

# Mitigation of Displacement and How it can be Applied to Lakota Culture in the Bay Area

Hannah DeBoer

## Abstract

*Displacement as a form of social violence against Indigenous people has seldom been covered in academic literature and review. The purpose of this study is to broaden the conceptualization of displacement to include the concurring detrimental effects on the mind, body, and cultural identity and to evaluate the role Inter-tribal organizations in the Bay Area can work to mitigate such effects on Lakota culture.*

## Introduction

Displacement as a form of social violence against Indigenous people is seldom covered in academic literature. In the United States approximately 71% of American Indian and Alaskan Native people live in urban areas (Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk 2018). Despite this, violence against urban Indigenous women fails to be addressed by scholars and institutions, of the most prominent being the government. Violence has a multitude of dimensions, displacement is a form of violence and simultaneously amplifies the effects of other forms of violence. Ignoring this connection leads to the reproduction of the problem of violence against Indigenous women the Indian relocation programs that emerged in the nineteen fifties have, and continue to cause detrimental effects to Indigenous Lakota women due to the importance of land and place in Lakota

culture. These effects range from victimization, declining mental health, and loss of identity.

Active and highly visible terminationist campaigns waged by the U.S. settler government gave way to more subtle “assimilationist” campaigns such as the relocation programs that emerged in the 1950s. These included the Urban Relocation act of 1952 and Indian Relocation act of 1956. Relocation is a covert form of violence against culture and people that has a long lasting traumatic effect and also adds and exaggerates to already existing historical trauma. Urban relocation was initiated and operated under the guise of the promise to help Native Americans on U.S. reservations find employment in metropolitan areas across the United States. Government promises of employment, education, housing, etc were not, as expected, acted upon and left

relocated individuals cut off from their families and isolated. The BIA, to strengthen the process of assimilation, denied any form of cultural contact between those who had been relocated. Little to no support both economic, social and communal was provided once individuals and families moved off reservation. Indigenous individuals had to find each other and form these connections. This resulted in the formation of the Indigenous founded, led, and run.

The Bay area of California (occupied Ohlone territory) was selected due to the large numbers of Native individuals being relocated to the region during the Indian relocation acts of the 1950's. Oakland has developed into a cultural hub for the development of urban Indigenous practices and demonstrations of resilience and resistance that work to combat the ill intent of the relocation acts. The Organizations of the Intertribal Friendship house (IFH), Native Health, and Sogorea Te' land trust were selected due to their prominence in the Indigenous communities of the Bay are in recognition and formation of space and place in conjunction with the acknowledgement of the importance of land.

## Methods

Initially, I had identified the three organizations those being Native Health, The Intertribal Friendship house and Sogorea Te' Land trust, as they had met my criteria of being Intertribal, Indigenous led and run, and located within Alameda county. I had initially planned to have interviews with public relations representatives of each of the three organizations and then approach the results of these interviews through the framework of grounded theory. However, due to time constraints and other limitations I turned to conducting a content analysis utilizing a modified grounded theory

framework of publications released by the respected organizations.

## Results

Land is interwoven with cultural ways, it shapes and permeates the culture. The emphasis is not on the land itself, per se, but rather the relationship formed to the land. This relationship characterizes the base for the development of cultural identity. The system of colonization assaults the relationship of people and cultures to the land. Relocation, being a manifestation of colonialism, intent was to sever this relationship. Expressed by Johnella La Rose of Sogorea Te',

The loss of land plays out in our everyday lives and it shapes how we look at things and how we feel about ourselves... the land was taken and that was such a deep soul wound. The taking of the land, the heart of the people, was the cause of a lot of problems. And I believe with this land trust, and the land itself, I think that is really going to help us find our way back" (Sogorea Te' Land Trust. 2017. Press Release.)

Relocation left Native people disenfranchised and cut off from community support along with blocking access to practice cultural ways that are conducted by tribal communities. Cultural ways that include worldviews, rites, rituals and ceremonies are in themselves protective factors against mental illness. As they provide the backbone for a strong cultural identity. According to the Native Health publication Native Vision,

An effective protective factor produced by Native American historical ceremonies is a strong cultural identity. Identity was targeted for attack by federal policies that outlawed Native American culture and literally made it illegal to be a

Native person. The most successful Native American programs are those that have revived culture, reducing the risk factor of isolation that many Native Americans experience (Native Vision Project. 2012).

Relocation has also resulted in the emergence of a new urban Indigenous identity in which relationships to land have been reconceptualized. Through interracial partnerships and births, Urban Natives do not always have access to tribal specific practices or the same land relations, this lack of, results in the importance of forming community that can replicate the relationships that are built on the basis of land and culture that is synthesized in result.

