

Discontiguous States of America: The Paradox of Unincorporation in Craig Santos Perez's Poetics of Chamorro Guam

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Guam had nothing to do with the causes and little to do with the conduct of the Spanish-American War. Nonetheless, the war was an epochal turning point in the history of the Mariana Islands.

—Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall*¹

On some maps, Guam doesn't exist; I point to an empty space in the Pacific and say, "I'm from here." On some maps, Guam is a small, unnamed island; I say, "I'm from this unnamed place." On some maps, Guam is named "Guam, U.S.A." I say, "I'm from a territory of the United States." On some maps, Guam is named, simply, "Guam"; I say, "I am from 'Guam.'"

—Craig Santos Perez, *from Unincorporated Territory*²

Despite historian Robert F. Rogers's claim that Guam and the Mariana Islands archipelago of which it is a part were not central to the conflict of the Spanish-American War, the continuing presence of this island within the territorial reach of the United States of America raises questions about the legacy of the year 1898 for the Pacific region. The distinctive cultural identity of Guam and its Indigenous Chamorro inhabitants today—mediated by centuries of Spanish imperial rule and Catholicism as well as brief but violent moments of Japanese colonization and military occupation—cannot be understood without examination of the influence of US military and civilian control over the last century. Guam's presence within the

American political terrain troubles the logic of an American hemisphere since the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean separates the island from North America's west coast. Indeed, Guam's motto, "Where America's Day Begins," ironically reminds us that many Americans do not recognize Guam as a territory of the Union and that Guam is almost always absent on maps of the United States. The vexed status of Guam within the nation provocatively questions the ability or relevance of "American Studies" as an intellectual project to comprehend it. This essay, then, queries how transnational American Studies can consider the lands of Guam and other unincorporated territories—all technically intra- rather than trans-national spaces—without reinscribing them as subordinate to or dependent on the United States and other industrialized nations.

Combating the erasure of Guam, poet-scholar Craig Santos Perez enacts an alternative political and cultural imaginary for Guam, its people, and the Chamorro language in his ongoing collage of long poems, *from Unincorporated Territory*. The second epigraph's progression of locating and naming home identifies a narrative trajectory sketched by Perez from absence through determination via American control and on to "simply" being (from) Guam. These states of place and belonging situate Perez and Guam in varying relationships to the United States—at times (and often simultaneously) irrelevant, dependent, interwoven, and in tension. The process of reading and interpreting his poems reveals the complicated histories of Guam and engages the reader in rethinking the paradoxical status of the island that is within yet without the United States. In the preface to the first volume of his poetic project, Perez writes, "These poems are an attempt to begin re-territorializing the Chamorro language in relation to my own body, by way of the page."³ The poems themselves, routed through Perez's body and the pages of the books, become manifestations of different kinds of territories imagined for Chamorros, where "re-territorialization" signifies the radical transformation of circuits that link bodies, lands, and words to create new forms of embodiment.

This essay thinks along with Perez to consider his poetic tactics of decolonization and demilitarization for Guam and the Chamorro people.⁴ In addition to explorations of languages and word play, Perez highlights critiques of US militarization, a cartographic reading of words on the page, and environmental metaphors of colonization as elements of re-territorialization. Throughout, his poetry uncovers how colonial languages and worldviews have been imposed on islanders and how Chamorros have both maintained Indigenous practices and incorporated foreign influences. In short, Perez's poetry documents what Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor has described as "native survivance." Perez reaches for a Chamorro present and future that is enmeshed in its history of colonization yet open to the independence and sovereignty of the Chamorro people. He refuses to choose just one identity—either an assimilated American or a transhistorical, ancient Chamorro one—because his contemporary Chamorro body has been constituted from and transected by a range of influences, both Indigenous and foreign.

In American history, 1898 marks an important and decisive year for the instantiation of direct United States control over territories outside the North American continent. It is a signal year for understanding trans-hemispheric, trans-continental, trans-regional America—a conception of the nation-state that exceeds the geographical boundaries of the continent’s east and west coasts and even the regional logic of hemispheric proximity. While contemporary US relations with some of the former spoils of the Spanish-American War are now fruitful grounds for transnational and neocolonial analyses because there are officially distinct nation-states under consideration, the territories that remain a part of the United States require a critical analysis that also takes into account the explicitly colonial status of these extra-continental spaces.⁵ Additionally, the continuing absence of Guam in conceptualizations of the Asia-Pacific, the Pacific Rim, the American Lake, or Asian Pacific Islanders (where Native Hawaiians often dominate the discussion) belies the importance of the island for the American military in the Pacific. Engaging Perez’s poetic vision allows a corrective to such absencing.

One way to approach this analysis is to reframe the issues at hand. I offer the neologism “discontiguous” to bring together a range of contradictory ideas occasioned by the presence of many territories within, but not constitutive of, the United States. That is, how can we think of these territories that are considered to be part of the nation, but are not seen to be spaces that define the national land, culture, or identity? “Discontiguous” plays off of the descriptive phrase “contiguous United States,” commonly referring to the lower forty-eight states in the middle of the North American continent, which seemingly form a solid and uninterrupted expanse. Replacing “United” with “Discontiguous,” the phrase “Discontiguous States of America” reminds us of the imperial topography of the United States, highlighting Native American reservation spaces within the boundaries of the contiguous states, offshore territories in the Caribbean and Pacific Oceans (including Guantánamo Bay, Cuba), and the two outlying states of Alaska and Hawai’i. The shift to consider discontinuities rather than connections thus supplements existing work in translocal studies that tend to examine those connections between distant spaces outside the rubric of nation-states. The complicated and contradictory layering of sovereignty, power, and cultural history in these discontiguous states calls for more analysis of alternative formations of America and American Studies. At the heart of this formulation is a challenge to the sovereignty of the United States, especially as sole or ultimate arbiter of cultural and legal values.

