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# He wahine māia, he wahine toa: A Gathering of Reflections on the Work of Haunani-Kay Trask

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*Mere Taito*

E te wahine rangatira, e te wahine toa  
Kua pā tō rongō ki ngā tōpito katoa o te ao  
mō tō māia, mō tō atamai te take  
Ko ō kupu te taiaha  
nāna i wero te kōtara o te kaikiri  
Ko ō whakaaro te toki  
nāna i tārai ō tātou waka mātauranga  
Ko tō ngākau te kapakapa o te manawa

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HINEITIMOANA GREENSILL (Tainui, Ngāti Koata, Ngāti Porou) is a PhD candidate in history at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Hineitimoana's doctoral project focuses on the political thought of Māori women in the 1970s and '80s. As a multifaceted archival project, her research engages with the intellectual and political work of her grandmother in conversation with a broader public archive of Māori women's writing in the late twentieth century. SAM ITI PRENDERGAST is of Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Paretekawa, Irish, German, and English descent. She is a lecturer in history at the University of Waikato and a PhD candidate in history at New York University. Her research investigates recent Māori diasporic movement in the historical and ongoing context of settler colonialism in the Pacific. WANDA IEREMIA-ALLAN (Sapapali'i, Safotulafai, Saōluafata, Lalomanu–Samoa) is a PhD candidate in Te Tumu, School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, University of Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand. Wanda's archival research traces the early twentieth-century intergenerational, intellectual gafa/genealogy of Samoan writing in the London Missionary Society newspaper *O le Sulu Samoa*. MERE TAITO is a creative-practice PhD candidate at the University of Otago, School of Arts English and Linguistics division. Her research examines the influence of reading creative Rotuman archival and contemporary texts on the writing of multilingual Fāeag Rotuam ta-English poetry.

i hihiko ai te tangata ki te tū mō te tika  
Moe mai rā, e te huia kaimanawa,  
e te kura ngaro, e te kura tangihia  
Kua whakatauiratia e koe te ara  
mō te hunga whai muri ake  
e puta ai tātou, ngā iwi taketake  
ki te ao mārama e

Chiefly woman, warrior woman  
You are known throughout the world  
For your courage and intellect  
Your words are the weapon  
That pierced the war belt of racism  
Your thoughts are the adze  
That carved our canoes of knowledge  
Your heart is the pulse  
That inspired the people to stand for justice  
Sleep now, revered one,  
Precious one lost and now mourned  
You have set a pathway  
For those who follow  
So we as Indigenous Peoples  
May once again return to the light

In 1985, Haunani-Kay Trask visited Aotearoa to contribute critical perspectives at a Pacific Studies conference at the University of Auckland. Observing the disturbing absence of Indigenous women speakers at the conference, Dr. Trask finished her keynote early, giving her remaining time to two Māori women, Atareta Poananga and Titewhai Harawira. As a group of Indigenous Pacific women negotiating our own place in the academy, our engagements with the work of Haunani-Kay Trask are inspired by her activism, scholarship, and creativity. We come together as wāhine of Samoa, Aotearoa, and Rotuma, to pay tribute to this wāhine toa. Drawing on our own unique sea, land, and skylines, our histories of colonialism and resistance, and our creative and intellectual journeys, we share the multiplicity of ways in which Haunani-Kay Trask's work speaks to our hearts and minds.

While remaining firmly rooted in our own cultural frameworks and bodies of knowledge, voyaging beyond the horizon and engaging with the work of scholars like Trask enables us to see ourselves from another vantage point. Centering our respective cultural paradigms in our scholarship, we follow in her footsteps, asserting our mana and resisting temporary notions of cultural revival. And in our creative, intellectual, and activist journeys, we carry the "fine baskets of resistance" woven by Haunani-Kay Trask with us, drawing power, inspiration, and courage from her work.

In this collection of essays, we speak to the connections Trask so clearly articulates between our cultural and political lives.<sup>1</sup> We weave our individual aho, or strands, together, bringing a diverse range of Indigenous Pacific experiences and cultural frames

to our work. Many of our words are not new, but we offer them as a *koha aroha*, a gift of love, that speaks to the significance of Haunani-Kay Trask's legacy. Reflecting on her work as a scholar, poet, and activist, we weave together our words of respect, love, and admiration, and consider the ways in which her scholarship continues to have relevance to us all.

## HINEITIMOANA GREENSILL

My engagement with Haunani-Kay Trask's work began as a teenager in my grandparents' living room, where my grandmother told me to read Lili'uokalani's book *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, and where we had watched countless *Nā Maka o ka 'Āina* videos together. The connections that my grandmother made between Indigenous struggles in the Pacific and our struggles at home in Aotearoa, and the relationships she built with other activists from *Te Moana nui a Kiwa*, inspired me to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and political context of *Ka Pae 'Āina o Hawai'i*. When I went on to university, a Kanaka Maoli friend gave me a copy of *From a Native Daughter*. This was my introduction to the scholarship of Haunani-Kay Trask. Reading her work again now, I am reminded of the clarity and power of her voice and the continued relevance of her political thought. The connections that Haunani-Kay Trask makes between land and sovereignty, and the groundedness of her theorizing in a Hawaiian worldview, speak to me as a Māori woman and as a *mana wahine* scholar.

In this reflection, I consider the centrality of land in Haunani-Kay Trask's scholarship alongside my grandmother's own political thought and the experiences of women's leadership in my *whānau* and community. I imagine my grandmother, Tuaiwa Rickard, and Haunani-Kay Trask walking side by side and engaging in conversation. I write around the edges of this conversation, interspersing my own thoughts with their voices, and considering the importance of their words to all of us as future *tūpuna* for the generations to come.

