

The Impact of the Military Presence in Hawai'i on the Health of Na Kānaka Maoli

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Abstract

The presence of the United States military on the islands of Hawai'i has affected the health and well-being of Native Hawaiians through large-scale historical processes, most notably Western colonization. This history has been shaped by the takeover of land for the purposes of military and commercial interests. We explore the effects that these interests have had upon the health of Native Hawaiian people, also known as Na Kānaka Maoli. Changes in policy and new program development are needed to improve the current poor health status of Native Hawaiians. In addition, potential avenues of research are proposed to evaluate the effects that the military presence has had upon the indigenous peoples of Hawai'i. (PHD 2007 Vol 14 No 1 pp 205-212)

The History Of the Military in Hawai'i

The process of military takeover for the purpose of economic profit is discussed in this paper. A brief historical overview serves as a logical starting point for understanding the present resources and health outcomes for the Native Hawaiian people, also known as *Na Kānaka Maoli*.

Militarization, commodification of island resources and foreign land ownership characterizes the 19th century in *Ka Pae 'Aina* (the indigenous term for Hawai'i). Captain James Cook and his crew were the first Europeans to come in contact with Hawai'i in 1778.¹ While it is often said that their voyages were driven by the spirit of scientific exploration, Cook was an officer and the HMS Resolution was a military vessel in the British Royal Navy. This makes the first Hawai'i contact a military contact.

Shortly after, Hawai'i became an integral part of trade routes and a source of valuable resources, such as cheap reliable labor and sandalwood. In 1842, President John Tyler and the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs recognized the strategic value of the islands, both in war and commerce, when they declared control of the islands as a "virtual right of conquest."² A small group of *hao'le* (white) businessmen, later referred to as "The

Big Five," exploited the strategic importance of Hawai'i in their pursuit of political and economic power. By the mid to late 1800s, sugar cane was the cornerstone of Hawai'i's economy. The Big Five exerted political influence on the Hawaiian Monarchy to grant exclusive rights to Pearl Harbor, identified as the military "key to the central Pacific Ocean." In exchange, the tariff on importing sugar to America was decreased. The extent of this political influence is seen clearly in the infamous "Bayonet Constitution" of 1886. National protests over the excessive influence of the Big Five resulted in then King Kalākaua's attempt to return political power to the Monarchy. The backlash resulted in a constitution, signed at gunpoint, which ceded most of the sovereign power over to the Big Five.³ The U.S. countered challenges to its client state through military means. When King Kalākaua's successor, Queen Liliu'okalani, attempted to return power to the Kingdom of Hawai'i, U.S. Minister Stevens landed U.S. Navy troops on the shores of *Ka Pae 'Aina* in what was later recognized as an illegal act of war.⁴

The health of *Na Kānaka Maoli* suffered tremendously in the years following European arrival. Infectious diseases became rampant, resulting in death tolls of holocaust proportions. Wave after wave of epidemics were introduced, including tuberculosis, scabies, small pox, measles, leprosy, and typhoid fever. Venereal diseases, previously not seen in *Ka Pae 'Aina*, quickly spread and killed at least 10,000 *Na Kānaka Maoli* over the 20 years after first contact.¹ By 1890, a little over 100 years after the arrival of Captain Cook, the population of

Hawaiians had dwindled from an estimated one million people to 40,000, a 96% decline so devastating that it has been described as a population collapse.^{2,5}(Figure 1) While many see the death toll as an inevitable result of contact, the original purpose of that contact remains a military expedition for the purposes of economic gain. Significantly, the population of all *Na Kānaka Maoli*, both part Hawaiian and pure Hawaiian, was at an all time low in the time following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy in 1893.⁶ It was during this time that the Big Five seized control of Hawai'i with the necessary aid of American naval troops, and subsequently consolidated political control over the islands.⁴ The Big Five occupied the highest political seats in the Republic of Hawai'i, including that of President. Martial law, supported by U.S. military forces, was requested in *Ka Pae 'Aina* from 1893 to 1898 to maintain control of a population opposed to their rule.^{1,2,7}

