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Articles

From a Native Daughter's Native Daughter—On Lessons Learned from Kumu Haunani

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In the spring semester of 2006, my cultural anthropology professor at Hawai'i Pacific University assigned Haunani-Kay Trask's "'Lovely Hula Hands': Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture" to read for homework. As she passed out copies of the essay, I did not think twice about it. I thought it was just another reading assignment, so I put it in my folder and, like many other students, told myself I would read it if I had time. When I got back to my apartment and read the essay, I was stunned. Trask's metaphor of prostitution to describe the exploitation of Hawaiian lands, culture, and people; the startling statistics of the effects of tourism in Hawai'i and on Hawaiians; not to mention her very raw, very honest conclusion: "Now that you have a Native view, let me just leave this thought with you. If you are thinking of visiting my homeland, please do not. We do not want or need any more tourists, and we certainly do not like them. If you want to help our cause, pass this message on to your friends."[1]

At nineteen years old, I found Trask's essay deeply eye-opening. It completely shifted my views about Hawai'i and the everyday realities of Hawaiians. A couple of semesters prior, I had read part of the *Rice v. Cayetano* case in my English class—my professor was a local attorney—but Kumu Haunani's work hit differently. Until I moved to Hawai'i for college, I had no idea that Hawai'i was an occupied nation, that its people were colonized. I had no idea that their kingdom was overthrown by the United States. I did not understand the complexities and the political, cultural, and

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racial injustices brought on by US military occupation. When I considered colleges as a high school senior, Hawaiʻi (specifically Oʻahu) seemed ideal because it allowed me to be away from home, but still close to home, and had a familiar environment and climate. It also had a "downtown," which I was excited about because I could experience city life while still living on an island.

I attribute the beginning of my journey into political and cultural consciousness to the work and teachings of Kumu Haunani-Kay.[2] I did not grow up in a family of activists, politicians, and educators. I was not taught the real history of my people and my island in any of my elementary or secondary classes.[3] In the home, my parents did not teach me Fino' CHamoru or tell me about our history.[4] Our language was reserved for the elders, for church, for the lisåyu (rosary), for Christmas songs, and for secrets adults wanted to keep from children. During my childhood, neither our language nor our history seemed to be of any importance. While we were CHamoru, our identity as American was the priority. As I understood it, being American was the identity that would help me succeed in life, get a good education, a good job, and a nice house. It was as if growing up in a more CHamoru way (like my grandparents and parents did) was associated with struggle, while growing up in a more American way was associated with dreams, success, and less burden. When I graduated from high school and moved off island for college, I carried this identity and mentality with me.

Later, I learned that Kumu Haunani had a similar journey. In "Fighting the Battle of Double Colonization: The View of a Hawaiian Feminist," she shares how she internalized and accepted white standards and expectations in terms of "work, education, life-style, diet, and, of course, skin color and beauty." As she explains, "To survive, I learned haole ways, was anxious to achieve in haole terms."[5] She proceeds to talk about how her colonized identity and upbringing kept her from learning her Hawaiian culture, language, and history, which were also not taught to her in school.[6] Knowing that Kumu Haunani had a similar experience to mine was both relieving and unsettling, the former because I felt that I was not alone in my experiences and the latter because it meant that this experience was likely rather common among Indigenous Peoples.

My journey to consciousness began in college. As Kumu Haunani asserts about student organizing, and which I extend to education and consciousness raising: "For students, as for any other organic group, organizing occurs at the site of engagement. The campus—where students study, live, and work—is the primary site of resistance."[7] This was my experience as an undergraduate. University became a second home, a place where I could grow in my political and cultural consciousness. By being assigned Kumu Haunani's work—first "Lovely Hula Hands," then *From a Native Daughter* and *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*—I learned about Hawaiʻi and Hawaiians. Trask's work awakened me to new (at least for me) and critical information about Hawaiʻi. And as I learned more about Hawaiʻi and Hawaiians, I learned more about Guåhan and CHamorus. I thus had a strong desire to learn more about my culture, my history, and who I was as a CHamoru (woman).

Lessons from Kumu: Part I

What did Kumu Haunani-Kay teach me through her writings and teachings? What lessons did she offer about fierceness, courage, and hope, all while grounded in deep love for our lands, ocean, and people? While she has taught countless lessons and inspired many peoples throughout our islands, our region, and our world in so many ways, I focus here on seven specific lessons I learned through her written work. I then share three lessons I learned from her teachings and conversations when I was a student in her Modern Pacific Women's Poetry class at UH-Mānoa in 2009. These lessons make evident that there is much to learn from her wisdom and experience as a Native daughter, an Indigenous scholar, writer, and activist. Interspersed with the first seven lessons are poems related to the theme(s) of the lessons. Kumu Haunani inspired me not only as an Indigenous academic, educator, and activist, but also as a poet, so I wanted to write the lessons I learned from her in poetic form.