In speaking to the vitality and dynamism of Hawaiian women's leadership, and to the critically important and diverse contributions Kanaka Maoli women have made to the Hawaiian nation, Trask makes the following observation:

What links these women leaders together, apart from their extraordinary talents, is an identification with our ancestral value of caring for the people and the land. This political/cultural assertion serves the nation not only as an opposing force to colonialism but as a Native reenactment of the reality that Hawai'i is our mother and we are her children. Our family responsibility, then, requires us to behave according to tradition. We must preserve and protect our family, that we may survive as inheritors of the lands of Hawai'i.<sup>2</sup>

Growing up, the most visible examples of leadership to me were our women. Whether in my *whānau*, community or political networks, by and large, our women made the most significant contributions. My grandmother Tuaiwa was the matriarch of our *whānau*, a leader in our community and an important political figure

in Aotearoa. Her work as an activist and community leader was underpinned by a belief in the critical importance of land to our very existence as tangata whenua, as people of the land. She insisted on pursuing a path for our people that would lead to the return of stolen land and to the assertion of Mana Māori Motuhake, Māori self-determination and sovereignty.

On the back cover of Donna Awatere's *Māori Sovereignty*, published in 1984, my grandmother wrote: "Maori Sovereignty to many may seem like an impossible dream, but I see it as the only way Maoridom can emerge from a vacuum created by colonialism—to emerge and spread its wings."<sup>3</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask represents for me many of the ideals of my grandmother, ideals that are often dismissed, even by our own people, as simply a utopian dream. But as the late Māori scholar Moana Jackson so often reminded us, it is important for us to dream—for us to believe that there is something beyond our current horizon. And while our hopes and dreams may "sometimes seem fanciful . . . they can also lead to new realities."<sup>4</sup> As Indigenous Pacific women, our ability to imagine alternate futures—to see new realities—requires a kind of fortitude that Haunani-Kay Trask so clearly demonstrated. Her determination to fight for the birthright of Kanaka Maoli to their whenua was deeply grounded in an understanding of land as tupuna, as an ancestor. This familial relationship is conveyed through Trask's articulation of the origins of Kanaka Maoli: "My people were born of Papahānaumoku—Earth Mother—and Wākea—Sky Father—who created our bountiful Hawaiian islands . . . The lesson of our origins is simple. The land is our mother, and we are her children. If we care for our mother, she will care for us in return. The relationship is more than reciprocal; it is familial."<sup>5</sup>

The genealogical connection to whenua, or land, that Haunani-Kay Trask speaks of is echoed in the words of my grandmother:

Firstly, whenua is land. Secondly, whenua is the placenta within the mother that feeds the child before birth. And when it is born this whenua is treated with respect, dignity, and taken to a place in the earth and dedicated to Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother of the Māori people. And there it will nurture the child. You know our food and our living comes from the earth. And there also this whenua of the child stays and says this is your little bit of land. No matter where you wander in the world I will be here and at the end of your days you can come back and this is your papakāinga and this, I will receive you in death. This is the spiritual significance of the land, I believe, to the Māori people.<sup>6</sup>

The physical and spiritual connection to whenua articulated so clearly in my grandmother's words is often invoked in both ceremonial and everyday contexts. What these wāhine toa remind us, though, is that this relationship is vitally important to our very existence as Indigenous peoples, which in turn is critical to the survival of the earth, Papatūānuku. Trask further drives this point in her critique of the "predatory consumption" of colonialism and the New World Order, and the resulting degradation of the environment.

"We are stewards of the earth, our mother, and we offer ancient umbilical wisdom about how to protect and ensure her life. This lesson of our cultures has never been

more crucial to global survival . . . No one knows how better to care for Hawai'i, our island home, than those of us who have lived here for thousands of years.<sup>7</sup>

In te ao Māori, the Māori world, the concept of ahikā is applied to those who continuously occupy an area and whose whakapapa, or ancestral relationships and genealogies, tie them back to the original ancestors of that place. The literal meaning of ahikā is a fire that burns. It symbolizes the fires of a village and the mark of occupation. As a Māori legal concept, ahikā is applied to those who have the right to make decisions in a particular locale by virtue of their whakapapa as tangata whenua and ongoing occupation of the land. Another interpretation of the word ahikā is those who keep the whenua warm. Ahikā, in this respect, is not just about the rights we inherit to our ancestral lands, but about our obligation as kaitiaki to care for the land. This ethic of care is echoed in the words of Haunani-Kay Trask: “*The land cannot live without the people of the land, who, in turn, care for their heritage, their mother.* This is an essential wisdom of indigenous cultures and explains why, when Native peoples are destroyed, destruction of the earth proceeds immediately.”<sup>8</sup> At the foot of my ancestral mountain, Karioi, areas from which our people were forcibly removed by legislative theft are now bare paddocks and farmland devoid of all native vegetation and wildlife. On the other hand, the places where we have maintained a foothold on our maunga, where we still occupy our land and exercise our rights as tangata whenua, are where our ancient forests still stand and where our birds still sing. Our fates as tāngata (people) and whenua (land) are inextricably connected.

Recalling the process by which our people in Whāingaroa were made landless during World War II, my grandmother would often sing a song about kūmara gardens that laments the loss of our land and speaks to the centrality of whenua to the well-being of our people. In a memoir written on January 1, 1995, she connects the removal of our people from the land to the genocidal policies of the settler-colonial government. “I know that I must write the story of my tribes struggle the pain the tears they shared. I must write it with the honesty exposing the corruption of a Colonial State determined to exterminate the native inhabitants of this land AOTEAROA by rendering landless thus separating them from PAPATUANUKU the Earth Mother from whence comes their survival and right to life.”<sup>9</sup> In her life's work, my grandmother resisted, both physically and intellectually, the removal of our people from the land and, ultimately, our extermination. Her story was not only one of resistance though. It was also one of reclamation and resurgence, charting a way back to whenua and to Mana Māori Motuhake.

