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“It’s Always a Part of You”: The Connection Between Sacred Spaces and Indigenous/Aboriginal Health

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Abstract

Since colonization, Indigenous/Aboriginal Peoples (IAP) have fought for their inherent rights to follow their ways of life on their traditional territories. One continuing battle is the protection of sacred spaces. Sacred spaces are places recognized by IAP as deeply spiritually and powerful. Relationships to sacred spaces sustain spiritual connections integral to our concepts of holistic health/well-being and are vital for cultural integrity. Though all of the natural world is sacred to IAP, the particular cultural and spiritual significance of sacred spaces and impact on health merits attention. Drawing from qualitative research, this article investigates IAP's perspectives and experiences regarding the connection between Indigenous/Aboriginal and sacred spaces, and we conclude that the desecration of sacred spaces has negative impacts on IAP's health.

Keywords: Sacred Spaces; Indigenous/Aboriginal People; Indigenous health and well-being; environmental desecration; cultural identity

Introduction: IAP's sacred spaces, health, and research needs

Indigenous/Aboriginal People (IAP) around the world are uniting to protect their sacred spaces from desecration. In what is now the United States but was first Indigenous homelands, current examples are Mauna Kea in Hawai'i, Nuvatukya'ovi and Oak Flat in Arizona, and Standing Rock in North Dakota. The authors of this article maintain that sacred spaces are crucial to IAP's ways of life, and we argue that the desecration of these places has negative impacts on health. Most notably, because colonization is designed to terminate, assimilate, and relocate IAP, the elimination of their existence and connection to their land and culture remain constant threats. Examples are replete worldwide—from the United States' Code of Indian Offenses of 1883, the Revised Laws of Hawaii, to Canada's Indian Act of 1876, which outlawed traditional healing and ceremonies (First Nations in Canada, 2013; Department of the Interior, 1883; Medicine, n.d.). We assert that like a disease, colonization spreads and causes harm to the

“physical, social, emotional, and mental health and well-being in traditional societies” (Gracey & King, 2009).

International agencies acknowledge these connections between health and environment. As early as 1946, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated,

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic, or social condition. (2007)

Today, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) addresses Indigenous People’s rights to sacred spaces and cultural practices. As Indigenous researchers, we claim that the highest standards of health and human rights possible are not upheld for IAP because of the ongoing, current, and emerging destruction of sacred spaces. Ongoing colonization has led to negative health effects, such as higher mortality and infectious disease rates, poor social determinants of health, and non-communicable diseases, which can be linked with racism, loss of languages and cultural practice ties, and spiritual, emotional, and mental disconnectedness linked with land removal (Gracey & King, 2009; King, Smith & Gracey, 2009). However, additional public health research is required to better understand these links.

We write as three Indigenous women whose goals are to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous People. Danelle Cooper, MPH, is Hopi, Tewa, Diné, and Mvskoke. She writes,

Although I grew up mainly in the city, I consider my home Moencopi, Arizona. As an Indigenous woman my responsibility and intentions are to protect and heal my people, ancestors, future generations, all living beings, sacred spaces, and Mother Earth. From my family, I have learned that we are connected to Mother Earth and every living being, and that we have to care for and respect them. My responsibility to write this paper is to aid in the protection and healing of sacred spaces and IAP. As Indigenous People we understand that sacred spaces are a part of us and connected to our health, but some of the world does not. Therefore, I hope this article

will help in spreading awareness around the issue of desecration of sacred spaces and IAP's health and prevent further destruction of sacred spaces.

Treena Delormier PhD, PDt, is a Kanien'keháka (Mohawk) woman and mother who was raised from birth on the reserve community of Kahnawake which is on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, about 10 miles from downtown Montreal, in Quebec, Canada. She writes,

I am a health professional and professor of public health and nutrition. My research training is both academic and community based, primarily in my home community. I believe research is a process of coming to an understanding through pursuits of knowledge that aim to improve the human condition and achieve social justice. As a supervisor of research trainees, I emphasize the through systematic inquiry. As an Indigenous researcher I endeavor to center Indigenous knowledges and methodologies in research and supporting the self-determination of Indigenous communities.

Maile Taulii, PhD, MPH, is Kanaka Maoli, a wahine (woman) and mother. She writes,

I am a Clinical Transformation Healthcare Researcher for the Hawaii Permanente Medical Group, where I bring cultural, ethical, and community-oriented perspectives to clinical transformation. In 2015, I established the world's first global Indigenous Master of Public Health degree program and was awarded the University of Hawai'i, Board of Regents Excellence in Teaching Award. I live with my husband, five children, and three dogs on a 20-acre food forest with our 'ohana, who aim to feed the community traditional, plant-based food from the land.

