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Traumatic Consequences in Native Hawaiians After Colonization

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Introduction

The Native Hawaiians are a marginalized group, like many other Indigenous populations, who have experienced heightened trauma due to their long history of colonization, the loss of their culture and land, and an extreme rate of growing homelessness. As a result of this trauma, many Native Hawaiians are left questioning what it means to be Hawaiian.

According to the federal government, to qualify as Native Hawaiian, a person must demonstrate “not less than one-half part of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands previous to 1778” (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2023). In other words, they must have a blood quantum of at least 50% Hawaiian. Those who are above this quantity qualify as Native Hawaiians and are therefore allowed to apply for homestead lands or Hawaiian land. Differing from the federal level, the state requires people to verify that they have ancestors who were living in Hawai’i before Captain Cook arrived in 1778 to receive benefits (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2023). State-level benefits include application access to the Kamehameha school system and welfare funds. On a cultural level, Native Hawaiians define themselves according to their *mo’okū’auhau*, or genealogy. This means that they depend on their ancestors to determine whether or not they’re Hawaiian, not blood quantity. In their eyes, it does not matter whether one is 100% Hawaiian or 1% Native Hawaiian, only that one realizes where and who they come from generationally.

The decline in Native Hawaiians across all definitions is tremendous. Today less than 5% of Native Hawaiians are 100% Native and in 2020, the last census recorded only 21.8% of Hawai’i’s inhabitants as being Native Hawaiian (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2023). In addition to the amount of Native Hawaiian people dissipating, the culture and traditions of these Native people are also disappearing. There might be a stronger formulation contributing to this issue

like the exploitation of land and appropriation of culture which work together to contribute to the historical trauma that these people have undergone. Together, historical trauma and cultural expropriation contribute to three significant social problems among Native Hawaiians; homelessness rates, substance abuse rates, and overall feelings of disempowerment.

This paper examines these social issues as the long-term effects of colonization on Native Hawaiians. To do this, I gathered sources and analyzed each of them to see what information I could collect. I also analyzed qualitative data and quantitative data to understand how the otherization of this important group has historically manifested and how it's currently seen while additionally instilling a sense of historical empathy in audiences looking to learn more about this topic. I argue through this paper that imperialism and white supremacy have continually perpetuated the "othering" of Native Hawaiians. It is imperative to note that while the traumatic effects felt by this Indigenous population is a detrimental process that has consistently occurred since the 1700s and is being fixed in many aspects, there are still many others that need attention and potential solutions. The colonization and continual othering of Native Hawaiians since 1778 in Hawai'i has resulted in traumatic consequences displayed by substance abuse data, rising rates of homelessness, and overall feelings of disempowerment, leaving many Native Hawaiians without hope for their people, their culture, and their land.

Background/history of colonization

The history of colonization in Native Hawai'i can be traced back to the 1700s. In January of 1778, James Cook, a British explorer and navigator, sailed around Hawai'i and landed in Waimea, on the island of Kaua'i (Onion, 2022). He called it the Sandwich Islands and from then on, Europe's ties to Hawai'i were cemented. Eventually, Cook was killed by the Hawaiians after he and his men shot a lesser chief to death. However, the connection between the Hawaiian

islands and the rest of the world remained constant. This continued in the 1800s when American



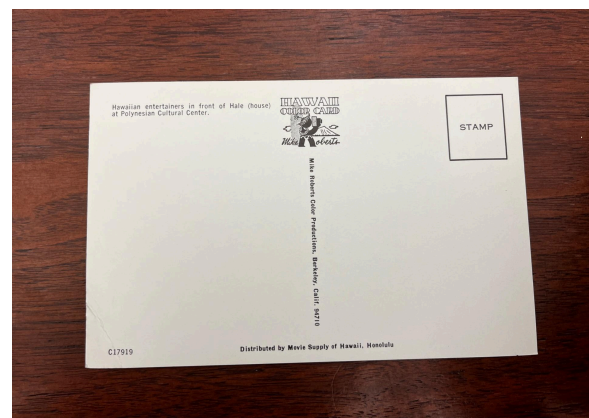
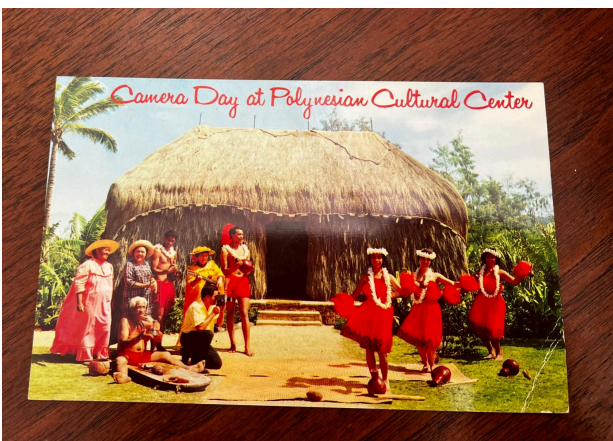
sailors heard tales of “half-naked savages” in Hawai’i and decided to send Protestant missionaries to preach the word of God (Onion, 2022). In 1820, the first missionaries were sent to Kauai. Entirely supported by the Protestant church, they proceeded to teach the Hawaiians the English language through the way of the gospel. ¹