When I look at the scholarship and activism of Haunani-Kay Trask, I am reminded of all the things my grandmother stood for. She too believed that our sovereign futures are tied to the land—that land is a critical place from which to build a nation—and that what we should dream of for our children, and for our mokopuna, our grandchildren, should be a future in which we return to our whenua. What I have learned from both my grandmother and Haunani-Kay Trask is that, as Indigenous Pacific peoples, we should all imagine this future and work to make it a reality. We should be unrelenting in our pursuit of justice and insistent in our demands for “land back.” We should imagine sustainable futures for our people that see us living, breathing, and

walking in the footsteps of our ancestors on the land that they once occupied, and on the land where the bones of our ancestors remain today. E mihi ana ki a koe e te wahine toa, e Haunani. You have inspired us to dream, to persevere and to fight.

## SAM ITI PRENDERGAST

What can I say, then, to Western historians of my place and people? Let me begin with a story.

—Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter*

A ten-minute drive from my marae, Mangatoatoa, a monument stands on the side of a highway. The obelisk, erected by settlers in the early 1900s, marks the so-called “battle of Ō-rākau.” In 1864, as part of a sweeping series of land “confiscations,” British troops descended on Ō-rākau with the aim of acquiring our land and destroying the resolve of Maniapoto people.<sup>10</sup> Māori land defenders, including my tūpuna (ancestors), resisted British invasion for as long as they could. But by early April, the British had declared themselves victors. The invasion was a desecration of life and land.

Less than ten years later, the renowned composer Rihi Puhīwahine addressed the colonial violence in an oriori, a lullaby, for her grandchildren.<sup>11</sup> Oriori are a type of song designed to ground Māori in our whakapapa, or genealogy—the relational ties that Haunani-Kay Trask called the “great bloodlines of memory.”<sup>12</sup> In Puhīwahine’s oriori, whakapapa is a pathway out of dispossession.<sup>13</sup> In the oriori, she looks upon a world reshaped by colonialism and leaves navigational instructions for her descendants. As you return to your ancestral lands, Puhīwahine tells her grandchildren, your elders will not know you. They will see you and ask, “Whose children are those coming our way?” Tell them, Puhīwahine says, that you are traveling around, that you are returning to Rangiaowhia and Ō-rākau, lands desecrated by colonial warfare. Say to them, she continues, “we are three quarter castes, made so by the white man, he who destroyed this land and made it lost to us.” Afterwards, tell them the names of your ancestors, and that only now have you returned to your ū-kai-pō, your deep homeland, to be nurtured. With that, Puhīwahine assured her descendants, “Ka mātauria kōrua,” “You will be known.”<sup>14</sup>

As early as the 1870s, Puhīwahine understood what Trask would later argue: settler occupation produces something far more sinister than mere “disconnection” between Indigenous peoples and our worlds. As Trask stressed throughout her life’s work, the violence of occupation thrusts us into new and mangled relations with our kin, our cultures, and our territories. In Puhīwahine’s oriori, elders look upon their descendants and see unknown children. In 2022, I return to Ō-rākau and find myself standing beside an obelisk planted next to a highway. These are scenes of misrecognition, produced when settlers pursue their own permanency on our sovereign lands. Misrecognition, in this sense, is material and political; it is not an invocation of sentimentality or the horror of feeling “lost.” Rather, it describes the structural effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous kinship to people and place. You can stand on your own lands and not know it. You can return to a supposed home and find that you are unrecognizable to your elders.

For Trask, any meaningful critique of settler occupation requires constant attentiveness to the settler state's trickery. In the titular chapter to *From a Native Daughter*, Trask recalls the false narratives of Hawaiian history that dominated her early education. The chapter is both a lament and a reassurance. Western historians had disfigured her history in monographs and curricula, claiming authority over how Hawai'i ought to be known. "For so long," she writes, "I had misunderstood this written record, thinking it described my own people. But my history was nowhere present."<sup>15</sup> Trask's frustration was that the histories were not only inaccurate, but also stood like a wall between Hawaiian people and Hawaiian knowledges. When she looked upon the past through the prism of Western writing, she imagined that she was looking upon her ancestors—instead, she was looking upon a mirage made by settlers as they justified the continued US occupation of Hawai'i. Trask's reassurance comes a few lines later. To know my history, she writes, I had to return to the land, I had to speak my language with my elders, I had to "learn the language like a lover so that I could rock with her and lay at night in her dreaming arms."<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, Trask was not promising that language or land will "reconnect" us with our imagined-to-be "authentic" Indigenous selves. As Emalani Case and Stephanie Nohelani Teves both argue, alongside so many others, the myth of Indigenous "authenticity" is a conservative falsehood designed to bind Indigenous peoples' to the past. Modern Indigenous peoples have abundant sovereign futures, and those futures will hold new forms because we are not stagnant subjects.<sup>17</sup> Indigenous resurgence cannot be a performance of Indigeneity for the nation state, but must be an insistence on Indigenous political power to determine our communities and territories. Trask's reassurance, then, is really a warning: she insists, throughout her work, that there is no liberation, resurgence, or political sovereignty when we align ourselves with settler statehood, narratives, and re-figurings of our own indigeneity. This is clear when Trask critiques Indigenous investments in obtaining "rights" *given* by the nation state. When Indigenous peoples begin to use the language of "rights" to argue for the place of our practices, culture, and peoples within the settler national system, Trask argued, we "are moving away from [our] cultural universe" and, worse, participating "in [our] own mental colonization."<sup>18</sup> For Trask, when we demand "rights" from a settler government, we drift away from the embodied sovereignty that resides in "our ancestral association with our lands of origin."<sup>19</sup> Trask's "return" to land and language was not about pursuing cultural revival in a newly "bi-cultural" US state, but about realigning herself with the futures that her ancestors pursued for their lands and their descendants.

