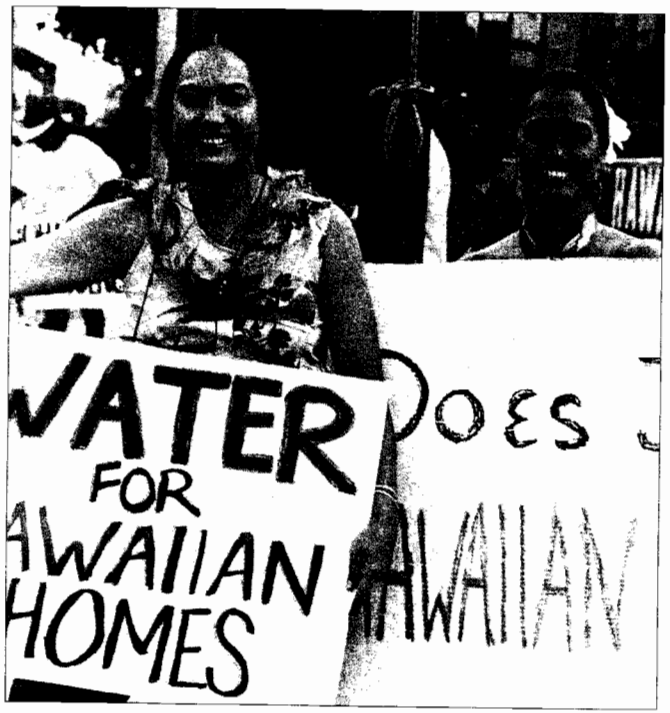
Long-time activist in Hawaiian communities on Maui Island, Dana Naone Hall is a poet, mother, and Hawaiian nationalist whose major work has been to preserve the sanctity of Hawaiian burials and to stop golf courses, hotels, and other destructive development. Here, she stands on the shoreline at Waihe'e where Japanese developers threaten destruction of ancient sites, including burials. She is a continuing source of inspiration for young Hawaiian women just entering our movement. (Photo by Margo Berdeshevsky.)



Mililani and Haunani-Kay Trask demonstrate at the State Capitol for water for Hawaiian homesteaders. (Photo by Ed Greevy.)

Trask
Part II
2

Neocolonialism and Indigenous Structures

In August 1990, my sister, Mililani, and I traveled to Karasjokka, Norway, to attend a world conference of Native women sponsored by the Sami people of the Arctic.

Despite profound geographic, cultural, and physical differences among the delegates attending, our similarities as colonized indigenous women—from the Americas, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia—were obvious. This speech was intended to underscore our shared conditions and commonalities.

In this mysterious northern land of ice and eternal light, we, the indigenous women of the world, are embarking on a timely path. This week, history is being made by the very fact of this conference and its focus on indigenous women. We are here to speak for ourselves, to decide our own strategies, and to plan our own futures. We are not here as members of minority groups or as adjuncts to male organizations but as Native women determined to link our peoples in a common cause for self-determination.

We come from diverse communities at varied levels of forced assimilation, economic exploitation, religious missionizing, political and cultural oppression, and physical extermination as peoples. Many of us are survivors of earlier genocidal campaigns, while some of us are no doubt fighting current genocidal campaigns. Clearly, we are vastly different from each other, not only geographically, but culturally, linguistically, and historically as well.

And yet, I believe, we share many more similarities than differences. We have a common heritage as aboriginal peoples, that is, as First Nations of the world. We are all land-based people, and some of us also sea-based people, who are attuned to the rhythms of our homelands in a way that assumes both protection of and an intimate belonging to our ancestral places. We have all been colonized by imperialist powers more or less resistant to our human needs for self-determination and self-government. And, at this moment, we face grave problems that range from environmental poisoning, nuclear radiation, and high infant mortality to land dispossession, economic marginalization, and militarization of our areas.

These large commonalities have brought us together as indigenous women fighting for our peoples, our lands, and our very survival.

In this context of shared experiences, I have been asked to address neocolonialism and the co-optation of indigenous sociopolitical structures. Obviously, these categories are both large and extremely varied. Our cultures, our geographies, and our responses to colonialism shape how and what we experience as Native nations. But given this, and acknowledging that I am working at a broad level of generalization, I will attempt an outline of concerns that others here should feel free to enlarge, modify, or otherwise change.