The discontiguous quality of Native reservations and unincorporated territories suggests a discontinuous logic of unity, one in which leaps of logic are necessary to create a semblance of wholeness. Indeed, the fact that the various unincorporated territories outside the continental United States have substantially different relationships with the federal government is evidence of a breakdown in the logic of territorial possession. The gaps between these territories and the nation-state as a whole create a paradox of what composes the body of the United States—

what is part of the nation-state and what is outside of it, or what is inside yet not a part. The Office of Insular Affairs in the Department of the Interior, which administers Guam and other off-shore territories, takes pains to use terminology that carefully avoids any suggestion of colonialism.⁶ The Office defines an “insular area” as a “jurisdiction that is neither a part of one of the several States nor a Federal district.”⁷ The term “insular” refers to island spaces but also suggests “inside,” a paradoxical naming of these “outside,” extra-continental sites.

Furthermore, the Office defines an “unincorporated territory” as a “United States insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply.”⁸ These territories are opposed to “incorporated ones” that form a part of the United States, thus pointing to the understanding that “unincorporated territories” are *not* a part of the nation-state. Embedded in the federal government’s naming of these unincorporated territories, then, is the (il)logic of uneven Constitutional protections as well as the paradoxical quality of unincorporation. Such territories have been incorporated into the control of the US government and designated as belonging to the nation, yet they remain unincorporated. If the emergence of the idea of nationalism relied on a particular (and then-new) relation between Europe and its New World colonies, as Benedict Anderson has argued, then the United States has created a different kind of “imagined community” in its relationship to Guam and its other extra-continental possessions.⁹ This new nationalist feeling ambivalently claims connections with the people and spaces of unincorporation, willing to accept Chamorro soldiers into the American army, for instance, but unwilling to allow Chamorro peoples to define their (American) identities.

With the transfer of power from the Spanish to the Americans after the 1898 war, the political, cultural, and colonial status of Guam diverged sharply from that of the rest of the Mariana Islands.¹⁰ Guam was placed under the US Naval Administration with an appointed governor, militarizing the island from the beginning of its association with the United States. In the initial years following this shift in ownership, a heated debate in the nation arose over how to treat these possessions. The legacy of these discussions was the creation of a new territorial status, in between a sovereign, independent nation and a colonial possession. Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall explain some of the Supreme Court decisions that decided the matter, “The *Insular Cases*, decided between 1901 and 1922, invented and developed the idea of unincorporated territorial status in order to enable the United States to acquire and govern its new ‘possessions’ without promising them either statehood or independence.”¹¹ The differentiation between what it meant for the United States to acquire territory by treaty from other nations and what it meant to incorporate a territory, meaning to administer the Constitution fully, created a space for treating unincorporated territories as domestic spaces if desired—particularly for revenue purposes in duties and tariffs—but also allowed the US Congress to withhold other rights and citizenship from the residents of those

territories as necessary. The importance of trade in determining the political and legal status of these lands and peoples must not be overlooked. The resulting patchwork of relations between the US government and its various island territories is decidedly discontinuous.

Furthermore, Brook Thomas argues that the *Insular Cases* “document how the country—or at least the Supreme Court speaking for the country—moved from a model of the United States held together as a compact of contracting entities to a corporate model of the nation-state.”¹² These cases, he contends, were crucial to the nation’s thinking of itself as a united, singular whole rather than as a federation of states that were each ultimately autonomous. In this way, the unincorporated territories led the nation to think of itself (its contiguous self, that is) as a body—a corpus—in ways that expelled the islands from the nation’s body. Thomas explores the “metaphor of incorporation” as a key consequence of the Supreme Court rulings, and as a concept that allowed the nation to think differently about its body versus its possessions. Contrary to the interpretation forwarded by most literary and cultural studies scholars of United States imperialism, he argues, 1898 signals a rupture in the previous logic of territorial acquisition.¹³ Overseas imperialism is not simply an extension of westward continental expansion but a new perspective that allowed for unincorporation as opposed to the two choices of incorporation or colonial control.

In a literal sense, Perez’s poetic project from *Unincorporated Territory* represents poetry coming out of such unincorporation. In figurative senses, Perez emphasizes the paradoxical status of belonging that characterizes Chamorros in the world. The unincorporated territory is a space where uneven Constitutional protections challenge notions of equality and individualism espoused by the United States. Ultimately, Perez’s re-territorializing looks beyond the United States as the overarching power that defines Guam and indeed even beyond the concept of the island as a territory limited just to land area. Echoing the work of influential Tongan scholar and activist Epeli Hau’ofa, Perez’s poetry imagines a larger oceanic world for Guam. As Hau’ofa writes, “The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought in it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters—as well as the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.”¹⁴ This pan-Pacific world, which Hau’ofa suggested should be called “Oceania” rather than “Pacific Islands” to emphasize the ocean itself as part of the world, is the basis for a decolonizing project for all Indigenous peoples of the Pacific. Perez’s poetics tells this story of Guam as a dynamic, Indigenous narrative—one that resists erasure and domination.

