



## Cultivating sovereignty in parks and protected areas: *Sowing the seeds of restorative and transformative justice through the #LANDBACK movement*

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### Abstract

Indigenous communities possess long histories of using land acknowledgments to reinforce their cultural ties with specific areas. Today, many public and private institutions use land acknowledgments to recognize the Indigenous Peoples who inhabited and still live in local areas. However, an opportunity exists to move beyond institutional acknowledgments and into action-oriented frameworks that support decolonization efforts, especially within parks and protected areas (PPAs). PPAs present an opportunity for the actualization of the #LANDBACK movement, which could strengthen Indigenous land governance, conservation, and sovereignty. This thought piece uses decolonization and storytelling methodologies to demonstrate how current PPA management paradigms perpetuate harm against Indigenous communities. It also explores how these paradigms can evolve to improve the social-environmental efficacy of PPAs by highlighting three areas of change where PPAs could perpetuate the cultivation of Indigenous sovereignty: (1) addressing cultural tensions and transforming current management systems; (2) creating Indigenous Knowledge spaces in PPA-related educational settings; and (3) building decolonial futures by returning lands to Indigenous communities. This paper presents reflective frameworks with guiding questions for PPA managers to embrace the #LANDBACK movement in partnership with Indigenous communities. These frameworks provide opportunities for park managers, educators, and

researchers to center Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and community well-being. Additionally, this manuscript provides the scaffolding for PPA managers and Indigenous communities to implement restorative and transformative justice practices within current PPA systems. Implementing the proposed frameworks within PPAs could generate monumental social transformation.

**Keywords** #LANDBACK; parks and protected areas; decolonizing; Indigenous sovereignty; restorative and transformative justice; land acknowledgments

## Introduction

Land acknowledgments affirm the existence of the original land<sup>1</sup> stewards who lived in specific areas before colonization<sup>2</sup> and occupation of modern countries. Many Indigenous communities used land acknowledgments for generations to reinforce their histories, genealogies, practices, and relationships with local ecosystems. Through time, non-Indigenous entities adopted land acknowledgments and made them a common practice to recognize the Indigenous Peoples who first lived in the areas. Though mostly well-intentioned, land acknowledgments do not always address the forced removals, relocations, and genocides of Indigenous Peoples. Nor do they focus on settler occupancy and the continued harms, trauma, and injustices to Indigenous Peoples and places. However, some contain the familiar phrase, “We’re on stolen land,” as a way to summarize hundreds of years of Indigenous Peoples’ trauma.

Two archetypes exist for land acknowledgments: (1) solidarity-based calls for recognition; and (2) empty platitudes that do not dig into more generative, action-oriented outcomes. The first archetype is not inherently bad; however, the second is problematic because it references historic harms but fails to mention the ongoing problems that Indigenous communities experience and Indigenous roles in maintaining biodiversity. This dehumanizes and tokenizes Indigenous Peoples, relegating them to being considered as relics from the past. Land acknowledgments provide an important reminder for people to reflect upon the histories of the lands they occupy, but a need exists to move beyond recognition to actionable frameworks that provide guidance for applying theory to real-world contexts in order to enact change. Applying actionable frameworks requires institutions to reflect on and address answers to the framework’s guiding questions.

Actionable frameworks prove especially pertinent within the context of parks and protected area (PPA) management within the US. After generations of violence against Indigenous Peoples, the establishment of the National Park Service was part of a broader effort to create PPAs at multiple governance levels for the benefit of the American public. However, in actualizing the land-for-all vision, PPAs

excluded and displaced Native communities (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). Today, key problems exist within most PPAs, including (1) misplaced and centralized decisionmaking authorities; (2) imbalanced power dynamics; (3) a lack of integration of Indigenous Knowledge systems; and (4) the absence of actionable steps to address historic and current harms to Indigenous communities.

This thought piece uses a decolonizing lens and focuses on three areas of PPA management: systemic transformation, environmental education, and strengthening decolonial futures. Finally, it addresses a need for repairing these problems by integrating a discussion on the #LANDBACK movement: a social media campaign that embodies centuries of land reclamation activism. The #LANDBACK movement demands colonial entities and settler occupants establish actionable, reparation-based steps toward returning Indigenous lands. This paper concludes with several action-based suggestions for PPA management that work in tandem with the #LANDBACK movement to help actualize the return of lands to Indigenous communities and strengthen Indigenous sovereignty.