In this article, we together investigate IAP's perspectives and experiences regarding the connection between IAP's health and sacred spaces, and we provide some specific discussion about Mauna a Wākea and Nuvatukya'ovi as examples of sacred site desecration.

Background: Sacred spaces and Indigenous health and well-being

Sacred Spaces

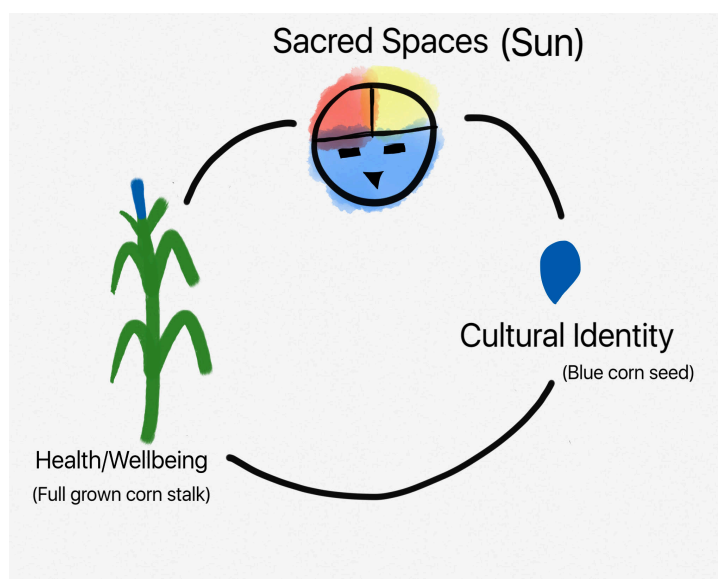
We begin by sharing our understanding of sacred space and our usage of this notion throughout this article before providing specific snapshots of sacred spaces and their relationship to IAP's health and well-being.

IAP have relationships with vital parts of the world considered sacred spaces, which are sites, places, and areas that are believed by IAP to hold power. We understand this relationship as IAP philosophy that asserts, 1) sacred spaces are foundational to Indigenous/Aboriginal ways of life; 2) IAP are attached to sacred places; and 3) IAP express responsibility to sacred places. As Deloria Jr. (2003) states, "Sacred places are the foundations of all other beliefs and practices because they represent the presence of the sacred in our lives" (p. 285). Most IAP will articulate connection with the land and the natural environment in their homelands and consider natural elements sacred—that is, our environments *are* our cultural identities, origins, religions, and worldviews, and our relationships to our environments require actively bonding with elements that include mountains to forests to deserts (Tsosie, 2000). Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete further writes, that this active bonding means harmonizing with place as "a matter of spiritual, psychological, and cultural survival for Indigenous People" (1994, p. 81). Harmonizing is to connect with places not only on a physical level of being in a place, but bonding at the mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. In plain speak, to have a relationship with a place and to know this place for IAP is similar to knowing and relating to one's family.

We believe that as IAP, we have a responsibility to care for sacred spaces and for the Earth, and that this caring is a "sacred covenant with the land" (Cajete, 1994, p. 84). We illustrate our view of sacred spaces with a model (see Figure 1) based on Hopi beliefs about the centrality of corn. IAP are like the corn, illustrated by the blue corn seed. The sun represents sacred spaces, and just as corn needs the sun to grow, IAP are nourished and healed by the power of sacred spaces and the cultural practices that are associated with them. People grow like corn and gain their cultural identity

through the cultural practices that connect them to these spiritual places. The fully-grown corn represents people’s health and well-being, because when sacred spaces are thriving, people are healthy. This relationship with sacred spaces promotes IAP as mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy. Without interaction with sacred spaces, IAP lose connection to their spirituality, ancestors, community, and the future generations.

Figure 1. Hopi corn model



Mauna a Wākea and Nuvatukya ‘ovi

Mauna a Wākea (Mauna Kea) in Hawai‘i and Nuvatukya‘ovi (Hopi for San Francisco Peaks) in Arizona serve as focal examples for our discussion on sacred places and Indigenous health connections. Kanaka Maoli Leon No‘eau Peralto (2014), expresses that Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian Peoples) have direct familial relationship with Mauna a Wākea, which means they are related to Mauna a Wākea, and the mountain is their family. Mauna a Wākea is the child of Papahānaumoku (Earth Mother) and Wākea (Sky Father), and this is where Poli‘ahu (snow goddess) other akua (god/goddess) live (Peralto, 2014; Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, 2003). Peralto states, “Mauna a Wākea is the piko [navel] that connects us

to the heavens,” and like the navel on human bodies, “Mauna a Wākea represents our physical and spiritual connections to past, present, and future generations” (2014, pp. 236-238). Peralto further shares,

