
Speaking the Language of Peace: Chamoru Resistance and Rhetoric in Guåhan's Self-Determination Movement

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Abstract: Chamorus (Chamorros) evince peaceful contestation through testimonies to the United Nations. These rhetorical practices highlight language as a form of political power-making for the Chamoru within that local struggle. Chamoru testimonies demonstrate the importance of non-violent opposition to militarization and colonialism, which have a profound impact on the inherent collective rights of indigenous peoples. This essay offers a unique approach that informs broader inquiries of U.S. military policy toward the Pacific and provides a significant contribution to interdisciplinary work aimed at understanding how to abolish militarization and war to maintain peace throughout the region.

Keywords: Chamoru, Chamorro, Guam, United Nations, testimonies, militarization, resistance, rhetoric

Résumé : Les Chamorus (Chamorros) déploient une contestation pacifique en portant des témoignages devant les Nations-Unies. Ces pratiques rhétoriques mettent en valeur le langage en tant que forme de prise de pouvoir par les Chamorus dans leurs luttes locales. Les témoignages des Chamorus démontrent l'importance de l'opposition non-violente à la militarisation et au colonialisme, qui ont impact profond sur les droits naturels collectifs des peuples indigènes. Cet article s'appuie sur une approche unique, qui sous-tend des enquêtes plus larges sur la politique militaire américaine à l'égard de la région Pacifique, et apporte une contribution significative au travail interdisciplinaire visant à comprendre comment abolir la militarisation et la guerre afin de maintenir la paix dans toute la région.

Mots-clés : Chamoru, Chamorro, Guam, Nations-Unies, témoignages, militarisation, résistance, rhétorique

Introduction

In 2014, Guåhan (Guam) remains an unincorporated territory of the United States and is one of the “oldest colonial dependencies in the world” (Van Dyke et al. 1996:625).¹ For the island and its inhabitants, this designation perpetuates the colonial relationship that began in 1521 when Ferdinand Magellan docked on the shores and was more formally established in 1668 when Spanish Jesuit missionaries embarked on religious conversion of the island (Palomo 1984:59–63; Rogers 1995:45). Centuries later, Spanish control was transferred to the United States in 1898. An imperial war of U.S. expansion, the Spanish-American War set “the regional grounds of what would constitute U.S. global hegemony in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez 2002:xiii). With the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the United States claimed ownership of Cuba, Guåhan, Philippines, Puerto Rico and parts of the West Indies. Congress then granted the Department of Navy administrative authority to establish a military government in Guåhan (Hofschneider 2001:18). During World War II, Japan seized Guåhan from the United States in 1941 and maintained a short but brutal period of military rule before the United States recaptured the island in 1944 (Gailey 1988:1–7). Since then, the island has remained under U.S. control, with Guåhan now considered to be the most strategic military outpost in the Pacific Rim (M. Perez 2001:97; Natividad and Kirk 2010). For over a century, U.S. military, political and economic considerations have converged to hold Guåhan in a state of political limbo.

The Organic Act of Guam, which ended Naval control and afforded civil and political rights and protection to Guåhan, was passed in 1950 and still continues to govern the island (Hofschneider 2001:155). However, those who received citizenship through the Act do not enjoy full protections under the US. Constitution (Gutierrez 2003:123). Furthermore, the Act declared Guåhan as an

unincorporated territory of the United States, a designation that afforded Guåhan an ambiguous political status, even as the issue of sovereignty remains a contentious one (M. Perez 2005:172). By recognizing only “states,” the legal umbrella of the U.S. Constitution excludes Guåhan and, consequently, the island remains exterior to the American nation, while simultaneously failing to be a nation or state on its own. Guåhan is afforded a political status that can be characterized as both/neither. Guåhan is represented as “both” a political landmass with citizenship status afforded to the inhabitants and a government with local elections and a delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives. Yet it is also characterized as “neither,” because the U.S. citizenship rights granted to Guåhan’s inhabitants are not full citizenship rights in practice. Citizens of Guåhan are restricted to voting only in the local plebiscite and prohibited from presidential elections, and the elected delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives is a non-voting member. Thus, “it is from this ambiguous political status that the island is poised in a tenuous relationship with the U.S.” (Stade 1998:47).

These interests have formed the basis of U.S.-Guåhan relations, which are characterized by the primacy of U.S. colonialism and framed in overtly militaristic terms (Camacho and Monnig 2010:150). Waves of conquest have left an enduring legacy of colonization and militarization that continues in contemporary society, and have had a significant impact on the inherent collective rights of the Chamoru (Chamorro) indigenous people.² The Guåhan population comprises roughly 160,000 people who represent a variety of demographic groups; the population is made up of an estimated 37 per cent Chamoru, 26 per cent Filipino, 11 per cent other Pacific Islander, 7 per cent European, 6 per cent Asian, 2 per cent other ethnic origin and 10 per cent mixed.³ Against this backdrop, Chamorus have formed a small yet determined self-determination movement to challenge the forces of military dominance (Bevacqua 2010:35).