## Decolonization through storytelling

Decolonization requires the prioritization of Indigenous leadership and the deconstruction of power imbalances (Smith 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012). This paper situates Indigenous leadership at the forefront of the writing process by including Native American (Taíno and Mvskoke Creek Nation), Native Hawaiian,<sup>3</sup> and allied authors. We incorporate decolonization by integrating Indigenous methodologies (e.g., storytelling), epistemologies (ways of knowing), and ontologies (ways of being) that contrast with dominant scientific understanding<sup>4</sup> (Chilisa 2020). Storytelling is a traditional Indigenous practice that includes the generational transmission of stories containing Indigenous Knowledges (Wilson 2008; Smith 2012). Three levels of storytelling exist: (1) the highest level: sacred stories told by certain people with proper permissions; (2) the second level: stories that focus on morals and life lessons; and (3) the third level: stories of Indigenous Peoples’ personal experiences (Wilson 2008). We use only the second and third levels in this paper.

Indigenous researchers often engage in storytelling by gathering Knowledge and sharing it within their communities or other communities. This differs from a dominant scientific approach wherein non-Indigenous scientists may collect and misinterpret Indigenous Knowledges, and then unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes about Indigenous Peoples and their Knowledges (Smith 2012). In contrast, decolonizing methodologies require researchers to ethically work with communities that scientists historically misrepresented or erased (Smith 2012). We employ culturally responsive storytelling to emphasize the importance of cultivating sovereignty within PPA management.

### **Transforming current management systems**

Current PPA management arrangements remain rife with issues regarding Native community relationships. Problems include (1) failure to respect cultural rights; (2) skewed power dynamics; and (3) unaddressed patterns of harm. Indigenous cultural rights issues within PPAs include restrictions on agency, limits on cultural discretion, and the illicit extraction of Indigenous Knowledges. Settler-colonialism and its resulting dispossession created challenges for Indigenous Peoples to access their homelands in culturally relevant manners (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). For example, Indigenous Peoples must provide the US National Park Service with sacred information before they gain permission to conduct cultural activities on their ancestral lands (NPS 2016). This constricts cultural agency and violates international guidelines (e.g., the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) that reinforce Indigenous data sovereignty: the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, and protect data. Forcing Native communities to relinquish sacred data may prove harmful if federal entities deny permits, or in circumstances where Indigenous communities refuse to disclose required information. Both scenarios threaten the continuation of traditional ceremonies, may pose limitations on the ways Indigenous Peoples can harvest medicines, and could impact other culturally relevant activities.

Requiring Indigenous communities to share sacred information about their traditional practices stands in contrast to many Indigenous practices wherein cultural norms forbid the sharing of such Knowledges with individuals outside of the community. It also fuels data mining issues by non-Indigenous entities and constricts data sovereignty. Therefore, we suggest PPAs eliminate barriers to access for Indigenous land use and redistribute governing powers to Indigenous communities so they can dictate access rights to their homelands.

Partnerships between Native communities and PPAs generally include Indigenous stakeholders in land management processes but rarely include co-management frameworks with equitable power dynamics. In these situations, Indigenous communities may exist merely as consultants while the ultimate decisionmaking powers remain with the land-managing agencies. This skewed power dynamic hinders possibilities for cooperative partnerships and perpetuates colonial dynamics that diminish the roles of Indigenous governmental sovereignty. We encourage governmental entities to create new management frameworks collaboratively with Indigenous entities to (1) create equity-based redistributions of power; (2) require land management collaboration with Indigenous communities; and (3) modify management objectives and ideologies to integrate Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

The implementation of restorative and transformative justice frameworks may also direct current management systems away from patterns of harm against Indigenous communities. Restorative justice addresses harms done to individuals and communities (e.g., through crime or denied cultural access to lands) by prioritizing the healing and repairing of relationships within communities without relying on criminal punishment systems (Kaba 2021). Creating restorative justice frameworks within PPAs could help all entities navigate tense situations. Restorative justice could be implemented by prioritizing the repair and fortification of relationships through non-punitive accountability measures. At a wider scale, transformative justice focuses on systemic harm (e.g., systems of oppression) and examines how to refashion systems and transform the conditions that result in harm and violence (Kaba 2021). Implementing transformative justice frameworks requires ongoing reassessments of how PPA governance arrangements may contribute to problematic issues and ways to minimize and eliminate patterns of harm.

