What color is independence?  
Stories of safety and decolonization in the Pacific  
(Draft; kindly request permission before citing)  
Ronni Alexander  
Kobe University  
alexroni@kobe-u.ac.jp

Abstract
This paper continues my work on the impact of colonization and militarization on emotion, looking at the differences in the ways people imagine being safe and feeling safe. It focuses on the island of Guam, a place that has been under foreign rule for over 400 years, but is in the process of engaging in a process of self-determination to decide on its future relationship with the United States. Guam houses extensive US military facilities which are currently being expanded. For the US, the territory of Guam is important not only for its strategic location and proximity to Asia, but also because on Guam there is no need to negotiate with a foreign government for military access. Many of Guam’s citizens, including indigenous Chamoru, are veterans and/or affiliated with the military, and there is widespread support for the US military because it is believed to make Guam a safer place. At the same time, indigenous people feel safer when they are able to practice their own cultures and lifestyles, many aspects of which contradict the militarizing presence of the US bases. Using stories, conversations and written essays, this paper explores being and feeling in the context of self-determination on Guam.

Key words: Guam/Guahan, decolonization, self-determination, feeling safe, militarization
What color is independence?
Stories of safety and decolonization in the Pacific
(Draft; kindly request permission before citing)

Ronni Alexander
Kobe University
alexroni@kobe-u.ac.jp

The island of Guahan/Guam is a relatively small island in the Pacific, but it has many faces. Tourists seek out the flashy hotels, designer boutiques, shopping malls and various tourist attractions. Local residents enjoy majestic ocean views, extended family parties on the beach, mom & pop stores and American fast food. Residents come from a range of ethnic backgrounds: Chamoru, Filipino, Chuukese and other Pacific Islanders, Korean, Japanese, Russian, U.S. mainland and more. And of course there are the bases, self-contained mini-cities that spill out into the local community in a myriad of ways. What would be the color of decolonization for this diverse island? What choice will the people of the island make, and who will make it? How do Chamoru tell the story of their struggle for decolonization? What colors do they paint it, and how do they envision the future?

Guahan/Guam is a colony of the United States; it has not completed the process of self-determination and decolonization. The indigenous Chamoru people

---

1 Guahan is the indigenous name for the island known to the world as ‘Guam’. Here ‘Guam’ will used except when referring to indigenous understandings of their island and culture. The indigenous people are Chamoru (also spelled Chamorro, CHamoru).

2 Guam is technically an organized unincorporated territory of the United States. Na’puti suggests that calling it a colony or colonized space is a form of resistance to the military governance of the United States (Na’puti 2014:306). The status is ambiguous and unique due to qualified citizenship rights (Na’puti 2014:303, Stade 1998:47, Alexander 2015). An organized territory is a ‘United States insular area in which the United States Congress has enacted an organic act.’ An unincorporated territory is a ‘United States insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply’ (U.S. Department of the Interior). The Organic Act of Guam (1950) granted all citizens residing on Guam at the time of the enactment, as well as their children born after 11 April 1899, statutory, or congressional, U.S. citizenship.

3 Guam is the southernmost of the Mariana Islands chain, but the two entities were split in at the end of the Spanish American War in 1898 when under the Treaty of Paris, Guahan, along with the Philippines, Cuba, and parts of the West Indies were ceded to the United States. The other Mariana Islands were purchased by Germany. As a result of these colonial transactions, Guam has had a unique trajectory. The other islands of Micronesia comprised the post-WWII Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and in the 70’s went through processes of decolonization. There are now four separate political entities, three (the Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia) are in free association with the United
of Guahan have endured over 400 years of colonization by Spain and the United States, and three years of occupation by Japan during World War II. Under the United States, governance of Guam was carried out by the U.S. Navy until 1950. That year, responsibility was shifted to the Department of the Interior and the people given United States citizenship (without the right to vote for president or representation in Congress) but continue to host major U.S. military installations.

From the outset there was Chamoru resistance to foreign rule, but Spanish weapons and diseases to which the people had no immunity proved to be deadly. After the U.S. Navy took over, Chamoru demonstrated their mastery of the lifestyle demanded by their new masters and by the 1920’s and 30’s, they had begun to campaign for U.S. citizenship.4

Japan invaded Guam the same day it bombed Pearl Harbor, and occupied the island between 1941 and 1944. During that time, many Chamoru risked their lives trying to support the United States. After the U.S. returned to Guam in 1944, Chamoru cited their loyalty to the United States during the war as further proof they merited U.S. citizenship. They finally achieved their goal when citizenship was granted in a unilateral decision by Congress in 1950 in the form of the Organic Act of Guam (Na’Puti and Bevacqua 2015, Alexander 2013). In a sense it was a pyrrhic victory. Because the decision was made unilaterally, the people of Guam obtained United States citizenship without having gone through a process of deciding on their political status for themselves. Moreover, the U.S. citizenship they received is different from that of citizenship held by other Americans; Americans on Guam do not have the right to vote for president and do not have a voting representative in Congress.