Textual, Linguistic, and Orthographic Experimentation

This next section considers more explicitly the poetic nature of Perez’s decolonial

imaginary and how such attention to language is crucial for understanding “Discontiguous States of America.” The essay then turns to more pointed examinations of three key topics in Perez’s critique of American Guam: US militarization, cartographic knowledge, and environmental metaphors as colonial critique. I was introduced to Craig Santos Perez’s work when he read from his first book, *from Unincorporated Territory [Hacha]*, published by TinFish Press, at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 22, 2009, at an Indigenous Poetry Reading event coinciding with the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference in town.¹⁵ In addition to his poetry and scholarly research in comparative ethnic studies, Perez is a co-founder with Jennifer Reimer of Achioté Press, a publishing project that “represents the unrepresentable, transnational, migratory, and adaptive. Achioté Press asks what it means to bear witness, to use adaptation as resistance, to cross borders, to map ourselves onto a dislocated world, to speak in exile, and to suffer diasporic hunger.”¹⁶ He has also blogged at the Poetry Foundation web site as well as on his own site.¹⁷ Like many poets engaged in contemporary cultural critique, Perez sees his writing as a way to transform how Chamorros move in the world and how they are perceived, particularly by the people and government of the United States.

Literary critic Rob Wilson has discussed experimental texts from the Pacific that “have these strange markings of writerly experimentation and textual play (postmodernism, brand A) as well as the concerns of belonging to and expressing a distinct, particularized, and limited model of identity, affiliated voice, sentiments of nationhood, and (post)colonial heritage (postmodernism, brand B, as it were).”¹⁸ Identifying the poetic impulses nurtured by TinFish, a small publisher of experimental poetry from the Pacific, Wilson explains how TinFish’s founding editor, Susan Schultz, understands the two postmodernisms: “This stance, claiming to express a postcolonial kind of postmodernity, would urge of writing in the Pacific those aggravated concerns to recapture strong claims to cultural, cultural-national, and subaltern ethnic identity; to reclaim some indigenous nation as seen under global/local superpower threat; and to express, more generally, some situated coalition of local writing forces and energies, a kind of place-based imagination of belonging to some specific locality, liminal zone, and counternation as entangled in a distinctive, if nervously ambivalent, colonial history.”¹⁹ As a book published by TinFish, Perez’s first volume from his opus enacts all these qualities of postmodern and postcolonial writing, offering a poetics that is challenging in its experimental novelty but ultimately densely layered with theoretical, historical, and political critiques of unincorporated territories.

At the macro-level, Perez explains of his poetry, “My multi-book project, from *unincorporated territory*, [is] formed through my study of the ‘long poem’: Pound’s *Cantos*, Williams’ *Paterson*, H.D.’s *Trilogy*, Zukofsky’s ‘A,’ and Olson’s *Maximus*. I loved how these books were able to attain a breadth and depth of vision and voice. So I began to imagine each book from my own project as a book-length excerpt of a

larger project.”²⁰ Thus, the title *from Unincorporated Territory* is an overarching one for his poetic project as a whole. Each volume of the project bears that title followed by a subtitle in brackets. The first volume is [*Hacha*] and the second [*Saina*]. “*Hacha*” is Chamorro for “one,” designating the first volume. “*Saina*,” however, does not mean “two” but refers instead to “parents elders spirits ancestors.”²¹ Paying homage to Chamorro elders, Perez maintains continuity across generations in the preservation of Chamorro culture and language. The diversion from the expected naming of the second volume with “*Hugua*,” the Chamorro word for “two,” reinforces Perez’s challenge to a linear progression of ideas.

In the Preface to his first book, [*Hacha*], Perez lays out the project that he undertakes with an overview of Guam’s history and definitions of key terms in the construction of Guam as a territory of the United States. The expository and analytical mode of the Preface provides the keys to understanding the experimental lines that follow. In describing Guam, he brings together the many disparate influences on its contemporary state, from various colonial forces to the movement of tectonic plates that created volcanic arcs and oceanic trenches in the Pacific. He offers definitions and etymologies of words like “territory” and “excerpt,” drawing startling new meanings from them. Of territory, commonly understood as “*land under the jurisdiction of a town, state, etc.*,” Perez suggests a sideways step to a similar-sounding word: “*Alternately, the original Latin word suggests derivation from terrere: ‘to frighten’ (see terrible); thus territorium would mean ‘a place from which people are warned off.’*”²² By collapsing the origins of “terror” and “territory,” he combines their meanings to offer an argument about Guam as a place from which people are warned off—whether it is the Chamorro or US military personnel is unclear. The affect of fright, however, lingers to structure considerations of all territories, unincorporated or not.

Within each volume of *from Unincorporated Territory*, Perez weaves together pieces of various long poems such as “*from Tidelands*” and “*from Ta(la)ya*.” Perez explains, “One difference between my project and other ‘long poems’ is that my long poem will always contain the ‘*from*,’ always eluding the closure of completion.”²³ He insists on the open-ended and never-finished quality of his poetry. He offers partial pieces of a larger, never-fully knowable whole. This work-in-progress quality of Perez’s poetry mirrors the status of Guam as a place still in the midst of transformations and contestations, without a final act towards which a teleological narrative unfolds.²⁴ Always coming *from* rather than *being*, the poems are co-extensive with Perez’s poetic vision and thus never fully containable in a volume of words. In addition to their fragmentary quality, Perez also notes that he challenges a linear unfolding of these interwoven excerpts, emphasizing a recursive and multi-layered knowledge that refuses a straightforward argument. Rather than collecting all excerpts from one poem in a solid, contiguous sequence of pages, the poet disperses them in a way that creates new meanings in the juxtaposition of different sections or the interruption of an excerpt by another poem.

