# Corporate Exploitation of Indigenous Sacred Areas and the Adverse Impact on Indigneous cultures. ORPORATE EXPLOITATION OF INDIGENOUS SACRED AREAS AND THE ADVERSE IMPACT ON INDIGNEOUS CULTURES

Research for the 21st Century

Dr. Walls

Spring 2012

Introduction

A common element that unites the spiritual beliefs of all indigenous peoples is the concept that the land itself is sacred. The designation of certain geographical areas used to gather food and medicinal herbs, perform rituals, worship, pray, and bury the dead is present globally among all indigenous people, and has been for thousands of years. It is in these special places that the seeker encounters the holy. Angels, saints and gods have appeared; miracles, blessings, and cures bestowed upon communities which in turn fostered a deep reverence and respect for that place among local populations. Another universal religious concept is that worship has specially designated and consecrated places, and many of these areas are also sites of historic and natural significance. Often established near springs, rivers, trees, groves, hills and mountains, they also served as meeting places to conduct public business. Mountains have added significance in that they connect the earth with the heavenly realm and are considered by some cultures to be the dwelling places of the gods, such as Mount Olympus in Greece. Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in the 13th century wrote: “*From time immemorial the mountains have been the dwelling place of the great sages. Wise men and sages have all made the mountains their own chambers, their own body and mind.” (*Loori) Other examples include Mount Madia, worshiped by the Kurds; Mount Kailash, home to Buddhist and Hindu deities. Followers of the Shinto tradition in Japan make pilgrimages to Mount Fuji to worship the goddess Sengen-Sama. (Olson 16)

But the right to exercise and express spiritual beliefs has all too often been ignored by international corporations as well as governments. Corporations have an extensive history of exploiting aboriginal lands for profit, and governments have an extensive history of allowing them to do so. This exploitation has come by means of energy exploration and extraction, mining, refining, large-scale farming, logging and commercial development. The result has been devastating for indigenous populations. How has the systematic destruction of sacred areas affected their cultures, health, and sovereignty? What measures are being taken to protect and preserve these areas? This discussion offers examples of two such sacred mountains- Niyamgini in northern India and San Francisco Peak in Arizona.

One of India’s most remote indigenous tribes is the Dongria Kondh inhabiting the state of Orissa in northern India for thousands of years. The tribe relies on the resources of Niyamgini Hill to sustain them, providing water, medicinal herbs, rich soil for the cultivation of millet, beans and peas and gathering bananas and sweet roots, the mainstays of their diet. The mildly alcoholic juice from giant palm trees is collected and is a staple of the men of the tribe, providing energy to nourish them throughout the day. Sustenance is only one component of the Dongria’s relationship with and dependence on their mountain. They believe that it was created as their homeland by the gods. Worshiping at the summit of the mountain, also the residence of NIyam Penu, one of their two central deities, is an integral element of their spirituality. (Mine – Story of a Sacred Mountain.)

In 1997, Vendata, Aluminum Unlimited, a London based mining company began operating an aluminum refinery in Lanjigarh, a village also in the state of Orissa. In April 2009, Sterilite, a subsidiary of Vendata applied for permission from the Indian government to mine bauxite from the Niyamgini Hills about 10 kilometers from the refinery. Bauxite is the raw material for the production of aluminum, and estimates placed the deposit at nearly 70 million tons involving 660 hectares of Dongria forestland. The application to perform open-cast mining at the location was granted and construction of roads to the mine site began. As a result of overwhelming international protest, the Indian government eventually blocked Vendata because an inquiry conducted by the government revealed that the way of life for the local tribes would be destroyed in addition to violating forest conservation and environmental protection laws currently in place. (Jena.)