Due to the way the Organic Act came about, Chamoru continued to be vocal on the subject of self-determination and citizenship. At the same time, Guam remained intensely loyal to, and unquestioning of, the United States military and its presence on their island. One reason is a discourse of ‘responsibility’ going back to the ‘liberation’ of Guam from the Japanese in 1944 and the cultural duty of Chamoru to repay that ‘debt’ (see for example Perez 2002, Diaz 2001). Although a civil administration was established through the Organic Act, Guam continued to house
military facilities and remained highly militarized. Known as the ‘tip of the American spear’, Guam is home to extensive U.S. military facilities covering close to one third of the island. The 2006 United States–Japan Roadmap Agreement and the current Pivot to Asia policy have brought an unprecedented military build-up to both Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Recently there has been increased interest in the topic of decolonization/self-determination. The conversation is complex, emotional and a bit frightening because decolonization cannot be discussed without facing the ‘who am I/who are we’ questions: What does it mean to be American? What does it mean to be Chamoru? What does it mean to be safe?

The objective of this paper is to tell a story about decolonization on the island of Guahan/Guam through a collage of conversations about identity, language, safety, militarization and political status. It suggests that the conversation about decolonization must include, or perhaps be preceded by discussion of identity; who we are and who we want to be. And identity comes from so many places – not only genealogical, historical and chronological but also from our hearts, hopes, fears and dreams. Moreover, a conversation about identity and decolonization needs to have a third dimension: demilitarization. While in practice it might prove very difficult, decolonization requires identifying not only what it means to be Chamoru and/or American but also what it means to be militarized and what it means to be safe.

The paper reflects work in progress on militarization and decolonization on Guam. In addition to written essays and editorials, it comes from multiple conversations with indigenous Chamoru and other residents made during numerous trips to Guam, especially between 2010 and 2017, communication with some diaspora Chamoru living off island, and student responses to a questionnaire about feelings of safety conducted in 2015. Some of the conversations lasted only 15 or 20 minutes, while some interviews went on for several hours. The paper is my version of their stories; they have provided the ingredients but I take responsibility for the final product. I have chosen to use pseudonyms (initials) to maintain privacy and to emphasize that this story is being told through my lens. Taking a post-structural

---


6 United States–Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation, May 1, 2006. Also Pivot to Asia/Pacific policy and build-up, especially Pagan & CNMI. Na’puti and Bevacqua. “Can these islands survived the military build-up in Asia http://www.civilbeat.org/2016/12/can-these-islands-survive-americas-military-pivot-to-asia/
feminist perspective, I assume that there is no single, objective story that reveals the truth but rather that understanding of politics can be achieved only in so far as we listen to multiple voices, pay attention to what people feel as well as what they say, and that we also position and understand ourselves.

What follows is first is an introductory section in which I position myself and explain how I came to be involved in this project. This will be followed by a theoretical section that will briefly discuss security and the importance of not only being safe but feeling safe. The third section will focus on Guam, the military bases and colonization; the fourth on decolonization and being Chamoru. The paper will conclude that decolonization is frightening, and that in order to confront that fear, demilitarization is also necessary.

(1) My story: How I got to this topic
My first trip to Guam was in about 1980, a stop on my way to Palau to learn about their struggle to be independent and nuclear-free. My strongest memory is the surprise and confusion I felt after opening the telephone book and finding on the first page not only the usual list of warning sirens for fires, earthquakes and tsunami but also one for nuclear war. After five years of living in Hiroshima, I thought I had a pretty good idea of what Guam might look like after a nuclear attack. I wondered whether it would be better to know, or not know that such an attack was imminent. And then I thought of the irony that if there were not United States bases on Guam, there would not be any reason to attack it in the first place.

It has been more than thirty years since that first trip to Guam. The phone book no longer includes nuclear war in its list of sirens and the island has not suffered nuclear attack. I have never met anyone who claims to have heard the nuclear warning siren, but there are occasional attack warnings. “They told us to go home and be with our families because North Korea was going to attack. I was scared! What kind of security is that?” (I. interview, 2014.12).³

The military has brought more than the threat of attack. On the one hand it has been the source of employment for many people on the island, but it has also been a constant threat to the health of soldiers, civilians and the local environment. It is now known that soldiers on Guam were exposed to radiation from ships used in U.S.

³ Guam is about the same distance from the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula. China has developed a missile it calls the ‘Guam Killer’ and the North Korean Musudan missiles are capable of reaching Guam. North Korea has claimed it can strike U.S. Pacific bases (Bowman et.al. 2016).
nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands. Islanders have also been exposed to Agent Orange and a variety of other toxic chemicals, a legacy of over 100 years of military activity on the island (See for example Mora 2017, Hernandez 2015, Natividad 2014). The following testimony describes just some of the impact on health and well-being caused by colonization and the military presence.

