



Editor's Note: Indigenous Communities and COVID-19: Impact and Implications

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As the editors we honor those who have contributed to this special issue, *Indigenous Communities and COVID-19: Impact and Implications*. In this time of great uncertainty and unrest we felt compelled to seek a call for papers that would examine aspects of our traditional cultures focused specifically on COVID-19 and its disruptions to the dimensions of our wellbeing and the restoration of wellness. This virus has impacted every individual and family on this planet, and, has helped coalesce the pervasive intersectional struggles of Indigenous Peoples.

The articles selected are compelling in their ability to cast light over the shadows of discord and air of conspiracy surrounding this pandemic. They acknowledge that the grief and anguish buried beneath the soil of intergenerational trauma are only half our stories told. COVID-19 has given recall to examine the pervasive injustice of western power and privilege. Our people are dying at disproportionate rates not only from the direct respiratory effects of this virus, but as a result of a failed system that is inherently racist. We see our people; our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, children, and young people in great peril because of systemic health inequities and economic exclusion.

At the core of the articles presented is Compassion and Purpose. What has been shared represents the collective voice of resilience, resistance, adaptivity, and inventiveness against forces of oppression. These have been met with global resistance expressed in “Black Lives Matter”, “The Me To Movement”, “Standing Rock”, “Ihumatao”, “The Protectors of Maunakea”, “First Nations Peoples Worldwide” and many other Indigenous demonstrations of collective sovereignty.

While it is imperative to acknowledge fundamental shifts in social relationships, policies, and social work practice these articles remind us that we need to sit for a while in the uncomfortable parts of our human psyche. If left unattended and unexamined they cause us sickness, pain, and spiritual

unsettledness. When integrated into a deeper consciousness this volatility dissipates into a higher order of understanding our ancestors knew and continually practiced.

We are reminded that to witness, means we must take heed, and listen. And while the world leaders and politicians pay attention to the urgency of what is happening in terms of the social, health, and economic costs of this pandemic, Indigenous people are harkening to the wisdom of their ancestors that if we, as a society, do not pay attention to our spiritual connections to the land we become disconnected; we become neglectful with little regard to the sacredness of breath and the sanctity of life. We become by default complicit in human suffering. It is all too convenient and comfortable to get swept in the catch-all “trauma-informed,” “person-in-environment,” “evidence-based”, “culturally responsive”, and decolonization rhetoric of mainstream social work, but the real question these articles address is what do they mean for Indigenous Peoples?

We recognize knowledge shared in these articles is nuanced, without limit or boundary, sacred, and, entreat us as readers and editors to give full deference to, and recognition of stories as the greatest source of a person’s power. Echoed in the portent words of Kamehameha III’s restoration of the Kingdom of Hawai’i, “*Ua Mau ke Ea o ka ‘Aina I ka Pono*”, “The Life of the Land is Perpetuated in Righteousness” are the tenets of truth, sacrifice, and love. That in spite of impending threat from hostile American business and colonial interest, Kamehameha himself, was attentive to, and strategic in his efforts to protect Hawaiian people and resources through the formalizing of a Hawaiian system of governance. These articles reflect similar protective instincts related to water rights, healthcare, food sovereignty, technology, social media, virus testing and contact tracing, community assets, cultural and linguistic responses, education, research, and practice.

The articles ask: what is in front of us that nothing should be taken for granted? That until we understand the lifeforce of trauma we cannot heal. COVID-19 has heralded an unprecedented era of discontent and social dystopia where we are all staggering in the uncomfortableness of not knowing. For Indigenous People however, there is no going back to normal. Normal was never just nor was it ever fair. Pre-COVID-19 life edified individuality, globalism, resource depletion, social disconnection, rage, and hate. Trauma is not new to us. We are the manifestations of the stories we are born into and those we create. These articles move us from affliction to triumph; from limitation to strength, from scarcity to abundance, and tap into the inner *puna* - the natural water springs and aquifers - of culture to reshape and retell the records of our histories.

The biggest take away we hope you gain from reading these articles is that we do not empower our communities, rather, as the authors share in their own ways, we simply offer the tools needed for

them to realize their own strengths, and inherent powers: their mana to restore integrity and take control of their destinies.

Angeles Arrien (1993) reminds us that whenever there is sadness, despair, or illness we must ask: When did we stop singing? When did we stop dancing? When did we stop “being enchanted by stories?” And “when did we stop being soothed by the sweet sound of silence”. To this we add the poignant question shared by Dr. Elizabeth “Eli” Sumida Huaman who writes the introductory article for this special issue: “When did the breath of life start to kill?”

Each contributor reminds us, that all of our dances, and all our stories matter, and they are pivotal to our authenticity and steadfastness as a People. How we leverage our cultural modalities to deal with the challenges ahead is the time when we begin to understand our wounds become the wisdom and the chronicles of our healing. It is befitting we end with the salient words of Dr. Concha Saucedo Martinez , founder of the San Francisco Instituto Familiar de la Raza, who said:

As Indigenous People we share our intimate stories of colonization histories but as a general rule rarely do we ever focus on the scars, the sadness, the brokenness, and the wounds without speaking to our stories of resilience and hope, the lessons handed down to us from our ancestors, and, the need to forsake and forgive. To not do this is to condone genocide by-proxy. (personal communication, 2012)

It would be remiss if we, as editors, did not acknowledge our Aloha to you all at this time and express our deepest condolences to you who have lost family, friends, and loved ones due to this pandemic. We hope these articles inspire and enrich you in your enduring work.

Finally, we acknowledge this Special Issue would not have been possible without the commitment and tireless work of our Copy Editor, Gladys Rowe, and Operations Manager, Tabitha Robin (Martens). Given the short window of time we had to meet our publication objective we are deeply appreciative of your professionalism, your dedication to task, and your insightfulness - Míkwêc.

Mahalo,

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Reference

Arrien, A. (1993). *Four Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Healer, Teacher, Warrior and Visionary*. San Francisco: Harper.