We present two questions to guide PPAs on the path to restorative and transformative justice: (1) What are the root sources of harm? and (2) How can these root sources be addressed and mended at a systemic level to prevent similar harms? Additionally, we recognize four components of a harm-focused PPA framework: decriminalization, power concentration, culture, and accountability (Table 1, Figure 1). Although this framework was developed in relation to PPA governance, it provides a tool for turning theory into practice for all situations in which power structures inflict harm upon communities.

Components	Guiding questions
Decriminalization	How have communities, cultures, and practices been criminalized and marginalized?
	How can future PPA management and conservation efforts avoid such criminalization and marginalization?
Power concentration	How have governance powers (e.g., decisionmaking and enforcement authority) been centralized and fortified in federal and state PPA agencies?
	How can such powers be transferred to Indigenous communities, how are those communities delineated, and which community members are excluded?
	How can PPAs cultivate capacity within communities to bolster power transfers through compensation and reparations?
	How can Indigenous communities manage human relations with land (e.g., PPA visitors and community members seeking access)?
Culture	Which cultures are centered within existing governance systems?
	How do colonialist cultures exacerbate harms immediately and systemically?
	How can Indigenous cultures and paradigms be centered, and what governmental changes might that necessitate (e.g., procedures, structures, personnel, etc.)?
	How can Indigenous land-based practices be supported, facilitated, and restored within PPAs?
Accountability	How and why has accountability failed or fallen short in past instances of harm?
	How can accountability measures be placed at the forefront of governance to facilitate smoother and more regular transformation?
	How can the wishes and concerns of Indigenous communities be prioritized, and how can this be done through community-based processes?
	How should accountability measures prioritize community and environmental welfare?
	How have accountability measures prioritized punishment instead of healing and transformation?

**TABLE 1.** Guiding questions for the four components of a restorative and transformative justice framework for PPAs.

### Who listens to storytelling?

Colonial institutions maintain a long history of cultural incompetency, and often fail to understand and acknowledge the genealogy and cultural significance of places and Indigenous Peoples. Land management institutions rarely delegate managerial powers to Indigenous communities that possess critical ecosystem-based Knowledges. Such institutions may not recognize the validity, value, significance, and connections embedded within Indigenous stories. This proves problematic because institutional powers delineate which stories and cultural practices are permissible under law, thus frequently restricting cultural agency and leading to the dismissal,

misconstruing, and misinterpretation of Indigenous stories and histories. Colonial entities may produce harmful requests and require the divulgence of sacred practices from Indigenous Peoples, which may create caustic tensions.

As an example from one of the authors, ‘Alohi Nakachi’s Native Hawaiian family maintains generations of Knowledge about local ecosystems and traditional practices. However, colonial institutions often dismiss the Nakachi family as emotional, uneducated, irrational, and lacking understanding. Institutional settings present the family with harmful requests (e.g., to validate