We are the Mauna, and our treatment of it reflects a deeply ingrained notion of the ways in which we now view and treat ourselves and each other. In neglecting our kuleana [responsibility] to mālama [to take care of] this ‘āina [land], we ultimately neglect our kuleana [responsibility] to the future generations of our lāhui [nation]. (Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, 2003, p. 241)

Kanaka Maoli are a part of Mauna a Wākea, and how they treat the mauna is how they treat themselves. Currently, there is proposed scientific development on Mauna a Wākea, which is desecration to Kanaka Maoli. The University of Hawai‘i (UH) is the main proponent behind planned construction of a Thirty-Meter-Telescope (TMT), and as the colonial powers, they believe they have control over this area (Brown, 2016; KAHEA: Timeline of Mauna Kea Legal Actions Since 2011). Since the 1960s, Mauna a Wākea has held 13 telescopes overall (HNN STAFF, 2019; Andone, Jorgensen, Sandoval, 2019). Because Mauna a Wākea is considered “ceded crown lands,” the State Land Department has been leasing this sacred space to UH (HNN STAFF, 2019; Andone, Jorgensen, Sandoval, 2019; see KAHEA: The Hawaiian Environmental Alliance). Furthermore, UH has then sub-leased Mauna a Wākea to other organizations through the Department of Land and Natural Resources (HNN Staff, 2019), including the TMT International Observatory LLC (TIO) members, which include a number of institutions—Caltech, University of California, Natural Institutes of Natural Sciences of Japan, the Natural Astronomical Observatories of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Department of Science and Technology of India, National Research Council of Canada, the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA), and the Gordan & Betty Moore Foundation. Kanaka Maoli believe that Mauna a Wākea is already suffering desecration through the 13 telescopes presently occupying the space, and that the added TMT will cause further harm.

Across the ocean on the United States mainland is Nuvatukya‘ovi (San Francisco Peaks), a sacred space for Hopi People in Arizona being desecrated by a ski resort called the Snowbowl (Wilson v. Block, 1983; Hopi

Tribe v. Arizona Snowbowl, 2018). The San Francisco Peaks are sacred to 13 Indigenous Nations in the region, which include Diné, Zuni, Hualapai, Havasupai, Yavapai-Apache, Yavapai-Prescott, Tonto Apache, White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache, San Juan Southern Paiute, Fort McDowell Mohave Apache, Acoma, and Tohono O'odham (see Protect the Peaks for more information).

The Hopi People oppose the privately-owned ski resort, which leases the land from the United States Forest Service (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010). Furthermore, the Snowbowl is using reclaimed wastewater to make artificial snow for skiers (Wilson v. Block, 1983; Hopi Tribe v. Arizona Snowbowl, 2018). In Hopi, Nuvatukya'ovi is central to Hopi culture, critical to ceremonies.

Indigenous/Aboriginal Concepts of Health/Well-being: Land and Identity

It is widely argued that IAP view health differently than western society. Western conceptualizations of health focus on physical elements related to the biomedical being, while Indigenous epistemologies focus holistically on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual being (King et al., 2009). IAP's ways of life and health incorporate philosophies of people in/striving towards harmony and spiritual relationships with the land, community, ancestors, and the spirit world (Gracey & King, 2009; Liu, Blaisdell, & Aitaoto, 2008). There is extant scholarship and testimony that supports the claims that connection to land is integral to IAP's health (King et al., 2009), and that IAP's notions of health include the overall wellbeing of family, community, and the Earth (Crivelli, Hautecouer, Hutchison, Llamas, & Stephens, 2013; Gracey & King, 2009).

For example, the Ojibwe peoples of the Northwoods of the United States and in Canada will refer to their health and well-being as resulting from balanced relationships between family, community, environment, and the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical elements that must be engaged in those relationships (Malloch 1989; Richmond & Ross, 2013). Maori health models developed by Mason Durie (1994) are founded in the Whare Tapa Whā model, which incorporates the Taha tinana (physical), Taha wairua (spiritual), Taha hinengaro (mental), and Taha whānau

(extended family). Along with these elements are the Te ao turoa (environment) and Te reo rangatira (identity) (Durie, 1994; Maori Public Health Action Plan, 2003-2004). Kanaka Maoli regard wellness as “lōkahi (oneness) and pono (harmony, balance),” with people and the world by maintaining “proper thoughts, feelings, and actions,” toward everyone (Liu et al., 2008, p. 6). Thus, we advocate for embracing and understanding multi-dimensional concepts of health as critical and including the role that sacred spaces play in affecting holistic constructions of IAP’s health.