In this article, I explore the intersection of colonial ideology and peaceful resistance rhetoric operating within the Chamoru self-determination movement. I examine Chamoru testimonies at the United Nations (UN) and examine the discourses about demilitarization that the movement deploys peacefully in relation to the U.S. state. Examining such discourses of demilitarization can provide theoretical insights for peace studies and understanding constructive conflict resolution from disenfranchised communities. In particular, I use counterpublic sphere theory (Felski 1989; Fraser 1997) to conduct a rhetorical analysis of UN testimonies from 2005 to 2010 and consider how peace can be maintained in situations

of militarization. I argue that the self-determination movement functions as a subaltern counterpublic and is constituted by an indigenous rhetoric of resistance. Ahead, I detail some of the issues of organizational history and the trajectory of the self-determination movement to situate the present inquiry and better understand the efforts at peaceful contestation. Examining these testimonies, I seek to answer this question: How can counterpublic theory facilitate an understanding of self-determination movements when addressed in transnational forums? This examination informs broader efforts at decolonization and contributes to an understanding of the rhetorical tactics used to engage in struggles over freedom from colonial rule and promote causes of peace. First, I provide a political, social and economic context of Guåhan and indigenous social movements. Next, I review the counterpublic sphere literature to establish a theoretical framework for understanding the Chamoru counterpublic. Then, I apply this lens to the UN testimonies and contemporary movement discourse aimed against the U.S. state. Finally, I discuss the implications of this self-determination movement upon broader efforts at peaceful resistance to militarization in the Pacific.

Situating Chamoru Movements

In the U.S. media and news coverage, there is a complete lack of regard for Guåhan and no significant media attention directed toward island issues. Thus, the Chamoru self-determination efforts and the peaceful opposition on the island to an ever-increasing military presence are largely invisible from the mainstream news media outlets on the U.S. mainland.

Despite its status as one of the last official colonies in the world, increased militarization on Guåhan has registered little to no protest on an international or national level (Bevacqua 2010:33). Subsequently, Chamoru struggles must be examined within the historical context of colonial and neocolonial projects, which have established a political economy of stratification. Understanding the political, social and economic context of the movement allows contemporary struggles to be viewed as a continuation of past conflicts.

As early as 1901, Chamorus began their call for peace by demanding an end to military rule and recognition of civil rights. During the first half of the century, indigenous leaders petitioned to receive political recognition; they continued these pleas for U.S. citizenship and changes to the Naval government structure for several decades. After the island’s occupation by Japan during World War II, the petitions for political rights continued. But it was not until after World War II ended that the United States actively considered granting

citizenship to the native inhabitants of Guåhan. A limited form of citizenship was granted in the 1950s with the passage of the Organic Act of Guam (Camacho and Monnig 2010:150). Since then, Guåhan has had a considerable history of engagement with the American political process. In 1980, the Guam Legislature established the Commission on Self-Determination. In 1982, the first self-determination plebiscite was held; there was not a majority vote, which led to the top options of Commonwealth and Statehood moving to a run-off and Commonwealth prevailing. Through the 1990s tensions soared as the movement remained divided over whether to sever ties with the United States or to maintain a closer relationship (Camacho and Monnig 2010:151). In 1997, local law created the Guam Decolonization Commission, which replaced the Self-Determination Commission.⁴ The Guam Decolonization Commission is tasked with researching and conducting plebiscites on the three internationally recognized options for self-determination: Statehood, Independence and Free Association. A plebiscite was anticipated for November 2000 and 2002, requiring a registration of at least 70 per cent of qualified “inhabitant” voters. However, because the Guam Election Commission was unable to establish the required voter registration, the plebiscite was rescheduled (Gutierrez 2003:124 n. 20). The Commission on Decolonization was then inactive for eight years, until Governor Eddie Baza Calvo convened the Commission on September 23, 2011. This meeting coincided with the governor’s letter to U.S. president Barack Obama officially announcing Guam’s Commission on Decolonization and detailing the islanders’ intentions to seek political self-determination pursuant to the UN charter and UN resolutions 1514 and 1541 (Kerrigan 2011).⁵ The revitalization of the Commission on Decolonization is an important step in the contemporary efforts to achieve self-determination for Guåhan.

Today, a diverse array of opinions and competing political interests operate among the Chamoru population (Na’puti 2013:2–3). In spite of these differences, the contemporary movement has positioned itself in opposition to U.S. military buildup activities that have quickly become a trend since September 11, 2001 (Lutz 2010). John Beverley explains that movements create legitimacy by asserting political and cultural rights and agency; this often entails “both a critique of hegemony and a possibility of a new form of hegemony” (2001:49). Establishing a critique of hegemony is particularly prudent given the United States’ aggressive agenda of privatization on the island—a project that represents one of the largest efforts at resource privatization on U.S. soil, which first entailed siphoning off the electricity and telecommunications sectors and now focuses on out-

sourcing waste and water system management to private companies (J. Aguon 2006b:45–47). The current efforts at privatization are inextricably linked with the larger scheme of militarizing the island. The expansion of the military requires more extensive privatization of natural resources and public services for personnel and their dependents inside the fence.