U.S. colonial presence has not only damaged our bodies of land and water, but it’s deteriorated our physical bodies as well. The military used Guam as a decontamination site during its nuclear testing in the 1970s, which resulted in massive radiation and agent orange and purple exposure. High incidences of various kinds of cancer and neurodegenerative diseases, such amyothrophic lateral sclerosis, Parkinsonism-dementia, and Lytico-Botig plague the Chamoru people. Toxic chemicals have snaked into our bloodstream, causing multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer’s, renal dysfunction, cardiovascular disease, liver dysfunction, deafness, blindness, epilepsy, seizures, arthritis, anemia, stillbirths, and infertility—all of which Chamorus disproportionally suffer. And because our mental health is woven to our physical health, Chamorus suffer dramatically high rates of incarceration, family violence, substance abuse, teenage suicides, and school drop-outs. The presence of the U.S. military has choked the breath out of our daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. Like the last totot (Marianas Fruit-dove) on Guam being slowly swallowed by the brown tree snake, Chamorus are being disappeared. Diseases have killed most of our elders: only five percent of the island is over the age of 65. Young Chamorus are joining the U.S. military and dying in America’s wars at alarming rates. In 2005, four of the U.S. Army’s top twelve recruitment producers were based on Guam. In 2007, Guam ranked No. 1 for recruiting success in the Army National Guard’s assessment of 54 states and territories. In the current war on terror, our killed-in-action rate is now five times the US national average. Since the war on terror began in 2001, 29 sons of Micronesia have died—17 of them from Guam (Perez 2008).

Today, Guam has again become central in United States military strategy. The rise of China and nuclear ambitions of North Korea have brought a U.S. military “Pivot to the Pacific”, one part of which is the relocation of U.S. Marines to Guam from Okinawa under the U.S. - Japan Roadmap Agreement (2006) and a build-up of military facilities on Guam and expanding into the Commonwealth of the Northern
Mariana Islands.

Part of the Roadmap Agreement called for moving Marines from Okinawa to Guam, and was accompanied by plans to build a new base on Okinawa that would include filling acres of shoreline and pristine ocean, home to, among others, the rare dugong. I joined the anti-base protests but at the same time asked friends and those around me why they thought moving Marines to Guam might be a solution. After all, nobody had asked the people of Guam if they thought it was a good idea. The answer to my question was that sending the Marines to Guam got them away from Okinawa and that Guam is part of the United States, so why should it be a problem. I decided to ask the same questions on Guam. There I found a totally different situation. In stark contrast to the pacifism and strong opposition to military bases in Okinawa, on Guam I found silence. After listening for a while, I began to hear voices of opposition that were strong and determined, but only beginning to break through. According to one friend, “It is hard to believe but ... we didn’t even notice the military. It wasn’t even on our radar!” (L. interview, 2014.12). I learned how difficult it is to question the presence of the bases without also questioning what it means to be American and what it means to be Chamoru. So I decided to listen and to try to find out.

(2) Feeling independent; feeling safe

In the Pacific, colonization and strategic interests have gone hand in hand (Alexander 1994). The Treaty of Paris consolidated U.S. hegemony in the Pacific, adding Guam and the Philippines to the list of American possessions in the region that already included Hawaii and American Samoa. As a result, the United States poured renewed effort into protecting its interests in the Pacific through military means. In an interview in the Guam Post, historian Robert Rogers put it in the following way, “(t)he American military priority (on Guam) is and always was on military objectives” (Steffy 2017a:3).

At the end of World War II, the United States was worried about the resurgence of a hostile Japan. One purpose for the establishment of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under American trusteeship was to keep the islands from being re-taken by Japan. The target for American ‘strategic denial’ shifted during the Cold War, but the principle remained the same. By the 1960’s, the Pacific had become informally known as the ‘American Lake’, with US control and/or military alliances throughout the region. Some countries and scholars, however, began to question whether protection guaranteed through nuclear weapons was in fact safe. This was particularly true in the Pacific where U.S., French and British
nuclear testing during peace time was threatening not only the lives and livelihoods of people in the region but also serving as an obstacle to decolonization and independence. By the early eighties, approaches such as human security began to suggest that security is far more than military strength. Using the concept of endogenous security, Alexander (1992) questioned the meaning of ‘security’ and the implications of American military superiority in the Pacific from the perspective of the people whose lives were destroyed or seriously impacted by nuclear testing and militarism. She suggested that security policy needed to begin by taking into account what people feel makes them unsafe.

Anthropologist Nils Bubant (2005) defines security as a political problem involving complex processes which take place in the “interstices between global, national and local representations,” and have contradictory outcomes (276). He calls these outcomes, “vernacular security,” a “convenient term for the analysis of different scales of creating imagined communities through a comparison of different but constantly interpenetrating political forms of management of threat and (un)certainty” (277). Bubant combines the idea of “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) with the idea that security/insecurity is socially constructed (Buzan, Waever, and DeWilde 1998, Hansen 2000), suggesting that securitization is a “discursive device for community-building” (Bubant 2005:277). Like Duffield (2001), Dillon (2009) and others, Bubant investigates the language of insecurity, asserting that the politicization of security involves the reproduction of uncertainty. As our understanding of what it is to be secure is bound to our understanding of what it is to be insecure (Burke 2002), if we are to escape a perpetual cycle of insecurity we need a new way of talking about it. Vernacular security suggests the creation of communities linked through their imagination of safety at a level which is specific to particular imaginaries in particular places.

Place and community are important to imaginaries of security, but those imaginaries are not necessarily limited to physical reality; globalization and information technology allow for multiple communities interacting on a variety of different levels and locations all at the same time. Military bases are special kinds of communities that are embedded in, or surrounded by, other communities. To those who live in and around them, military bases can be both threatening and reassuring at the same time. The more militarized the surrounding community, the more likely people are to feel the bases as reassuring rather than threatening.