The San Francisco Peaks in Arizona is considered holy ground by 13 Native tribes, including the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai, the Yavapai-Apache Nation, and the White Mountain Apache Nation. The mountains are sacred because they are believed to be the homes of the kachinas which are considered ancestral spirits to the Hopi and surrounding tribes. (Olson 39). Snowbowl Ski Area is located about 14 miles north of Flagstaff, Arizona in the Coconino National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service built a road and lodge on 777 acres on the tallest of the San Francisco Peaks, Humphrey’s Peak, in 1937. In 1977 permits were issued by the Forest Service to a private contractor (Snowbowl) to expand the operation by building new ski lifts, lodge facilities, parking lots and improving the roads. The lawsuit filed by the Navajo and Hopi tribes in 1981 to block the expansion was the first of many years of protest and litigation. (Glowacka). The most recent affront to the tribes was the resort’s proposal to purchase reclaimed wastewater from the City of Flagstaff, Arizona to create artificial snow. When natural snowfall is insufficient, ski areas often supplement the snowpack by producing artificial snow. Water is forced through a spray nozzle and combined with compressed air to create super cooled droplets that fall to the earth. (Linnacre and Geerts) The proposal also includes the construction of a large pipeline and pumping stations to force the water up the side of the mountain.

This concept is particularly offensive to the Hopi tribe whose traditional relationship to the land includes the belief that water is life-giving and sustaining and it should remain pure for spiritual cleansing and renewal. Closely related is the origin of the water before it touches the mountain. The Hopi s believe recycled municipal wastewater contains contaminants of death and disease from hospitals, mortuaries, and human excrement, and that technology is not capable of purifying and sanctifying this water, especially for ceremonial and ritual use (Glowacka). On February 9, 2012, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals granted permission for the project to proceed. Author and National Public Radio commentator Mary Sojourner who was jailed for chaining herself to an excavator in a futile attempt to stop the desecration lamented that the project amounted to “cultural extermination and genocide”. (Sojourner.)

**Works cited**

Glowacka, Maria, Dorothy Washburn, and Justin Richland. "Nuvatukya'ovi, San Francisco Peaks." *Current Anthropology* 50.4 (2009): 547-561. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 30 May 2012

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Mine – Story of a Sacred Mountain. Lumley, Joanna, narr. Survival International Charitable Trust.2009. Film.

Olson, Brad. Sacred Places Around the World. San Francisco: CCC Publishing, 2004. Print.

Topic Analysis

Academic Disciplines

Humanities, Social Sciences, Anthropology, History, Religion

Library of Congress Subject Headings

Philosophy, psychology, religion

Geography, anthropology,

Social sciences

Mythology, mysticism, spirituality, Indians of North America, indigenous people.

Key Terms

* Ø Indigenous
* Ø Aboriginal
* Ø Native American
* Ø Indians
* Ø Sacred geography
* Ø Spiritual and religious beliefs
* Ø Desecration
* Ø India
* Ø United States
* Ø Dongria Kondh
* Ø Vendata

Most Important Databases and Periodical Indexes

ProQuest Research Library, JSTOR, Credo Reference, WorldCat

organization

Sacred Land Film Project

P.O. Box C-151

La Honda, CA 94020

www.sacredland.org

650.747.0685

Christopher McLeod, Project Director

The stated objective of the Sacred Land Film Project is to deepen public understanding of sacred places, indigenous cultures, and environmental justice. It produces a variety of media and educational materials — films, videos, DVDs, articles, photographs, school curricula materials and Web site content. An example of their work is *In the Light of* *Reverence* (2001) a documentary about the struggles of the Hopi, Winnemem Wintu, and Lakota Sioux to protect sacred areas on their reservations. This resource compliments additional materials researched about North American indigenous efforts, and a video of an interview with Winona LaDuke available for viewing on their website was of particular interest as she authored one of my book resources.

statistical

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Via Paolo di Dono, 44

00142 Rome, Italy

Tel: 39-0654591

Fax +39-065043463 - E-mail ifad@ifad.org

<http://operations.ifad.org/web/guest/topic/statistics/tags/indigenous%20people>.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is an agency of the United Nations organized to eliminate poverty in developing nations.

According to it’s website, indigenous populations comprise 5% of the world’s population and 15% of all poverty- stricken groups are indigenous. Data regarding indigenous populations including demographics, individual regions, countries, and living conditions are available. Statistical information on indigenous populations is difficult to compile as census enumerations in many third-world countries is cost prohibitive for these governments. (Leete & Mubiala 7).

Work cited

Leete, Richard, and Lalan Mubiala. *Counting the People, Constraining Census Costs, and Assessing Alternative Approaches*. United Nations Population Fund***.*** 2003. Web. 28 May 2012. <<http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/184_filename_popdev-strat-7.pdf>

Sources

***encyclopedia***

Harrelson, Walter. “Rites and Ceremonies-Sacred Places*.” The New Encyclopedia Britannica.*  15th Edition, Vol. 26. Chicago. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Incorporated. 2010. 777. Print. 32 vols.