The people of Guåhan are still pursuing their internationally recognized right of self-determination. In particular, “this movement is composed of numerous organizations, some of which have been fighting for decades, such as *I Nasion Chamoru* or Organization of People for Indigenous Rights (OPI-R) and some created just recently, such as *Famoksaian*” (Bevacqua 2010:35). We Are Guåhan is another significant group in the contemporary movement; it emerged in 2009 around the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that outlined the Department of Defense’s (DoD) plans for the U.S. military buildup. We Are Guåhan is one of the most highly visible groups on the island and carries a strong Internet presence that reaches well beyond the territory. The organization’s goals are to “educate the public on the impact of the proposed military buildup, provide the people of Guam with a voice in the buildup process; and, promote a sustainable future for Guam.”⁶ When the DoD announced plans to build a firing range at Pãgat Village, We Are Guåhan galvanized strong public opposition to the buildup. This resistance to the military buildup plans culminated in the organization’s joint efforts with Guam Preservation Trust and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to file a lawsuit against the DoD in November 2010 (M. Aguon 2010). In 2011, one year after the lawsuit was filed against the DoD for breaking the law in its selection of Pãgat Village, the DoD admitted it must prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and give the public an opportunity to comment on its plans during scoping meetings (Ridgell 2011). The group maintains a website that provides information about the military buildup issues, events, news and opportunities to get involved and take action. They also host an open public forum page on Facebook and express their organizational goals: “We Are Guåhan aims to inform and engage our community on the various issues concerning the impending military build-up. We Are Guåhan aims to unite and mobilize our people to protect and defend our resources and our culture.”⁷

These organizations and others have focused on grassroots educational campaigns and protests at both the local and federal level, testifying at the UN, and have built “solidarity with other indigenous peoples around the world and those struggling under the weight of Amer-

ican militarism or colonialism" (Bevacqua 2010:35). The case of Guåhan parallels that of Puerto Rico, which also endures political and economic subordination to the United States and has experienced impediments to self-determination and decolonization under the legacy of colonial rule. The strategic security of Puerto Rico has provided the rationalization for continuing U.S. military authority there and has led to persecution of Puerto Ricans advocating the legal right to self-determination (Rodríguez Orellana 2002:425–429). Chamoru movements also correspond with sovereignty struggles throughout Native America and Latin America and inform the sovereignty struggles in Hawai'i and other territories around the world (Meijknecht 2001:132–133; M. Perez 2001:109).

A Review of Counterpublics Literature

Jürgen Habermas's theory of public sphere argues that individuals are assembled in a public body, guaranteed to all citizens and understood as an arena for producing rational-critical discourse capable of providing a check upon the state (Habermas et al. 1974:52; Habermas 1991: 28–29). Contemporary theorists have guided Habermas's conception of the public sphere toward a more subversive framework.⁸ For example, Rita Felski argues for a counterpublic sphere as "an oppositional discursive arena" within late capitalism that offers a key for analyzing diverse cultural and political practices of movements. This model focuses on communicative networks and economic, political and social structures that produce and disseminate ideologies (1989:9). Unlike the Habermasian model, the state is not necessarily the primary audience for counterpublic activities. A counterpublic is excluded in various ways from the dominant means of political discourse and suffers from a lack of political power (Asen and Brouwer 2001:3). Turning to the state is not an option in many cases, especially when individuals lack rights, resources or responsibilities granted through state power or when individuals are outright denied state protections (Asen and Brouwer 2001:15–16). For Chamorus, turning to the state is not a viable option due to the lack of full political rights and opportunities for engagement in the United States in spite of their citizenship status. Nancy Fraser explains that subaltern counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (1997:123). The subaltern counterpublic provides a locus for expressing alternate ways of knowing; it is a space where cultural and political rights to difference are legitimated and oppressed groups are not viewed as objects but are

understood as subjects of discourse (Felski 1989:171; Stephenson 2002:101). These discursive arenas deploy communicative practices that resist the control of dominant groups and include a range of standpoints, social movements and marginal populations (Asen and Brouwer 2001:7).

By emphasizing cultural significance, identity, communicative networks and social movement practices, Felski's and Fraser's work on counterpublics offers a useful framework for examining the oppositional discursive space of the Chamoru self-determination movement. Since counterpublics are directly intertwined with issues of identity, politics and governance, they provide "conceptual resources" for expressing oppositional cultural identities and an understanding of how groups critically engage in the practice of democracy (Fraser 1997:70; Stephenson 2002:100). In particular, counterpublic theory provides a distinctive lens for viewing the discursive elements of peace maintenance and a mechanism for analyzing the resistance rhetoric operating within the movement. This offers a useful vantage point for scholars to engage rhetoric that has emerged from the context of globalization and hegemonic neoliberal practices. Such peaceful resistance in the face of increased militarization and privatization establishes unique political and cultural agency for change.

A Chamoru Counterpublic Emerges

A subaltern counterpublic sphere emerges when public discourse is considered singular and overarching, resulting in the exclusion of particular groups. Counterpublics formed by these subordinated social groups are structured sites of collective deliberation and contestation; they engage their dominant counterparts through oppositional argumentation (Fraser 1997:125). The dominant discursive arena on Guåhan is predominately controlled by U.S. military interests and industries; it is an arena that operates through the exclusion of Chamorus from full U.S. citizenship rights. The interests of the U.S. mainland are made manifest throughout the island, exacerbating an already perplexed and contradictory political position for Guåhan. As a result, Chamoru self-determination "continues to be attacked on constitutional grounds, while claims to U.S. economic and political benefits are often challenged" precisely because Guåhan is neither fully part of the United States nor a completely self-governing entity (Stade 1998:47). From this precarious political location, Chamorus have found it difficult and often problematic to voice opposition to the exclusionary practices and policies of a territorial ruler that maintains colonial ever-presence, even from a distance. However, as Keith L. Camacho and Laurel A.