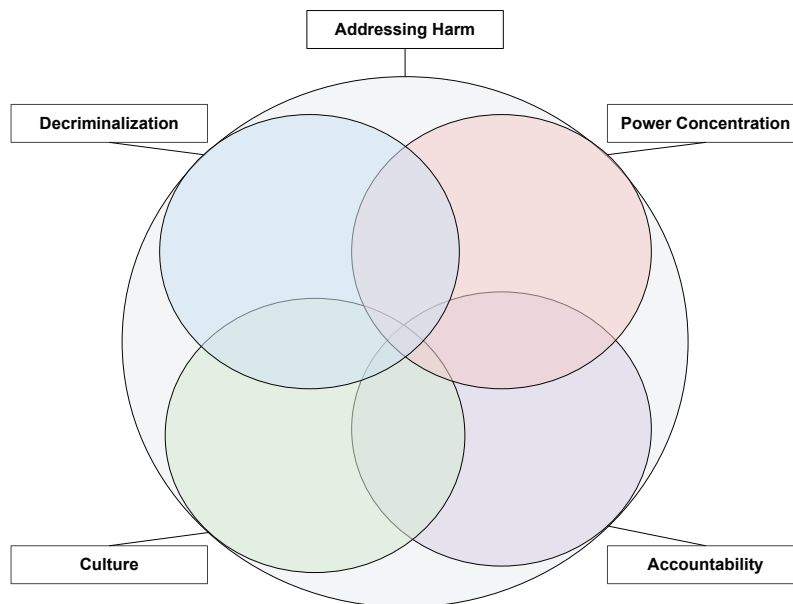
**FIGURE 1.** The four components of a transformative justice framework to address harm within PPAs. The four components include (1) decriminalization; (2) power concentration; (3) culture; and (4) accountability. When the four components are addressed together, each one overlaps and provides opportunities for generative management outcomes.

the meaning of Hawaiian culture and to create a rubric for authenticating Hawaiian Indigeneity). Such requests maintain systems of vetting Indigeneity similar to those of blood quantum requirements for Native Americans. The following discussion outlines additional experiences that the Nakachi family endured, which occurred during Hawai‘i legislative processes about potential laws and regulations for culturally significant places and species. These experiences articulate the harms embedded into the procedural necessity to share stories and Indigenous Knowledges in colonial governance settings. The discussion is presented in the present tense because the institutional problems and their harms are ongoing for the family, as with other Hawaiian families defending cultural practices and places.

Nakachi’s family feels compelled to share stories and partner with colonial institutions to protect culturally significant places, species, and practices (especially those integral to their kuleana: responsibility, accountability, privilege, and rights). They tell their stories with the understanding of the power held by institutions that manage lands, species, and practices central to the stories. By choosing to share stories in these settings, they relinquish the power to choose who is present, which creates a situation wherein certain outside entities are privy to information that would not otherwise be told. Some individuals present during the legislative settings heard Nakachi’s family stories and learned about their cultural practices and terminology. However, without knowing the significance of the terms, stories, and the genealogy or protocol around the practices, the individuals appropriated the stories for their own economic and personal gain.

The risk of cultural appropriation and the mistreatment of familial kuleana is not taken lightly by Nakachi’s family. Yet, the colonial systems in Hawai‘i provide no alternative means for Hawaiians to argue for the protection of their places and ecosystems. However, a paradoxical need exists for Indigenous communities to plant seeds of information through storytelling to cultivate sovereignty. But this should be facilitated in a manner that provides just enough information to non-Indigenous audiences

The Four Components of a Transformative Justice Framework to Address Harm within PPAs



without tapping into sacred Knowledges. Storytelling builds accountability, perpetuates culture, and helps to decriminalize cultural practitioners, thus transforming systemic power imbalances over time. However, risks of harm still exist for Indigenous communities. To mitigate these harms, colonial systems should reflect on the guiding questions in Table 1. Additionally, Indigenous communities that possess genealogical Knowledge should be granted governing oversight for their lands.

### Creating Indigenous Knowledge spaces in PPA-related education programs

Current environmental education (EE) and environmental interpretation (EI) programs center dominant epistemologies and ontologies; however, PPAs have a responsibility to uplift pedagogical practices that confront settler-colonialism and honor Indigenous Knowledges, cultures, and paradigms. The US education system delegitimizes Indigenous claims to ancestral lands and associated Indigenous Knowledges (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua 2013). Furthermore, settler-colonial school systems suppress Indigenous histories and realities by subordinating Indigenous epistemologies (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua 2013). PPA-based EE and EI programs are not exempt from these influences. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provides an example of the US education system’s history of enacting a logic of elimination toward Indigenous communities (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua 2013). Standards-based evaluation systems that incorporate high-stakes assessments detrimentally affect a broad range of students and educators, including in PPA-based EE and EI settings. EE and EI practitioners are pressured

to adopt curricula with common core standards to prove legitimacy, not appear overly political, and align themselves with the standards-based evaluation goals of K-12 education (Gruenewald and Manteaw 2007). The emphasis on standards-based instruction shifts many practitioners away from programming that addresses socioenvironmental issues, including the displacement and subjugation of Indigenous communities (Gruenewald and Manteaw 2007; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2013). Though this may not initially appear as important in the context of PPA-related education, the Tbilisi Declaration (1977), which came from the world's first intergovernmental conference on EE, outlines the significance of addressing socioenvironmental issues through EE and EI.