The intertwining structure of the poems is echoed thematically in the poem dedicated to Perez's grandfather, "from Ta(la)ya." The talaya is a throw net; "ta" by itself means "our"; "la'la" means "water"; and "taya" means "empty."²⁵ The collapsing and interweaving of these words into the title of the poem mirrors the way the poem weaves together narratives of Spanish conquest, American military occupation, Japanese colonization, and Indigenous survivance. Of this last narrative theme, the poet's Chamorro grandfather recounts his life in Agana, the capital city of Guam; the poem then notes in bracketed asides, "[in spanish Agaña]" and "[In 1998, the legislature officially changed the name of the capital city—Agana—to the Chamorro name—Hagatña]."²⁶ This change in names is the result of cultural contestation on the ground, pushes and pulls against the assertion of Chamorro language in the public space. The figure of the grandfather, who has persisted despite the changing of colonial control over the course of his life, grounds the poem's weaving of histories. In the poem, the talaya, or throw net, embodies the transmission of Indigenous practices as the grandfather recounts learning to hunt for fish with these nets during the Japanese occupation. In a startling conflation, he likens the prisoners of war to the fish being caught: "the size of the mesh is determined by the fish you are hunting: smaller mesh for the manahak and a larger / mesh for the ti'ao he says 'the prisoners called the mesh eyes / remember that' to change your eyes depending on the thing hunted."²⁷ The grandfather takes on the role of the hunter, using the mesh of the talaya to see different things he hunts. The eyes as organs of sight become both the vehicle for knowledge (to perceive is to know) but also the basis for self-identification. The "I," in this regard, emerges in the curious reference to "prisoners" who call the mesh "eyes," a subtle reference to the possibility that the grandfather was once a prisoner (of war). Later in the poem, the grandfather recites numbers in the Japanese language, an act that reminds us of Japanese colonial rule that enforced a Japanese educational system. It is an activity that places him in the role of a prisoner or colonial subject.²⁸

While most of the poems in *from Unincorporated Territory* do not follow established poetic forms, many are modeled after other narrative forms. One such example is "from Stations of Crossing," dealing with voices of resistance structured around the Stations of the Cross in Catholic churches. These stations, arrayed along the walls of the church, portray various stages of Christ's crucifixion as paintings or sculptures, offering separate physical spaces for supplicants to meditate on each step of Christ's sacrifice. The stations structure prayer as a physical journey taken along with Christ, encoding a shifting relationship between the supplicant's body and the narrative. Each section of Perez's poem must likewise be read as a separate station, and the reader must embark on a physical journey along with the figures depicted in the poem. While there are conventionally fourteen Stations of the Cross, ending with Christ laid to rest in a tomb, Perez's "from Stations of Crossing" only offers thirteen stations, again suggesting a sense of open-endedness where the final station is yet to be written. Additionally, Perez constructs this poem by borrowing

sonnet end-words from Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows*, a practice he attributes to Aaron Shurin's *Involuntary Lyrics*. Basing the poems of each station on another poet's sonnets adds yet another layer of determination for his words—the point acknowledged here is that there is no creation *ex nihilo* for Perez; he is always already enmeshed in words and traditions that signify, multiply and contradict, and what he as a poet must do is to create new possibilities from those existing signifiers.

The enfolding of Chamorro and Catholic aspects of Perez's beliefs in this and other poems might seem contradictory to some, but Perez's work demonstrates how many Chamorro peoples are both Catholic in faith and Chamorro in heritage. Perez writes in his notes "on Stations of Crossing": "These poems emerged from two texts of resistance literature: the *Gospel According to Matthew* and Chief Hura'o's 1671 speech. . . . The 'he' in this poem is a brace of their [Jesus and Hura'o's] imagined voices."²⁹ The intertwining of these two leaders' voices of vastly different and perhaps opposing traditions forces Perez to negotiate the concepts of resistance and dominance in complex ways. Hura'o, after all, is known primarily for his resistance to Spanish and Catholic missionary colonization; he died in battle against these forces. Interestingly, this use of Catholic narrative structure to meld Catholic and Indigenous rhetoric has a precursor in Vicente Diaz's essay, "Pious Sites: Chamorro Culture Between Spanish Catholicism and American Liberal Individualism," which follows the sections and structure of the Catholic mass in examining the legacy of Chamorro political leadership in Guam.³⁰

In a more radically dispersed fashion, the poem "*from Tidelands*" appears in a three-page sequence at the end of the first section of the book; reappears in the third section, alternating pages with "*from Aerial Roots*"; surfaces in section four in between stanzas six and seven of "*from Stations of Crossing*" as an interlude; and then again emerges at the end of the volume on alternating pages with "*from Descending Plumeria*." Thus, "*from Tidelands*" at points mimics the ebb and flow of the tide in tidelands, where its words represent the water that washes over the land of the other poems.³¹ Within the poem itself, also, two pages in particular appear to be duplicates but with words missing from the latter version, as if the tide had come in and then left, taking away some words that were part of the shore. The first page begins, "taut / 'shadows almost' visible be- / low the dispersal of 'forms-swathe' this / small touch 'no maps sown' to hallow / / [tano]." The second subtly effaces and transforms parts of this stanza as: "taut / 'shadows' visible / the dispersal of 'forms' this / 'no maps sown' to hollow / / []."³² The second page's dropped words further fracture the already fragmented syntax of the first page.