Lesson: Know (Y)our History

Colonial attempts
to R.I.P.
our stories from us.
keeping truths from us
burying them 6 feet under
while unearthing ancestral bones,
replacing truths
with fictional tales
of those who came before us.

In many contexts—oral and written—Kumu Haunani typically began her writings, talks, and discussions with her lineage and the contextualization of Hawaiian history, including the colonization of Hawai'i by the United States. She would begin with this history to acknowledge who and where she came from and to tell people the truth about Hawai'i: that it is not the idyllic paradise most people think it is. It is a colony. Given the long colonial history of Hawai'i by the United States, Kumu Haunani pushed the search for truth and for the responsibility to tell the truth: "For visitors to Hawai'i, these statements [about Hawaiian realities] are quite shocking because the Hollywood, tourist poster image of my homeland as a racial paradise with happy Natives waiting to share their culture with everyone and anyone is a familiar global commodity."[8] Even Indigenous and local peoples are unfamiliar with their histories. As colonized peoples, we must know our history, our stories. They ground us and tell where we come from. They are a way of passing down beliefs and values and of informing each other about injustices faced by our communities.[9] It is also our responsibility to perpetuate our history because it reveals the truth about our experiences and the everyday realities of life in the colonies.

Lesson: Speak (Y)our Language

'Ōlelo Hawai'i
Fino' CHamoru

Indigenous languages banned for decades
brought to a comatose state
—the colonizer's mission
But even their God was on our side
because the languages of our ancestors
awoke from their near-death experiences
to be spoken and chanted
from the tongues of elders and children.
So much work left to do.
But death is not an option.
We are here to stay.

Indigenous languages have been devastated by colonization, which led to other negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples. Thiong'o writes, "The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages . . . and ultimately in themselves."[10] Colonial languages have often become dominant in the colonies, while Indigenous languages are pushed to dire states in desperate need of revitalization efforts. As Kumu Haunani reminds Indigenous Peoples, we must maintain our languages because they are our direct connections to our ancestors and are integral to the decolonization of our minds as well as to other aspects of our lives. She continues, "Language, in particular, can aid in decolonizing the mind. Thinking in one's own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one's own world view, which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology."[11] Leanne Simpson echoes, "Indigenous languages carry rich meanings, theory and philosophies within their structures. Our languages house our teachings and bring the practice of those teachings to life in our daily existence."[12] Our Indigenous languages are like navigational charts that carry the ways of thinking and knowing and doing of our ancestors and have the potential to guide us as we work through thinking for ourselves, outside of colonial confines, creating decolonial futures. Our languages, once spoken freely and actively, have been disconnected from us, and us from them. But acts of decolonization, such as (re)learning our languages, are thriving in many of our communities.

Lesson: Aloha *ʻĀina*

Love for the land
a loose translation
for a grounded love
the deepest of its kind
This will endure
as it has for millenia
And the land will remain
well beyond the loose translations
and the temporary agendas
— shopping malls, hotels, and military bases—
of those who have no aloha for the ʻāina

There is a reciprocal relationship of deep love and care between the land and the people of the land and, in the case of the Pacific, the ocean. According to Kumu Haunani, "Hawaiians must cultivate and husband the land that will feed and provide for the Hawaiian people. This relationship of people to land is called *mālama ʻāina* or *aloha ʻāina*, ʻcare and love of the land.ʼ"[13] Hawaiians, like other Indigenous Peoples, believe that the land is our mother. Just as we are tethered to our mothers as babies through our umbilical cord, we are rooted in our lands through our genealogical connections and our histories. In some of our creation stories, our peoples are created from the land, a parallel to being born from our mothers. Kumu Haunani-Kay's writing makes known that the Americans stole Hawaiian lands, explaining: "We suffered a unilateral redefinition of our homeland and our people, a displacement and a dispossession in our own country. In familial terms, our mother . . . was taken from us. We were orphaned in our own land."[14] Therefore, as Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua writes, Kanaka scholars, including Kumu Haunani, have "articulated aloha ʻāina as a Hawaiian form of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist resistance and critique."[15] It is the alternative to tourism and militarism.[16] The deep care and love for land is part of reconnecting relationships and people to the land that the colonial power attempted to sever, part of countering the colonial agenda.