How can EE and EI programs address environmental problems without honoring original land stewards, especially when social injustices for Indigenous Peoples fold into environmental injustices? The ongoing displacement and dispossession of Indigenous communities present a socioenvironmental problem that every level of society should confront. PPAs can address K-12 educational deficits that stem from teaching common core standards by establishing collaborative educational programs with Indigenous communities to perpetuate and protect Indigenous Knowledges, cultures, and paradigms. Doing so would contribute to socioenvironmental justice outcomes and decolonial futures by (1) including flexible education requirements; (2) integrating a holistic understanding of environmental

and cultural topics; and (3) using the guiding questions in Table 2 to address and prevent harm. Addressing these questions may steer PPA managers toward decolonial futures by confronting settler-colonialism and centering Indigenous epistemologies and paradigms in PPA-based educational programs (e.g., the program listed in the following section).

**Aloha 'Āina education: 'O Keawa'ula Ke Kumu (Keawa'ula, the source for learning)**

The following provides a powerful example of how PPAs can successfully introduce Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies into EE programs. For centuries, Kānaka 'Ōiwi have been guided by their commitment to Aloha 'Āina in struggles for ea (political independence, self-determination, and breath) and the protection and revitalization of land (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2013). Aloha 'Āina is often translated as “love for the land,” but this does not communicate the complex spiritual, ethical, political, and environmental dimensions of this Native Hawaiian value. Peralto (2018) draws a connection between re-establishing ties to 'āina and re-asserting self-determination when he states that doing so “raise[s] our collective conscious and capacity as a lāhui [nation] by re-remembering [sic] and re-connecting us to many of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual 'piko' (people, places, and practices) that were rendered inaccessible to many 'Ōiwi of the previous generations” (p. 48).

Two authors of the present paper, Brigitte Russo and

**TABLE 2.** Guiding questions for the four components of a transformative justice framework for PPAs, adapted for education managers of and educators in PPA-related programs.

Components	Guiding questions
Decriminalization	How do PPA-related educational policies and practices prioritize academic achievement over other outcomes and perpetuate punitive and criminalizing discipline measures when students fail to assimilate?
Power concentration	How can power and capital relating to education policies and practices be transferred to Indigenous communities, educational institutions, and organizations in partnership with PPAs?
Culture	Which cultures are centered within existing educational settings?
	How can educational policies support and fund PPA programs that center Indigenous Knowledges?
	How can PPAs prioritize and center Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and pedagogies within educational policies and practices?
Accountability	How can accountability measures be placed at the forefront of PPA policies and practices to ensure that guidelines, pedagogies, and curricula address the needs of Indigenous communities and educational institutions?

Kekaha Spencer, are ‘Ōiwi PhD students and teachers who created and implemented an Aloha ‘Āina science curriculum at Wai‘anae Intermediate School. The curriculum focuses on sharing ‘ike kūpuna (ancestral Knowledge) so students can learn about the history of Hawaiian scientists, thereby providing opportunities for students to understand how Hawaiian culture contains deep ecosystem Knowledges. The curriculum helps students connect to place and community by learning the mo‘olelo (ancestral story) of each place within their moku (district). The curriculum highlights Keawa‘ula, a wahi pana (sacred place), and piko located within the Ka‘ena Point State Park Reserve. Figures 2 and 3 show the mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) of Keawa‘ula.

In 2017, with the support of Kānaka and settler allies, Russo and Spencer signed a state of Hawaii adopt-a-park agreement to care for a one-acre parcel of Keawa‘ula. They work at this parcel with students and community members to revitalize Keawa‘ula through the removal of

persistent invasive species (e.g, Guinea grass, *Urochloa maxima*) and out-planting coastally endemic species (e.g., ‘ōhai, *Sesbania tomentosa*). The program creates reciprocal relationships in which students take care of Keawa‘ula, and Keawa‘ula strengthens their sense of place and belonging. The restoration and revitalization of Keawa‘ula provide the Wai‘anae community with opportunities to regenerate relationships with ‘āina that have been strained due to colonial pressures. Touching soil, nurturing native plants, and restoring ‘āina are parts of the struggle for ea and connected to the health and breath of the community (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua 2016). Keawa‘ula remains a sacred, spiritual piko and provides a place to cultivate Aloha ‘Āina.