For the purposes of discussion, I have defined neocolonialism as the experience of oppression at a stage that is nominally identified as independent or autonomous. I use *nominally* to underscore the reality that independence from the colonial power is legal but not economic. Some examples of neocolonialism include the control by multinational corporations of former territorial colonies. Latin American, African, and Asian countries come to mind. Other examples include the persistence of social and cultural practices imposed by colonial powers during the first stages of imperialism even after independence, for example, Anglo-American legal and land tenure systems in places as diverse as the Philippines, Fiji, and parts of Africa. Finally, neocolonialism refers not only to dominant colonial retentions but also to psychological injuries suffered by the colonized that continue to wound our internal and external lives.

Part of neocolonialism, of course, is the ideological position that all is well; in other words, that decolonization has occurred. Therefore, problems and conflicts are post-colonial and the fault of the allegedly independent peoples. Nothing could be more inaccurate.

To begin with, indigenous peoples *by definition* lack autonomy and independence. In the modern, post-war world, we are surrounded by other, more powerful nations that desperately want our lands and resources and for whom we pose an irritating problem. This is just as true for the Indians of the Americas as it is for the tribals of India and the aborigines of the Pacific. This economic reality is also a political reality for most if not all indigenous peoples. The relationship between ourselves and those who want control of us *and* our resources is not a *formerly* colonial relationship but an *ongoing* colonial relationship. That is to say, we are not now autonomous yet dependent. Rather, we are dependent *and* subjugated. Part of our subjugation is the unequal relationship to our numerous colonizers.

In the world system today, natural and human resources, markets, and technology determine the value of indigenous peoples to the colonial powers. Tragically, this is a truism for every woman in this room. Thus, land is no longer our mother, source of physical and spiritual sustenance. She is now a resource for consumption and profit. Our children are no longer the flower of our nations but the labor units of industry and the military. Our cultures are no longer the expressions of harmony and beauty between our people and our gods but the source of entertainment and recreation for the world's rich. Our spiritual values and philosophical systems are no longer the guides to daily and generational life but the playthings of First World adventurers. Even our ancestors, long dead, have not escaped these degradations. Their bones and artifacts are now displayed in museums and antique shops as "primitive" curiosities.

These transformations continue to occur not only as a result of brute physical and economic violence but also as a by-product of skillful co-optation of our own cultural forms. At the risk of over-generalizing, I want to suggest five areas in which co-optation occurs and then use a vivid example from my own culture to illustrate how successfully "colonial" such co-optation can be.

I begin with our own self-definitions, that is, with how and what we call ourselves. Unless I am mistaken, most indigenous nations sim-

ply say they are the "people" or the "people of the land," or "human beings." The sense of this identity is an attachment to place and a differentiation from other living things in the natural world.

Under colonialism, this identification is transformed into pejorative categories that take on legal force. For example, the U.S. government has defined a Native Hawaiian as someone with 50 percent or more blood quantum. Those who meet this blood requirement are eligible for lands and revenues. Those who do not meet this test are completely dispossessed. As a result, our people are divided by race, something foreign to us and to our identity as a nation.

Beyond the question of who is and is not indigenous looms the power to define and thus to determine who we, as Native peoples, will be in the future. Imposed systems of identification are instituted to separate our people from our lands and from each other in perpetuity. Again using my own people as an example, the white people who created our classification hoped that Hawaiians of 50 percent or more blood quantum would eventually die out, thus leaving our lands and revenues not to Hawaiians of less than 50 percent blood but to the state and federal governments.

The experience of a legal identity is, as all identities, both psychological and political. Who we believe ourselves to be is often *not* what the colonial legal system defines us to be. This disjunction causes a kind of suffering nearly impossible to end without ending the colonial definitions of who we are. Barring this, we are constantly in struggle with government agencies and, sometimes, with our own people. We are besieged by state powers attempting to decrease our numbers and therefore our claims by merely defining us out of existence. Or, we are categorized in a manner alien to our cultures in the hopes of strangling our ancestral attachments to our own people.

If we are tribal, the colonial power defines us so as to minimize the powers of the tribe. If we are not tribal, the colonial power uses our self-definition against us by claiming that we are not indigenous because we are not tribal. If we are of mixed bloodlines, we are often not indigenous enough and therefore not able to claim lands. But if we are not of mixed blood, we are required to substantiate our ancestry.

Definition, then, has served to co-opt our identity. Naming has been, for many of us, a theft of matrilineal descent by Western patriarchal descent. In the case of Hawaiians, legal imposition of Christian, English, and patrilineal names meant the loss of our ancestral names. This imposed system greatly weakened and, in some areas, destroyed our indigenous practice of genealogical naming.