The brackets surrounding the Chamorro word *tano* mark it out from the English words surrounding it. In many of the other poems, brackets function similarly to suggest a volatile relationship between colonial and Indigenous languages. At times, these brackets simply isolate or imprison Chamorro words, as in the quoted lines above; at other times, the brackets offer Chamorro words followed by their translations in English. The Chamorro word "[tano]" on the first page, for example, is

defined at the bottom of the page: “[*tano* : *land, soil, earth, ground*].” Italicized, the second instance of the bracketed Chamorro word is further marked out from the text as a footnote. In the almost-replicated second page, the disappearance of “tano” from the brackets that enclose it on the first page suggests an absent land or home, one designated only by the brackets that delineate its boundaries on the page. Such a bracketing parallels the way Chamorros’ control over their land disappears under colonialism, left as only a hollow shell of its former self.

As demonstrated by his use of brackets and blank spaces, Perez’s poetry importantly functions at a visual level in the orthography of words and negative spaces of the page. He also uses punctuation marks as visual elements on the page beyond their mechanical function. His poems “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*” and “*from Tideland*s” make liberal use of tildes (~): marks that separate words as hyphens do but also mimetically represent the ocean waves that are an important aspect of islanders’ worldview. The push and pull of ocean waves, determined by the moon and celestial forces beyond human control, makes tides an apt metaphor for understanding Guam in a fundamentally different scale and perspective. As Perez explains, the tilde also holds other meanings in specialized discourses. For linguists, the tilde signals a shift in pronunciation while for mathematicians it suggests an equivalence between terms on either side.³³ In addition to the tilde, the placement of words on the page creates an image of waves in a two-dimensional painting of the ocean. For example, the opening foray into poetry of [*Hacha*] begins after the Preface and epigraphs with “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*,” a poem that floats different names and spellings for Guam such a “*goaam*,” “*goam*,” “*islas de las velas latinas*,” and “*guajan*.”

At the level of the text, Perez’s work enacts a kind of critical re-envisioning of the power of language and the possibility of meaning-making on the page. Cultural critique and history blend in his highly provocative poetics, transforming words and the printed page into vehicles for tracing the messiness of cultural contact, political force, and linguistic melding. Perez brings Chamorro words into (and slightly out of) the lines of his poems, “re-territorializing” the power of language and imperialism to control the possibilities of identities and politics. At times, the Chamorro words appear in brackets, set off from the rest of the poems. At other times, the words are italicized, following the common orthographic convention for marking out foreign words. At yet other times, though, the Chamorro words butt up against English words without warning or visual differentiation, pushing for a recognition of the sovereign status of Chamorro in relation to (American) English. As Perez explains, “The non-English words in this collection are Chamorro (also spelled Chamoru), the name of both the native language and the native people of Guahan. The colonial school system on Guam, when I grew up there, did not teach written Chamorro in the schools, a consequence of Americanization and a sustained desire to eradicate the native language. In the *ocean* of English words, the Chamorro words in this collection remain *insular*, struggling to emerge within their own ‘*excerpted space*.’”³⁴ The

oceans, islands, and excerpted space all function at both literal, metaphorical, and visual levels, suggesting the relationship of Guam to the United States as it is situated in the Pacific. Furthermore, English translations for Chamorro words sometimes follow them immediately on the line; sometimes later on the page (as in a footnote); and sometimes on entirely different pages and in different poems. Such an uneven treatment of the translations makes the task of reading Perez's poetry elusive and requires readers to move back and forth across the pages, seeking connections and translations across various poems.

In his comparative study of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other liminal spaces of American control—what he calls “American Tropics”—Allan Punzalan Isaac writes that “the American Tropics turns upon ‘America’ to demonstrate how America not only is itself a trope but continually gyrates and generates tropes about itself to underscore its identity or difference against its perceived others.”³⁵ This play on words—tropics in geographical terms as well as tropes in literary ones—allows Isaac to focus on the way language produces the convoluted understandings of insular territories’ in-between status as part of America’s narrative of itself. Perez, writing from the perspective of one such insular territory, emphasizes languages—Chamorro, English, Spanish, and Japanese—as the basis for understanding and revolutionizing Guam’s status. More than simply marking the loss of Chamorro language under colonial rule, though, Perez emphasizes a more complex linguistic space for Chamorro culture. Rather than simply considering assimilation to a colonial language as a process of cultural loss, where the only form of resistance is to revert to a transhistorical Indigenous Chamorro, Perez instead examines layers of languages, including the differential power relations and histories between them, as a way of forwarding critiques about US control of Guam. While Perez’s formal experimentation resonates broadly with his decolonial imaginary, he also offers more pointed commentary about the situation of Guam as a US territory. The remaining sections of this essay point out just a few of the many complex and interconnected topics addressed in his poetic project.