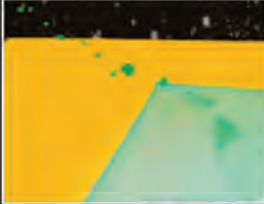



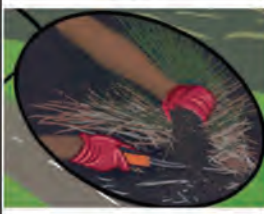

This project provides an example of the intersection of Indigenous epistemologies, conservation, and reciprocal learning between Kānaka and ‘āina in a quest to cultivate sovereignty within public education and PPAs and to create sust‘ĀINable<sup>s</sup> systemic changes. Future

**FIGURE 2.** ‘O Keawa‘ula ke kumu (Keawa‘ula, the source of learning). This figure represents the mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) of Keawa‘ula.





# 'O Keawa'ula Ke Kumu

<p><b>Ao &amp; Pō</b></p> 	<p>Native Hawaiians knew about celestial lines before Western contact. Tropic of Cancer is known as ke ala nui polohiwa a Kane - the big dark road of Kane (God of freshwater). They saw this line as a separation from pō (darkness) and ao (light). Pō is one of many spirit realms. Each island had one or two leina (place where spirits leaped into pō). At Ka'ena point on the West is the leina a ka 'uhane, one of O'ahu's leina (Mahelona &amp; Ruggles, 2015).</p>	<p><b>Mūhe'e</b></p> 	<p>Keawa'ula was known for its mūhe'e (cuttlefish). A phenomena where mūhe'e spawning would change the color of the water to a reddish tinge. Keawa'ula (the red harbor) is named after this phenomena. Unfortunately this no longer occurs, but hopefully one day the mūhe'e will spawn rehabit the harbor once more (Sterling &amp; Summers, 1978).</p>
<p><b>Pohā</b></p> 	<p>Archaeological sites including ko'a (fishing shrines), fishing and gathering locations, remnants of shelters and settlements for fishermen, and rock features have been found at Keawa'ula. Pohā Cave is believed to have concealed nine water courses, most being fresh water. These water courses were underground and released into the center of the Ka'ie'iwaho Channel, located between O'ahu and Kaua'i. Native Hawaiians gathered drinking water by diving down into the ana (cave) with ipu (gourd) to collect fresh water (Sterling &amp; Summers, 1978).</p>	<p><b>Ka'aahi</b></p> 	<p>Completed in 1898, the O'ahu Railway and Land Company connected Honolulu to Kahuku, via Wai'anae and Wai'alua. The railway was meant to serve plantation towns and ranches, but also became a scenic tour. In 1947, railway services ended, and the railway was abandoned after damage by a 1946 tsunami and a decline in ka'aahi (railroad) use (Division of Forestry and Wildlife, 2009).</p>
<p><b>Huki</b></p> 	<p>Fast forward to 2017 and Keawa'ula became a place with many invasive plants and occasional trash. Through multiple partnerships with state and federal organizations Wai'anae Intermediate students began to restore this culturally important place by removing invasives. Through this process the ecology of the place began to shift. Russo and Spencer continue to bring students back four times a year to huki (pull out) invasives and plant natives.</p>	<p><b>Kanu</b></p> 	<p>Every year students and partners continue to kanu (plant) native plants to restore and revitalize Keawa'ula. Students have experienced a large increase in their sense of kuleana (responsibility) as they begin to care for this space. It is essential to keep cultivating sovereignty by sowing the seeds of restorative and transformative justice.</p>

**FIGURE 3.** 'O Keawa'ula Ke Kumu explained (Sterling and Summers 1978; Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife 2009; Johnson et al. 2015)

environmental programs within PPAs should include opportunities for Indigenous teachers to perpetuate the genealogical stories and culture of the land and its people. This example also provides evidence of the care-work that Indigenous communities put into EE and conservation, which supports the #LANDBACK movement.

