# Colonialism and the Politics of Space on Guam

Matthew Ryan Louie

Merritt Writing Program, University of California, Merced

Dr. Frederick Young

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## Colonialism and the Politics of Space in Guam

Despite colonialism becoming less prominent across the world, the remnants still impact colonized populations. Guam, a territory of the United States, remains a colonized nation and colonialism continues to impact the native Chamorro people along with those who call the island home. The islanders have been subjected to unjust treatment including confiscation of land without reparations for military installations and holding US citizenship without having the right to vote. Even with these injustices, many Americans do not know that the island is a territory of the United States, let alone, know of its existence. This marginalization of the island has allowed the United States to maintain its colonial power and continue to make decisions without the consent of the islanders. Therefore, a discussion of the injustices faced by this population is essential to help achieve fair treatment for these United States citizens.

Current research, such as that of Hattori (2009) and Becavqua (2017), has observed the issue of colonialism simply as a power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized, via physical and political control. However, there is a psychological component of colonialism impacting the mindset of the islanders. This mindset stems from the colonized population becoming dependent on the colonizer. Therefore, analyzing colonialism through a psychological lens provides a crucial perspective of analysis, in which highlights that colonialism is an issue greater than just a power dynamic.

## Background

As mentioned earlier, the main focus of research currently lies in the power dynamic that colonization creates. The United States started building the dynamic shortly after claiming the island from the Spanish in 1899. To establish its rule, the United States started to eliminate remnants of Spanish colonization, specifically Catholicism, with the separation of the church and

state, the banning of fiestas, and the expulsion of Catholic priests (Hattori, 2009). The elimination of Spanish rule allowed the United States to exercise its political power by implementing a western political system. While the original goal of the political system was to provide the islanders with democracy and eventually self-government, these claims fell short as the military controlled the island like an authoritarian regime (Maga, 1985). This political control ultimately allowed the United States to build the foundation for the power dynamic as they ruled the island with little opposition.

One of the ways in which the United States reinforced the power dynamic, was through the shift in institutions from an indigenous to western approach. The intentions of the approach were geared to help the United States maintain its power through "benevolently assimilation" or the idea that the changes from colonization were "an act of friendship and benevolence, rather than a process of disenfranchisement and dispossession" (Hattori, 2006, p. 7). An institution that was impacted the most, by the shift towards western approaches, was health care. For the United States, the main goal of the shift in health care was to ensure that the navy on the island would not be harmed by any potential diseases, while building human capital by keeping the islanders healthy to serve the military. Therefore, the US Navy built the Susana Hospital as another step towards "benevolent assimilation" (Hattori, 2006, p. 7). The focus of the Susana Hospital, in specific, was to entice the Chamorro women to move away from the traditional pattern, or Chamorro midwives, towards western hospital births (Hattori, 2006). Along with promoting western child delivery practices, the facility stood out as a symbol of the United States on the island, as it was one of the only American buildings, and enforced American ideals, such as English-only rules and western etiquette (Hattori, 2006). By establishing western practices in health care, the United States reinforced their power by signaling its presence on the island.

Similarly, the institution of education had the goal of promoting the assimilation of Chamorros. While the Susana Hospital was a singular location and challenged traditional norms, there was a "wholesale importation of the American school system" (Hattori, 2011, p. 221). This importation was not modified to incorporate native culture and tradition; therefore, it did not teach the island's youth about their native culture. As a result, once these students went to higher education, there was little engagement in their native culture (Hattori, 2011). The lack of engagement with their native culture and the assimilation into the American school system strengthened the power dynamic between the U.S. and Guam, as students were taught to see through lens that idealized the United States.

Unlike the hospitals and schools, which promoted the power dynamic through the enforcement of ideals, the United States' use of the physical space of the island for military installations strengthened the power dynamic by shifting the economy. Because of the island's geographical location, the United States sees Guam as the frontlines for any interactions with Asia or the rest of the Pacific. This perception has resulted in almost a third of the island being dedicated to military bases (Namkung and Lee, 2012). As a result of the control over the physical space, "the military is a major infrastructure for the Guamanian economy" (Namkung and Lee, 2012, p. 34). With the military using the majority of Guam's resources for itself, there is little room for expansion in other economic sectors. By becoming a key component of the economy, the impacts of military bases reinforce the power dynamic through the dependency on these bases to maintain economic stability.

