



Reclaiming Our History and Sovereignty

BY A. Rodney Bobiwash

Haunani-Kay Trask, *From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*

Common Courage Press, Maine, 1993

In *From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii* Haunani-Kay Trask has done a remarkable job of expressing not only the frustrations and experiences of Native Hawaiians under colonialism but also those of indigenous people around the world. This collection of essays, speeches and assorted submissions is based on the one geopolitical reality shared by all indigenous people — that the denial of ownership of our lands makes possible, and indeed inevitable, the denial of our history, culture and right to be. The reality, that in the modern world our existence as indigenous people is not just an inconvenience to developers but is in itself an act of subversion, is the central thesis of all true resistance literature produced by indigenous peoples. Trask's work is in every sense a true and a powerful piece of indigenous resistance literature.

At first this work can at times seem repetitive, a weakness inherent in the sources the material is drawn from. For

instance, the history of Hawaii is repeated throughout the various pieces. However, a more thorough reading of the work uncovers not repetition, but rather a growing conviction that a reader must take this history as meaningfully as the writer intended it to be. The repetition would be irritable coming from a casual observer, but coming from Haunani-Kay Trask it underscores a fierce and uncompromising conviction that history is important, understanding is essential, support is necessary, and all of these must be on Hawaiian terms. The unwavering stance that historians must first know the language of the people they study is given without apology, and somewhat ironically embodies the very problem of the inevitability of racism within colonial institutions, including universities. The essential problem of relationships within the colonial context is that the colonized can never escape hegemony, while the colonizer can never confront it.

There are several important arguments presented in this work, although analysis is limited to problems generated by the colonial experience rather than suggestions for solutions. Given the context of the work, however, this is understandable. The work confronts non-Native people with the need to do something themselves about their attitudes and privilege, taking responsibility for their history. Certainly this is an important book for non-Native people interested in supporting Native struggles to read. The experiences the author outlines in the section on building coalitions have warnings for Native people involved in struggle and for their non-Native allies. The particular emphasis on the experience of working with white liberals is important — that they will support you with words only but will not go "to the barricades" with you because even their support is a result of hegemony. Trask's experience in academe is one which is all too familiar to Native people who work in Canadian universities. Racism is an institutional fact and the institution has no stake in eradicating it. Even those universities supposedly progressive, remain incorrigible in the face of

criticism from dispossessed peoples. Disciplines (like History) remain the reserve of white males, and indigenous knowledge continues to be at worst denigrated and at best appropriated and exploited. Indigenous knowledge is forced of necessity into an academic ghetto, ie., Native Studies departments, which perpetuates its marginality. At the same time non-Native academics continue to govern the grants industry, in which the exploitation of Native peoples constitutes yet another colonial abuse.

Those who have read Noam Chomsky will find familiar ground in the author's discussion of the new World Order and the role of the Pacific Islands in the U.S. military complex. There is little new in this, but like all good activist writing it is immediate and painfully local.

Finally, for those interested in cultural appropriation the article "Lovely Hula Hands" (also featured in *Border/Lines* no. 23) is important on a number of levels. It draws upon the metaphor of the land as a woman's body and the reality in indigenous societies of woman as bearer of culture. In the metaphor of prostitution, Trask makes a compelling case against corporate tourism, seeing in it the horrific spectre of the rape of the land, the rape of the culture and the literal rape of Hawaiian women.

The appendices included in the book are useful and of particular interest to aboriginal peoples. The United Nations Draft Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the U.N. Conventions on Genocide will be useful to human rights practitioners and educational to those who have yet to read them. Further to this, the inclusion of these documents again underscores the scope of this work — local, but with definite international implications and usefulness. This is activist writing at its best.

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