Lesson: Write and Publish

Writing in books
was not the way
of our first ancestors
Nor was publishing
But they can be our ways
to record our stories
to share them
so that more of our children
can read them(selves)
see them(selves)
speak them(selves)
know them(selves).
Books were not the way
of our first ancestors
But after everything
that has happened
they can
be a way
our way
as future ancestors

Kumu Haunani wrote and published when these were uncommon practices for Pacific Islanders. It was a time when mostly non-Pacific Islanders were writing and publishing about Pacific-related issues. Coming from this experience, then, Kumu Haunani encouraged Hawaiians and other Pacific and Indigenous Peoples to write

and publish our stories and poetry, in our own ways and on our own terms. She highlighted, "Writing is both decolonization and re-creation."[17] It is a political act.[18] By the 1990s, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed, "Indigenous people are writing . . . The activity of writing has produced the related activity of publishing."[19] Writing and publishing are avenues for us to control our narratives and transform the ways our stories are told. And as we re-write and re-tell our stories, writing and publishing can inform and educate. They can raise consciousness in our communities.

Lesson: The Cultural Is Political

Cultural practices
without political purpose
are just culture for culture's sake.
But for colonized peoples
it's not just dancing
just chanting
just weaving
just carving
It's a movement
of reclamation
re-creation
resurgence
Us in the present
serving as a conduit
between the past and the future
refusing
to disappear
to be erased
chanting our lineage
to our skies
dancing our stories
on our lands
sailing our vessels
in our waters
aligning the cultural
with the political
Remaining
grounded
immovable

According to Kumu Haunani, the cultural must be political: "You cannot just dance hula and go to Hawaiian language class at night and think you're going to get a land base! You can't do that! Cultural people have to become political. It's not just that political people like myself have to become cultural. 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."[20] Because of colonization, cultural practices cannot be performed for culture's sake. They serve another purpose. When Indigenous Peoples enact them, cultural practices are essentially acts of resistance against colonial powers because they challenge colonial efforts to assimilate and erase Indigenous cultures and peoples.[21] Thus, when we dance our dances, chant our chants, communicate in our languages, weave, carve, fish, and farm; when we nurture our connections to our lands, waters, and ancestors, we refuse to be erased. We refuse the colonial agendas meant to eliminate us and displace us. When both the cultural and the political work together, even more can be done in Indigenous communities, as was observed by Kumu Haunani in the 1990s: "After nearly twenty-five years of a Hawaiian revival in the language, the arts, and most visibly, in the struggle for our mother, the land, two springs of our Hawaiian renaissance—cultural and political—merged together in a demand for sovereignty."[22]

Lesson: Resist

When we live in a colony
we have to resist
We don't have another option
when colonial agendas
    Development
    Hyper-militarism
    Environmental destruction
dictate how we live
and where we live
So we
resist
challenge authority
and control
who we are
and who they—our children—
will become

In a 1993 speech outside of the Iolani Palace, Kumu Haunani strongly and eloquently proclaimed: "We are not American. We are not American. We are not American. We are not American. Say it in your heart. Say it when you sleep. We are not American. We will die as Hawaiians. We will never be Americans."[23] Living in a colony means that part of ensuring our existence is maintaining our resistance. Our resistance is our way of holding our colonizers accountable for the injustices they have perpetrated upon us and the atrocities they have wrought on our (is)lands and communities.[24] Our resistance is our way of demanding justice for our communities. Through her work and through her life as an activist, educator, and writer, Kumu Haunani embodied resistance and consistently demonstrated the need for it. She reminded us that "More than verbal disagreement, resistance takes organization, planning, and a tenacity that develops and sustains individual and group capacities."[25] It is an act that cannot be

carried out alone. It requires the help of our communities. And while our goals may not always be seen or actualized, "resistance is its own reward."[26]

Lesson: Fight through the Struggles of Academia

Ruperake
talked about being kidnapped by school
thoughts and lifestyle transformed

Teresia
questioned becoming an academic
for fear of becoming one of *them*

Ngũgĩ
said that when English became the language of his education
it disrupted the harmony of his private and public spheres

Linda
spoke about not seeing ourselves in our texts
but also seeing but not recognizing ourselves in our texts

Haunani-Kay
said that haole men were uncomfortable
with Native women in the university

We must
birth possibilities
and cultivate realities
in a place that was not created for us

and carve space for ourselves anyway.