An important element of these constructions of safety and security is emotion, yet peace studies and international relations have been reluctant to engage theoretically with this theme. In fact, dichotomous views of rationality, reason and
masculinity deem emotions to be irrational, impulsive and feminine. Realism relies on fear and anger in stressing the need for military might; liberalism invokes trust in discussions of building confidence or cooperative orders.

Emotions are very much a part of the so-called rational decision making processes addressed by scholars of international relations. They are an important and increasingly acknowledged part of identity, culture and politics (See for example Crawford 2000, 2014; Hutchison and Bleiker 2008, 2014; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). Some current debates focus on topics such as the processes through which individual emotions become collective and political (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014), the role of bodies and biology (McDermott 2014), the roles of emotions in social relations (Mercer 2014) and the processes of institutionalizing emotions (Crawford 2014). Here it is understood that emotions begin with bodies, but the collective of social emotions is larger than, and independent of, particular individuals with particular feelings. Emotions are an integral part of identity, and like identities they may be multiple, conflicting and inconsistent. Collective emotions are important for collective acts of resistance and violence, but these acts are not necessarily emotional responses. Emotions are part of who we are; they help to build and maintain our cultures and politics as well as our physical and intellectual lives.

One of the most important and perhaps most manipulated emotions is the feeling of being safe.8 International relations in general and security studies in particular certainly involve emotions such as fear and anger. Cold War nuclear politics, including such strategies as mutually assured destruction (MAD) provides many examples of the manipulation of fear. Military bases are real and imagined symbols of military strength that serve to militarize the attitudes of those who work at them and live in the surrounding communities. Looking at the ways people understand military bases and their own safety can help to reveal the connections and contradictions among militarism, militarization, security and peace.

On Guam, while there are people who oppose the bases or at least want to start a conversation about them, but there are also many who feel safer with the bases there (Alexander 2016 unpublished). For example, one woman on Guam explained that while she knew the bases are a threat, “In 1941 the Japanese came because they knew the U.S. wasn’t there to protect us” (C. conversation, 2016.5). Later, two friends shared their stories. One told me it was safer because of the presence of the military. She said they would help if there were a disaster or an

8 The language of being and feeling safe is difficult. Rather than distinguishing between safety and security, here ‘being safe’ refers to physical safety/security while ‘feeling safe’ refers to feeling safe/secure. Safety=personal, security=national?
attack, asking “How can we protect ourselves if North Korea or China drop bombs on us?” (A. conversation, 2016.5). Her friend, B, took the opposite position. “The military cares about their own safety, not ours (B. conversation, 2016.5).

One area of concern for some people on Guam is nuclear weapons. People live adjacent to the military fences, and a Chamoru friend took me to a section of fence from which we could see a place where nuclear weapons are believed to be housed. When I asked if the weapons made him feel safe, he replied, “How could I feel safe? I have nuclear weapons on my island!” (J. interview, 2013.9). I posed the same question to a man living nearby. He told me he was not afraid that the US would be in a war and that the base is “…no intrusion. They make emergency announcements about weather, so it’s OK” (M. conversation, 2013.9).

L. (Interview, 2013.9) shared her view on safety, too.

We are taught, and most people believe, that the military is here to protect us and keep us safe. Peace might mean having enough food or good houses, but safety is something different. It is connected to the war, and the Japanese…. During the Japanese time, women covered themselves with animal feces so they wouldn’t be raped. Some women were forced to be ‘Comfort Women’ and there is so much shame! They can’t even tell anyone. Of course that makes the situation with the US more complicated. Every family has someone in the military, and for a long time it has been the key to creating a better life for the entire family. …We need to understand that peace and safety come from inside, from the land and our lifestyle, and not from the military.

(3) What Color is Guam?
Does your world map assign a color to Guam? Maps of the world often resemble simple coloring books; solid colored lines enclose similarly colored ‘countries’. Dotted lines and multicolored and/or differently colored interiors are only used occasionally. Small islands are often left off of the coloring book map. When they appear, they are often merely indicated by black dots. The colored blocks of the world map serve to reinforce our understanding of the world as a collection of independent political entities constructed through dichotomies of inside/outside, national/international and domestic/foreign. This metaphor of the coloring book is used by Kopper (2012) to discuss the imaginary of territorial sovereignty. He challenges the unidimensional image with ideas from Cézanne, who “believed the line and color should be applied together in order to create the picture on the
canvas in a mutually constitutive way – analogously to borders and socio-political practices today” (Kopper 2012:279). The coloring book map does not reflect the complex relationships in our interdependent and globalized world.

If you were to assign a color to Guahan/Guam, what color would it be? Would you use the same color for Guam and the United States? Would there be a Guahan color and Guam color? What color would you use to indicate the U.S. military bases on Guam? If Guam is a colony of the United States that houses U.S. bases, would you categorize those bases as domestic or overseas facilities? Aguon explains the anguish of trying to give a color to an otherwise invisible island and being unable to attract people’s attention. “...(W)e are at home in our kitchens and living rooms engaging even our closest friends and families who have set their hearts on singing America.... The tragedy of our day, however, is that cynicism like a bad lover has come calling and many of us no longer believe this war is one we can win” (Aguon 2006:18).