Monnig observe, in Guåhan “processes of decolonization have developed despite and, some argue *because of*, the intense militarization of the island” (2010:150). Thus, the historical exclusion of Chamorus and the increasing militarization of their land have marked the emergence of the subaltern counterpublic that builds community and expresses opposition to U.S. governance.⁹

To understand the Chamoru self-determination movement as a subaltern counterpublic, one must recognize its characteristics (Felski 1989:171). First, it is a site for expressing alternate ways of knowing. Claiming subaltern knowledges is particularly important for Guåhan, where cultural alteration has taken its toll as a result of the U.S. education model, which has enforced an English-only policy and suppressed indigenous knowledge for more than 60 years. Assimilation in this form has fragmented indigenous identity and may push the Chamoru language to the edge of extinction within the next 20 years (J. Aguon 2006a:55–56). By recognizing my social location and incorporating the writings, work and testimonies of the indigenous group, this article draws from and extends Chamoru epistemology that currently operates within the counterpublic. Second, the movement legitimates rights to difference by articulating cultural and political agency in the context of globalization and U.S. militarization.

Finally, the self-determination movement allows for members to shift from the margins of dominant discourse to establish their own centre for discourse production. This view recognizes Chamorus as subjects of discourse rather than passive recipients or mere objects of discourse for academic research. Recognizing Chamorus as indigenous subjects informs an understanding of the critical engagement and oppositional discourse deployed against the dominant U.S. counterpart. Such peaceful resistance in the face of increased militarization and privatization establishes unique political and cultural agency for change.

The Chamoru counterpublic still faces the difficulty of expressing opposition to the United States across such an expansive spatial distance, a situation that is intensified by the tenuous condition of states and publics. As Asen and Brouwer argue, the dual forces of globalization and civil societies have placed the state under duress—sparking transformations in the state itself, and causing a “growing trend toward international decision-making bodies” (2001:16). In many ways, the Chamoru counterpublic must both disengage from and engage with the U.S. nation state. This has been an uphill battle for Chamorus. Because of its political status, efforts to engage the U.S. nation state simultaneously manifest as disengagement from the nation. The movement engages

the state through an antagonism centred on the United States’ colonial and militaristic control over the island. But to express this opposition to the United States, the counterpublic must raise the question of self-determination, which requires a disengagement from the nation state. In the peaceful struggle for self-determination, there have also been many roadblocks preventing direct engagement with the United States. Thus, the movement turns to the UN and uses the framework of international law and human rights to seek redress. Human rights rhetoric has been a resource for consciousness-raising and has demonstrated that, “despite combating the internalized colonialism crippling the majority of Chamoru minds and consequently our progress, Chamorus committed to a human rights agenda managed to wield a position of honor and acumen” (J. Aguon 2006b:35). Focusing on an agenda of human rights, Chamorus speak to the international governing body of the UN as a conduit for directing oppositional argumentation in a peaceful manner against the United States. By continuously voicing resistance to the United States within the transnational political space of the UN, the Chamoru counterpublic maintains a mechanism for expressing nation-state opposition in a platform that welcomes collective deliberation and engagement with the nation state.

Toward a Transnational Frame: Politics, Governance and Counterpublics

The actions and activities of the Chamoru movement demonstrate Fraser’s argument that counterpublic space in a globalizing world does not perfectly align with state-like powers (2009:157). Habermas’s public sphere configuration that correlated publics with political citizenship and a sovereign territorial state has been challenged by the long history of colonialism and neocolonialism (Fraser 2009:80, 157). Conflating membership with affectedness has been the justification for “the progressive incorporation, as active citizens, of the subordinate classes and status groups who were resident in the territory but excluded from full political participation” (2009:24, 95). Today, using citizenship as the primary factor for membership and public opinion formation is problematic. Instead, Fraser seeks a new understanding of legitimacy where legitimate public opinion is achieved as a result of “a communicative process in which all who are jointly subjected to the relevant governance structure(s) can participate as peers, *regardless of political citizenship*” (Fraser 2009:96).

Contemporary public spheres trespass the boundaries of territorial states (Fraser 2009:155). This fluidity presents the need for the creation of new transnational

public powers that are made “accountable to new, transnational public spheres” (2009:98). Moving toward a transnational conceptualization of public sphere theory enables scholars to account for non-state-centred public spheres, challenge state-centred frames and account for counterpublics comprising individuals regardless of political citizenship. The transnational frame encourages us to explore how the primacy of nation states has shifted toward international decision-making bodies. It also challenges the assumption that publics and counterpublics neatly map onto civil society and, in turn, provide mechanisms of accountability for the state.