Dr. Walter Harrelson taught at Andover Newton Theological School, the University of Chicago Divinity School and was Dean at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. He has written numerous books and articles on ancient religion and scripture. This article offers a comprehensive overview of sacred places, discussing the factors that designate an area as sacred, the connections between indigenous peoples and the land, and how these areas are used in ceremonies and worship. Written objectively, the author presents factual information with an unbiased viewpoint. The general public including students will find the author’s vocabulary and style informative and appealing. Individual locations were not discussed so the article did not provide information about the two locations targeted in my topic. This is an excellent resource to begin research and will yield a basic understanding of the sacred as it relates to indigenous culture.

***subject encyclopedia***

Brockman, Norbert C*.”* Encyclopedia of Sacred Places. *“* ABC-CLIO. 2011. Print.

Sacred areas and their importance in the world’s religious and spiritual traditions is the main theme of this volume. Written by Norbert C. Brockman, SM, PhD, Professor Emeritus of International Relations at St. Mary's University, the book includes 200 articles describing various sacred areas worldwide. Included are maps of the continents denoting sacred areas, black and white photos, a glossary of terms, and appendixes arranged alphabetically and by religion. The author describes the various types of sacred places and their histories, the current status of preservation efforts and the controversial aspects of each. Individual locales are covered, so pertinent information about the two sacred mountains addressed in my research was useful.

This is a resource that will assist high-school and university level students and teachers in studying and understanding sacred geography and its cultural significance to the world’s religions. Professor Brockman present s the information in a manner that is sensitive and respectful of all major religions and spiritual practices.

***books***

1. LaDuke, Winona*. Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming.* Cambridge: South End Press, 2005. Print.

Winona LaDuke is a graduate of Harvard and Antioch Universities, and a member of the Ojibwa Tribe. She has written extensively on Native American and environmental issues. This book presents an analysis of the sacred, what it means to indigenous people, and how “sacred” is defined in contemporary courts. Also included are interviews with indigenous scholars and tribal elders, which are supported with historical examples and governmental records. LaDuke’s intention is to help non-aboriginals understand the importance and meaning of the sacred. Her approach is obviously not without bias but reinforces the assertion of my topic that desecration of the holy is destructive to indigenous cultures. This is a resource which would appeal to the general public, students, teachers, and policy-makers. It offers a unique and authoritative perspective by an indigenous person who has personally experienced the effects of cultural disintegration within her own tribe. Other resources have offered analysis from an “outsider” position. .

1. Olson, Brad. *Sacred Places Around the World*. San Francisco: CCC Publishing, 2004. Print.

Brad Olson is a travel writer, artist, photographer, producer, and publisher who personally visited over 50 places while writing this book. Although it is presented as a travel guide, the background research offers interesting examples of the many forms of sacred areas on all continents. The contents are arranged according to continent with countries ordered alphabetically. The introduction offers brief discussions of sacred locations and their metaphysical properties, including geomancy, ley lines, and vortexes, which were not broached by other resources evaluated. This alternative approach contributes to an understanding of the richness and complexity of aboriginal culture. A section on sacred peaks includes an examination of each area, a brief history, how the area is regarded by local populations, and travel information for those who want to visit. Full-color photographs of sacred areas are interspersed throughout and give the reader a real sense of the splendor and majesty of the area, as well as an appreciation for the reasons it was designated as a sacred place by the first indigenous inhabitants. Maps and black and white photos also lend visual interest to the text. Written mainly for travelers, this book would be useful for the general public, high-school and undergraduate students. Olsen cautions prospective visitors to be respectful of local customs, regulations, and boundaries and this attitude prevails throughout.

***periodical***

Jena, Manipadma. "India: Indigenous Groups Step Up Protests Over Mining Project." *Global Information Network*: n/a.*ProQuest Research Library.* Feb 23 2010. Web. 28 May 2012.

<http://libproxy.spokanefalls.edu:2058/docview/457547823/fulltext/13706148033371522C3/1?accountid=1587>.