Military bases are gendered and militarized spaces where soldiers live, train and engage in war and war preparation. They defy the imaginary of the coloring book in multiple ways; the monotone spaces do not reflect internal diversities, nor do they reflect the ways social relations fail to coincide with the indicated borders. The soldiers living within their fences may wear uniforms of a single color, but represent a range of diverse ethnic, religious, gender and other identities, and live within in a web of social relations that exceed the spatiality of the physical contours of their military home and likely to include their distant homes, friends and families. The boundaries marked by those fences demarcate but also blur borders of time and place, both domestic and foreign (Alexander 2015). Bases are can also be invisible; the politics of national security and secrecy mean that often military bases are subject to a different set of rules for disclosure and transparency than the communities that surround them. While the justification for overseas military bases is that they enhance security, in fact they are contested spaces being used for power projection and access to foreign markets and resources (Vine 2015). And of course, as much as they may provide military defense, foreign bases are also targets and so increase the risk of attack even as they demonstrate preparedness to retaliate.

About thirty percent of the island of Guam lies within military fences. Local residents, land owners included, generally do not have access to the land, bases or other facilities within the fences unless they are on active duty or otherwise affiliated with the military. But military bases are militarized and gendered spaces with influence that exceeds the fences that contain them. The people of Guam share their island with military bases, but the aggressive and defensive capabilities
housed there are only part of the story. The bases also contain the best schools, hospitals, inexpensive shopping and other services only available to those on active duty.

As mentioned above, the interest of the United States in the island of Guam has been from the beginning one of strategy and is intimately connected to war. The implementation of that strategy is made easier by its political status; in an American territory there is no need for Status of Forces agreements (SOFA) or negotiations with a foreign government. In the words of one Pacific Air Forces commander, “Guam, first of all, is U.S. territory . . . I don’t need overflight rights. I don’t need landing rights. I always have permission to go to Guam. It might as well be California or New Jersey” (Brooke 2004). Another example is the 2006 Roadmap Agreement between the U.S.A and Japan (USJSCC 2006). The Agreement was to “. . . ensure a long-term presence of U.S. forces in Japan and transform Guam, the westernmost sovereign territory of the United States, into a hub for security activities in the region” (U.S. Department of Defense 2010, 66) but the people of Guam were not consulted or included in the negotiations. Nor were they consulted in 2011, when the Obama administration announced that it had raised the overall importance of the Asia-Pacific region within U.S. security strategy. This so-called Pacific ‘pivot’ reflected a post-WWII policy of trying to promote stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region by maintaining troops and involvement in diplomatic affairs (Manyin et.al. 2012:1-2). In 2015, this strategy was confirmed by the Department of Defense as follows:

Recognizing the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and its maritime domain for the security of the United States, the Department is focused on safeguarding freedom of the seas, deterring conflict and coercion, and promoting adherence to international law and standards. As it does around the world, the Department will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, in support of these goals and in order to preserve the peace and security the Asia-Pacific region has enjoyed for the past 70 years (Department of Defense 2015a:1).

In practice, the Pacific pivot increases the relative importance of the Asia-Pacific region in the global network of American military bases and installations. Japan continues to be an important link, and means a larger military presence on Guam

---

9 The United States has a global network of 686 military bases and installations (Vine 2015:4). There are 122 base sites in Japan and 114 in U.S. territories including Guam. A ‘base site’ is a “Physical (geographic) location that is owned by, leased to, or otherwise possessed by a DoD Component. Each site is assigned to a single installation. A site may exist in one of three forms: land only – where no facilities are present; facility or facilities only –where the underlying land is neither owned nor controlled by the government, and land with facilities – where both are present” (Department of Defense 2015:3-6).
and also in the Northern Mariana Islands.10

Since Guam is a U.S. territory and people there have U.S. citizenship, the U.S. bases on Guam ought to be the same color as the rest of the island. Technically speaking, the concept of civilian control in the United States means that the commander in chief of the military is an elected civilian, and that Congress has a certain amount of control over how military decisions are made. While Americans can vote in federal elections from anywhere in the world, Americans registered to vote on Guam do not have the right to vote for president, have no voting representation in Congress and have no control over the military on their island. In that sense, many people might not use the same color for the bases as they use for themselves. “We are neither fish nor fowl, and have no political framework to change that. The tragedy is that so many Guam people are so normalized that they don’t think anything is wrong. The U.S. has managed to convince them that they have the best deal, and that dignity, identity and culture don’t really matter” (V. interview, 2010.5.8).

The injustice of having citizenship without the fundamental rights and privileges of democratic participation is reflected in this testimony to the 2008 U.N. Decolonization Committee.

We, the people of Guam, recognize that race continues to define the boundaries of the nation and the constituents of a militarized territory. Why are the American people in the Marianas denied the right to vote? Why are there American bases in Guam if the people lack political voting rights? What role has race played in the political relationship between the United States and their Chamoru territories? (Tuncap 2008).

(4) Is fear the color of decolonization?