To date, empirical research addressing links specifically between *sacred spaces* and IAP’s health presents a gap in the literature. However, there is work on the relationship between IAP’s health and land. Here, we delineate the two. For example, research linking IAP to their lands has introduced “solastalgia”:

the pain or sickness caused by the loss of, or inability to derive solace from, the present state of one’s home environment. Solastalgia exists when there is recognition that the beloved place in which one resides is under assault (physical desolation). (Albrecht, 2006, p. 35)

Solastalgia is an “attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation” (Albrecht, 2005, p.45). Albrecht explains that solastalgia occurs when place-based distress transpires, and people feel homesick due to their environment being destroyed (2006). Relatedly, somaterratic illnesses refers to primarily physical illnesses related to environmental contaminants, while psychoterratic illnesses relate to mental well-being threatened through the disconnection between Indigenous peoples and their lands (Albrecht et al., 2007). We believe that these concepts also apply to the destruction of sacred sites. For example, we see testimonies of somaterratic illnesses from our participants, including a New Mexico Acoma Pueblo participant who observed, “There’s exposure from extractive industries such as mining, which has led to cancer.” This person then emphasized “unity” or the collective in upholding responsibilities and maintaining ceremonies linked with preventing illness:

when we do not uphold this traditional based knowledge,
when we allow our ceremonies to go unattended, and not

participate in the full capacity...on numerous occasions you'll see physical ailments too...if we don't have that spiritual mental connection to our ceremonies, our spiritual calendar, and we assimilate to mainstream society, there's negative consequences there...Just even our change in lifestyle...Look at how many of us today are facing illnesses that we never faced historically in the past...High blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease.

Testimonies like these are critical today, and we also note the work of Richmond and Ross (2009) focusing on colonial policies and IAP's environmental dispossession, a process that results in Aboriginal people's reduced access to the resources of their traditional environments. They further argue that environmental dispossession leads to cultural disconnections between land and identity, which contributes to poor health experienced by Inuit and First Nations in Canada (Richmond & Ross, 2009). We add that the impacts of colonization through historical trauma cannot be emphasized enough here. Indigenous historical trauma is a worldwide phenomenon among IAP due to colonization (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2007). Historical trauma is defined as "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma" (Brave Heart, 2003, p. 7). Researchers further explain that historical unresolved grief stemming from colonial violence constitutes "the current social pathology, originating from the loss of lives, land, and vital aspects of Native culture promulgated by the European conquest of the Americas" (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, p. 60). Historical trauma results from oppression, negative dominant policy impacts, and the spiritual persecution of IAP's beliefs (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

Additionally, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Indigenous historical trauma have been associated with American Indians in the U.S. who face ongoing incursions (Manson, et al., 1996). A prominent example is the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, on March 14, 1989, which has been correlated with anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other negative health impacts among Alaska Natives (Palinkas, Peterson, Russell, & Downs, 1993). This environmental disaster affected Alaska Native traditional subsistence lifestyle, social relationships, and saw increased

alcohol, drug abuse, domestic violence and decreased physical health (Palinkas et al., 1993; Palinkas, Downs, Peterson, & Russell, 1993). These environmental disasters and threats are widespread and ongoing, impacting Indigenous homelands and sacred spaces. However, their impacts can be countered through social, cultural, and political processes by which IAP are reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2013).

Research on Sacred Spaces

In this section, we describe qualitative research conducted with IAP focusing on testimonies of sacred spaces, including Mauna a Wākea and Nuvatukya‘ovi. Data was collected between July 2015 to January 2016 in Hawai‘i and Arizona through in-depth interviews. Participants included eight well-regarded IAP cultural experts from different Indigenous nations and between the ages of 31 and 65. Participants were selected based on extensive knowledge regarding sacred spaces in their respective homelands, and as this article focuses more specifically on Mauna a Wākea and Nuvatukya‘ovi, the Kanaka Maoli and Hopi participant testimonies are highlighted in this article. In addition to sharing their knowledge of sacred sites, participants were asked to provide insight on the nature of observed problems and to give recommendations for solutions. Twenty-eight questions comprised the interview protocol, and audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

A qualitative thematic analysis of sacred spaces in relation to IAP’s health was conducted in order to inform the interview process and to allow the researcher to listen for the following themes: sacred spaces (descriptions of), cultural identity (sacred spaces linked with notions of Indigenous identity), and health and well-being (related to sacred spaces).

What are sacred spaces, and how are they desecrated?