The organizations evaluated all work to create community based experiences that form a sense of place. Place is the emphasis on the relationships formed and maintained through culture; an emphasis on the interactions between people and how that relation is formed and maintained. Place emphasises community and the interactions in the community in which cultural heritage is acknowledged and acts as an adhesive for action and orientation and thus create a sense of belonging. These experiences can be built on the basis of Indigenous practices and Native Identity or Native identity being the common ground for those in attendance.

The Intertribal friendship house hosts community dinners, weekly yoga and drum and dance practice. Though not rooted in North American Indigenous cultural practices, allows those in the Native community to engage within that community in a safe space. Meeting on a weekly basis works to provide stability and encourage a healthy habit. Despite the multitude of Native cultural practices and traditions drumming and dancing spans across cultures and regions. Used in private ceremonies and showcased to the public as with pow wows and festivals. More often than not, when

used/performed in the public sphere there is an element of competition involved. Specific nations have songs and methods but there is a Pan Indigenous cultural tradition that has emerged. These practice spaces at the IFH allow for greater inter community engagement, where a sense of place is developed and sustained. Native Health through the offering of weekly programs such as beadwork, cross stitching, collage, and like the Intertribal Friendship house, drum and dance practice, result in the formation of a sense of place and allow for the community to come together with the specific purpose of healing. These places along with the sense of place that have been established allow for recreation and establishment of a community and brings the communal culture into action. Communal place allows for the recreation of the relationship of land and culture. Exemplifying that when land is taken, there still needs to be a place for people to come together.

Having place is for the informance of self and cultural identity. Space is the act of having a presence within public consciousness. To have space necessitates the act of reclamation and is achieved through the education, outreach, public events and physical space. All of which create visibility. Sogorea Te' Land trust works in partnership with Planting Justice. Planting Justice is an intersectional organization creating family sustaining careers that cultivate food sovereignty, economic justice, and community healing. They create space for people impacted by mass incarceration and other oppressive systems to envision and work towards personal community transformation through land reclamation, ecological design, and urban food/medicine production (Sogorea Te' Land Trust. 2017. Press Release.). Planting Justice runs a plant nursery in Eastern Oakland and they provide a cultural

ease to Sogorea Te' Land trust in which they have built a traditional Ohlone ceremonial arbor. The partnership of Sogorea Te' and Planting Justice have created a space for the public to engage with Indigenous tradition through visibility.

Native Health conducts digital stories that cover the topics and experiences of addiction, assault, recovery and other hardships in intersection with Indigenous identity and experience. Examples of this gives visibility to Native people, and it aids in both advocacy and in personal healing. The Intertribal Friendship House along with creating a place for Native peoples also creates space for Native people through hosting Pow Wows and other public demonstrations of Indigenous culture, celebrating identity.

### **Discussion and Further research**

The themes of land, place, and space come together to help inform settler understanding on how violence is enacted against Indigenous people, in the case of this study the focus is on the Lakota people. When evaluating how these results can be applied to examine colonial violence waged on the Lakota it is paramount to note that some of the cultural ways touched upon are specific to the Lakota who are one out of 573 federally recognized nations in the united states.

The taking of land, denying access to land, removal and relocation is done in the acknowledgement of the role land plays in the development of culture, hence the acts to

sever the relationship. Relocation, as touched upon, led to a decline in tribal communities, leading to a loss of the usage of the Lakota language, by Lakota individuals. The Lakota language is an expression of personal and sociopolitical relations over time. One of the key observations to understanding Lakota relation to land is the lack of separate lexical categories to differentiate between time and space, all temporal statements are simultaneously spatial ones and vice versa (Powers 1975). Time/space is by its own, a marking of a relationship, such as the Lakota making of relatives ceremony along with other ritualistic uses. The loss of language is also a loss of cultural understanding and way of conceptualizing the universe.

The relationships that land synthesises in the creation of place can be observed through the Making of Relatives ceremony that connects relatives to both past and present along with physical and spiritual beings (St. Pierre and Long Soldier 1995). The theme of space, in these publications calls for us to give platforms and visibility to Indigenous peoples.

Actions include the need for more programs and awareness around urban Indigenous peoples and programs that allow for the creation of space. Further research and areas of inquiry include the relation between land, place, and culture, and the formation of a multi spatial identity and the challenging of urban centers being strictly settler colonial spaces.

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**Recommended Citation**

DeBoer, H. (2020). Mitigation of displacement and how it can be applied to Lakota culture in the Bay Area. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.mimjournal.com/deboer-2020>