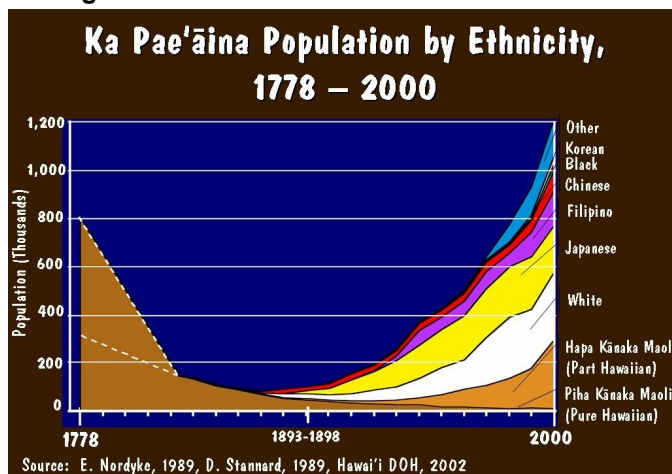
The presence of the American military increased tremendously over the next century, especially following the Spanish-American War. According to scholar and activist, Kyle Kajihiro, construction of a naval base at Pearl Harbor began in 1900, destroying 36 traditional Hawaiian fishponds and transforming what was once a rich food source for O'ahu into a vast naval station. This was soon to be followed by the construction of Fort Shafter, Fort Ruger,

tures on human potential and well-being.⁹ Such violence denies communities and individuals of opportunities to reach their full physical and mental potential. In Hawai'i, structural violence has occurred through the invasion of space, notably military take-over of land. The loss of land, the mounting political presence of the U.S. imposed by military forces, and the dwindling number of Native Hawaiians due to death from disease resulted in the loss of indigenous political autonomy. Thus, expansion of the American empire in the Pacific and Asia¹ via military and commercial interests brought about the loss of lives, political autonomy, and nation for *Na Kānaka Maoli*.

The Military Presence in Hawai'i Today

Currently, *Ka Pae 'Aina* is the most densely militarized state in the nation. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the combined military branches in 2004 include 161 military installations in Hawai'i.¹⁰ Furthermore, the military controls 236,303 acres, or 5.7% of the total land area. On O'ahu, the most densely populated island, the military controls 85,718 acres, or 22.4% of its land. On O'ahu these lands include Pearl Harbor, Schofield Barracks, Hickam Air Force Base, Lualualei Naval Reservation, and the Kane'ohe Marine Corps Air Station. We will show that the occupation of land for military use has resulted in the destruction of the natural environment, the release of dangerous toxins, the destruction of people's homes, and the displacement of people.

Figure 1



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Fort Armstrong, Fort DeRussy, Fort Kamehameha, Fort Weaver and Schofield Barracks. General Macomb wrote "Oahu is to be encircled with a ring of steel."⁸

A fundamental process that affected the mental and physical health of *Na Kānaka Maoli* is structural violence. Johan Galtung defined "structural violence" as the harmful influence of economic and political struc-

The environmental impacts of such widespread presence are far-reaching. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, 2002 rankings of major chemical releases and waste generation, Honolulu County ranks in the top 20% of the "dirtiest/worst counties in the U.S." for total environmental releases.¹¹ Military installations make up five of the top 10 polluters in Hawai'i.¹² More than 798 military contamination sites have been identified by a report prepared for Congress, entitled the 2004 Defense and Restoration Program. Currently, there are three "Superfund" locations¹³ in Honolulu County. "Superfund" is a deceptively benign sounding term for areas that are defined by the significant dangers they impose upon the environment and the population due to abandoned or uncontrolled waste. Two out of the three sites are associated with the U.S. military, including the U.S. Pacific Command Naval Computer and Telecommunications area, and the Pearl Harbor Naval Complex.

Numerous additional examples of military negligence in the treatment of toxic substances exist. These include but are not limited to the following.

Military contamination hazards, such as unexploded ordnance,¹⁴ various types of fuels and petroleum products; organic solvents such as perchloroethylene and trichloroethylene; dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB); explosives and propellants such as cyclotrimethylenetrinitramine (RDX), trinitrotoluene (TNT), octogen (HMX) and perchlorate; heavy metals such as lead and mercury; napalm, chemical weapons, and radioactive waste from nuclear powered ships, and Cobalt 60, a radioactive waste product from nuclear-powered ships, have been found in sediment at Pearl Harbor. Between 1964 and 1978, 4,843,000 gallons of low-level radioactive waste was discharged into Pearl Harbor.⁸

The complete magnitude and prevalence of environmental toxicity is unknown because the routine monitoring of toxins and any correlating effects upon health is not required.¹⁵ The information cited above is from areas already designated as sites for cleanup response and likely represents only the tip of the iceberg.