The embodied politics of return bring me back to the relationship among Trask, Puhīwahine, and the futures these two wāhine—of different islands, at different points of the vast Pacific—imagined for Indigenous peoples. Specifically, in the final section of this essay, I want to sow the early seeds of an argument that, together, the works of Rihī Puhīwahine and Haunani-Kay Trask problematize the notion that Indigenous "persistence" is an expression of Indigenous sovereignty. The celebration of our persistence, or our "continuance," is increasingly common across scholarship about Native peoples.<sup>20</sup> This is not the persistence that Emalani Case describes in *Everything Ancient Was Once New*, where the thing that persists is Pacific peoples'



ongoing commitments to new life.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the framework of persistence that needs problematizing is the framework that positions Indigenous peoples as subjects “not yet dead,” as individuals and communities who exist, still, despite settler logics. The problem with this kind of framing, especially when figured as a form of resurgence, is that it elides what both Trask and Puhiwahine sharply identify as a central violence of settler colonialism: by their presence on our lands, settler states alter the landscapes of our places and our relationships. The very word “persistence” disrupts our ability to see how, as Trask often argued, our participation in the structures of the settler state—whether as tokens of authentic culture, as partners in immigration exclusion and carceral networks, as adherents to the structures of patriarchy—can work against our self-determination.<sup>22</sup> Persistence, in other words, elides the complexities of our existence. Our survivance is so important, but it is not enough to sustain our sovereignty.

To end, I return to Puhiwahine’s words, “ka mātauria kōrua,” you will be known. As Puhiwahine guides her grandchildren back to Ō-rākau she evokes the state of being lost to describe the relationship between her descendants and their territories. The remedy, for Puhiwahine, is not only to return to the land, but to locate ourselves in our genealogies, recognizing those genealogies as the material ties that ground us in place. It is not enough, in the context of ongoing settler colonialism, to *know* our whakapapa; for Māori, our futures depend on our commitment to insisting that whakapapa determines our political communities. In the Pacific more broadly, our genealogy, our ancestors, our histories, our Indigeneity are, together, the source of our political sovereignty to self-determine. By whakapapa, Puhiwahine argues, “you will be known” not by the state or by relatives, but by the lands from which sovereignty grows. Return, Trask urged, to the places where sovereignty grows.

## WANDA IEREMIA-ALLAN

From my intimate participation in the Hawaiian movement for self-determination, it is obvious to me that these politicizing agents have most often been women— young, nationalist women. Occasionally, older women with cultural knowledge have evolved into nationalist, but they lead by virtue of their cultural mana, rather than by political mana.

—Trask, *From a Native Daughter*

Trask’s writing on Indigenous Hawaiian mana and political leadership helps me understand the ways in which Samoan women in the Fa’atuatua I le Atua Ua Tasi (FAST) political party exercised their agency and resilience in the 2021 Samoa elections. More specifically, Trask’s observations of the collective might of Hawaiian women in Hawaiian political struggles provides new impetus to think about the specific articulations of gendered power and mana wielded by the FAST party leader, the Honourable Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa and her group of friends named “Fiame4friends,” during and after the tumultuous 2021 Samoan elections.

The April 2021 Samoa elections could be considered the most divisive, litigious, and unsettling period of modern Samoan politics. The tense four-month standoff period between warring parties started with the release of election results in May 2021.

These results declared an even split of votes between the Human Right Protection Party (HRPP) and the FAST party. The HRPP moved to invoke a law that added another woman to their party. This maneuver was quickly followed by a vote by Tuala Iosefo Ponifasio, the independent politician for the FAST party. These acts sparked a succession of legal challenges in the Court of Appeal, which eventually ruled in favor of the FAST party.

As the deadline for swearing in the new government approached, the head of state, Tuimaleali'ifano Va'aletoa Sualauvi II issued a declaration that banned the Legislative Assembly from meeting. This declaration led to the locking of the doors to the parliamentary building and the refusal to swear in the new government despite the Court of Appeal's ruling in favor of FAST's electoral win. These legal disputes became a tail-spinning, drawn-out political tussle that reverberated across all sectors of Samoan society, both within Samoa and abroad. The tensions threw into the spotlight the moral and ethical leadership of many seasoned politicians. The crisis was eventually resolved by the Samoa Court of Appeal on July 23, 2021, confirming Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa as Samoa's first woman prime minister.

This reflection discusses the dual nature of political and cultural mana, which Trask identifies in the two groups of women in Hawaiian nationalist movements. I pay attention to the cultural ethics in modern-day politics and the multiple roles and mediums Samoan women utilized during the four-month standoff, which was termed "the Samoa's constitutional crisis." This is a personal reflection on the compelling interplay of political power and cultural mana in a Samoan political context, as seen through the eyes of a diasporic Samoan woman on Tainui whenua in Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand. Like many Samoans in the diaspora, I followed Samoan politics with keen interest and feared that the ensuing unprecedented legal contests and political partisan politicking would leave Samoa's cultural institutions irreparably damaged.