The Protestant continued until 1852 when the American church withdrew its funding. Believing that it was in his people’s best interest, King Kamehameha III sold the missionaries Hawaiian land at a lower price so that they would stay and continue to “help” his people. But once King Kamehameha III sold the land to the missionaries, the missionaries then required land buyers to prove that they were using the land to earn a living, and only then would there be a deliberation to decide whether the potential buyer could have legal ownership over the land (Rowe, 2020). However, missed deadlines and payment issues caused many of the Native

¹ Image 1: Captain James Cook and his men battle the Native Hawaiians after arriving to the islands.

Hawaiians to lose their land, which resulted in them only being able to keep 1% of their *'aina*, or land (Rowe, 2020). From then on, Native Hawaiians have continually tried to take back their land, but it has proven to be very difficult. This push-and-pull process has been extremely detrimental to the Native Hawaiians' sense of culture because a core belief of these people is that it is their responsibility to protect and care for their *'aina*, or land. Consequently, many Native Hawaiians were forced to leave and the remaining population was coerced into contending with the choice of paying high housing prices or being forced out onto the streets. Those who could afford to leave moved off of the islands to the mainland to places like California or Nevada, which were significantly cheaper.

At the beginning of this process, there were about 300,000 Hawaiians (Smithsonian, 2007). When the Western travelers began going back and forth between Europe and the islands, they brought diseases with them that quickly infected the Native populations. By 1853, the population of Hawaiians dwindled to 70,000 (Smithsonian, 2007). Even so, missionaries and other Europeans took the remaining people and slowly began to eradicate the Native language and Hawaiian traditions like hula dancing because it seemed to promote spiritual views that



contradicted their own. This forced Native Hawaiians to teach their people these customs in

private, and those who were caught by the government were arrested. Due to this newfound mandated discretion, these traditions suffered a tremendous decrease in prevalence, popularity, and documentation. This erasure would fuel the future battle between Natives and foreigners to take back their land and culture, persisting for years to come. Today, hula dancing and the Hawaiian language are only two examples of Hawaiian culture being used as a way to attract tourists and make money. Words like “*Aloha*” or “*Mahalo*” are printed on clothing, signs, and other memorabilia for tourists to memorialize their time on the islands. Hula dancing performances are put on at luaus, corporate events, and tourist attractions to gather visitors and donations. Hawai’i has been made into a money-making scheme and aspects of its beautiful culture and traditions have been utilized to continue the cyclical process of exploitation tourism.

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Additionally, while tourism accounts for many of the ways Hawai’i has been taken



advantage of, so have the businesses and institutions that have been established throughout the years. When the missionaries proceeded to increase their presence in Hawai’i, they did so by establishing plantations and companies that would control Native land for years to come. The

² Image 2/3: This postcard from the LMU special archives depicts the plantations on the islands that Europeans created.

industrialization and urbanization of the islands are shown in postcards collected by the Loyola Marymount University Department of Archives and Special Collections. These postcards show the multitudes of buildings and hotels and the amount of land turned into sugar cane and pineapple plantations (LMU Special Archives, Postcard Box H-10, 2022). The postcard depicts workers farming the main products of the islands: pineapples and sugar cane (LMU Special Archives, Postcard Box H-10, 2022). These products contributed to the money that flowed in and out of the island and added to the tourism that has grown over the years. The Dole plantation is one of the biggest sources of money, bringing in 6.5 billion dollars every year (Public Broadcasting Service, 2022). This plantation, which also doubles as a tourist attraction, exemplifies how the government has taken a natural resource of the island and turned it into a source of income and a way to increase tourism. Westerners have taken traditional practices of farming and cultivating lands, which also have spiritual ties ingrained in them for the Native Hawaiians, and have industrialized them to mass produce items from the islands for economic trade.