Nevertheless, military bases in Hawai'i continue to expand because Hawai'i is home to Pacific Command, the command center for U.S. military operations for half of the globe.¹⁶ Its outposts include bases in the Marshall Islands, Guam, Okinawa, Japan, and Korea. According to the U.S. military, bases are built for the purpose of "defense" in the event of violent struggle with other nations. However, military dominance also protects and enables commercial interests. The most direct example is the armaments industry, a business worth \$200 billion worldwide.¹⁷

The Health of Native Hawaiians

European contact has had a devastating effect upon *Na Kānaka Maoli*. Although the disease processes have changed, epidemiological data show *Na Kānaka Maoli* continue to experience significant health disparities. Native Hawaiians represent 22% of Hawai'i's population.¹⁸ Compared to all other ethnic groups in Hawai'i, *Na Kānaka Maoli* have the highest prevalence rates for chronic diseases, such as obesity (69%) and asthma (33%), and when adjusted for age, among the highest rates of cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.¹⁹ The rate of deaths due to cancer and heart disease are also highest when compared to other

ethnic groups in Hawai'i. The prevalence of high risk behaviors such as smoking, substance abuse, and violent behavior are higher than the general population and have been identified by *Na Kānaka Maoli* as significant problems facing the Native Hawaiian community today.²⁰ Not surprisingly, *Na Kānaka Maoli* die at younger ages than Hawai'i residents in other ethnic groups.¹⁹

Low education level, working class job status, and low income correlates with poor health status.²¹ We argue that the military presence in Hawai'i has played a significant role in the loss of political autonomy, access to land, and therefore healthy food sources for *Na Kānaka Maoli*. Furthermore, previously healthy lifestyles have been replaced by toxic activities with unknown and unstudied health ramifications. Therefore, the resultant poor health status of the indigenous people of *Ka Pae 'Aina* is a form of structural violence.

Mākua Valley: A Living History

The history of Mākua Valley is a striking example of the history of *Ka Pae 'Aina* and the complex relationship between the islands and the U.S. military. At the time of European contact a vital community existed, based upon *ahupua'a*, the traditional pie-shaped land division extending from the mountain to the sea on the western coast of the island of O'ahu. The infrastructure included sacred sites, rich fishing ponds, irrigation, schools for specialized training, and agriculture designed to be almost completely self-sustaining.⁷

Figure 2



View of Mākua Military Reservation from Farrington Hwy. Photo Courtesy of Ed Greevy

In 1929, the U.S. Army began to acquire parcels of land for the purposes of military training. The strategic importance of Mākua valley (see Figures 2 and 3) increased following World War II, and the army eventually seized more than 4,000 acres for the purpose of training operations.²² The injustices associated with this land seizure are apparent in a lease granting the Army rights to 1,500 acres for a mere \$1 a year.²³ Over the next 70 years, the people of Mākua were repeatedly

and forcibly removed from the valley in a cycle of dispossession and reclamation. From 1848 to the present, Mākua residents have been displaced more than six times, a figure which includes only the major land clearances.^{24,25}

The most recent major land clearance took place on June 18, 1996. At the time, the community at Mākua was

comprised of approximately 60 families and 282 people who built *hale* (homes) and created their own form of self-governance. The residents could be defined as homeless, because all were indigent and living in a village that existed outside of the boundaries of western land ownership. In a population comprised of the dispossessed, 83% of the population were *Na Kānaka Maoli*, many of whom represented generations of displaced Mākua residents.²⁶ The village exemplified the current living conditions of many of the indigenous people of Hawai'i.

Homeless vs. Houseless

Though severely compromised by generations of colonization, depopulation, and westernization, *Kānaka Maoli* cultural values provided inspiration to survive in Mākua, where living conditions were extremely difficult. Scant rainfall, almost constant exposure to the sun, infrastructure damaging ocean winds, lack of electricity, almost no access to potable water, no real sewage system, and frequent harassment by local authorities were conditions that defined their daily life. Sparky, a former resident, described the community as consisting of Hawaiians who practiced a "traditional lifestyle," symbolizing the resilience of the Hawaiian culture in the face of oppression and injustice.²⁷ Many of the villagers resisted the term "homeless," and instead redefined themselves as "houseless." "We're not homeless," stated another resident. "We're Hawaiians. Before the word 'homeless' they called us squatters. But let's go even further back. Before that it was Hawaiian lifestyle."²⁸ In traditional times, *Na Kānaka Maoli* had access to *pu'uhonua*, or place of refuge, in times of trouble. Due to the loss of a land base, Native Hawaiians no longer have access to places of refuge. Despite significantly adverse conditions, the people of Mākua created a sanctuary, drawing upon the traditional concept of *pu'uhonua*. As

one resident described, Mākua served as a safe place for "healing our past of torment and destruction."²⁵