In order to discuss decolonization, it is first necessary to recognize that Guam is in fact a colony. Colonization has become so normalized and internalized that for some people it is almost invisible. Julian Aguon calls this internalized or second tier

---

10 The military build-up is to increase military holdings to about 40% of the island, and entails, among other things, the drilling of 22 water wells and the destruction of a reef with at least 110 species of coral in order to construct a deep-draft wharf for nuclear air-craft carriers, each of which carry 85 fighter jets and 5600 people. Beginning in 2022, 5000 Marines with 1,300 dependents will be added to the 6000 personnel already stationed on Guam. B-1B and B1-S bombers are being deployed, along with about 300 airmen. It also involves construction of a live fire range complex that will deny local access to historical sacred sites and close the Ritidian National Wildlife Refuge, home to numerous endangered species. The plans also include bombing practice on Pagan, an island in the CNMI (Bowman et. a. 2016). For updated information, see http://guambuildupeis.U.S./draft-documents (Last accessed 2016.2.28)
colonialism, where the struggle is not against the colonizer so much as against oneself (Aguon 2006:17). He says,

(A)ls America’s perilous push to dominate the global political stage is being forced to peel back its mask by thoughtful citizens the world over, we, the indigenous people of America’s westernmost possession are not joining in the fight. We are kept under lock and key. Cleverly invisible in the international community so that no one sees as we slip quietly into the sea. Not marching, but being marched, to the drums of our own disempowerment. But alone, that information is insufficient to understand the quality of anguish today being loosed on the Chamoru people” (Aguon 2006:13).

We live in a world that tends to equate being safe with military, economic and political power. Affiliation with powerful states can be associated with safety; weaker states are, by definition, less able to fend off attack and maintain their integrity in adverse conditions. For Guam, affiliation with the United States represents protection by the US military as well as stability in the form of economic aid accompanied by most of the benefits of American citizenship. Trading in the known for the unknown is under the best of circumstances difficult. On Guam, trading the known – colonization, militarization and US citizenship – for the unknown of independence can be very frightening.

In the seventies, there was some momentum for decolonization on Guam. A Commission on self-determination was established and a constitution was drafted, but rejected in 1979. In the early 1980s, a draft Commonwealth Act was drawn up. After numerous controversies, difficulties and legal battles, a Guam Commonwealth Act was ready to be submitted to Congress in 1988. Guam Congressional delegates Ben Blaz and Robert Underwood tried until 1995 to get the Act passed, but it never got out of committee and they finally had to accept defeat (Trovelino 2016).

Turning instead to the United Nations, a bill was passed in 1997 establishing a

---

11 April 19, 1979, Governor Carlos G. Camacho signed Public Law 12-17, establishing the Guam Political Status Commission. From that day forward, the Government of Guam has been moving toward a self-determination vote of, by, and for Guam’s Native Inhabitants, as defined under the Organic Act of Guam 1950 and their descendants. (Guam Elections Commission http://gec.guam.gov/decolonization/)

Guam law mandates “Guam Election Commission establish the Guam Decolonization Registry ‘for the purposes of registering and recording the names of the Native Inhabitants of Guam.’” (See Guam Code Annotated, Title 1, Chapter 21; Title 3, Chapters 20 and 21. For a description of the early efforts for commonwealth, see Ada 1996).
Commission on Decolonization “for the implementation and exercise of Chamorro Self-Determination” (Public Law 23-147). This was contested by a former Air-Force officer Davis, who was denied when he tried to join the decolonization registry. His claim was denied and is under appeal. In the meantime, the election of Governor Eddie Calvo in 2011 gave new energy and promised funding to efforts for decolonization (Tolentino 2016).

With commitment to decolonization and funding promised, there is renewed interest in self-determination. The Decolonization Registry is growing, although according to one young man whose job is to enroll people, “most people don’t even know what the decolonization registry is” (T. interview, 2016.5.28). According to the head of the Commission on Decolonization, Ed Alvarez, “It is no wonder that it is hard to get things moving. There is so much to do and I have to do it all myself, and there still isn’t funding for most of it” (Alvarez 2017.1.2 personal communication).

A recent story in the Guam Post (Steffy 2017b) suggests that factors such as bureaucracy, lack of US Congressional will, differing priorities, procedural problems, and especially the lack of funding for public education and the failure to set a date for the plebiscite have combined to reduce interest in the decolonization process. However, recently this has changed. It is likely that a date will be set for 2018, but it is dependent on 1) a ruling by the District Court of Guam on Davis v. Guam; 2) the definition of the “70% threshold” requirement; and 3) the completion of the education campaign (Steffy 2017b).

Michael Lujan Bevacqua, a Chamoru academic, activist and artist, explains that the options for Guam come first from the three established under the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (UN Resolution 1514):

“...The first is integration with their colonizer, which is commonly known in Guam as statehood. The second, free association is to form a foundational agreement and share parts of your sovereignty with another power, which is usually your former colonizer. Finally, there is independence, which contrary to common misconceptions does not mean isolation from the world, but rather joining it as a sovereign and equal entity (Bevacqua 2016b).”

---

12 T. was trying to get people to sign the register. I offered, but he reluctantly turned me down as I did not meet the conditions, including Chamoru heritage and living on Guam.