## #LANDBACK: Decolonial futures and returning land

PPAs present an opportunity to actualize the #LANDBACK movement and return lands to Indigenous governments. In terms of justice, recognizing personal and institutional occupancy of stolen lands through land acknowledgments is not sufficient. Instead, institutions and land management entities should return Indigenous lands to their original stewards for governance. Such actions reflect a key goal of decolonization as a politic (Tuck and Yang 2012) and thus move beyond the acknowledgment phase. Although historic harms cannot be undone, returning lands to Indigenous communities would support the collective social responsibility to prevent colonial land dispossession. Returning lands may also further conservation and Indigenous sovereignty-based objectives because Indigenous communities currently oversee 80% of the world's biodiversity (Garnett et al. 2018). Therefore, returning lands to Indigenous stewards could potentially

restore biodiversity and propel conservation efforts in directions not witnessed since before US occupancy.

Today, many Indigenous communities work to (re)build and increase capacity for land governance by expanding their resources, objectives, and departmental abilities. Because capacity building takes time, the actualization of Indigenous communities' management of their ancestral homelands may require the implementation of new processes, departments, and personnel. Therefore, it may be necessary for governmental agencies and Indigenous communities to create generative and just partnerships. Such partnerships should focus on collaboration, rather than mere consultation. These types of partnerships would resolve the power issues within federal and state government co-management arrangements in which the US remains as the authoritative entity. Creating such partnerships would require transferring land titles and related powers from US agencies to Indigenous governments and communities, and may also necessitate new treaties. These steps could create partnerships that sow the seeds of a fruitful decolonization movement if they center Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and relationships with the land.



A key piece of the decolonization process includes embracing Indigenous paradigms and returning land governance authority to Indigenous Peoples and communities (Tuck and Yang 2012). Therefore, these partnerships should turn away from dominant modes of environmental governance and create room for the implementation and institutionalization of Indigenous philosophies surrounding environmental relations, governance, and land stewardship. These partnerships must prioritize the concerns and wishes of Indigenous communities throughout the process. While some Indigenous communities may desire longer-lasting partnerships to facilitate a more gradual transfer of power and responsibility, others may possess the capacity and desire to immediately govern their homelands. Therefore, Indigenous communities should control the timeline and any necessary alterations. Placing these powers within Indigenous communities upholds their sovereignty and discontinues a long legacy of paternalism and invalidation of Indigenous governments.

How these partnerships take shape is highly contextual based on the lands, Indigenous communities, and histories of relationships between entities. The restorative and transformative justice frameworks (Table 1, Figure 1) provide guidance for improving existing partnerships and management arrangements. Two additional lines of inquiry may help build the initial scaffolding of the partnerships and inform their nuances and directions: (1) What are the key steps and processes needed by communities that desire longer partnerships? (2) How can PPAs support the process by which Indigenous community members and visitors (re)build and maintain relations with land through stewardship opportunities?

Returning lands to Indigenous communities may not always result in the removal of public access. Public access may depend on the land area, Indigenous community, and seasonal factors. However, Indigenous land governance will shift conservation away from Indigenous dispossession, and move governance and land management into Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and ways of relating with the land that existed for millennia. The finer details of land governance principles will also vary. Although uncertainty about future access may create anxiety for visitors who developed relationships with PPAs, the historical and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous communities should take priority. Returning lands should not be used as a new form of patriarchal dominance or to replicate histories of dispossession, but fracture these structures to cultivate Indigenous sovereignty and liberation for all people (Tuck and Yang 2012).

## Conclusion

PPAs present an opportunity for moving beyond land acknowledgments in action- and justice-oriented directions. Such a movement may transform environmental governance and conservation into spaces that honor Indigenous Knowledges and ontologies. Most importantly, PPAs can support the actualization of the #LANDBACK movement by returning lands<sup>6</sup> to Indigenous communities. These changes can be facilitated through the institutionalization of restorative and transformative justice frameworks that address tensions and instances of harm that arise within existing governance systems. Furthermore, the process of decolonization may Indigenize social and environmental landscapes and center Indigenous Knowledges, epistemologies, and ontologies.