Definitions of who we are closely parallel where we live and with whom we live. Thus, our extended families have suffered incessant pressures to fragment into nuclear units of only parents and children. In nuclear families, women's power, as the power of the mother generally, is reduced from life-giver to domestic servant. When industrial capitalism penetrates our societies, our people are driven into the labor market, where production takes place outside the family, which declines to a mere consumer unit. This sundering of our functions also severs our people from their traditional work. The devaluing of traditional, cultural kinds of work accompanies the forcing of our people into the labor market. Depending on where we live, women's "work" then ranges from domestic labor and prostitution to sales clerkship and *hula* dancing. Such work has no meaning and no status in our cultures; therefore, we lose both our traditional work and the high valuation that attached to our roles.

In the Pacific, "big nation" dominance has meant that labor markets develop to serve the needs of American, French, Japanese, New Zealand, and Australian interests. Two well-known cases will suffice to illustrate my point.

American military dominance in the Pacific has meant that enormous amounts of land, water, and other resources are diverted to satisify American military needs. The Marshall Islands and Hawai'i are clear examples of how a dominant power's so-called "national interests" result in the loss of lands and the skewing of employment opportunity because of the burdensome presence of military personnel, bases, training areas, and ports. Such a large military presence both directs the kinds of employment that will develop and limits the opportunity for work in traditional fields such as agriculture and fishing. A substantial military presence also creates a second economy, with special privileges for its personnel, including housing, elite consumer goods, and exclusive recreational areas. This misuse of land is coupled with the ill-effects of the military on Islanders' physical and mental health. Finally, there is the ultimate injury: the frightening risk of becoming "strategically important" in the game of superpower politics.

If the American military exemplifies one way in which foreign impingement structures labor demand, Japanese corporate invasion of the Pacific, meanwhile, spells dangerous foreign control of fragile island economies and, in the case of tourist investments, the inundation of small land bases and populations by hordes of visitors. The indigenous people are then presented with the alleged opportunity of

waiting on tourists, cleaning their rooms, selling them artifacts, and smiling for a living.

In the case of Hawaiian women, the definition of us as alluring, highly eroticized Natives is anchored by a tourist economy that depends on the grossest commercialization of our culture. Because of mass-based corporate tourism, our women have become purveyors of our dances, our language, our islands, in other words, all that is beautiful about us. This is cultural prostitution, often with our own people's willing, if unexamined, participation.

We, in the Pacific, do not take this kind of cultural degradation lightly. The Japanese in particular are investing heavily all over the Pacific, including Fiji, Vanuatu, Tahiti, Sāmoa, and of course, most spectacularly in my own Native land, Hawai'i. The disastrous effects of mass tourism on island cultures is best observed in Hawai'i, where the multibillion dollar industry has resulted in grotesque commercialization of our Native culture, creation of a racially stratified, poorly paid servant class of industry workers, transformation of whole sections of our major islands into high-rise cities, contamination and depletion of water sources, intense crowding—with densities in the worst areas exceeding that of Hong Kong—increases in crimes against property and violent crime against tourists, and increasing dependency on corporate investments.

The co-optation of indigenous ways does not work without complicitous Natives. Some of our people are bought, some are crushed between impossible demands, others are squeezed until they become but images of their former selves. Those who resist often find the price too high. In Hawai'i—the world's most isolated archipelago—Native resistance no longer results in death or imprisonment, as it once did, but now brings chronic unemployment or threats of law suits or constant hounding and public ridicule that threatens our sanity. For the sake of our loved ones, our families, our elders, and our relatives, we participate in the wage system because we feel there is no other way.

And yet, throughout our Native nations, there are attempts to rebuild self-sufficiency projects that begin with our traditional subsistence activities—such as farming, fishing, and gathering—and proceed outward to Native crafts, and further still to the performing arts, such as dance and theater. These are healthy signs of resistance to co-optation, but not all of us have this opportunity.

While our naming and our family structures have been subjugated to Western systems, so too have our land tenure and inheritance customs been co-opted. Land, once held in common for use by all has

nearly everywhere come under the threat of private property tenure, and all the bureaucratic papers that trail along with it, like deeds, mortgages, and bank notes. The constant fighting over land and water that we see throughout Indian country, in Hawai'i, New Zealand, Australia, and other parts of the world is played out in the language of property law. The inevitable conflict between land that is collectively held and land that is individually owned will never cease because it is a conflict between cultures whose values are directly opposed.

For our peoples, this means only ill-health, poor living conditions, urbanization, and continued theft. As the industrial countries increase their stockpiles of waste and weapons, they will need to bury them somewhere. Of course, that unspecified "somewhere" is our Native lands and waters. Thus, Japanese plans to bury their nuclear waste in the Mariana trench; the Euro-American plan to incinerate chemicals on Johnston Island in the Pacific; French testing of nuclear weapons in Tahiti and their pretense that radiated water does not circulate throughout the Pacific. I understand that here, in Samiland, there are plans to bury nuclear waste in the Arctic. As with our labor, so with our lands: we are reserved for First World needs.