With no outside funding or social support from the wider population, an intertwined community of governance, agriculture, fishing, and self-protection evolved which was arguably more successful at dealing with issues of malnutrition, familial instability, hygiene, shelter, and substance abuse cessation, than many government-sanctioned programs (see Figure 4). Unfortunately, all public health efforts focused upon transferring the residents of Mākua to state and federal programs, and little data was collected on the effectiveness of their own interventions. Not only had the residents identified their own needs, but they also did the work necessary to address these own concerns. Community-initiated programs, such as those seen at Mākua, are often less expensive, have more inherent loyalty by participants, and maintain more cultural relevance. More importantly, they empower their creators to reclaim a feeling of being active participants in

their own destiny. Instead of the world simply acting upon them, they had the power to act upon the world. Contemporary clinical discourse on empowering patients and clients often fails to recognize that community members are engaged in this constructive and challenging process themselves.

The effectiveness of culturally-based interventions in the healing of *Na Kānaka Maoli* has been well established.^{29,31} Of note, such interventions require a stable land base with access to an abundant supply of clean water in order to provide the means to cultivate and harvest traditional food sources. As noted above, Pearl Harbor is a striking example of how a source of healthy food in the form of traditional aquaculture has been replaced by a toxic military site.

The stated purpose of the 1996 Mākua eviction was to clear the area for public use.²⁵ However, it was no coincidence that the land clearance occurred at a time when the need for military training sites became a priority.²¹ To this day, the U.S. Army continues to utilize Mākua Military Reservation and their activity has resulted in significant damage to the valley. Damage

Figure 3



Truck filled with explosives at Mākua Military Reservation, 1996. Photo courtesy of Ed Greevy.

includes but is not limited to numerous disastrous fires. The most recent example was in the summer of 2003. The fire, deliberately set by the Army, was meant to clear 900 acres of land. Due to a shift of wind, the fire raged out of control burning 2,100 acres and destroying many of the remaining sacred sites in the valley.³² In Mākua Valley, the homes and communities have been burned repeatedly, both literally and figuratively.

In 2004, the Hawai'i State Legislature passed Act 50, banning people from living on all beaches and public parks. The act calls for arrest, a \$1,000 fine and/or 30 days in jail if the banned individual returns to the location of their citation within a year.³³ The Act has effectively prevented the return of the Mākua community, and has served as another step in the criminalization of homelessness in the islands.

Mākua Valley is not an isolated incident of the ongoing separation of *Na Kānaka Maoli* from a land base. The transfer of land to foreign interests and unkept promises to return land continues to

this day. During Hawai'i's Statehood Act, two million acres of land were reserved for Native Hawaiians and thousands were promised homestead awards. Today, 45 years after statehood, an estimated 30,000 have died while waiting for their land, and approximately 22,000 Hawaiians remain on the waiting list.³⁴ Next, we will explore the effects that the proposed military expansion in *Ka Pae 'Aina*, the Stryker Brigade, may have upon the islands.

The Stryker Brigade

The presence of the military in *Ka Pae 'Aina* is part of a global dynamic. The control of extensive land masses in the Pacific as sites for military training, storage, and testing³⁵ is particularly pertinent to current international politics, such as the ongoing war in Iraq and tension with North Korea. The tragedy lies not only in the historical dispossession of *Ka Pae 'Aina*, but also in the fact that Hawai'i is now part of an empire, serving as a location for soldiers drawn from working class communities all over the U.S. At the crux of a global stratagem, the militarization of *Ka Pae 'Aina* is a base for further injustice and dispossession throughout the world.

The pattern continues with the July 2004 approval for a Stryker Brigade on the islands of O'ahu and Hawai'i. Strykers are 20-ton light armored combat vehicles designed for rapid deployment in an urban setting. A new squadron of C-17 cargo aircraft, plus 291 vehicles along with new high-speed attack ships will be stationed to provide transport for this brigade. Army plans call for further U.S. military acquisition of 1,400 acres of land on O'ahu in addition to 23,000 acres on the island of Hawai'i. Costs are estimated at \$1.5 billion.³⁶ The construction threatens to take more land and natural resources from *Na Kānaka Maoli*.

Figure 4



Young boy living at Makua, 1996. Photo courtesy of Ed Greevy.