When asked, “What do you think makes a space sacred,” participants responded using six characteristics. They explained that sacred spaces are, 1) places that have power (i.e. mana in the Hawaiian language) and where energy is embedded;

- 2) the home to “deities,” “gods and goddesses,” and “ancestors,” as well as places where people can connect spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically with them;
- 3) places of worship, ceremony, and prayer, (similar to how other religions might view their churches, temples, or mosques); where ceremonies such as sweat ceremonies and vision quests take place, and link to ceremonies completed from afar. These places are where “shrines” and heiau [Kanaka Maoli for temple] are located;
- 4) places of origin, genealogy, and ancestors; participants expressed sacred sites as “there before them,” and existing since “time immemorial.” For Hopi, where women place “mother’s wombs” [placenta or umbilical cord] connecting newborn children to these places, and place offerings such as “prayer feathers.”
- 5) living places; participants called them, “living organisms,” “natural,” and used IAP’s languages to describe them. All of the “land”, the ‘Āina [Kanaka Maoli], is sacred. Water is also considered sacred with particular importance given to “rivers” and “springs.” Along with “mountains,” and “mountain tops” as important sacred spaces;
- 6) part of healing and ceremonies; sacred spaces are places of healing, and where people “harvest medicine” such as “plants,” or “water.”

Participants provided specific examples of the desecration of sacred spaces—through natural resource extraction and storing of toxins, including nuclear waste, as well as through extractive industry, including harvesting of timber, and “mining of uranium, copper, lead, molybdenite, and coal.” Other examples of desecration include “non-Indigenous commercial and recreational activities,” specifically the ski resort on Nuvatukya‘ovi and where the tourist/ski industry produces massive human waste, debris, and general disrespectful encroachment from visitors. In the case of Mauna Kea, Kanaka Maoli participants discussed harm transpiring through what they referred to as the ambitions of Western science, exemplified through telescopes on top of the mountain. Destruction of features of sites, such as an ahu [Kanaka Maoli for shrine] and temples were also noted as ways sites are desecrated.

Cultural Identity

Participants' connections to sacred spaces was conveyed through usage of language like stewardship, covenant, and kuleana [Kanaka Maoli for responsibility]. Participants communicated that their stewardship, covenant, and kuleana were dedicated to deities/spirits, the Earth/world/land, ancestors/people/future generations, and humanity/community. Cultural practices maintained connections to sacred spaces. For example, regarding stewardship to deities/spirits, one Hopi mentions relationship to spirits at Nuvatukya'ovi:

very simply that's where we believe the Kachinas spirits live, and our prayers are offered to the peaks and to the Kachina people there, to the cloud priest. And that's been part of our culture for thousands and thousands of years. You know the time the first clans began to arrive here in this part of country and the world, the San Francisco Peaks was experienced. Certain things happened a long time ago, and today thousands and thousands of years later, the Hopi People still I believe carry that relationship to the San Francisco Peaks or to Nuvatukya'ovi, which is interpreted to mean, the "Peaks with the Snow," that's what it means, Nuvatukya'ovi. So it becomes very special to you, and then as you grow up into the culture into adulthood and then later into levels of some cultural responsibility, it's daily for us. When you sit down in the kiva and you smoke and pray. And we look at all of the four cardinal directions, we think about it, we visualize it. And then towards the west then you visualize the peaks... *It's always a part of you* [emphasis added].

For the Hopi, Nuvatukya'ovi is their cultural responsibility, and their relationship with the sacred spaces makes Nuvatukya'ovi a part of who they are.

Stewardship to the earth, world, and land also represented connections participants carried with them to sacred spaces. The same participant explains,

the San Francisco Peaks, Nuvatukya'ovi. You know the significance of the place to the Hopi People. And see so I just want to talk about

that background on how I look at space and really the environment and the special qualities of what we have naturally here that that gives us a feeling of being Hopi. You know because every clan has a stewardship responsibility. Ceremonies have an Earth stewardship responsibility. So for some of us who have now gone through time and have learned, we take that responsibility pretty seriously...it's not just at big events, it's daily for me.

