[32] a moving poetry collection focused on grieving our loss of country; Victoria Nālani Kneubuhl's plays, "Ka Wai Ola" and "Ola nā Iwi", both of which focus on colonial dispossession of land and of the bones of our kūpuna;[33] Wayne Westlake's posthumous collection, *Westlake* (2009);[34] Sage U'ilani Takehiro's *Honua* (2006);[35] and my own poetry collection, *The Salt-*

[28] Trask, "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature", 173.

[29] Alani Apio, *Kāmau* (Honolulu: Palila Press, 1994).

[30] Apio, *Kāmau A'e* (Honolulu: Palila Press, 1997).

[31] 'Īmaikalani Kalāhele, *Kalāhele* (Honolulu: Kalamakū Press, 2002).

[32] Māhealani Perez-Wendt, *Uluhaimalama* (Honolulu: Kuleana 'Ōiwi Press, 2008).

[33] Victoria Nālani Kneubuhl, *Hawai'i Nei: Island Plays* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

[34] Wayne Kaumualii Westlake, *Westlake,* ed. by Mei-Li M. Siy and Richard Hamasaki (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

[35] Sage U'ilani Takehiro, *Honua: A Collection of Poetry* (Honolulu: Kahuaomānoa Press, 2007).

*Wind, Ka Makani Pa'akai* (2008)[36]; as well as the many Kanaka Maoli writers published in the anthologies *Mālama: Land and Water* (1985),[37] edited by Dana Naone Hall, and *Ho'omānoa* (1989),[38] edited by Joseph Puna Balaz; the four volumes of *'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal* edited by Māhealani Dudoit and ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui;[39] and the anthologies of Polynesian poetry *Whetu Moana* (2003)[40] and *Mauri Ola* (2010),[41] underscoring how Kānaka Maoli belong to the Pacific alongside our closest Pacific cousins.

Literature and art represent powerful sites of self-representation and indigenous articulation that serve to overturn the ideological hegemony of the colonial enterprise. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes how creating art or literature or ideas is about "transcending the basic survival mode" and contributing to "the spirit of creating which indigenous communities have exercised over thousands of years. Imagination enables people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones".[42] Therefore, while "a substantial part of our writing draws upon the experience of living in a damaged world where the Native people have suffered unspeakable horror",[43] the uē, or grief, we carry arms and strengthens us as we move forward, so that we may also recognize the potential for our writing to kū'ē, or resist our colonization, to embrace life and hope.

[36] Brandy Nālani McDougall, *The Salt-Wind, Ka Makani Pa'akai* (Honolulu: Kuleana 'Ōiwi Press, 2008).

[37] Dana Naone Hall, ed., *Mālama: Hawaiian Land and Water* (Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1985).

[38] Joseph Balaz, ed., *Ho'omānoa: An Anthology of Contemporary Hawaiian Literature* (Honolulu: Kū Pa'a Inc., 1989).

[39] Māhealani Dudoit and ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, eds., *'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal* (Honolulu: Kūleana 'Ōiwi Press, 1998–).

[40] Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri, and Robert Sullivan, eds., *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003).

[41] Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri, and Robert Sullivan, eds., *Mauri Ola* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

[42] Smith, *Decolonizing*, 158.

[43] Trask, "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature", 177.