



Sustainability Series



Laurel Mei-Singh

Geography, Anthropology, and Environmental Studies | Environmental Justice and Military Occupation in Hawai'i

This presentation investigates the relationship between military fences and Hawaiian struggles for environmental self-determination. The presence of the United States military in Hawai'i has transformed entire ways of life by altering Hawaiian land tenure systems through displacement, disruption of subsistence practices, and environmental degradation. Widespread fence construction during World War II martial law not only enclosed spaces where people grew food and caught fish to eat, but also unfurled a security infrastructure that continues to police and manage daily life in Hawai'i to this day. Yet the US military does not simply impose itself on Hawai'i's land and people. Grassroots initiatives reveal significant capacity to reshape the landscape of a highly militarized place and remake the islands' environment. These Indigenous-led efforts enact human-environment relations premised on the interdependence between humans and the natural world—confronting the militarized partitioning of land.

Based on ethnographic research conducted on the Wai'anae Coast of O'ahu from 2011-2017, this project conveys the persistence and power of Indigenous resurgence as a set of projects that the US military and auxiliary institutions aim to contain and manage. As such, the containment and management of human-environment relations structure empire building and settler colonialism in Hawai'i. This research prompts consideration for how the punitive policies of a militarized carceral state structure Indigenous dispossession, and the socioenvironmental significance of military bases.

Laurel Mei-Singh has research interests that include land and militarization, the relationship of race and Indigeneity to histories of war, fences and self-determination, racial capitalism, and the Pacific. Currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate in American Studies at Princeton University, she earned a PhD in Geography with a certificate in American Studies from the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center. A devoted public scholar, she has participated in community organizing efforts in New York City and Hawai'i, and currently serves as a board member of CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities in New York City. She was born and raised near Lāhale (Diamond Head) on O'ahu.

Thursday, April 25th
3-4:20 PM
Cafeteria Hall 115

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