In the 1960s, over 1.7 million people visited Hawaii, and today, more than 6 million tourists visit the islands each year (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2022). This number has drastically increased and continues to grow each year, causing the island to become more crowded and for much of the land to be built up and therefore destroyed to accommodate the growing amount of people who travel to the islands. This is seen through hotels, timeshares, Airbnb, and other rentals, which also drive up housing costs for Hawaiians.

The land, or *'aina* of Hawaii, believed to be given to the Native Hawaiians by the gods to be protected and cared for, has been industrialized considerably since the 1700s, which has contributed to a vast number of problems. As displayed by its history, colonization has taken the

land, culture, and traditions of Hawai'i since 1778 and has invoked the prostitution of its natural beauty as well as perpetuating the immoral *otherness* of its Native people. This has led to many experiences of trauma, specifically historical trauma, among the Native Hawaiians, which has also contributed to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Traumatic consequences

The continual othering of Native Hawaiian people has led to substantial post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is also attributed to a long-lasting sense of unresolved grief and unresolved historical trauma. Indigenous people like Native Hawaiians tend to experience trauma directly correlated to the long-standing history of systemic oppression from colonizers and foreigners attempting to impose assimilation for economic gain and systematic power. Trauma according to the American Psychological Association (APA) is “an emotional response to a terrible event” and can be seen in long-term effects like unpredictable emotions, strained relationships, and a sense of helplessness (DeAngelis, 2019). There are various types of trauma, but the three most often seen and assessed are acute trauma, chronic trauma, and complex trauma. Acute trauma is from a single incident; chronic trauma is repeated and prolonged; and complex trauma is exposure to multiple traumatic events (DeAngelis, 2019). These can appear in different ways but the type of trauma seen most persistently in experiences of colonization is historical trauma.

Historical trauma is “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Nahulu et. al., 2023). “For Indigenous peoples, land dispossession, forced relocation, epidemics, and forced assimilation and sterilization are just some examples of the collective losses they have experienced over time” which results in “substance abuse, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem,

anger, and suicidal thinking” (Nahulu, 2023). This is an issue to be aware of, especially considering the growing displacement of Native Hawaiians. Later generations may also feel survivor’s guilt and interpret any moment of happiness or joy as a betrayal of their ancestors’ suffering (DeAngelis, 2019). This is similarly seen in those who have experienced enslavement, the Holocaust, or other forms of violent colonization. Native Hawaiians, like other Indigenous communities, are a population that falls into the group of those victimized by violent colonization. It is important to note that historical trauma doesn’t just have to be a result of historical genocide and does exist through forms of structural violence that are “limitations placed on groups of people by society that stop them from achieving basic needs and a quality of life that would otherwise be possible” (DeAngelis, 2019). In Hawai’i, this can be seen through examples of classism, educational disparities, and even a general disregard for Native people.

When people undergo any experience of trauma, they may develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. PTSD is defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as a disorder that develops after experiencing or witnessing a “scary, shocking, terrifying, or dangerous event” and is characterized by feelings of intense distress or fear (DeAngelis, 2019). While PTSD usually appears 3-6 months after a traumatic event, descendants of those who have experienced a traumatic event may also experience symptoms of PTSD. This can be observed both biologically through the passage of genetics due to cellular memory and psychologically through the transference of historical memories (DeAngelis, 2019). Those who have personally experienced trauma or whose ancestors have undergone trauma are at an increased risk for PTSD symptoms. Native Hawaiians may experience PTSD as a consequence of the historical trauma of colonization,, which is related to the rates of homelessness and

substance abuse in Hawai'i as well as the general feelings of disempowerment and loss of identity that many Native Hawaiians may feel.

Rising rates of homelessness

Hawai'i has a growing epidemic of homelessness that has increasingly gotten worse over the years. Over time, a lack of land accompanied by extreme housing costs has forced many Native Hawaiians out onto the streets, contributing to the high rate of homelessness in Hawaii. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defined the unsheltered homeless as “people with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground” (Gray, 2020). The islands of Hawai'i have the fourth highest rate of homelessness in the nation per capita behind states like California and Washington D.C., which are substantially larger in population size.