Chamoru exclusion from full political participation and Guåhan’s status as neither a stand-alone nation nor U.S. state have influenced the turn toward international governing bodies (Stade 1998:47). International law recognizes self-determination as a mechanism of recourse for determining the legitimacy of control over particular geographic space and populations (Hendrix 2008:17). As a result, Chamorus have resorted to diverse modes of engagement with established international law to practice their inherent right of self-determination. The shift toward the transnational arena of the UN can be considered another forum for democratic engagement and a site for expressing oppositional discourse against the United States. However, turning toward the UN is a forced choice for the Chamoru counterpublic. As a strategically valuable U.S. possession with an obscure political status, Guåhan’s appeals to the UN for local autonomy have been to no avail (M. Perez 2005:81). Due to the fiduciary relationship with the United States as administering authority of Guåhan, Chamorus require U.S. cooperation to exercise the right to self-determination. “It is unrealistic and a violation of the obligations outlined under Article 73 [of the UN Charter], to expect a dependent people to unilaterally engage in self-determination without the support of their administering power. Yet this is precisely the situation in Guam” (Cristobal 1993:153). After decades of colonial rule by the United States and successive failures when positioning demands upon the U.S. state, the self-determination movement’s shift to the UN signals an effort to maintain efficacy in a transnational arena that provides a check upon states and holds the power of accountability for international law violations.

In Their Own Words: Chamoru Testimonies to the UN

The data collected for this article include 30 testimonies presented at the UN on the question of Guåhan from 2005 to 2010. These testimonies were given at the UN Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth

Committee), the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. After a lull in visits before 2005, this time period represents the resurgence of UN testimonies motivated by the impending U.S. military buildup and the necessity of raising the critical issue of Chamoru self-determination. These testimonies carry the legacy of more than 20 years of Chamorus appealing to the UN on behalf of human rights for Guåhan (Anonymous 2009).¹⁰ These testimonies demonstrate one of the fundamental ways that the Chamorus have created collective deliberation, generated contestation and mobilized people to address self-determination.

The delegations of Chamorus representing interests of Guåhan at the UN strongly connect with other self-determination efforts manifesting on the island. These local efforts include the creation of public education organizations, community engagement in the public hearings and scoping meetings surrounding the U.S. military buildup, joint legal action against the DoD over its proposed firing range at Págat Village and engagement of issues of decolonization in schools, villages, web-spaces and beyond. The international and local activities highlight the emergence of the Chamoru counterpublic poised against the dominant discourse of U.S. territorial rule and create a cultural community that critically engages important debates and issues about Guåhan. Rather than be content with their marginalized political position, Chamorus have found, in the self-determination movement, an outlet for political critique and a facilitator for peaceful discussion and high-level criticism and debate (Quimby 2011:378–79).

The testimonies presented from 2005 to 2010 deploy several rhetorical tactics and engage various themes. In each testimony the witnesses situate themselves as individuals belonging to the Chamoru indigenous group and as supporters of self-determination. This move signals the primary rhetorical tactic of identity formation, which occurs through the strategic deployment of the Chamoru language and provides a distinctive vernacular discourse. Testimonies also reference the legacy of the Chamoru culture and people, and the history of Chamoru petitions for decolonization and self-determination at the UN. By referring to Guåhan as a “colony” or “colonized” space, these testimonies illuminate the problematic nature of U.S. military governance on the island. This naming process discursively transforms the island from a marginal U.S. territory into a geographic space that merits urgency in both the international and U.S. political arenas. These tactics present in the testimonies spur identity formation among members of the counterpublic and beyond and rhetorically highlight the impact that

U.S. policies have on the culture, language and identity of the Chamoru people.

Utilization of long-standing cultural practices provides continuous reminders of an identity distinct from that imposed upon a group by an outside power; among such practices are the culturally grounded discourses that construct ties of solidarity while reminding the people of their identity. Gerard Hauser argues that such discourses are “recursive social action whose continuity provides stability to national identity while simultaneously promoting instability within the larger society” (1999:120). The Chamoru language represents a culturally grounded discourse that draws attention to the identity and solidarity of the indigenous people of Guåhan. While the Chamoru language is recognized as one of the official languages on the island and is used on government documents and websites, the language is threatened by extinction within the next generation (J. Aguon 2006a:55–56).¹¹ Thus, language usage is an important component of the resistance waged at the UN and functions as a mechanism for Chamorus to assert their inherent right to self-determination as a people. This linguistic and cultural identity is placed in stark contrast to the hegemonic U.S. identity that is connected to forces of military buildup, environmental degradation, displacement and cultural erosion. In their statements from 2005 to 2010, petitioners use the Chamoru language to displace the normalcy of U.S. governance and establish a case for self-determination, to call attention to the purpose of testimony and to give appreciation for the opportunity to address the UN forum on the important issues relating to Guåhan. Senator Vicente Cabrera Pangelinan, a member of the Guåhan Senate, offers an example of vernacular discourse in his testimony when he says,

Ginen y anti y espiritu yan y man fotna na taotao Guåhan na hu presenta este na testimonu, yan u fan libre y taotao pagu. It is from the soul and the spirit of our ancestors that I present this testimony today for the liberation of the people today. [Pangelinan 2008]

The Chamoru language is used to call attention to the purpose of testimony and to show appreciation for the opportunity to address the UN forum on the important issues relating to Guåhan. This is evidenced throughout most of the testimonies where vernacular discourse is used to provide unifying identity among Chamoru language speakers. The testimonies of Michael Tuncap and Josette Marie Lujan Quinata, from 2008 and 2010 respectively, demonstrate this format and discursive mode:

Hafa Adai yan buenasi! (Hello and good day) Your Excellency Mr. Chairman Jorge Aguello, and distinguished members of the Fourth Committee: *Dangkolu na si Yu'os ma'ase* (sincere thank you) for your invitation to participate at this important testimony for the remainder of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in the 21st century. [Tuncap 2008]