In *From a Native Daughter*, Kumu Haunani describes some of her struggles as an Indigenous woman in academia, specifically at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. These struggles included racism, sexism, and the challenges that came with speaking about controversial issues in the public sphere for various reasons, including her lack of tenure and the anticipated scrutiny she would face from both the university and non-university communities. For Indigenous and women of color academics in particular, she explains, "there is no other alternative but vigilance and struggle. Without it, institutions wear us down by petty bureaucratic procedures and the force of inertia."[27] Given the challenges we face in academia—a space created neither by nor for Indigenous Peoples but where Indigenous Peoples have carved out spaces nonetheless—Indigenous women have to remain steadfast, seeing through the academic (colonial) bureaucracy; fulfilling our responsibilities to our students and our community; and using university spaces and teaching opportunities to increase consciousness in our students and to connect our classrooms with our communities and vice versa.

Lessons from Kumu: Part II

I learned other lessons, specifically as a student in Kumu Haunani's Modern Pacific Women's Poetry class. Kumu Haunani mentioned these lessons during or after class and did not actually elaborate on them. I wanted to mention these lessons because perhaps they can also be helpful for others, especially Indigenous folks inspired by this mana wahine.

Lesson: Don't look down when you're walking. Keep your head up.
While walking to one of the benches in Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies after class one day, Kumu Haunani noticed that I looked down at the ground while I walked alongside her. Upon noticing this, she said, "Don't look down when you're walking. Keep your head up." She went on to talk about how we have been colonized for so long that we have been taught not to believe in ourselves, not to have confidence in ourselves. So when we walk, we often put our heads down. But she said that we have so much to be proud of.

Lesson: Allies should stand in front of us, not behind us.
Kumu Haunani used to say that if non-Native people really wanted to be good allies, if they really wanted to support us, they could do so by standing in front of us (not alongside us), for example, at protests. That way, if anyone were to ever charge at protestors, our allies would be at the frontlines protecting us. That is real solidarity: when our allies are willing to put their lives on the line for our movements and for us.

Lesson: Pacific women are writing poetry, and they are fire
Kumu Haunani's class introduced me to the fierce and beautiful poetry of Teresia Teaiwa (Kiribati and Fiji), Grace Mera Molisa (Vanuatu), Jully Makini (Solomon Islands), and Konai Helu Thaman (Tonga). Of course, we read Kumu Haunani's poetry as well. These Pacific women poets showed me, an aspiring CHamoru poet, what was possible with poetry, not only in terms of writing and publishing but also with themes and formats. Kumu Haunani spoke highly of these women, how they often pushed the boundaries of complacency and silence, how they were fire. And she constantly reminded our class (made up of Pacific women) that we could write and publish our poetry, too.

Consciousness Raising in Postsecondary Institutions

For Indigenous Peoples, consciousness raising should begin in our homes. However, because of the colonization of our homes, many of our peoples do not begin their journeys to consciousness at home, with their families. And schools with US-based curricula do not give Indigenous children opportunities to learn the truth about who they are and where they come from. Teachers in K–12 schools often perpetuate colonized thinking and maintain the colonial agenda of ignorance, thereby keeping the colonized *colonized*. Thus, as educators in postsecondary institutions, we are responsible for bringing our students to consciousness or, at the very least, bringing them to and helping them begin their journeys. Kumu Haunani explains, "As colonized people,

we are colonized to the extent that we are unaware of our oppression. When awareness begins, then so, too, does decolonization."[28] In other words, we have a responsibility to our students and to our communities to increase consciousness in our students so that we can move toward decolonizing minds, toward genuine decolonization in our communities. If our students are not exposed to decolonial truths at home or in the K–12 school system, then our college classrooms can serve as a home for them, and students and faculty can become extended family.

But to be clear: educational institutions are not the only sites of initiating and fostering consciousness. They are just one place and, in my experience as a student and a teacher,[29] these can be safe spaces if everyone present prioritizes and honors the safety of all participating in the journey.