A PIT count done on March 9, 2022, found just under 4,000 people experiencing homelessness on Oahu, compared to the population of 905,000 people who live on the island as a whole (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2022). A PIT count or Point in Time Count is an “annual street and shelter count that determines the number of people experiencing homelessness on O'ahu on a single night in January” (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2022). It is essential to note that this count was done in March instead of January due to Covid 19. The data is also from 2022 instead of 2023 because the final count from 2023 has not been released yet. Of the 4,000 individuals identified, 52% identified NHPI as part of their only race or part of their multiracial identity, and 81% of multiracial individuals indicated having NHPI as part of their racial background” (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2022). NHPI stands for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander and includes people who have origins in any of the original

peoples of Hawai'i, Guam, Samoa, Tonga, Micronesia, or other Pacific islands. This means that over 50% of people identified as experiencing homelessness were also part of a minoritized group. While it is important to note that this study was done during the immediate aftereffects of a pandemic where many people lost their jobs and were then forced out of their homes due to an inability to pay, this number further demonstrates the underfunding of substantial resources for marginalized or colonized people.

To emphasize how drastic this problem is, in 2020, Hawai'i existed as the state with the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the nation (Morishige, 2020). Homelessness in Hawai'i can be attributed to rising housing costs, land being taken for military and cooperation purposes, and an overall assertion of capitalization. The military presence in Hawai'i accounts for 5% of the total land, or 200,000 acres (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2023). However, this doesn't account for military housing which is provided for soldiers and their families. Hawai'i is the most expensive state in the nation in terms of housing (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2023). These rising rates in housing costs force people from their homes and out onto the streets. Fewer than one in three households can afford the typical single-family home (Continuum of Care (COC) program, 2023). This means that those who are unable to pay the high housing costs must find alternative ways of housing. In addition, there are a large number of homes where the owners are not full-time residents. These are often vacation rentals or Airbnb, but they are not lived in full-time. This extenuates the tourism industry and makes the housing stock more expensive as well as the taxes set on neighboring houses. Consequently, Native Hawaiians are either forced to contend with the high housing prices and related issues or move out of their houses. Native Hawaiians are often forced out onto the street where they experience an increase in PTSD and trauma-related substance abuse.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse in Hawai'i is also a substantial problem that can be linked to colonization. The men who were part of Captain Cook's group introduced alcohol to the Native Hawaiians when they arrived (Onion, 2022). They did this by distilling a rough essence of beer to the people. This process was also done with other substances as more people arrived in Hawaii. Colonization brought a host of problems separate from the influx of people, including harmful diseases, money-making schemes, and illicit substances. This introduction of substances combined with the already harmful effects of colonization has led to an enhanced proclivity to substance abuse for minoritized groups. A study done on Native Hawaiian college students in 2016 found that "thoughts, knowledge, or experience associated with historical trauma may enhance substance use behavior due to increased perceived discrimination" (Pokhrel et. al., 2016). This study examined substances like cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana among 128 Native Hawaiian community college students. While there is not a lot of research on perceived discrimination felt by Native Hawaiians, it has been shown that substance abuse rates are higher in Hawai'i among Native Hawaiian youth compared to Hawaiian youth (Pokrel et. al., 2016). This may be a result of historical trauma being a significant stressor that is linked to enhanced rates of substance abuse (Pokhrel et. al., 2016).

Additionally, while there is a large amount of alcohol abuse, there is also a large amount of drug abuse in Hawaii. Crystal meth (or "ice") was abused heavily in Hawaii, especially in several communities on the island of Oahu. In the 1980s, Hawai'i existed as the ice capital of America. During the time of the first accounts of ice in the 1960s, this drug was prevalent among white (Caucasian) people (Laidler, K.A. & Morgan, P., 1997). It wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that this drug became common to other ethnic groups in Hawaii. Today, the majority of

those admitted to treatment centers are Native Hawaiian and white (Laidler, K.A. & Morgan, P., 1997).

Substance abuse rates are higher among those who are impoverished, homeless, or both (Pokrel et al., 2016). These aspects culminate in an enhanced level of trauma or symptoms of PTSD. When Native Hawaiians who are homeless are on the street and forced to watch their islands being mutilated by tourists, feelings of hopelessness and discontent, which are consistent with trauma, fester. This resentment and potential survivor's guilt pushes them to find security and release through the usage of substances. However, due to the addictiveness of the substance, this seemingly helpful escape fuels the process of abuse.