Trask's discussions of the cultural and political mana of Hawaiian women helps me understand the interplay between Samoan moral and political authority in a Samoan political setting. While Trask does not privilege one group of women over the other, or bind one specific form of mana to seniority and age, she clearly draws our attention to the intergenerational collaborative power generated from various cultural institutional settings. Her observation points to the subtle and overt forms of power embedded in traditional societal settings. Thus, Trask's words help me think about the different articulations of power at the intersections of cultural and political crossroads. More specifically, I am driven to think about the "indices of power" navigated and wielded by the Honorable Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa and her four political and media savvy group of female friends who named themselves "Friends4Fiamē."<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the initial poll numbers in April 2021 resulted in the even distribution of votes between the two parties. This draw inspired the opposing HRPP to appeal to the Samoan Electoral Commission, to invoke a bylaw requiring 10 percent of the Legislative Assembly to be allocated to women. Read by many as a desperate rather than a genuine attempt to increase women's representation in the HRPP, this effort led to the appointment of Aliimalemanu Alofa Tuua of the HRPP party to the Legislative Assembly, which tipped the number of votes in the HRPP's favor. This

discrepancy was subsequently rebalanced by the alignment of the independent party member Tuua Iosefo Ponifasio to the Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa’s FAST party. The head of state declared the dissolution of Parliament and issued orders for new elections.<sup>24</sup> The constitutional crisis wrought by much debate, and court appeals concluded with the Samoan Supreme Court overturning HRPP’s appointment of Aliimalemanua and the acknowledgment of Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa as the new prime minister four months after the initial elections.

While the constitutional and legal frameworks were contested and vigorously debated in the public forum, a less visible but equally compelling dispute at the grass-roots level relating to the ideological and cultural clashes in Samoan culture was taking place. These tensions reflected the spheres of Feagaiga—sacred covenants between sectors of Samoan society relating to moral and political autonomy. The pervasive battles for customary authority through the articulations of mamalu (dignity) and pule (authority) were quietly waged in the national consciousness during the Samoan elections. For Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa, the Feagaiga (sacred covenant) relationship between brothers and sisters, which saw the traditional allocation of political power to the male sibling and the moral authority to the sister, became an ideological battleground that needed to be continually and publicly resolved. As a contemporary political leader, Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa, not only inherited both roles but was also expected to demonstrate her aptitude in navigating these two offices through the constant display of her collegial manner, collaborative decision making, and steely resolve under pressure.

The dignity (mamalu) of her cultural office as paramount heir and matai alii was naturally assumed in her role as the political party leader. Thus, the combination of both political and cultural mana, as Trask noted, by female members of the Hawaiian Nationalists movements, was the foundation on which Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa also stood. Not only did Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa navigate the political minefield during this time, her manner of doing so, with restraint and dignity, reflected the behavior befitting the moral authority of her cultural office and vice versa.

In corresponding efforts, her fellow party members (as orators and brothers) performed their duties of Feagaiga by defending her during the onslaught of partisan politicking and public sledging. Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa’s wielding of cultural (moral) and political power both protected her status and upheld her mamalu (sacred dignity) in the face of public attacks by the opposition party. To traditionalists in the rural villages, who had warmly received her during her grassroots village campaign tours, the political attacks from the HRPP party were also read as cultural and moral threats to Samoan cultural institutions. For many, Fiamē Naomi Mata’āfa was a seasoned and experienced politician who had proven herself politically and culturally in her role as the former deputy prime minister before her resignation from cabinet in 2020. On the cultural front, her restrained and dignified conduct befitted someone of her paramount chiefly status. This chiefly status drew many to the FAST party’s popular village campaigns. For many, these grassroot campaigns were seen to acknowledge and unite the interconnected pillars of Samoan society and village honorifics that many felt had been missing for a while in modern Samoan politics. “A high chiefly line may bequeath the potential for *mana*, but the actualization or achievement of *mana* in terms of

political leadership requires more than genealogy, it requires specific identification by the leader with the people, just as the *ali'i* or chiefs in days of old were judged by how well they cared for their people.”<sup>25</sup> In the face of agitated national political factions and civil groups, both in Samoa and abroad, Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa appealed for collective calm. The lockout of her political party on the morning of her swearing in forced officials to conduct a rudimentary service outside the parliamentary building in a makeshift tent. The makeshift ceremony not only invoked images of a painful colonial past, but also reinforced the image of an irrefutable grassroots “peoples” movement. This dramatic event was replayed regularly on Samoa’s state television and was circulated widely on social media, deepening the cultural and partisan divide between Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa, her FAST party and the HRPP party. The images were largely interpreted not as a demonstration of the strongman politics of the HRPP leader, Hon. Tuilaepa Sa’ilele Malielegaoi, but as a powerful image of the restrained, dignified, and stoic leadership of Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa and her FAST party. The images replayed the cultural offence of denying her moral and political authority, which in people’s minds had already been bequeathed to her by virtue of her inherited status and cultural office. The theatrical standoff was tense. Ironically, while she was expected to advance the political might of her party by agitating for political claims to office, she was simultaneously expected to perform her role as “pae ma le auli” conflict resolvers and community protectors.

She was able to navigate these tensions during the many public standoffs and protest marches organized by both parties. Public support for the way in which she handled the lockdown of the parliamentary building on the morning of the swearing-in ceremony was evident through social media and mainstay media. The standoff scene outside the parliamentary building was reminiscent of the pro-independent *Mau* protest movement against the German colonial government 110 years earlier. As both “pae ma le auli” conflict resolver and her new unofficial role as prime minister, Fiamē Naomi appealed to the nation for calm. In the shelter of the makeshift tent, she consoled and boosted morale among a disillusioned and angry crowd. She quelled the rising emotions, attended the afternoon prayers, and went about organizing a rudimentary swearing-in ceremony. Combining the political and cultural authority invested in her person, she appealed for calm in an emotionally heightened and politically charged national crisis.