Perez’s Critique of US Militarization

After “unincorporation” into the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, Guam remained under US military rule for the next half century despite active petitioning by Chamorros for more self-governance or independence.³⁶ In 1941, the Japanese imperial army, while infamously bombing the US military base at Pearl Harbor in Hawai‘i, also attacked and seized control of Guam from its own bases in the northern Mariana Islands. The Japanese subjugated the Chamorros, placing them in war camps as prisoners and occupying the island as a military zone. In 1944, the American re-capture of Guam and wresting of the northern Marianas from Japanese control was bloody, a “liberation as apocalypse.”³⁷ And importantly, though often unmentioned, the northern island of Tinian then played a large role in the ending of

WWII; the B-29 bombers that dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki departed from Tinian's North Field, which was also the staging ground for practice runs of the bombings. This long history of US militarization surfaces repeatedly in Perez's poetry, particularly in his grandparents' memories and as actual footnotes to poems recounting family stories.

As mentioned earlier, the first poem excerpted in the book is "*from Lisiensan Ga'lago*"; the poem begins with an exercise of naming and renaming the island of Guam and emerges repeatedly throughout the book, interspersed between pages of other poems. Importantly, the title phrase "*lisiensan ga'lago*" is what the Chamorros called the strips of cloth they had to wear as identification under Japanese military rule in WWII. The words mean "dog tag," a fitting precursor to the American era when many Chamorros join the US military and wear dog tags in that capacity.³⁸ By subsuming poetic lines concerned with the naming of Guam under a phrase associated with war, Perez emphasizes the importance of militarization for the construction of island identity. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe explains, "Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs and militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations."³⁹ Guam and Chamorro life have been infused with militaristic ideas, creating a political and social culture that relies on the US military, and Perez's poetry seeks to challenge such common-sense understandings of life with the military.

With the rise of the Cold War following WWII, Guam became a more valuable possession for the nation than it had ever been. Historians Paul Carano and Pedro C. Sanchez write, "Guam, America's farthestmost outpost of the Pacific Ocean, is an unincorporated territory of the United States. As such, it is one of America's most important bastions of defense. A glance at a map of the Pacific area shows how strategically Guam is located with reference to Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and the mainland of Asia."⁴⁰ Without a doubt, the militarization of Guam is perhaps the single biggest issue for the island, especially when understood as more than contesting the presence of physical bases and personnel that take up much of the island. The same is true in other parts of the Pacific as well as in Asia, and it is not only the US military but Japanese and other nations in the past and present that have militarized the space.⁴¹

In his groundbreaking essay, "The Exceptional Life and Death of a Chamorro Soldier: Tracing the Militarization of Desire in Guam, USA," Michael Lujan Bevacqua characterizes "*the banal ambiguity* of Guam's political existence," as a sign of empire's coming or quiet passage.⁴² Bevacqua describes militarized Guam as banal because it is considered commonplace and unremarkable. The status of Guamanians as US citizens without the full guarantees of the Constitution makes the island an

ambiguous political space. Guam’s residents, for example, have no representatives in the US Congress and thus no official voice. Yet, Chamorros and others are encouraged to join the military and do so in large numbers, far more per capita than any other region of the United States or any other ethnic group. Bevacqua focuses on the figure of the Chamorro soldier as a shade-like figure, neither living nor dead, in the ambiguous space of American belonging in order to forward the cause of Chamorro self-determination.

With President George W. Bush’s declaration of a War on Terror, the US military has increased its military presence in the Pacific as well as in the Middle East since September 11, 2001. Recently, while questioning Admiral Robert Willard at the House Armed Services Committee hearing on March 25, 2010, the US Representative from Georgia, Hank Johnson, wryly remarked of proposals to increase the number of US military personnel on the island, “Yes. My fear is that the whole island will become so overly populated that it will tip over and capsize.”⁴³ He asked about the size of the island to emphasize its smallness and noted concerns about possible adverse effects on the environment as a result of military buildup in such an insular space.

Rather than simply providing argumentative statements against US militarization directly, Perez brings up this issue in his poems by offering deictic lines and pages. This approach forces readers to look beyond the pages of the book as well as between the pages, disrupting a straightforward narrative through the pages and encouraging recursive and repeated readings of the poems. The poem “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*,” for example, presents an enigmatic page composed of a box with a grid of nine words, eight of which are struck through:

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| ocean | hanom | light |
| tano | bread | niyok |
| breath | attadok | peace |

Superimposed on the box in large, bold print is the number-question, “**8000?***” And below the box and number is a request to “please visit” three web sites that are then listed below by URL.⁴⁴ Upon visiting the sites, the page of poetry becomes more clearly about militarization. The URLs point to a petition to the United Nations to voice concerns about the military buildup on Guam after September 11, 2001; a blog titled “Peace and Justice for Guam and the Pacific” dedicated to the decolonization of Guam; and another blog devoted to news about Guam.⁴⁵ The petition mentions “8000” as the estimated number of US Marines scheduled for transfer to the island, and buried in a later poem “*from Descending Plumeria*,” the same number pops up in

a footnote, seemingly detached from the text on that page: “[*8,000 Marines and their dependents will be transferred to Guam from Okinawa by 2014 through a joint effort of the United States and Japan.]”⁴⁶ This page thus densely weaves text in ways that rely on outside contexts for meaning. The reader must become a detective, tracing flows of meaning from the words on the page to other pages in the book as well as web sites on the Internet.