Participants also expressed a sense of responsibility to both their ancestors and future generations:

for Native Hawaiians, our connection to land goes back to our genealogy, our mo'ō kū'auhau, our genealogy. And in our genealogy we hear the stories of Wākea the Sky Father mating with Papahānaumoku our Earth Mother. And from their mating comes forth all of our islands... and so these islands are like our ancestors. In our genealogy we're directly connected to them. And so when people desecrate our lands, I try to tell my student this, "Imagine somebody punching your grandmother in the face. How does that make you feel?" That is how a Hawaiian feels when somebody desecrates land. It is as if somebody punched my grandma in the face, now I have a sense of anger, a sense of resentment, but also a sense to protect and to care for my tutu. And if my land is in my genealogy my tutu, or grandparent, I respect the land in that same way. Because the land has provided for my family for generations, and generations, and generations...If we know our genealogy, if we know who we are and where we're from, we will know where we're going. And I know that we come from these lands. That we come from this place. I know that the Kalo is our older sibling. I know that the islands and the stars are our older siblings. And if people begin to desecrate that, it is as if they are desecrating and fighting with my own family.

This participant shares how Kanaka Maoli are connected to the land through their genealogy—thus, desecrating the land is the same as harm to a respected relative. The person adds,

But once we start to educate on some of these issues and once you know, then you have a kuleana or responsibility to act. But a kuleana

also means a privilege too, cause now you're privileged to know, now you're privileged to act. It's very dual in that sense where it's a responsibility but it's also a privilege to have these kuleana. What we're training the kids here and in the community it becomes their kuleana, not only their rights, not only their responsibility, but also their privilege to uphold and to help pass on to the next generations and generations.

Kanaka Maoli state that they have a kuleana to take action once they know about issues. Kuleana is a privilege for Kanaka Maoli to uphold and to pass on to the next generation to ensure that future generations also carry on the responsibilities.

Lastly, participants described cultural identity in relation to sacred spaces as tied to humanity, including their communities and other people. Sacred spaces and the ceremonies connected to them are not only done for individual purpose or even the specific IAP group to which they are meaningful. They are for the benefit of *all* humanity. As one Hopi participant states,

it's never an individual thing, when you go to these locations. It's always for a purpose. There's always a reason for these places that we go to for different offerings...I feel that with these places that are identified as sacred spaces, that those things be maintained so that we can continue to offer our prayers as Hopi People to that one location, and our prayers in turn are going to help in the well-being of everybody as whole, not just Hopi, but everybody in general.

For IAP, like the Hopi, sacred spaces help maintain cultural practices that include everyone. As one Pawnee participant states, "most of these ceremonies that are conducted by Indian people are for the good of humanity as a whole. To "preserve the continuity of the of the universe."

Cultural Practices

In this section, cultural practices are the ways IAP connect to sacred spaces and point to how IAP maintain their responsibilities and connect their cultural identities to these places. Completing cultural practices reinforces the covenant they undertake to protect and care for the Earth.

Cultural practices in direct relation to sacred spaces were defined by participants as ceremonies and rituals, offerings and prayers, seeking healing, and speaking their Indigenous languages. Speaking Indigenous languages is the mechanism for maintaining oral traditions and sharing traditional knowledge. In addition to ceremonies carried out at sacred sites, participants described making pilgrimages and special spiritual journeys to their sacred sites “since time immemorial.” One Kanaka Maoli person explains,

If we’re going to the island of Kaho‘olawe for example, we’re gonna go next week to honor our Makahiki ceremonies. It’s the closing of our Makahiki season, which is like our our winter harvest season or our the birthing of the new year. The Makahiki ceremonies are specific to our Akua or our god Lono. And so when we go, we go and we bring offerings of growth in many different forms...What will bring these physical things along with our spritual prayers in hopes that when we go to that space and do these ceremonies, Lono will bless us with rain, and not the heavy rains, but the nice soft rains that can help green our lands and green our spaces. So when we go to these lands, when we go to these sacred places, we will do different things according to the place. And so Kaho‘olawe is a very special place in that we will go to to ask the Akua for guidance, to ask the Akua who are gods, for blessings to continue throughout the year. And so to engage in that, we engage in it through chant, through prayer, through observation, through giving of physical offerings, through through sweating on the land and sharing that space with the land and getting dirty in that land. Through eating from that land in that space, but again it all goes back to the the proper way of entering that space and coming into it.

Makahiki for Kanaka Maoli is a winter harvest and New Year ceremony for the Akua Lono (Kanaka Maoli for one of their Gods). Furthermore, oli (chant), and mele (songs) are done at sacred spaces for the space, as well as offerings and prayers such as ho‘okūpū (ceremonial gift) provided to sacred spaces. Participants offer “prayer feathers,” poi wrapped in ti leaf, and Hawaiian salt as offerings to sacred sites. Just as the place is honored, sacred sites are also sites considered in IAP’s healing, and participants

discussed traditional medicines gathered, which may include elements like water. While we do not delve into the details of these ceremonial activities in this article, our emphasis here is on cultural practice connections that are maintained, even from afar, reinforcing IAP's cultural connection to sacred spaces.