The Samoan alagaupu (proverb) “O Samoa ua uma ona tofi” points to the foundations of Samoan authority, stating that the true leaders of Samoa have already been appointed by their ancestral and political connections. This proverb went a long way toward clarifying the national consciousness in relation to Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa’s inherited sociopolitical and moral authority. Despite its modern-day grounding, Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa’s inaugural appointment as the first Samoan prime minister did not occur overnight. Her genealogical connections, political experience, education, and popularity led many to register their vote in her favor. As the daughter of the first Samoan prime minister, Fiamē Faumuina Mata’afa, and the minister Lauulu Fetauimalemau Mata’afa, Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa was also touted as a leading authority in politics, education, and diplomacy. Her long service as deputy prime minister

from March 19, 2016, to September 11, 2020, bode well for her campaign for prime minister, and therefore perhaps surprised many in the oppositional party, including the former prime minister Tuilaepa Sailemalielegaoi, who had been in power for over twenty years, by securing half of the national and popularity vote.

### *E sui le faiga ae tumau le fa'avae: Practices Change but the Foundation Remains*

The politically active group who named themselves “Fiame’s friends” included Tau’iliili Alise Stunnenberg, Sose Annandale, Nynette Sass, and Lauano Lauina Grace was visibly present during Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa’s campaign for prime minister. Established after Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa’s resignation as deputy leader and deputy prime minister in 2020, the group collectively raised funds, organized grassroots outreach campaigns, and drove a successful social media operation named “Friends4Fiame.” The proverb “E sui le faiga ae tumau le faavae” gave license for the adoption of new forms of organizational practices for a modern Samoan audience. In multiple ways, these four female friends’ efforts reflected the traditional roles performed by the aualuma (attending sisters of the village). As such, they provided spiritual, practical, financial, and moral support. In conjunction with the FAST political party, they participated in the metaphoric dynamics of a village in which the sacred covenants between orators and chiefs, tama sā and suli (heirs) and aumaga (attending sisters) were activated and upheld. Members of the FAST party and “Fiame’s friends” committed their support to her not only by virtue of the political party system, but also through deeply sanctioned and pervading cultural customary practices that had been in practice for over three millennia.

### *E au le ina’ilau o Tama’itai: Rising to the Top*

“E au le inai lau o Tamaiti” is a Samoan proverb that refers to the collective might of Samoan women. The proverb emerged from the construction of the Fale Samoa, in which members of the aualuma (women who serve the village chief’s daughter) reached and completed the thatching of the fale ahead of the aumaga (untitled men in the village). This alagaupu (proverb) recognizes the personal and organizational ability of women to reach metaphorical heights. In the same vein, the alagaupu (proverb) is an allegorical reference to the role of women as the *malu o le fale*, the shelter of the house, family and community; which is also represented in the *malu-tatau* for Samoan women. On the night of the successful election, the four friends declared:<sup>26</sup>

“It’s an amazing result, given the short time the party had prepared, and the four of us are only a small part of it. So to be able to look at each other and say wow, we helped make a change, I think that was the amazing thing.”

“I am just in awe of this woman who has got this responsibility on her shoulders now to try and make it work and form a government.”

“She’s inclusive, she’s consultative, so it’s a big change from how the government’s been run over the past 20 years. We can only get better and stronger.”

## *Writing our Own Histories*

Our story remains unwritten. It rests within the culture, which is inseparable from the land. To know this is to know our history. To write this is to write of the land and the people who are born from her.

—Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter*

Trask's writings on cultural and political mana across the generations of Hawaiian women draw attention to the multiple political struggles in modern Samoa. Her writing reminds us of our responsibilities to center our Indigenous philosophical paradigms on writing our histories. She reminds us that our political might can be found by championing our established sociopolitical entities. She gives meaning to the ancient covenants that we have inherited and reminds us of our responsibilities as Pacific women to go forward with all the modern articulations of cultural covenants available to us. Trask inspires me to center Samoan epistemological frameworks in the writing of Samoan histories. Trask inspires me to look past the more overt forms of political power, and into its intersections with moral and cultural mana, which Trask identifies as often the domain from which Hawaiian women meet and organize. Similarly, these Samoan cultural sites are not viewed as passive sites of inert inactivity, but rather as fluid and potent spaces of inspiration and resilience. While these sites are not visible from the first reading, they are places of immense sociohistorical power: reminiscent of our ancestors and connected to our lands, language, and ways of being. It is at these cultural and political crossroads that we meet as sisters, siblings, ancestors, villages, even as adversarial political opponents. These crossroads are examples of the many powerful sites where Trask urges us to write our histories from. *Fāāfetai tele lava*.

## MERE TAITO

### *Triaging to and Foraging for Trask*

No'ia 'e Māuri. I am a Rotuman Islander from the districts of Malha'a and Noatau in Rotuma, Fiji. I am also a creative practice PhD student examining the writing conditions necessary for multilingual Fāeag Rotuam ta (Rotuman language)-English poetry. For this special issue commemorating the scholarly and creative work of Haunani-Kay Trask, I offer two poems "Triage to Trask" and "Forage from Trask." I have been thinking about the expressions "triage to" and "forage from" and how they define my interactions with Trask's scholarly and poetic writing during different times of my manuhiri-immigrant life here in Aotearoa New Zealand. My awareness of this binary existence has acquired a vintage of its own since my arrival in 2007. Fourteen and a half years has been a good span of time (but by no means exhaustive) to observe Tangata Whenua and Tangata Ole Moana relationships in this country. It has also been a good length of time to hold a settler colony in my metaphorical hands and feel it for what it really is: a twisted crown of razor sharp barbed wire. In such a state (pun intended), moves to "triage to" and "forage for" become necessary acts of self-preservation. In "triage to," the act of accessing a person, place, memory, or object is either deliberate or unintentional and often made with



some method of urgency. In most cases, it is usually well-being straining and cracking under duress that triggers the code for “triage to.” In “forage for,” on the other hand, the forager seeks from a space of stability and purpose. The act of access is paced and slow: thoughtful and deliberate. The seeker is almost happy.