## Analysis

While current scholarship lays out how the power dynamic of colonization impacts the islanders, their work also indirectly discusses a psychological component of colonization. This

psychological aspect primarily stems from the mindset colonization has on both the colonizer and the colonized. The United States, the colonizer in this case, gains a mindset of superiority and the sense of entitlement for "helping" colonized individuals. Conversely, for colonized groups, as a whole, colonization has created a mindset of dependency and inferiority (Ward, 2013). In addition, the Chamorros have also dealt with the rhetoric of the United States "liberating" and "saving" the island from the Spanish and Japanese rule suggesting they should be patriotic towards the United States (Woodward, 2013). The combination of these two mindsets permeates through the current literature in the discourse.

The shift of government emphasizes the mindset that colonialism creates on both the colonizer and the colonized. The shift to a western political system instills the mindset of inferiority for the islanders as the change suggests they cannot govern themselves. Similarly, the colonizer gains the mindset of superiority for helping this "incapable" group govern themselves. Maga (1985) supports this claim suggesting that "an independent Guam was never the goal of the United States government or the islanders" (p. 159). The mindsets of colonization are highlighted through Maga's example, as neither group wants to change the current western political system. The United States, the colonizer, wants to keep the current system to maintain its power over the island and its prime location for military installations. In addition, the United States believes that the islanders cannot govern themselves as they are unfamiliar with the system and how it works.

The Chamorros, the colonized, also have fallen into the mindset of inferiority. For example, Bevacqua (2017) cites some of the older Chamorros, who have fallen into the dependent, or inferior, mindset: "You think you can run a government without the United States?... The United States has built the strongest economy in the world, what have Chamorros done in the same history? We made canoes and built latte stones" (pp. 110-111). For many of the Chamorros,

specifically those who lived through World War II, favor keeping close ties with the United States. Their preference stems from the United States liberating them from the brutal Japanese occupation, therefore, they accepted the United States taking leadership over the island as "protectors." After years of westernization and the United States reinforcing the ideas of "liberation" and "protecting", the islanders have built a dependency and belief that they need the United States in order to stay economically stable and protected from other nations.

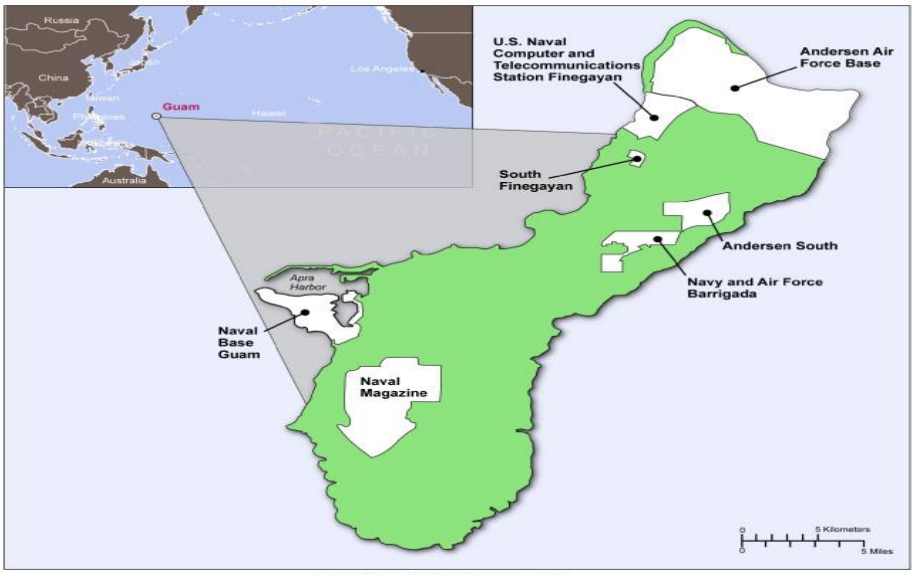
The shift in institutions also reinforced these mindsets. The Susana Hospital, for example, reinforced the United States' mindset that they are "helping" the islanders by saying "the mission of the United States is that of benevolent assimilation" (Hattori, 2006, p. 7) the article continues by claiming the goal of providing the hospital was "to protect 'the well-earned reputation of the American Navy as champions in succoring the needy, aiding the distressed, and protecting the honor and virtue of women" (Hattori, 2006, p. 7). These claims portray the United States in a way where the hospital is a "gift" to the islanders and they are saving them from their "backward" traditional practices. Consequently, the colonizer mindset is being reinforced as they are the "champions" of protecting people who are "inferior". Furthermore, the colonized islanders fall further into the mindset of dependency from being told they are "saved" from their "backward" practices with the installation of American health care.