Hafa Adai distinguished members of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) and Chairman, H. E. Mr. Chitsaka Chipaziwa. *Dankolo na si yu'us ma'ase* (thank you very much) for your time in allowing me the opportunity to address this esteemed international body. *Guahu si* Josette Marie Lujan Quinata and I am a proud Chamoru daughter of Guåhan. [Quinata 2010]

From these examples, the vernacular discourse can be seen as creating unity as well as peaceful division. The testimonies offer recursive social action by following the Chamoru language up with English translations that establish sharp resistance to continued colonial formations on Guåhan and point toward the purpose of testifying as one of producing a peaceful alternative to U.S. territorial rule. In addition to identity formation, the testimonies also focus on particular themes such as self-determination, militarization, political participation and opposition to the United States. The testimonies argue that self-determination is an inalienable human right established by international law that the United States has consistently denied to Guåhan. Witnesses argue that the UN must act on behalf of Guåhan to combat this injustice. As Craig Santos Perez (2008) argues, the issue of self-determination must be given priority and direct action in international legal proceedings to grant Chamorus their established political right:

The Fourth Committee must give top priority to the fulfillment of our inalienable right to self-determination, as affirmed by General Resolutions 1514 and 1541 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Other testimonies connect the issue of self-determination with international law and emphasize it as a fundamental characteristic of humanity and the foundational basis for political enfranchisement:

I fight the same fight that took the lives of Ron Rivera and former Senator and founder of I Nasion Chamoru Angel Santos. Our message has been loud and clear—the Chamoru people of Guåhan deserve to exercise our basic, inalienable human right to self-determination. [Leon Guerrero 2008]

The massive militarization of our island home undermining our human right to self-determination before we even had the chance to vote on a political status is being coupled with an aggressive privatization agenda being pushed by the local Chamber of Commerce, which is dominated by US Statesiders. [S. Perez 2008]

These testimonies evince the self-determination rhetoric of the Chamoru counterpublic, and demonstrate the ways in which human rights discourse is bound up with the overarching rhetoric of self-determination. Using the discourse of rights seems apropos when petitioning about guarantees codified in international law within the transnational forum of the UN. However, scholars have critiqued the discursive formation of rights and argued that, although testimony is a useful form of documentation and rights language bears rhetorical power, “the human rights field has little to offer in terms of either ‘remedies’ for victim or insights for prevention” (Heise 1994–95:1210). The criticism should be tempered with any discussion of the transformative and subversive capacities of self-determination rhetoric in the context of the UN.

Connected to the issue of human rights discourse are issues of militarization and political participation. The testimonies explain the denied political rights of Chamorus in contrast to the increasing political rights of the U.S. military on and off the island. By directly addressing the issue of political participation, witnesses argue that U.S. military influence threatens to push Chamorus even further into the marginal space of engagement and participation in the decision-making process of their island. The testimonies exemplify oppositional discourse surrounding the political disenfranchisement of Chamorus:

In this time of great need for Chamorros and Guam, with the overwhelming burden of inequality accumulating, the expediting of the current US militarization, the huge conflicts of interest of those entrusted with preserving our human rights and their subsequent disregard for it, it is essential to ensure that all the accomplishments of our forebears on behalf of decolonization and self-determination be maintained. [S. Perez 2007]

This hyper-militarization poses grave implications for our human right to self-determination because the US currently asserts that its citizens—this transient population—have a constitutional right to vote in our plebiscite. [C. Perez 2008]

Here, the issue of political rights is inextricably linked with self-determination while noting that projected plans

for U.S. military expansion on Guåhan will exacerbate an already grave situation of political marginalization. In addition, the authors of this testimony critique the double standard of U.S. voting rights and citizenship. By discussing political rights for Guåhan in the framework of group identity, this testimony argues that electoral and constitutional rights should be granted only to the Chamoru population and should not be extended to the transient population of the military personnel. Other testimonies voice opposition to continued U.S. militarization, which threatens to trample the political right of self-determination afforded to Chamorus:

The sum effect of U.S. cultural hegemony and militarism is to permanently deny Chamoru people our long and uphill struggle for self-determination. The military buildup we speak of today and the scheduled relocation of tens of thousands of additional US military personnel is the latest act of negligence and abuse on the part of the US as the official Administering Power of Guam. The General Assembly must pass a resolution condemning this mass military relocation and buildup of Guam. The Fourth Committee must take direct action to stop the military occupation of Guam. [Lacsado 2006]

Instructive here is the statement made by the Deputy Commander of US Pacific Command, U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Daniel P. Leaf in his visit to Guam in September 2006 who stated that U.S. troops have a US Constitutional Right to participate in Guam’s local elections. If this is an example of US policy regarding local governance, then Chamorro self-determination is gravely endangered. Moreover, this military buildup of Guam goes against the Administering Power’s moral and legal obligations to protect our human rights. [S. Perez 2008]

Once again, the issues of self-determination, political rights and human rights are linked together. In addition, terms such as *our* and *Chamorro* establish division between the citizens of Guåhan and those who simply occupy the military bases on the island. Finally, the lack of political participation on Guåhan is exposed as a problematic and unjust situation:

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]