The living and essential link to Indigenous/Aboriginal health and well-being

While cultural practices are maintained in many Indigenous communities, our focus is on impacts to IAP's health. Participants were asked to describe this relationship, and they asserted first that the health of sacred spaces is interconnected with IAP's health. As IAP have physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual relationships with sacred spaces, desecration causes harm to people on all these levels. Harm is caused in many ways, including when IAP are obstructed from access to being able to fulfill their stewardship through cultural practices. Additionally, participants described desecration as disruptive, making it difficult (if not impossible) to connect to the spiritual power of places, deities, and their ancestors, all of which they perceived as having negative health effects, including the rise of social problems.

It's pretty simple: it's harm forever. You know, for me personally, because I was in the thick of the legal fight, the political fight, and then being a practitioner, it's there forever, that experience. To know that the proponents and the Coconino National Forest got their way...the Hopis pray to nature. The Kachinas are a part of nature. So to substitute the natural with technology just doesn't fit in our way of looking at these spaces and landscapes. It just never existed...that kind of substitution never ever existed in Hopi ways of thinking...what one of our elders testified that is that if the if snow-making came in, and now it's there because we legally lost. Then our generation who were in the thick of this fight today, it's harm directly. We feel it, we see the mountains there, but what our elders said, "What about over time?" See but the immediate harm for our generation, living generation today is forever. You know and then, in our principles of life, then when we live out our lives in this world

right, the physical world, then we become spiritual people. So the harm in a secular and physical sense is up to my last day here. But you know what, when I say forever, it's also into my spiritual life. See that's what people really don't understand on this whole business of *emotional harm* for in this case the Hopi People [emphasis added].
(Hopi participant)

This participant was involved in the legal battle to protect their sacred space and described experienced harm on various levels—the physical and emotional harm of fighting, losing politically and legally in court, and by *seeing and feeling* the impact of desecration on their mountain. The Hopis carry the harm forever spiritually because they become “spiritual people” once they live out their physical life in this world. Thus, direct injury does not end on an emotional and physical health level *in this world* but goes on to the spirit world.

Participants importantly described social issues like drinking, drugs, suicide, and domestic violence resulting from desecration. A Kanaka Maoli participant explains,

there's sort of a disconnection. You see sort of a break down in society. Erosion of cultural values, because you no longer have the places that you made ceremony or worship. You you lose that that knowledge of the place is lost. And then so then the cultural practice discontinues. And then you have following generations wondering why they have pain inside them, you know, it's an unarticulated pain. And it has to do with cultural loss. And it can manifest as maybe criminal behavior, domestic violence, crimes, health problems. It's really just being untethered to something that is, what was the foundational things within your culture. It's being just loosened and untethered from that root.

This participant described “unarticulated pain” when a sacred site is destroyed, because of the connection with the place being disrupted. This disconnection is linked with erosion of cultural values, due to loss of the place where the people made worship or ceremony. Without the sacred spaces and culture practices, IAP feel what participants referred to as “pain inside them” that can impact the future generations due to what is more broadly understood as cultural loss. The same person went on to explain,

after a while it's like a thousand paper cuts, it's like if the things that are important to your culture are destroyed, then you start to think then, "I'm expendable. I don't matter." And you have you have modern society reflecting that you don't really matter. And then so then when you realize that you're just a throw away person, then your health suffers. Because then you believe that you're worthless, you know, that you lack any kind of value. And so what does that mean, what does that translate, in terms of your health? You get stressed, if you're a person that's trying so desperately to hold onto what's left of your culture, and every day you see an onslaught against it, you know from the dominant society, then there's this strain, this it's like you can never relax in that struggle. Sometimes you find meaning because at least you fighting for something, but if you constantly struggling, then that becomes like major stress, and then the diseases that are associated with stress, that's what manifests, you know for you physically, whether you realize it or not, so it's just sort of this compounding thing, a burden or a pain that you become accustomed to.

Indeed, research with IAP has shown that acculturation and racism physically affect health among Native Hawaiians, with higher levels of hypertension due to the stress of not being exposed to their culture, being disconnected from the Kanaka Maoli community, and perceived daily racism (Kaholokula, Iwane, & Nacapoy, 2010).

Discussion: IAP and Human Rights Frameworks

Through the testimonies shared, desecration of sacred spaces is seen as related to struggles for cultural continuity that are linked to IAP's health. We are reminded of what one participant from Acoma Pueblo stated with regards to desecration and rights: that desecration of these spaces constitutes "human rights violations to our traditional cultural worldview." This is an important reality for us to consider. Moreover, acknowledging their settler colonial contexts, participants described dealing with feelings of worthlessness and the "daily onslaught" against dominant society, which caused them significant stress manifesting as physical pain. These

perceptions and realities of health impacts are critical areas for further research. With more public health research that takes on an IAP's sacred spaces lens, we believe that prevention and healing methods can be initiated for and by IAP and in relation to their sacred spaces.