Education also highlights, specifically the colonized mindset, rather than both the colonizer and colonized mindset. The "wholesale importation of the American school system" fosters the mindset of inferiority for the islanders as they are being taught a curriculum focusing on an American lens of history along with the enforcement of English-only (Hattori, 2011). The lens of US history portrays the colonization of North America through the ideals of "Manifest Destiny". By teaching this history that idealizes the United States, the islanders learn from a young age that

colonization is “normal” and “inevitable”, therefore not questioning, along with believing, they need the United States’ rule. In addition to teaching the idealized US history, the enforcement of English-only, or “No-Chamorro”, rules further perpetuate an inferior mindset for the Chamorros as speaking their native language was forbidden. Students were subjected to punishment when they spoke their native language conveying that Chamorro was bad or uneducated. These rules and punishments further perpetuated assimilation as, from a young age, Chamorros had to abandon their native language in order to fit what was perceived as good in education.

Furthermore, the control over the island builds a dependent mindset of the islanders. As the islanders are politically and mentally compliant, the United States has taken advantage to utilize most of the land for military installments (see Figure 1). This use of land for military purposes reinforces the mindset of inferiority in two ways: the islanders are impacted by the control over the physical space and with the military becoming the centerpiece of the economy.

Figure 1: Selected DOD Facilities on Guam




Source: GAO analysis of DOD data; Map Resources (map).

The military maintaining control over a large portion of the island emphasizes how the control of the physical space reinforces the colonizer/colonized mindsets. The creations of the military bases have created physical divisions of Guam. These divisions strengthen the mindset of inferiority for the islanders, as they prevent them from freely traveling the island.

Furthermore, many of the bases, specifically Anderson Air Force Base, have taken away land from the Chamorros including private land (owned by families) and land with an abundance of culturally rich history. The confiscation, the limiting access, and the replacement of the land with military bases convey to the Chamorros that they are periphery to the goals of the United States. Therefore, as the United States continues to destroy the island for military purposes, without the consent of the islanders, they are reinforcing the mindset of inferiority in the Chamorros.

Additionally, the shift in the economy has made Guam reliant on the military and they cannot expand other economic sectors because of the island's geographical limitations. As the military has been the centerpiece of the economy throughout the United States' control over the island, many of the islanders see the military-centric economy as "normal" and there are no other options to keep Guam's economy afloat. Consequently, this acceptance of the current state of the economy causes the islanders to adopt a mindset that they need the United States and the military bases in order to maintain the economy.

## Conclusion

Despite the current literature focusing on the power dynamic between the United States and Guam, the problem spans further also including a psychological component that impacts both groups. The addition of the psychological approach, however, does not discredit nor suggest changing how current research is conducted. Instead, the psychological approach contributes an essential layer of analysis to address the challenges faced by the Chamorros. Therefore, in addition to pursuing other potential components to the problem that also contributes to the relationship between the United States and Guam, future research must also build a stronger understanding of the interactions between the power dynamic and psychological component. By taking an intersectional or multifaceted approach to this issue, there can be a better understanding of the

impacts that colonization has on both the colonizer and the colonized. Furthermore, by addressing the impacts that colonization has through a power dynamic and mindset of dependency, there can be a conversation to counteract the impacts through encouraging younger generations on Guam to start to desire the reclaiming of their culture and realize there are other options, outside of the military, such as tourism.

The combination of further research and conversations about valuing indigenous culture could galvanize a change from the current mindset of dependency to a mindset of self-determination that many of the current researchers, like Bevacqua (2017) and Hattori (2006), have. While this shift from colonization would not be an easy process, Bevacqua (2017) suggests there must be no hesitation: “When confronted with this impasse [stuck between stagnating in the safety and familiarity of dependency or moving towards an unfamiliar, unknown future] one must not turn back. Instead, one must jump” (p. 120).

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