In the final poem contained in the first volume of Perez’s poetic project, “from Descending Plumeria” (which alternates pages with “from Tideland”), this concern with critiquing US militarization emerges in footnotes that offer a parallel narrative to the poetic lines on the top half of the pages. The poem in fact begins with a drawn map of Guam, labeled with the names of all the US military bases.⁴⁷ The narrative of the poem concerns Renee, a cousin who died in a motorcycle accident in San Francisco, and memories of a typhoon whose name the poet has forgotten but which was nevertheless “mapped and monitored.”⁴⁸ Yet, these footnotes instead trace the history of US military occupation of the island and the accidental importation of brown tree snakes that decimated the native avian life of Guam. These stories of death, of the destructive power of the natural world, and of transnational (trans-hemispheric) travel suggest the dangerous consequences of ignoring the complex connections between familial, national, military, and environmental histories.

Along with militarization, the development of Guam in terms of commerce and environmental protection has reflected its ambiguous status as an unincorporated territory.⁴⁹ Of note is the huge presence of Japanese capital and tourism in the more recent development of Guam’s beaches, shifting the island towards a service-based economy. Though the people of Guam hold widely conflicting opinions about whether or not the island should remain a possession of the United States (and if so in what way), a growing portion of the Chamorro population has actively sought to re-establish Chamorro sovereignty. Delegations of Chamorro activists have testified for years before the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee, bypassing the US government, in claims for independence.

Craig Santos Perez himself has traveled to the committee to provide testimony, and he reproduces the text of that testimony as footnotes to the sections of his second book, *from Unincorporated Territory [Saina]*, with lines striking out the text: “~~my name is craig santos perez and i’m a poet and native son of guam. i represent the guahan indigenous collective, a grassroots organization committed to keeping chamoru culture alive thru public education and artistic expression.~~”⁵⁰ His placement of the testimony in footnotes, shunted to the bottom of the page, as well as under the strikethrough text comments on the erasure of such activist work in the imaginary of the US public at large. The erasure is never complete, though, leaving a palimpsest-like trace of what has been covered. This kind of orthographic experimentation as structural commentary is typical of Perez’s decolonial poetics.⁵¹ Interestingly, Chamorro scholar Bevacqua employs the strikethrough in a similar

manner, crossing out the “USA” in the title of his essay as well a word in the phrase “U.S. colonized ~~subject~~.”⁵² The former instance suggests removal of the United States from association with “Guam,” the word which comes before it. The latter pushes on the meanings of “subject”—as an active agent or as a verb meaning to put under one’s control—to point out the paradox of a colonized subject who has no self-determination under colonial rule. The resonance between Bevacqua and Perez’s use of the strikethrough suggests a possible citational nod from Perez to Bevacqua or a shared understanding of how written language often functions to cover over as well as articulate voices.

Perez’s Cartographic Knowledge

In *from Unincorporated Territory*, Perez also plays with maps, questioning their omnipresence in monographs about the islands of Oceania. As the second epigraph of this essay points out, maps are a significant way to identify one’s country or place of origin, and the maps in turn identify how one’s home becomes legible to others. Indeed, first contact between Europeans and Guam initiated the cartographic re-creation of Guam. In 1521, while Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan was en route to the Molucca spice islands on behalf of the Spanish kingdom, he stumbled upon Guam in the Mariana Islands. As his galleons sailed toward the islands, the Indigenous Chamorros came out on proas—Micronesian outrigger canoes with a triangular lateen sail. The ocean currents carved out the route Magellan took across the Pacific, guiding him between the islands of Guam and Rota through a channel called la Bocana by the Spanish. Magellan’s journey and maps helped establish trade routes for later ships to navigate their journeys across the Pacific via la Bocana. This way-station status of the island was a major reason that the Spanish claimed it a few decades later, and it became an important stopping point for ships traveling between the Spanish colonies of New Spain and the Philippines.

Maps and their legends visually show how places are positioned with respect to each other from a bird’s-eye-view that assumes an omniscient and disinterested position. In fact, however, as cultural geographers have argued, maps encode histories and politics into the texture of their pages and are far from offering a perfect representation of the world. The vast spaces of the Pacific Ocean, as traversed by European explorers, seemed full of emptiness, and the creation of maps allowed future explorers to navigate the waters safely and confidently. Before European contact, the Chamorros and other Micronesian seafaring people relied on other means of navigation, but post-contact, of course, Chamorros could not help but see the world differently through the maps of Western navigation. Indeed, Western maps have become an especially significant way for making sense of Oceania in a post-contact world. Margaret Jolly writes, “Indigenous and foreign representations of the place and its peoples are now not so much separate visions as they are ‘double visions,’ in the sense of both stereoscopy and blurred edges. Foreign

knowledges of the Pacific have both used and aspired to eclipse indigenous knowledges.”⁵³ This stereoscopic view is what Perez offers in his considerations of maps transformed into poems with the typographic help of the book designer.

In his maps, Perez centers Guam in relation to other spaces of the Pacific Rim, which usually occupy the center of representation. He uses the canvas of the page to create geopolitical maps anchored by words rather than lines designating boundaries or dots identifying cities. These map poems comment on historical, political, and cultural relationships more succinctly than narrated prose. Three such maps variously trace the tradewind-facilitated routes of the region, the geographical movements of the Japanese and Allied forces in WWII, and the connections made by airports that are designated by their three-letter codes.⁵⁴ In parsing these map poems, the reader must grapple with how words create different spaces and relationships in the same geographical locations. A map labeled with the tradewinds in the Pacific, for example, explain why the small island of Guam, rather than other islands in the Pacific, became such an important nodal point in the Spanish Empire. The map poems, in their emphasis on words rather than lines or dots, also suggest the importance of conceptual relationships between the identified/named boundaries and sites. The trade wind map, for example, carries with it a particular narrative of imperial trade history in its designation of relationships between spaces in the Pacific. These relationships are different—though not necessarily mutually exclusive—from the ones traced in the map of three-letter airport codes.