Conclusion: Love Fiercely and with Your Whole Being

From the time I read the Xerox copy of "Lovely Hula Hands" sixteen years ago, until today, Kumu Haunani has inspired me and influenced my work—my roles as mother, teacher, writer, activist, and, now, faculty in the CHamoru Studies program at the University of Guam. Her work is fierce and sparked a fire in me to learn more and to write more. And when I took her Modern Pacific Women's Poetry class at University of Hawai'i, I had the chance to learn from her and talk with her in person. That class and having her as a kumu were life-changing. It is one thing to read her work and to learn from her work; it is another experience to sit down with her and talk with her. I left every class session inspired by her strength and tenacity. I remember after one class session, we walked through the halls of Kamakakūokalani and talked story. I remember thanking her for inspiring me, another Native daughter from across the ocean. She told me there was no need to thank her. She proceeded to talk about CHamoru activist Anghet Santos and how much she learned from him about the situation with Guåhan and CHamorus, highlighting that CHamorus are also a fierce people.

Kumu Haunani's work initiated my journey to political and cultural consciousness. Having her as a kumu evoked the courage I needed to equip myself to return home and fight for a more just, decolonial future. Because of her, I have actively worked to help my students decolonize their thinking. As part of her lineage of students, I will continue educating my daughters and my students, working to grow their consciousness and the most tåddong (deep), most genuine love for our land and our Ocean.

This is perhaps the biggest lesson of all, one which encompasses all other lessons: love fiercely and with your whole being. In Kumu Haunani's written work, in her poetry, and in her talks and interviews, she spoke intelligently and passionately, clearly articulating her messages and intentions. Her fierce and deep love for Hawai'i nei, the 'āina, her people, and Oceania grounded and guided her. This love gave her hope: "No matter how effective colonialism has been in dismembering our culture and our people, it has not managed—yet—to kill all of us, to push all of us out of Hawai'i, to strangle our love for our people and our language and our land."[30] It is Kumu Haunani's love that we can learn the most from.

For Kumu Haunani

Native Daughter from Hawai'i nei
Teacher and poet of Oceania:

You woke your nation
You woke an entire Ocean

You are fire
and your lessons and love will burn
long after you have left this realm
Spreading decolonial truths
Igniting conscious minds

Every time a volcano erupts
or the earth quakes
it will be a sign —

Another Native
has read your work
or heard your voice

Anger
burning

Another generation
on
Fire

Notes

1. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter—Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 146.
2. When referencing Haunani-Kay Trask throughout this paper, I use Kumu Haunani-Kay or Kumu Haunani.
3. I am referring to the truths about the colonization of my island home and my people, particularly that we are a US colony and have limited rights as "Americans," and that the US military has occupied much of our lands and waters for over one hundred years, without the consent of the original landowners. High school history of Guam courses generally focuses on the precontact CHamoru society, the Spanish occupation, and the WWII Japanese occupation. In terms of US occupation, I was taught that the United States saved us from the Japanese and that life under the United States was good for Guåhan.
4. CHamoru language
5. Haunani-Kay Trask, "Fighting the Battle of Double Colonization: The View of a Hawaiian Feminist," in *Working Papers*, ed. Office of Women in International Development (Lansing: Michigan State University, 1984), 4.
6. Ibid.
7. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 186.

8. Ibid., 18.

9. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies—Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 144–45.

10. Ngũgĩ wa Thing'o, *Decolonising the Mind—The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 1986), 3.

11. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 43.

12. Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back—Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2011), 49.

13. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 141.

14. Ibid., 16.

15. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted—Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 36.

16. "Journey to Justice: A Conversation with Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask " (1985), Vimeo video, 28:51, 2012, https://vimeo.com/39644495

17. Haunani-Kay Trask, "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization," in *Inside Out—Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, ed. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 19.

18. Kumu Haunani's work about writing often highlights the significance of writing for Indigenous peoples. In her essay "Indigenous Writers and the Colonial Situation," she writes: "To us, it is a story of colonization and our resistance to it. Publishing for the indigenous writer, then, is not only an ambitious dream, as it is for most writers. It is a necessary struggle against extinction" (1984, 81). Her point is that writing is not just a leisure activity for Indigenous peoples; it is an act of decolonization.

19. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 150–51.

20. "Journey to Justice."

21. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 42.

22. Trask, "Writing in Captivity," 18.

23. Nā Maka o ka 'Āina, "Scenes from the Centennial," DVD, 1993.

24. "Journey to Justice."

25. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 167.

26. Ibid., 168.

27. Ibid., 167.

28. Ibid., 145.

29. I learned this through my experiences as a student in both Kumu Haunani's class and Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's classes. Mahalo nui and Sen dangkolo na si Yu'os yan Saina ma'åse' to Kumu Haunani and one of her students, my kumu, mentor, and friend, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua for shedding light on this responsibility and the need to create safe spaces for our peoples' journeys to consciousness.

30. Trask, *From a Native Daughter*, 96.