And this leads me to political co-optation. Our leaders are tremendously vulnerable to the pressures of colonial governments, insidious anthropologists, greedy financiers, and a host of other predators. The politics of co-optation, in other words, are treacherous and not immediately obvious.

For example, it seems that some of our people, once educated in colonial systems and yearning for colonial things, have a very difficult time returning to help their nations. This is not to say that we do not need lawyers, scientists, and other technical people who are familiar with the colonizer and colonial ways.

But as peoples, we need to convey to our younger siblings that learning about and understanding the outside world has a goal other than individual success or money. *Our* goal is to help our people. Co-optation occurs so frequently once our people leave us, which is why the colonizer tries to take our children, to force our families into urban areas, and to separate our generations. Indeed, the entire policy of the United States regarding its Native people can be seen as various confusions over how to destroy or co-opt us. The failure of the first policy leads to the inevitability of the second.

The United States now seeks to avoid confrontation with us by creating false Native governments, like tribal councils, or in Hawai'i the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The Brazilian, New Zealand, Canadian,

and other governments seek to do the same. Once these false fronts are in place, agreements for natural resources, militarization, waste burial, and a host of other things are immediately drawn up and signed. Co-optation triumphs in the guise of Native self-determination.

In Hawai'i, the effectiveness of co-optation is very visible. We have had a Hawaiian governor who behaves like a white man. We have Hawaiian representatives in the electoral system, including the Congress of the United States, who think, talk, and act like capitalist entrepreneurs bargaining off our natural and human resources. And I have Hawaiian students at the university who yearn to sell our culture in the tourist spots in our islands.

All these Hawaiians think, to greater or lesser degrees, that they are helping their people. Personal advancement has become the proof of self-determination, a ridiculous belief but one that is nevertheless strongly held. The breakdown of collective identification, which I referred to earlier, has set in motion an increasing individualist identification fed by popular culture, the structure of the market, and the bureaucracy of everyday life. As a result, personal achievement becomes the mirage of our movement, beckoning our people down a path of falsity and emptiness.

For my people, and perhaps for many others, neocolonialism *is* co-optation. Apart from the loss of our lands, the fracturing of our identities and collectivities, and the psychological impairment of our understanding, co-optation is the ever-ready reply from Native sell-outs to those of us who continue to organize among our people. Our young people, especially, are vulnerable to co-optation.

The problem, then, for all of us, is to strengthen our resolve; to learn from each other about strategies and linkages; and to create alternatives. This last possibility is the most difficult to fulfill.

But that is why we are here. Not merely to meet, exchange, and console, but to fashion new ways of resisting, of continuing as Native people. Specifically, we are here to build women's organizations focused on the needs of other women and their families and to work these organizations into political forces that will continue to be the backbone of our people.

And for this, we are remarkably gifted. At home, our movement is led by women, like the Kia'āina of our nation, my sister, Mililani. The few men present are overshadowed by our strong women leaders who constantly confront establishment Hawaiians who have become politically assimilated. Indeed, everywhere in the Pacific strong indigenous female leadership is the norm: in Belau, where women traveled to the

U.S. Congress to lobby against the Reagan-inspired economic and political chaos that has drowned that tiny nation in violence; in Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu, also called New Zealand, where articulate women leaders are fighting for language, land, and cultural rights; in Guam, where indigenous Chamorro women are organized to gain some form of autonomy from the U.S. government; in West Papua and East Timor, where genocide by Indonesia has driven out thousands of refugees and given rise to new, young leadership; in Kanaky, also known as New Caledonia, where the Kanak liberation front is locked in a battle with the French; in Tahiti, where the Polynesian Liberation Front is pushing for independence and, of course, in the Pan-Pacific Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific Movement, where indigenous women from throughout the Pacific, such as Hilda Lini of Vanuatu and Hilda Harawira of Aotearoa, have been guiding lights.

Let me suggest, in closing, a few things to keep in mind. We need to be inclusive in our categories of analysis. We need to work toward resolutions regarding land and resources, family issues, militarization and nuclearization and, of course, self-government.

Let me offer now a favorite saying of Hawaiians. It was uttered by one of our great chiefs before the worst battle of his life:

Imua e na poki'i
Forward my younger siblings

A inu i ka wai 'awa'awa
And drink the bitter water

A loa'a ka lei
Of opposition until we wear the lei

O Ka Lanakila
of Victory.