While land acknowledgments recognize and call attention to the continued dispossession of Indigenous Peoples, the stories and practices illustrated in this paper detail how reshaping PPA governance can sow the seeds of Indigenous sovereignty. The previously mentioned pathways for PPA governance transformation may offer directions for improving the socioenvironmental efficacy and equity of conservation and land management, and address over 500 years of harm related to settler-colonialism. How PPAs are remodeled and returned will depend highly on the lands, histories, and Indigenous communities involved. Therefore, a multitude of pathways may exist for these transformations.

Decolonization necessitates the return of all lands and the restoration of Indigenous philosophies and norms across landscapes (Tuck and Yang 2012). PPAs provide an avenue to model such transformation. However, the #LANDBACK pathway may require an array of strategies and partnerships between entities. The creation of such partnerships could help address a collective social responsibility that exists to further such movement towards a decolonized reality, especially concerning land relationships and governance. Finally, we encourage readers to transform their ethical compulsion to acknowledge lands into a politic of #LANDBACK that sows the seeds of Indigenous sovereignty.

## Acknowledgments

The first and fourth authors of this paper acknowledge funding from the National Science Foundation (grant numbers 2018254693 and 1906610, respectively). The second author of this paper acknowledges funding and support from the Ford Foundation, Achievement Rewards for College Scientists, the Benton Community Foundation, and Indigenous Education, Inc.

## Endnotes

1. “Land” refers to the total environment of an area, including, but not limited to, terrestrial areas, freshwater bodies, oceans, sky, and biota.
2. In Hawai‘i, the use of “colonization” remains disputed due to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and subsequent occupation by the US.
3. *Native Hawaiian*, *Hawaiian*, *‘Ōiwi*, *Kanaka*, *Kānaka* (plural), *Kanaka ‘Ōiwi*, *Kānaka ‘Ōiwi* (plural), *Kanaka Maoli*, and *Kānaka Maoli* (plural) are various terms and identities referring to any individual(s) of native Hawaiian ancestry; a descendant of the original people who lived in Hawai‘i prior to Western contact.
4. *Dominant science* privileges colonial epistemologies and ontologies that are assumed to represent standard ideas. The use of dominant knowledge systems may “other” and delegitimize nonconforming and incongruent epistemologies, including those rooted in Indigenous paradigms (Smith 2012: 173).
5. *Sust‘ĀINable* merges “sustainable” with “‘āina.” Native Hawaiian practices are grounded in sustainability, as ‘āina was seen as a genealogical and reciprocal part of their family.
6. This paper refers to the return of public lands, not private lands, because we focus specifically on parks and protected areas. Although private lands, particularly those owned by colonialist corporations and institutions, are a site of contention and negotiation within decolonization discourse, that is not the focus of this paper.

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The Interdisciplinary Journal of Place-based Conservation

Co-published by the **Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity**, University of California, Berkeley and the **George Wright Society**. ISSN 2688-187X

Berkeley **Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity**



#### Citation for this article

Fisk, Jonathan J., Lara A. Jacobs, Brigitte Ululani Kekahiliokalani Russo, Erica Meier, 'Alohi Nakachi, Kekaha K.P. Spencer, Kainoa Kaulukukui-Narikawa, Amber Waialea Datta, and Kalani Quiocho. 2021. Cultivating sovereignty in parks and protected areas: Sowing the seeds of restorative and transformative justice through the #LANDBACK movement. *Parks Stewardship Forum* 37(3): 517–526.

*Parks Stewardship Forum* explores innovative thinking and offers enduring perspectives on critical issues of place-based heritage management and stewardship. Interdisciplinary in nature, the journal gathers insights from all fields related to parks, protected/conserved areas, cultural sites, and other place-based forms of conservation. The scope of the journal is international. It is dedicated to the legacy of **George Meléndez Wright**, a graduate of UC Berkeley and pioneer in conservation of national parks.

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The journal continues *The George Wright Forum*, published 1981–2018 by the George Wright Society.

PSF is designed by Laurie Frasier • [lauriefrasier.com](http://lauriefrasier.com)



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