Manipadma Jena is an independent development journalist and communications consultant from eastern India. She specializes in environment, climate change, biodiversity, indigenous people, and is considered an expert on internal Indian affairs.

This article elaborates on the successful efforts of the Dongria Kondh in northern India to intercept an expansion of Vendata Resource’s bauxite mining and refinery operations on Niyam Dongar Hill. This area is the home of the traditional deity of the tribe and provides leaves, bamboo, roots, medicinal herbs, fruits, and palm-tree juice for food and barter. A focus of the article was the deaths and health problems occurring near the present refinery which include respiratory difficulties, skin rashes, and sores. The author presents a brief history of the actions, international protest and litigation surrounding this event, and is written objectively. The Dongria Kondh is one of the specific indigenous tribes in the scope of this topic, so this article provided valuable insight into the well-publicized case of the Dongria.

***academic/scholarly journals***

1. Ornelas, Roxanne T.” Understanding Sacred Lands. *“Great Plains Research17.2 (Fall 2007):* 165-171. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 21 May 2012. <http://libproxy.spokanefalls.edu:2058/docview/755052963?accountid=1587>.

Researching the culture and geographies of indigenous peoples with emphasis in public policy, environment, sacred lands, and human rights is the focus of Roxanne T. Ornelas, who is Assistant Professor of Geography and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Miami University. In this article, Ms. Ornelas examines the protection of indigenous sacred lands in the context of human rights. As an example in the U.S., the Garrison Dam Project in the 1940’s and 1950’s and its’ effect on the native population is discussed. She goes on to explain how the Human Rights and Indigenous Issues Report by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was implemented with the objective of cultural preservation. The article is very useful for an overall explanation of what sacred sites are, how these areas contribute to the cultural identity of indigenous people, and current efforts to protect them*.*

**2.** Glowacka, Maria, Dorothy Washburn, and Justin Richland. "Nuvatukya'ovi, San Francisco Peaks." *Current Anthropology* 50.4 (2009): 547-561. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 30 May 2012

<http://ez.sccd.ctc.edu:2048/login?url>.

Maria Glowaka is an Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Arizona; Dr. Justin B. Richard is Professor of Anthropology and of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago and served as Justice Pro Tempore of the Hopi Appellate Court, the highest court of the Hopi Nation; Dorothy Washburn is an anthropologist well known for her studies of native life in Southwestern North America. Their co-researched article is the most comprehensive discussion of the San Francisco Peaks examined in my evaluation of resources. It outlines the complete history of tribal court challenges in detailed chronological order, presenting complex legal proceedings in a logical and understandable manner. Also included is a thorough examination of Hopi culture cosmology and how tribal attorneys connected it to modern law in the ongoing litigation involving the preservation of the Peaks. This article is intended for undergraduate and graduate level students and researchers.

***BEST INTERNET SOURCES***

1. *Protect Sacred Sites Indigenous People, One Nation.* Protect Sacred Sites, n.d. Web. 21 May 2012.

*<* http://protectsacredsites.org>.

Protect Sacred Sites is a grassroots organization that focuses on protecting sacred lands, stopping desecration of burial grounds and the illegal sale and trade of ancient artifacts and burial items in the United States. This site was a main catalyst for my interest in the topic of aboriginal rights as it relates to religious and spiritual practices. It provides an extensive collection of news articles regarding current legislative efforts, tribal efforts, and status updates on specific threatened areas. The information available would be of value to activists, students, government officials and anyone interested in the topic. Videos and email updates are included. The site is obviously not without bias, and supports the argument of my topic. A photo gallery of indigenous sacred sites is a great addition to the text. Extensive information about the San Francisco Peaks area is available.

*2. Survival for Tribal Peoples,* Survival International, 2012. Web. 30 May 30, 2012. *<*http://www.survivalinternational.org*>.*

Among the objectives listed on the website of Survival International are the protection of tribal lives, lands, and human rights. Survival International is a global non-profit organization whose only focus is tribal or indigenous peoples. This website provided my non-print resource, the documentary *Mine – Story of a Sacred Mountain* annotated below. That video is only one of many available for viewing at this site. The materials are well-narrated and produced, and could be easily understood by any audience, including grade-school students. The Tribes & Campaigns section of the site provides extensive descriptions of tribes worldwide that are considered threatened in some manner. A map and alphabetical listing of countries and tribes is a helpful feature.