### *Triage to Trask*

I arrived in Aotearoa on a three-month visitor’s visa on July 27, 2007. I came with a medium-sized suitcase, a box of books, and a long-term plan to transition to permanent residency under the Skilled Migrant Category. The nine-month-long period of permanent residency processing was emotionally and financially crippling. These early months were dark days for me in settler colony New Zealand. Well-being can buck and spin under institutional immigration requirements.

Dark days in settler colonies come with the territory. Events such as the illegal sale and proposed development of Māori land at Ihumatao in 2019 and the Christchurch massacre staged by a white supremacist, also in 2019, are merely two examples of this darkness. If not watching national tragedies play out in mainstream media, you are often fighting your own smaller battles in workplaces and communities. A bad day in the colony workplace is when your boss reminds you that you are working in a “Western institution” and therefore “Western” rules of conduct and procedure apply. A bad day at the colony supermarket check-out counter is when you are asked whether you understand that the punnet of blueberries you are holding in your hands is \$9.99. Is it supermarket policy to remind all customers of their overpriced out-of-season-fruit or just customers like me who look like they cannot afford to splurge on expensive fruit?

Dark days in the colony can wear you down, too. Since my arrival in 2007, I have found many strategies to cope, some of which include reading and writing poetry, making art, nurturing personal and academic relationships with like-minded Māori and Pasifika individuals and groups, repairing my relationship with my language Fāeag Rotuām ta, and here is a favorite: replaying on social media the Island Issues 1990 episode video clip of Trask and the “woefully ignorant caller.”<sup>27</sup>

In this video, Trask is wearing a red kikepa; her legs are crossed and her hair falls loose down her back. It is not only Trask’s swift response about American imperial history, a reference to Joey Carter (Who is Joey Carter? I had to do a quick Google search), and the Soviet Union that grips me but also her infectious authority, conviction, and fearlessness that make me sit upright in my chair. Like the title of the second section of *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*, Trask is “raw, swift, and deadly.”<sup>28</sup> To draw from her poem “Racist White Woman” from the same collection, it seems as though Trask’s verbal “hearse of violence” (or at least one version of it) did arrive at the caller’s home and “get her” good.<sup>29</sup> If ever there is a public takedown to remember, this is it.

The poem “Triage to Trask” (see fig. 1) is my expression of gratitude for Trask’s gift of resilience, which I have constantly drawn from the Trask-caller video. I have lost count of the number of times I have watched this clip. The red cloth, which represents

Trask's kikepa; the fiery nature of the verbal exchange; and the telephone graphically anchor the poem. Trask's fire is like power fluid; it flushes me out from the dumps of settler colony New Zealand. I may have deliberately centered the haole caller as the protagonist in desperate need of critical medical intervention, but truth be told, the resuscitation is truly mine.

### Forage for Trask

The creative artifact proposed for my doctoral research is a collection of multilingual Fäeag Rotuām ta-English poetry written specifically for the purpose of Fäeag Rotuām ta regeneration in Aotearoa. To position a collection of multilingual Fäeag Rotuām ta-English poetry within the body of Rotuman creative literature, I have had to ask the questions: What is Rotuman creative literature, and who counts as a Rotuman creative writer?

I have “foraged” from a number of Indigenous creatives and scholars like Trask to tentatively peg the boundaries of Rotuman creative literature. From Trask's discussions of Hawaiian literature, I have argued for the principle of Indigeneity as one of the defining features of Rotuman creative literature.<sup>30</sup> Rotuman creative literary work in any of the genres of poetry, the many forms of prose, graphic novel, and screenplay must be produced by persons with ancestral and heritage connections to Rotuma. Such a person may live anywhere in the world; however, such a person *may* choose to engage (or not) creatively with the Rotuman consciousness. In other words, the Rotuman creative writer is not constrained to writing about “Rotuman things.” I offer this nonrestrictive stance because it is risky to *load* and therefore *expect* “Rotuman conscious-building” of a Rotuman writer. I also reason that Rotuman creative literature is additive rather than subtractive. It is encompassing of Rotuman visual symbols of fā'i (tattoos) and adaptive of oral forms of creative expression such as hanuju (storytelling), and fakpeje (ceremonial poetry). The contemporary Rotuman creative writer has a very strong ancestral foundation of rich creative forms from which to draw, but whether one accesses and adapts heritage forms of creative expressions for literary work is the prerogative of the Rotuman creative writer. All that said, something tells me that these formative ideas of Rotuman creative literature and writers will expand and shift as I progress through my doctoral studies.

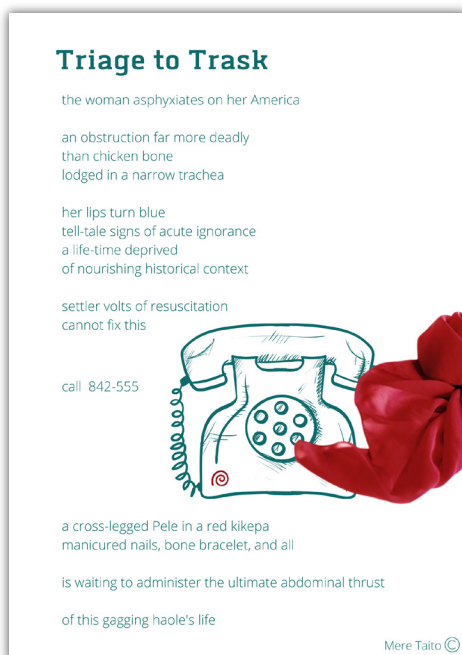


FIGURE 1. Triage to Trask. Image of illustrated poem by M. Taito.