Overall, the testifiers are emphasizing how militarization affects their ability to self-determine as a people. It is through their discourse of demilitarization that they establish a foundation for peacemaking based on their inherent right of self-determination. The language prevalent in the testimonies is very standardized in many respects. First, each speaker begins by acknowledging the Fourth Committee and often specifically acknowledges the committee chairman. Second, many of the testimonies use the term *administering authority* rather than saying the *United States* or making a direct reference to the United States. Many of the testimonies also make appeals based on the organizational support for the implementation of a decolonization agenda. This discourse places focus on external sources of support and shifts the call for action from the individuals providing testimony to the public interests of the people they represent. Senator Vicente Pangelinan was the first elected official from Guåhan to submit a testimony to the UN in several years; the prepared testimony was read by a Chamoru attorney on the senator's behalf. The presence of the senator's testimony demonstrates a tension between political participation and exclusion. While Senator Pangelinan stands to represent the people as an elected official in the Guåhan Senate, he is denied the right to vote in U.S. federal elections. His testimony is juxtaposed against U.S. representative democracy, which outwardly extends representation for Guåhan in Washington, DC, through the presence of an elected delegate in the House of Representatives while denying full participation. The testimony is also juxtaposed against the transnational governing body of the UN, which is heavily influenced by U.S. veto power.

Assessing the UN as a Transnational Frame

The Chamoru movement's engagement with the UN has not yet translated into success in terms of achieving political rights or sovereign status. By directing public attention in an issue-specific and temporary manner, the UN operates within the established format of national public spheres (Habermas 1998:177). In this way, the UN has been challenged as a "weak" public, since it lacks the institutional power to compel states to act and its international laws have historically lacked enforcement mechanisms (Fraser 1997:134). The problems of enforcement mechanisms can be connected with the primacy of the ideal of absolute sovereignty for states (Mater 2001:218). The world is characterized by a global political realm, in which "nation-states must justify their actions to a global public because of the discourse produced by NGOs and other transnational governing institutions" (Mater 2001:215–216). Although NGOs and

transnational organizations attempt to hold states accountable, they may still comprise "weak" publics in relation to the U.S. state. This phenomenon can be better understood when considering that conventional arenas, such as the UN, have historically dominated the process of decolonization and the actions of social movements. Through legal bureaucracy, constitutional lawyers and their categories of analysis have diverted attention from key issues of decolonization (Bertram 1987:17). The enforced norms of discourse and established formats for UN hearings seriously hinder the deliberative potential for witnesses who enter the forum as activists for social change. Similar observations have been made regarding the limitations of U.S. congressional hearings; controlling mechanisms can include the content of hearings as well as the modes of expression (Brouwer 2001:92–93). As a "weak" public, the UN does not afford any decision-making power to witnesses. Certainly a major obstacle for witnesses remains their inability to "directly participate, through voting, in the final determination of policy proposals" (Brouwer 2001:93). From this understanding of the transnational forum of the UN, we can better understand the limitations and possibilities it offers for self-determination movements that utilize peaceful means for achieving their self-determination goals.

The Chamoru case demonstrates some limits of a transnational frame. Counterpublics facilitate the creation of oppositional discourse; yet, for the Chamoru movement, the decision to direct such discourse to the transnational public of the UN has diluted the transformative potential of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in favour of U.S. territorial interests. By using the UN as a medium for communicating opposition to the United States, the Chamoru counterpublic is relying upon a "weak" public to channel its discourse against U.S. territorial rule. Positioned within a transnational political arena, the movement is subjected to human rights violations, colonialism and nationalism. Such positioning for indigenous rights struggles is often troublesome because, on the one hand, it reflects an appeal to the global logic of nations and peoples and, on the other hand, it necessitates dependency upon a state or transnational structure to guarantee particular rights (Stade 1998:48).

Such scepticism exists toward appealing to conventional means for achieving decolonization for Guåhan. Some contend that the decolonization question should not be asked solely in standardized terms set out by the UN, international treaties, laws or U.S. conceptions of democracy (Camacho and Monnig 2010:149). On the one hand, the UN testimonies represent a forced choice for Chamorus, who have been continuously denied recourse

by the United States. Conversely, by turning to the “weak” transnational public of the UN, the Chamoru counterpublic is positioned within standardized international discourse that lacks the decision-making authority needed to transform opinion formation into concrete political influence on the United States. In this sense, both the UN committee and the Chamoru counterpublic function as “weak” publics.

Despite the creation of international laws with enforcement mechanisms, international regimes and transnational agreements, the issue of decolonization has yet to be included in the international governing documents from the UN. Thus, building the case for decolonization and self-determination through the UN presents an uphill battle when U.S. interests so heavily saturate the transnational forum. Although the UN has provided a place for Chamorus to voice concerns and facilitate opinion formation, they still lack voting rights and direct action capacity with regard to the U.S. violations of international law. As a result, the Chamoru decolonization movement is haunted by past conflicts, which manifest in the present and require new methods of engagement in the struggle against political exclusion.