Other forms of intervention include policy, and with the recognition of the distinct rights of IAP, laws and acts have been proposed as one approach to protecting IAP's rights. We assert that Indigenous access to and protection of sacred spaces are human rights, and IAP have been actively pursuing ways to protect them under this framework for decades. Indigenous Peoples strive for "place-based justice," which is based on their "responsibility to protect places important for survival" (Lorenzo, 2017, p. 2). More recently, the UN Declaration explicitly addresses Indigenous rights and can offer justifications for protecting sacred spaces. Laws in the United States that relate to IAP and sacred spaces are the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (AIRFA), the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990 (NAGPRA) (Lorenzo, 2017). However, although these are in place, they do not always assist and typically require concrete (Western scientific) evidence, which can diminish the firsthand testimonies of IAP's views on sacred spaces and health. For example, under the U.S. National Register of Historic Places certain areas can be designated as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP), but do not include "intangible resources" (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2012, p. 1), which would include reliance on IAP's cultural practices as not necessarily justifiable for TCP designation. Generally speaking, the issue is much deeper here in that western views of land are focused on ideas of property and do not include discourse on the *sacredness* of land, water, and air. When land is seen solely as property, as Sumida Huaman states, this is "only for human gain, this is a parasitic relationship and not a reciprocal one" (Sumida Huaman, 2017, p. 8).

As Indigenous researchers, we are concerned about how to put into practice protections that consider the relationship between IAP, sacred spaces, and health, and we see human rights education (HRE) as one mechanism. For example, drawing from long-term and emerging United Nations frameworks, Bajaj (2011) writes that HRE is,

education, training, and information aiming at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and moulding of attitudes directed to: (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law; (e) The building and maintenance of peace; (f) The promotion of people-centered sustainable development and social justice. (p. 484)

For us, this includes *all* people understanding that desecration has negative effects on humanity and Earth. As our participants have described, there is a ripple effect, with damage done to all living beings in this world and the spirit world. Using human rights education that is founded in our Indigenous knowledges, we hope that students and their families will gain respect for IAP's ways of life and the sacred spaces that we share. As IAP, we also have a right to care for and learn from sacred spaces, constituting what we believe is *IAP's human rights education*.

Conclusion

In this article, we emphasize that the desecration of sacred spaces points towards impacts on IAP's health in multiple ways. Our research considered IAP's definitions of sacred spaces, connections to sacred spaces, understandings of desecration, and perceptions of Indigenous health impacts. We listened to participants who asserted their kuleana to deities/spirits, world/Earth/land, ancestors/people/future generations, and humanity/community, and we understand that in order to fulfill stewardship roles, IAP maintain their relationship to sacred spaces.

IAP are involved in cultural practices associated specifically with their sacred spaces, which are living manifestations of their cultural identities. These include their origins, ancestors, and the future generations

all at once. Participants shared that sacred spaces are our identities, part of them forever—from birth to when we enter the spirit world. We, along with our participants, know that we *are* our sacred spaces, *they are always a part of us*, and we are forever bonded to our Mother Earth. While desecration has a massive negative effect on IAP's abilities to access and engage our cultural practices, making it difficult to fulfill our covenant, it does not curtail our love for our sacred spaces and Earth Mother.

Colonization is continual and the driving force behind desecration and remains unrelenting in myriad ways. Knowledge shared from our study may help researchers and Indigenous community members to build health measurements that continue to analyze the relationships between (the desecration of) IAP's sacred spaces and Indigenous health. Possible interventions involve input from IAP, research support, and wide public health efforts rooted in IAP's human rights education. Furthermore, activism and social organizing leading to upholding laws and policies, while creating new ones is another approach key to protecting sacred sites.

As a final word, as Indigenous women, we see our responsibilities as ensuring the health of our people, all living beings, and Mother Earth. Our motivation to partake in this research was to assist our people who struggle daily with protecting our sacred spaces and to share their stories and experiences. Enduring injuries and traumas across time—from our past ancestors, to our present people, and to future generations—it is our collective energy and that of the people who shared their stories, as well as our communities, our ancestors, and our sacred spaces connecting to create what we have presented. This is our daily life—to know, feel, and experience desecration but to also follow our responsibility in protecting and healing our sacred spaces, as well as our commitment to preventing future harms to our people and Earth Mother. We hope you will join us in this responsibility.

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