Disempowerment

Due to a long history of continuous oppression, there is an enormous level of trauma that is associated with feeling disempowered due to the perceived loss of identity. Feelings of lost identity come from the question of what it means to be Native Hawaiian. As mentioned previously, federal law requires a 50% blood quantum for Native Hawaiians to qualify for homestead lands. In 1920, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole attempted to lower the blood quantity to extend the benefits to more people. However, Congress denied the request so that they would maintain control. This was a "colonial tactic of erasure" with the idea that years of dilution would eventually rid the world of a Hawaiian race (Momona, 2022). While this meant a lack of accessibility for those who were unable to meet this requirement and therefore qualify for land, it also created a strict definition of what it means to be Hawaiian. Rigidly confining the definition of one's Hawaiian background to blood quantity leads to confusion about identity, which also correlates to a sense of disempowerment. The consequences of this form of violence result in feelings of lesser self-worth, anxiety, and an increased sense of helplessness (Avalos,

2021). For example, it leaves those who may be 49% or 10% Hawaiian as well, as those who have had family in Hawaii for decades but aren't Hawaiian by blood, questioning where they fit in or if they even do. This way of defining one's race was originally a tactic by the government but has transitioned into a way of creating a platform for ostracization. Additionally, it leaves Native Hawaiians feeling more helpless when they are unable to qualify for resources. This inability coupled with the high costs of housing forces these people out of the islands, emphasizing their sense of disconnect, or onto the streets where they may be drawn to substances or other dangerous coping mechanisms.

However, for those who are Hawaiian or knowledgeable about Hawaiian culture, one's ability to be considered Native isn't measurable by blood. It is instead connected to *mo'okū'au* or genealogy. It is acknowledged that Native Hawaiians wouldn't be here without their ancestors and that is the only way to know whether one is Native Hawaiian or not. While this may seem very generalized and opaque, it is a belief that one's Hawaiian background is memorized and passed down through generations. "Blood does not determine race," which is especially important to remember when discussing how to fix issues connected to trauma from loss of culture and identity (Momona, 2022). While this isn't a concrete solution to fixing the governmental tactics of ostracization, it is a way of quelling the fears and feelings of loss among the Native people. It helps them to remember that they are a community and they are Hawaiian. This unifying tie allows Native Hawaiians to remember who and what they are fighting for when attempting to find solutions for the effects of colonization.

What can be done?

While many people and foundations are working to fix these issues, there is always more to be done. First and foremost, more research is needed. Most, if not all, sources used

emphasized the need for more research in this field. When discussing Native Hawaiians as an identification, they are often grouped under the bracket of Asian Americans or Pacific islanders. There needs to be more studies focused on the specific effects of colonization on Native Hawaiian people. Additionally, when marginalized indigenous groups are discussed, Native Americans are immediately thought of which actively erases the existence and experience of Native Hawaiians. This act also contributes to the perceived loss of identity many Hawaiians feel because they don't feel like their culture is recognized or acknowledged. For example, in the PIT count discussed above, Native Hawaiians fall under the category of NHPI which is Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander. While here, they are mentioned individually, they are still grouped with the term Pacific Islanders which encompasses multiple islander populations. Therefore, there is a lack of research and knowledge about the experiences of Native Hawaiians. This needs to change especially when working to find a solution for the consequences of the othering of these people. This is not a problem that is going to disappear easily, but by working to realize and understand what has happened historically and by actively creating change for the future, progress is achievable.



However, this notion brings about the question of *how* to move forward and what people can do themselves, as these institutional problems are unable to be solved by a single visitor or non-Native. Historical trauma is not an easy issue to tackle; before addressing historical trauma it

is important to note that the healing process is relational. Healing calls for people to re-establish relationships with themselves, their ancestry, and their culture. This is with the intention of having people process the grief of past traumas and hopefully create new historical narratives. However, this is easier said than done, especially when many anti-colonial groups in Hawai'i believe that the only solution to healing historical trauma is to eradicate tourism as a whole and return all of the land to its original owners. They also tend to idealize the notion that foreigners shouldn't be welcomed anymore and that the land should be utilized in the traditional ways of farming and cultivation. This is demonstrated by signs and stickers seen in Hawaii that say "defend Hawai'i" pictured with guns around it or by protest signs declaring messages like "keep Hawai'i lands in Hawaiian hands" or "this is not America" (Momona, 2022). These messages



emphasize their want to rid the island of tourism and to return the land to its rightful owners, the Hawaiians. They believe that nothing positive has come from these foreign visitors and that everyone would be better off without them. ³⁴