This site was a significant contribution toward my understanding of the common elements that unify indigenous beliefs everywhere. By it’s very nature, Survival International has a definite objective and a clearly stated agenda. An interesting page in the site titled “Who are we, who opposes us?” lists extremist religious and conservationist organizations, militaries, corrupt governments and profit-seeking corporations as possible challengers to their cause.

***non-print***

*Mine – Story of a Sacred Mountain*. Lumley, Joanna, narr. Survival International Charitable Trust.2009. Film.

<http://www.survivalinternational.org/films>.

This is a short documentary produced to inform concerned individuals, businesses, and governments about the struggle of the Dongria Kondh tribe in India to prevent Vendata, a London-based mining company from mining bauxite on their traditional lands. Narrated by actress/activist Joanna Lumley and created by Survival International Charitable Trust, a global non-profit working for the rights of indigenous tribes. It relates the tragic effects of bauxite mining and refining on a neighboring tribe and the resulting health, economic and subsistence devastation that almost decimated them. Interviews with tribal leaders, including English sub-titles, comprise most of the film which was released in April 2009. Also covered is the relationship of the Dongria Kondh with Niyamgini, the sacred mountain that has sustained them for thousands of years. The documentary provided an example of how indigenous people successfully fought a huge corporation and preserved their native lands, and encouraged additional research. *Mine-Story of a Sacred Mountain* was intended to educate and solicit support for this specific issue. It was effective in doing so, as it sparked an international outcry against Vendata Mining, and construction of mining roads and the open pit mine on tribal lands was halted immediately. The film was very useful because it provides a great example of an indigenous tribe that was able to preserve its cultural heritage though the preservation of their sacred mountain. One of the most appealing aspects of this video is the cinematography which presents the spectacular geography of the location and details of daily tribal life in a manner that will hold the attention of any audience, including grade-school students (providing that they have the ability to read the English sub-titles that translate the interviews with tribal members.)

Research Process

I first became aware of this issue when listening to a program on National Public Radio called Native America Calling. Klee Benally, a Native American activist was interviewed about his arrest for protesting furture expansion of the Snowbowl Ski Area on the San Francisco Peak area of northern Arizona. I immediately thought of this issue when encouraged to choose a Pathfinder topic that I was passionate about. My initial challenge was to convert what I initially perceived as a regional issue into a global issue Now, after studying and reading I have come to realize that the desecration of sacred areas is happening all over the world.

The most notable change in my research strategy occurred when I became clear on the proper terminology for the population groups I was studying. Becoming familiar with the nuances of LCSH as enabled me to localize my searches and better describe what I was looking for. Another breakthrough was the evolution of my topic statement/question which started as uncontroversial and somewhat boring. Also, the original statement/question did not accurately express my personal viewpoint. After a prompt from the instructor and thoughtful consideration, I changed my statement/topic to include exploitation by corporate interests. I also found that using the terms “sacred sites or areas or lands’ were simply too broad as literally thousands of these places exist. Since my original area of concern was a mountain in Arizona, I elected to limit my topic to sacred mountains specifically, so I have come full-circle in my thought process. . Black Elk, the highly revered spiritual leader of the Oglala Sioux said it this way: “The Power of the World always works in circles and everything in Nature tries to be round”. (Brown)

Another useful exercise was to distill my topic down into three major aspects: sacred places, Dongria Kondh, and San Francisco Peaks. I chose resources that were relevant to each aspect individually and those that enabled me to connect each to the others. I also balanced and distributed my sources so that not all of them correlated to one single aspect of the topic, for example.

Books are my preferred research tools, probably because they are readily accessible and familiar since I have used them for research for many years. However, I did discover many new Internet tools and now that I know how to evaluate websites I am much more comfortable in using them. I was also pleasantly surprised to learn that alternative sources, such as the video I watched on the Dongria Kondh tribe of India can be of immense value. Watching this short documentary really helped me to clearly define the scope of my project by providing an example of successful tribal efforts to protect their sacred mountain. My prayer is that the Navaho, Hopi and other tribes in Arizona will also be able to defend against corporate exploitation of their sacred mountains.

Work Cited:

Brown, Joseph Epes. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1989. Print.