13 A press release on 24 August 2016 announced, for example, that the plebiscite scheduled for November 2016 would be postponed because none of the planned educational activities had been held (Saipan Tribune Press Release 24 August 2016: http://www.saipantribune.com/index.php/commission-decolonization-votes-plebiscite/ )
Bevacqua suggests that most people see the choice for Guam as becoming part of the United States (statehood), affiliation through a commonwealth agreement as in the case of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or independence. Of course, he adds, “even if the people decide they want statehood or a closer relationship with the United States, that decision needs to be approved by Congress. When we chose commonwealth in the seventies, Congress refused to move on it. That could happen again. There is no guarantee the Congress will approve or act on our decision” (Bevacqua, personal communication 2017.1.1).

Bevacqua’s choice is for independence and he has been actively working to educate people about that choice. He says that things are changing, citing examples of young and old people who are beginning to see why decolonization is important and what it might mean (Bevacqua 2016, 2017 personal communication and 2017b).

Many older Chamoru remember the days when they were forbidden to speak their own language or live according to their own culture. Their stories reflect their own struggles to be modern and American. These stories illustrate the ways that colonization leaves its impact on the bodies, minds and hearts of the colonized. It denigrates the ‘native’ as a feminized, childish, irrational and perhaps innocent ‘other’ in need of protection and education. Combine that with militarism that imbues a Hobbesian faith in power and the need to protect one’s own through a rational, masculinized, technological capacity to destroy. Safety becomes on the one hand the ability to protect and on the other, the state of being protected.

Post-colonial and neo-colonial societies have been oppressed, their cultures, lands and languages desecrated and taken away. They have suffered attacks on their pride and joy in themselves and their culture, and over time the ways of the colonizer have become incorporated into their own cultures and behaviors. Part of this process is the incorporation of the desire or need for protection. This perhaps might lead people to seek safety/protection within the worldview of their colonizers, even as they struggle to recreate the worldview that has been taken from them. This idea might also help to explain the simultaneous affirmation of indigenous culture and need to protect the land and environment from the military while at the same time looking to the military for protection.

The idea of decolonization in the form of independence is frightening for many people (Alvarez 2017.1.5 personal communication). Of course, any kind of change or unknown can be very frightening. Not a few people find it hard to imagine how Guam might survive economically without the United States, although independence does not necessarily mean being without economic assistance. This, according to Bevacqua, comes out as fear of isolation. Bevacqua counters this fear
by arguing that most countries have relations with other countries, and an independent Guam would be no different. Today, he says, “we do not exist in interdependence with others, but rather a state of dependence. It is our colonial status that makes the difference” (Bevacqua 2017a).

Others fear independence for reasons of security. Many of Guam’s citizens, including indigenous Chamoru, are veterans and/or affiliated with the military, and there is widespread support for the US military. Many people believe the U.S. presence makes both Guam and the rest of the world safer. For those people, the preferable form of decolonization might be to gain the right to vote in U.S. elections and have a voting representative in Congress. At the same time, Chamoru people say they feel safer when they are able to practice their own cultures and lifestyles, many aspects of which contradict the militarizing presence of the US bases.

One obstacle to independence is that many people have a hard time imagining what Guam might look like without the bases. One young woman shared that her family had always been on Guam, and she expected that her kids would be, too. When I asked her about her vision for the future, she said she wanted it to be a peaceful place. Asking if that meant without military bases, she told me she had “never experienced Guam without bases so it is hard to imagine” (F. conversation, 2016.5.28). After some thought, she added that she thought “It would be good to try without them and then compare” (F. 2016.5.28). This view was echoed by many others who said either they had never thought of Guam without the bases or could not imagine how it might be. Many others agreed with R. (conversation, 2016.5.28) who told me, “I’m an American but I’m also an indigenous Chamorro.” He thinks it is good to talk about decolonization, but the U.S. is necessary for Guam economically and for protection. Generally ‘protection’ refers to military attack by North Korea, economic takeover by China or some unidentified terrorist threat.

There are some people whose understanding of culture is leading them to question the military presence. In May of 2016, Guam hosted the Festival of Pacific Arts, a gala held every four years in a different Pacific island location that celebrates all aspects of Pacific culture. I attended part of the festival and also a conference on indigenous languages that was held at the same time. Wherever I went and pretty much whoever I spoke with stressed the importance of trying to regain Chamoru language and culture. There also seemed to be a general feeling of excitement and perhaps even empowerment that came from seeing so many Pacific Islanders living their cultures. “It gives us the idea that maybe we can do it, too. And of course, Guam doesn’t want to be left behind” (J.B. 2016.5, Guam).

The values of respect for others and the environment that are so important in
Chamoru culture are in stark contrast to those necessary for promoting militaries, militarization and military expansion. The connections of identity, culture, language and ethnicity are reshaping the spatiality of coloring book borders into diverse endogenous or perhaps vernacular spaces. On Guam, peace and security are understood by many to be a part of the national security of the United States, but safety is related to cultural values and practices. The growing recognition of the importance of Chamoru culture has helped people to be critical of the military and make militarization visible. This has led people to become active in working toward decolonization and demilitarization, including opposition to the military build-up (Alexander 2015, Na’Puti and Bevacqua 2015).