Part (i) of “Forage for Trask” (see fig. 2) honors Trask’s ideas specific to the body of Hawaiian literature and their influence on my thinking around Rotuman creative literature as an Indigenous body of work. In this section of the poem, Trask is the tallest tree in the forest. She has to be. As the poem suggests, I gather only “what matters to me,” which plays on the idea of sustainability and the practice of “leaving some for others.” Indigenous research is powerful if it engages the principles of collaboration and sharing. Part (ii) (see fig. 3) is a graphic poem that celebrates the endless treasures of found poems in Trask’s impressive collections of poetry. The act of “finding found poems” is parallel to the act of “foraging.” The eight-lines were “found” in Trask’s contributions to the anthologies *Mauri Ola*:<sup>31</sup> “Sisters” and “Nā ‘Ōiwi” and *Whetu Moana*:<sup>32</sup> “Broken gourd,” “Puowaina: Flag day,” “God of my ancestor,” “From Ka’awa to Rarotonga,” and “Into our light I will go forever.”

### CONCLUSION

In the poem “Sons,” Trask writes of the making of “ropes of resistance for unborn generations” and the weaving of “fine baskets of resistance to carry our daughters.”<sup>33</sup> In its entirety, I see Trask’s activism, scholarly, and creative works as bustling storage houses of knowledge filled with baskets and ropes of resistance. To this phenomenal legacy, Indigenous communities around the globe will flock, either as “triggers”

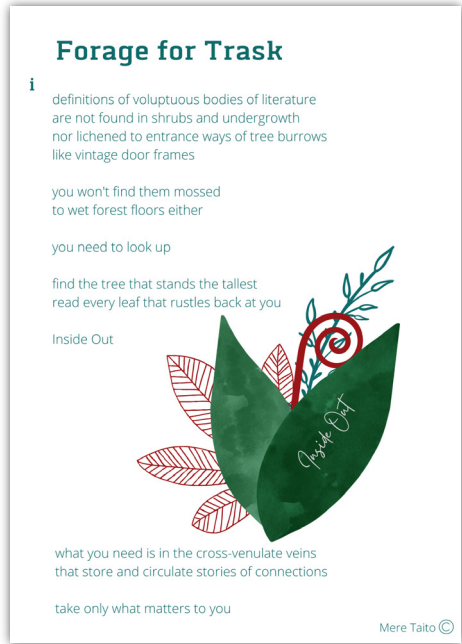


FIGURE 2. Forage for Trask I. Image of illustrated poem by M. Taito.



FIGURE 3. Forage for Trask II. Image of illustrated poem by M. Taito.

to find much-needed healing, courage, and emotional strength; or as “foragers” to draw sustenance from academic, activist, and creative thought. The broken and curious will always gather here. What extraordinary power.

## NOTES

1. 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 (Baltimore, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).
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3. Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland, New Zealand: Broadsheet, 1984).
4. Moana Jackson, “Decolonisation and the Stories in the Land,” *E-Tangata*, May 9, 2021, <https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/moana-jackson-decolonisation-and-the-stories-in-the-land/>.
5. Haunani-Kay Trask, “Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism,” *Signs* 21, no. 4 (1996): 906, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495125>.
6. Geoff Steven, *Tē Matakite o Aotearoa: The Māori Land March* (Auckland: Seehear, 1975).
7. Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993), 80–81.
8. *Ibid.*, 33.
9. Tuaiwa Rickard, unpublished memoir, 1995.
10. For more on settler warfare at Ō-rākau, see Aunty Rovina Maniapoto, “Flight from Ō-rākau,” *Tē Ara Wai*, <https://tearawai.nz/tour#/tour/location-orakau.html>.
11. See Pei Te Hurinui Jones, “Te Oriori a Puhīwahine,” *Tē Ao Hou* (1960), 18. For more on Rihī Puhīwahine as a political theorist and composer, see Hemopereki Simon, “Ngā Whakaaro a Puhīwahine: A Political Philosophy and Theory from the Mōteatea of Puhīwahine,” *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 4, no. 1 (2020), <https://dx.doi.org/10.18124/08er-ys75>
12. Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (1999), 118.
13. For more on the meanings of whakapapa, see Nēpia Mahuika, “A Brief History of Whakapapa: Māori Approaches to Genealogy,” *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019), [doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020032](https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020032)
14. Jones, “Te Oriori a Puhīwahine,” 18.
15. Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (1999), 118.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New: Indigenous Persistence from Hawai‘i to Kahiki* (Mānoa: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2021); Stephanie Nohelani Teves, *Defiant Indigeneity: The Politics of Hawaiian Performance* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).
18. Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (1999), 88.
19. *Ibid.*
20. In May 2022, a search of “Indigenous persistence” in JSTOR and ProQuest returned pages of results ranging from “persistence” on Peru’s north coast, assertions of Indigenous persistence in Mission-Era California, collections on Indigenous persistence across and beyond the Americas, among others. While an emphasis on persistence is sometimes motivated by the political desire to insist on our continuance, the increasing prevalence of the term demands attention.
21. Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New*.
22. Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (1999), 88.

23. Sapeer Mayron, "Fiamé's 'Four Friends' Elated," *Samoa Observer*, April 11, 2021, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/82246>.
24. "Samoa Head of State Calls for Second Election," *Radio New Zealand*, May 4, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/441793/samoa-head-of-state-calls-for-second-election>.
25. Trask, *From a Native Daughter* (1993), 117.
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27. No'eu Woo O Brien, "You caller, need to learn about Hawaiian history and about where you are," *Facebook*, May 14, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/100000536782180/videos/1301240389903841/>.
28. Haunani-Kay Trask, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (Portland, OR: Calyx Books, 1999), xii.
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30. Haunani-Kay Trask, "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature," in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, ed. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson (Baltimore, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 168.
31. Robert Sullivan, Albert Wendt, and Reina Whaitiri, eds., *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English Whetu Moana II* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), 233–38.
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33. Trask, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*, 56.