However, this seemingly radical idea is not a sufficient answer. Allowing only Native Hawaiians onto the land would mean that the majority of the population would disappear. As mentioned previously, there is only a small minority of Native Hawaiians due to the history of colonization and interracial marriage that has occurred. Forcing those who are not considered

³ Image 4: Hawaiian locals hold up signs telling tourists to leave the islands.

⁴ Image 5: A sign promoting a popular saying is held up by Hawaiian protestors.

Native Hawaiians by blood to leave would be harmful because many of those whose ancestors have lived on the island for years and who have established homes and cultural roots would also experience a loss of belonging, reinforcing a cycle of grief and displacement. This brings us back to the debate about who is considered to be Hawaiian. There are many people whose ancestors/family have spent years in Hawaii and who have established long-lasting ties to the island and its people. Alternatively, there are Hawaiians who are Native by blood even if they haven't lived on the island. Additionally, Hawaii's inhabitants heavily depend on the tourism market. Ridding the islands of one of its lead money-making sources would detrimentally harm its people and the islands as a whole. While it is not ideal, tourism and those who are not Native to the island are necessary to keep the island active. Keeping this in mind helps activists and inhabitants consider other ways to keep tradition and culture alive like granting more land to Native Hawaiian communities without a low blood quantity restriction. Another alternative would be constructing buildings with a prominent acknowledgment and addressment of the Native Hawaiian land. This is essential especially when it comes to places that have been destroyed and are in the process of being rebuilt.

Conclusion

The Native Hawaiians are an Indigenous group that has suffered the consequences of colonization including enhanced rates of homelessness, substance abuse, and an overall sense of disempowerment. This paper explain these factors while also instilling a call to action. While this has continued since the 1700s, it is an issue with consequences still existing today. Through this paper, it is vital to know that more research is needed, and while many are working to begin the healing process for those affected, there is still much to be done. The Native Hawaiians, like

many other Indigenous populations, have had their land and culture taken from them. It is imperative that this is acknowledged and that changes are made.

Epilogue

At the beginning of August 2023, a wildfire wiped across the island of Maui destroying the town of Lahaina and leaving many without homes, especially many Native Hawaiians. More than 97 lives were lost, and 2,207 buildings were destroyed (National Public Radio (NPR), 2023). The rebuilding of this town and many of the other historical landmarks raised an important question of the future of the island as well as its inhabitants. It is imperative to ask whether the land should be restored to help those who had lost their property or if the town should be rehabilitated with the tourist industry in mind. Should the town be rebuilt with a historical and cultural mindset, or should it be built with the inclination to bring in more tourists? This is a contemporary issue that asks how to build a Hawaiian society with Native Hawaiians and their culture in mind while also recognizing their dependency on tourism.

Many foundations are working on this issue. On December 15, 2023, Governor Josh Green gave a four-month update on his plans for the island of Maui. At the peak of the wildfires, 12,000 people were displaced from their homes and almost 8,000 people were moved into hotels around the island. To avoid people becoming homeless, many of these people are still being housed in hotel rooms while the state attempts to build long-term housing opportunities around the island. Governor Green emphasized the need for housing while many of the timeshares and vacation rentals still stand empty. He says that if this continues to happen, he will have to come down on these owners who have “short-term rentals that aren’t able to be used by our people” because “It’s just not okay that we don’t have housing for our local people (Osher, 2023). Therefore, he states that he will have no choice other than to “propose a moratorium on

short-term rentals through emergency rules” (Osher, 2023). This is slightly reassuring, but it is only a temporary solution to help the locals of Lahaina. As of now, these people will be at a disadvantage when the town is rebuilt due to high housing prices. Economists in Hawaii are worried because “market prices are likely to far exceed the already high prices that existed in Lahaina” (Selsky, 2023). This will pose problems for businesses, homes, and restaurants around the island. Additionally, it will further the loss of culture and land that these islands are already facing. Therefore, other solutions must be found.

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