The United States is at least in theory committed to the idea of decolonization, but the possibility of losing Guam is in practice not something it does not want to do. Guam’s location between Hawaii and Asia makes it strategically important to the United States, but so does its political status; there is no need to negotiate with a foreign government for military access. Guam’s two major industries are the military and tourism, both of which are directly linked to world politics. In the nineties, for example, military downsizing and a recession in Japan had serious repercussions for Guam. At the same time, most families have at least one person in the military, and having an active member enables access to base facilities and other perks. Military jobs and enlistment are featured at Career Days at local high schools, and participation in junior ROTC is actively encouraged, making enlistment an accessible and attractive career choice for high school graduates. As mentioned earlier, the idea of gratitude to the U.S. for “liberation” through support of the military is common and has been passed on to the younger generations. A combination of economic considerations, desire to see the world outside of the small island of Guam and understandings of what it means to be American citizen combine to make the military seem like a good choice for many young people (Bevacqua 2010, Alexander 2013). Enlistment rates and support for the military, particularly in the Army, are high. In fact, Guam is so militarized that until about ten years ago, the presence of the military went virtually unquestioned, even by Chamoru activists and those who had suffered loss of loved ones and/or land to the military (Alexander 2015; Nagashima 2015).

Conclusion: Decolonization requires demilitarization

“Guam is an example of ‘successful’ colonization of the worst kind” (L. interview, 2013.9). It is still a colony and has not yet completed the process of self-determination. The reasons are complicated, but originate from two main
factors: the unilateral granting of U.S. citizenship under the 1950 Organic Act of Guam and the perceived strategic importance of the island for U.S. military purposes. During 400 years of foreign rule, the land, culture and language of the indigenous Chamoru population has been stifled and oppressed, but not destroyed. Today, after years of trying to ‘be American’, Chamoru are re-discovering their pride and joy in themselves and their culture. At the same time, ‘being American’ has led to the incorporation of many aspects of American culture into everyday life. The presence of U.S. bases has meant that a significant part of Americanization has also included militarization, including the understanding of safety to mean the desire or need for military protection. This has been outlined here as the inability to imagine life without the bases and the belief that the bases are necessary for protection, even as people struggle to recreate the Chamoru worldview that has been taken from them. This lies beneath the simultaneous affirmation of indigenous culture and need to protect the land and environment from the military while at the same time looking to the military for protection.

Today there is renewed interest in decolonization. This coincides with a move, particularly among some indigenous Chamoru, to question a huge military build-up, including the moving of U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam, and the growing military presence. This first became visible in the context of concern over the environmental implications of the build-up. Plans for a live-fire training range near important ancient Chamoru sites, concerns over use of water and access to land, and unease at the influx of more soldiers, particularly Marines, have caused people to engage in a range of activities to resist the build-up and also to promote Chamoru culture and core values. Recently, the demands of the U.S. military have spread to other parts of the Marianas Island chain. The response has been a growing network of transborder activism and opposition between people in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands. This is also reflected in the conversation about self-determination.

At the same time, many people on Guam remain loyal to the United States and supportive of the military. Many of Guam’s residents are currently active in the military or are veterans. Many of these people believe the problem is not one of dependence/independence but rather one of a way to make their voices heard. For them, the answer lies not in making fundamental changes in the relationship with the United States but in getting the right to vote in national elections.

If Guam did not have U.S. bases, there would probably be no reason for North Korea or any other country to attack it and no need for defense against malicious terrorists or armies. Yet many people say they feel safer knowing the military is
there, even though some also acknowledged that the U.S. military presence was also the cause of the problem. This collective emotion of feeling unsafe has somehow become entwined with an understanding of military power as ensuring peace and security that asserts that people would feel even less safe without the bases. This is one way that overseas military bases reproduce a discourse of insecurity which allows for their continued, if contested, existence.

In order for people on Guam to imagine decolonization, they need to be able to imagine their island without military bases and think about what color they would like their island to be. Understandings of endogenous or vernacular security challenge the colored borders of national security, asking us to look inside, perhaps even within the bodies of those living in those spaces, but also imagine their interconnections with people are places outside those borders. This is of particular relevance when thinking about colonial and/or post-colonial societies where security has been internalized to mean “safety-as-protection”, feeling safe might only be possible in unsafe ways – through military protection. This reflects not only the ways people view peace and security but also helps to ensure they remain supportive of ‘protection’ by militarily powerful ‘others’. It is therefore from the endogeneity of individual and collective bodies that we must challenge meta-narratives of security that deny the importance of feelings of safety and develop ways to establish living places and space where people can feel and be safe.
References


…. (2015) “Living with the Fence: Militarization and Military Spaces on Guahan/Guam,” Gender, Place and Culture


Höhn, Maria and Seungsook Moon, eds. (2010). *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War II to the Present*. Duke University Press.

Hunt, Krista and Kim Rygiel, eds. (2006). *EnGendering the War on Terror*. Ashgate


doi:10.1017/S1752971914000268.
Manyin, Mark E., Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael F. Martin, Ronald O’Rourke and Bruce Vaughn (2012). “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s “Rebalancing” Toward Asia.” Congressional Research Service 7-5700, R42448

United States Department of Defense (2015a) “Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy.” Available at: 


http://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/


United States Navy. “Welcome to Japan/Yokosuka.” Available at:  
http://www.cnic.navy.mil/content/dam/cnic/cnrf/cfa_yokosuka/pdfs/abbreviate_d_abo_ab_cso.pdf (Last accessed 2016.3.4)