Environmental hazards and health risks include the release of particulate matter, volatile organic compounds and metals into the air, the contamination of groundwater resources from munitions, fuel and support facilities, the risk of range fires, and the destruction of habitat and ecosystems.^{15,35} *Na Kānaka Maoli* suffer from disproportionate rates of asthma. The significant amount of particulate

matter generated will disproportionately affect those who suffer from this respiratory ailment. Environmental damage that disproportionately affects the poor and communities of color is called environmental racism.

The Stryker Brigade will also ultimately increase risk to civilians globally. Unlike most other military brigades, designed for environments such as the jungle or the desert, the Stryker Brigade was primarily designed as an urban assault vehicle. Around the world, civilians are often killed in counter-insurgency operations;³⁷ these fatalities will inevitably increase when warfare is practiced in heavily populated urban centers. The examples of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina³⁸ and the announced plans for the use of the military to enforce quarantine in the event of an avian influenza pandemic,³⁹ are symptomatic of the increasingly domestic use of the military. Residents of the U.S. must critically address the potential for harm imposed by such military training and technology, both globally and domestically.

Recommendations

Structural violence has impacted the health of *Na Kānaka Maoli* through historical and political processes.

Addressing the health of *Na Kānaka Maoli* necessitates action on multiple levels, including policy reform, program development, and much needed research.

Policy

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People states that the deprivation of *Na Kānaka Maoli* nationality and the theft of land represent human rights violations. In the process of self-determination, all indigenous people should rightfully and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development.⁴⁰ Therefore, land repatriation, education, medical, and social services for *Na Kānaka Maoli* should be prioritized. We recommend halting further military expansion in Hawai'i while the health effects of the military presence is investigated. The historical effects have been of such magnitude and devastation to *Na Kānaka Maoli*, that we also recommend the cessation of the global deployment of soldiers and arms based in Hawai'i. The concern is to prevent globally the negative repercussions that have occurred locally.

Program Development

Effective public health programs must be culturally appropriate, relevant, community-based, and sustainable. A key strategy would be to identify community created systems that seek to redefine healthy alternatives. The residents of Mākuā Beach organized themselves to form a self-governing community, and tried to establish an officially recognized *pu'uhonua* (place of refuge) for houseless residents of Hawai'i. If a community were to arise, that had self-initiated systems, which addressed their own needs, such processes should be identified and evaluated for effectiveness. If they are found to be effective, we should then lend our resources, education, and expertise to support such approaches. At the very least, we must defend such communities from destruction, and identify and discontinue policies, such as Act 50, that inhibit growth and survival.

Future Research

The health effects of the military in Hawai'i have been inadequately researched. Initial efforts should include a detailed catalogue of all the major toxins that have historically been discharged into the air, water, and land of *Ka Pae 'Aina*. Routine monitoring of common toxins produced by military activity should be required. An entity funded by the U.S. government, but comprised of researchers mutually chosen by the community, needs to be created. In addition, all known toxic sites, in particular those designated to be Superfund sites, need a comprehensive environmental study. Also an in-depth

evaluation of the health status of the residents in the surrounding areas should be undertaken. Such a study would have to take into account time spent in the area, water source, habits such as fishing in contaminated waters, and age of residents, to assess degree of exposure. Ethnicity and income should be taken into account as historically, toxic exposure has been seen disproportionately among the poor and people of color.

Evaluating the effects of the military and dispossession of land on the current poor health of *Na Kānaka Maoli* will be a challenge. Another potential avenue of research would be to perform a genealogical survey of a population that has been removed (e.g. Mākuā), and evaluate the rate of disease among their descendants. The rates would then have to be compared against not only that of the general population of all Native Hawaiians, but also those *Na Kānaka Maoli* who have had a history of a stable land base for generations. The latter would be very difficult to find, as very few populations exist in *Ka Pae 'Aina* that have not been removed from their ancestral base.

Policy changes, program development, and research can be made possible by reallocating funds away from such projects as the \$1.5 billion appropriated for the

Stryker Brigade.

Glossary of Hawaiian Terms

ahupua'a: traditional land division extending from the mountain to the sea

'aina: earth/land

haole: originally, foreigner; current usage, of Caucasian ancestry

Ka Pae 'Aina: the traditional name for Hawai'i, used prior to Western contact. The literal translation is a group of islands or archipelago. Also seen referred to as *Ka Pae'aina O Ka Moananui*, referring to Hawai'i's connection to all of Oceania.

Kānaka Maoli: Native Hawaiian

na: makes the noun that follows, plural

pu'uhonua: places of refuge in traditional times, where people could go in times of trouble and find safety

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