In a transnational era when public spheres do not neatly line up with state entities, the creation of strong publics becomes much more salient. From blogs to Chamoru zines and testimonies, the counterpublic offers a unique arena for public opinion-formation regarding self-determination and decolonization issues for Guåhan. The existence of this counterpublic facilitates consciousness raising and the creation of oppositional discourse that has since been translated into petitions and testimonies to the UN. Although problematic in many respects, for the Chamoru counterpublic the shift toward the transnational forum provides a contemporary example of how counterpublic theory must be expanded to consider the diverse mechanisms of engagement for challenging colonial powers in a post-Westphalian world. The Chamoru counterpublic certainly deploys a variety of tactics for engaging dominant political discourse; however, the movement is limited by culminating its efforts in appeals to a transnational organization in which the United States has veto power. In this configuration, the status of the counterpublics and their relationship to the state remains tenuous.

Ultimately, the transnational public sphere requires unique configurations to yield both opinion formation and decision-making authority. While the appeal to transnational entities holds the promise of such authority, the case of the Chamoru counterpublic demonstrates the limits of such engagement. In calling for a turn to a transnational frame, Fraser argues that theorists must

reconsider the core premises of public theory with regard to efficacy and legitimacy of public opinion. Heeding this call is necessary for public sphere theory to maintain its critical and political edge and the promise of contributing to struggles for emancipation.

Conclusions and Future Directions

I have put forth a theoretical framework for understanding the complex and contradictory scene that lies at the crossroads between colonial ideology and resistance rhetoric. I have argued that this intersection shapes and produces Chamoru subjectivity and their subsequent acts of peaceful resistance. Chamorus are suggesting an alternative to U.S. dominance and subverting the confines of the UN system through the use of the Chamoru language in their UN testimonies. From this case study, peace is a foundation for Chamoru resistance. The testimonies and the emergence of the counterpublic sphere coalesce around expressing opposition to U.S. territorial rule and the impending military buildup with the express purpose of maintaining peace through constructive conflict resolution throughout the foreseeable future. This lens offers several advantages for current mobilization efforts and future research. By uncovering political texts that ideological constructs have attempted to bury deep beneath the surface, this perspective brings attention to the underrepresented arena of U.S. territories within communication scholarship.

Calling attention to this area of the world is essential, both for engaging the wider American public that remains largely unaware and uninterested in territorial issues and for acknowledging the efforts of colonized peoples to organize and peacefully resist injustices within their lands. As this case study has shown, it is necessary to think about colonization and self-determination efforts as the 21st century unfolds. Given that colonization subjects peoples to ideological relationships, understanding the discourses of self-determination offers a necessary step on the path toward true peace. In addition, as a method of rhetorical analysis, counterpublic theory informs broader ideological criticisms and an understanding of social movements while turning to the imperative issues of self-determination, decolonization, cultural preservation and peace in the Pacific. Given the political status of the island, the efficacy of these efforts remains to be seen. Understanding how dominant political discourse serves the foundations of colonial ideology is a crucial recognition for social movements seeking to build solidarity and voice their demands for a decolonized future. From this understanding, peoples worldwide are in better positions to find their emancipatory

potential, to challenge, resist and wage peaceful forms of protest against the insidious forms of colonial violence throughout the world.

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Notes

- 1 Throughout this essay I refer to the island *Guåhan*, which is the indigenous name for Guam. I also use *Chamorus* rather than *Chamorros* to avoid the Spanish and U.S. colonial terminology and spellings imposed by external authorities, and stand in solidarity with contemporary indigenous struggles. As a member of the Chamoru diaspora, I have made a conscious political decision and strategic choice to follow other Chamoru and Pacific scholars and take ownership of otherwise borrowed, legally sanctioned names for the island and its indigenous inhabitants (J. Aguon 2006b:12–15; Dames 2003:379; Monnig 2007:27–31).
- 2 The Chamorro Language Commission changed the spelling of *Chamorro* to *Chamoru* in 1994; however, the spelling has not been officially adopted (Dames 2003:379 n. 4).
- 3 Demographic data from the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census Bureau figures. Reports available from <http://www.census.gov>.
- 4 Public Law 23–147 created the Commission on Decolonization.
- 5 The full text of Governor Calvo's letter is available for review and highlights the significance of the self-determination issue for the Calvo Tenorio administration.
- 6 <http://www.weareguahan.com/about-weareguahan/>. The organization presented a series of "grey papers" that summarized the concerns. Papers provide an important set of texts on the core issues for the local community with regard to the buildup.
- 7 At the time of writing, the Facebook forum has a total of 3,266 open members and is an actively updated page that informs the Facebook community about the U.S. military buildup and other pertinent issues facing Guåhan.
- 8 Asen and Brouwer critique the Habermasian model for creating a strict separation between the public sphere and the state and for ignoring the possibility that individuals could face exclusion from participation (2001:3–13). See also Michael Warner (2002).
- 9 Community building occurs through a web-based arena, where blogs, websites and alternative media publications address issues of decolonization and self-determination for Guåhan. This online presence functions as a catalyst for political opinion formation within the Chamoru counter-public. Blogs connect to alternative news coverage of military planning, interviews with decolonization activists and publicity for Chamoru cultural events both on the island and across the United States.
- 10 The 2008 testimonies from the Guåhan delegation at the UN have been compiled in a document called *Hita Guåhan*, published in the December 10, 2008, edition of the Chamoru zine called *Minagahet*.

- 11 A report conducted by the Haya Cultural Heritage and Preservation Institute in 2005 assessed the level of Chamoru language usage and the status of the Chamoru language according to the number of fluent speakers (J. Aguon 2006a:55–56).

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