In a slightly different manner, the poem “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*” takes on the visual look of maps by suggesting how the placement of words on the page creates map-like meaning. In a series of three contiguous pages, the poem offers italicized Chamorro words and non-italicized English words spread out across the page like waves or islands of an archipelago. On each of the three pages is a box like a legend on a map. Understood as a legend, then, these boxes contain the keys to understanding the symbols (or words) on the map. For example, the first page offers translations of Chamorro words as the key: “*fino ‘haya : native words.*”⁵⁵ The second page contains just an empty box, suggesting a missing key that frustrates attempts to make sense of the words on the page.⁵⁶ And the third page again offers translations but with the direction of the lines rotated counter-clockwise by forty-five degrees. This sideways-quality of the legend box encourages a rotating of the page as a whole to re-view the map presented at a different angle. Additionally, the translations offered are incomplete—some Chamorro words have a blank space following the colon, suggesting an incompleteness to the project of cross-cultural translation.

Perez’s Environmental Metaphors of Colonial Critique

An element of many Indigenous struggles is concern for the integrity of the environment, and *from Unincorporated Territory* also offers examinations of how

colonialism has transformed Guam's natural world. Perez's environmental narrative emerges primarily in snippets throughout the poetic text like mountains rising out of the seabed, each protuberant piece offering glimpses of a vaster narrative submerged in time. In the preface of his first book, Perez describes the geological forces that created the island: "Guam belongs to a string of volcanic arcs and oceanic trenches that encircle the Pacific Basin, containing over 50 submarine volcanic edifices and 11 major subaerial volcanoes. The Marianas Trench, located near the Marianas archipelago, is the deepest part of the earth's surface. The trench, shaped like a semi-circle, was formed by a process of subduction that caused an uplift and union of two underwater volcanoes."⁵⁷ This geological description anchors the historical and environmental referents that follow, reminding readers of alternative scales and time frames that might shift understandings of the place of Guam in the world.

Environmental devastation in the Pacific wrought by US military occupation since the first half of the twentieth century has greatly concerned Indigenous activists and scholars. In "from Descending Plumeria," Perez narrates in footnotes the story of the brown tree snake, a non-native reptile likely imported by military planes after World War II: "*The first brown tree snakes reached the war torn island as cargo ship stowaways.*"⁵⁸ This snake notoriously has caused the extinction of much of the native bird life. For scientists, the consequences of the accidental introduction of this snake into the insular ecosystem are an important lesson in the delicate equilibrium of micro-habitats. The snake stands in for the destructive forces at large that globalization and transnational flows cause on Guam. As chronicled in the book *And No Birds Sing: The Story of an Ecological Disaster in a Tropical Paradise*, it took years for ecologists and biologists to figure out why the native bird population of the island was going extinct.⁵⁹ The eerie quiet of the island's forests by the late 1970s forced preservationists to act quickly to identify the cause of the bird deaths. Disease and habitat destruction were at the top of the list of suspects initially, but after long years of research—both experimental and journalistic—biologist Julie Savidge demonstrated that the brown tree snake with its highly adaptable eating habits was to blame.

Perez, however, also emphasizes the obverse of this bleak view of transnational flows in the object of the achiote plant (*Bixa orellana*, in its scientific nomenclature; lipstick tree in colloquial terms). The achiote stands in for transcontinental forces that enable and transform Indigenous life, emphasizing a non-static identity and culture. As noted earlier with respect to Achiote Press, Perez gravitates towards the figure of this plant as an especially rich symbol of Indigenous (Chamorro) resistance. At the start of the poem "from Achiote," Perez explains in a prose preface, "the achiote plant is indigenous to central and south america and the caribbean. it was transported across the pacific to southeast asia by the spanish colonialists."⁶⁰ In fact, "achiote" is derived from the Nahuatl word for the plant, "achiotl," pointing to the Mesoamerican origin of the name. In a brief historical

account, he connects the Americas to the Pacific and Southeast Asia via Spanish colonialism and the achiote plant. While people were central to the transcontinental, transregional movement of this plant, its presence in the lives and cultures of indigenous peoples on both sides of the Pacific and in the islands of the Pacific is a significant testament to the ways that ecosystems intertwine in the wake of colonialism. On the right side of the same page is a long column of other names for the achiote in different languages and spellings—achiote, achiotec, achiotl, achote, annatto, urucu, beninoki, bija, eroya, jafara, kasujmba-kelling, kham thai, onoto, orelanstrauch, oruco-axiote, rocou, roucou, ruku, roucouyer, unane, uruku, urucum, rucu-uva. This proliferation of names for a single object highlights the cross-cultural movement and use of the plant. Also on the same opening page of the poem is a line drawing of the plant to provide a visual representation of the plant named in such disparate ways.

Moving on from the brief history of the plant in Spanish colonialism, Perez offers some comments about how the Mayans of the Americas used the achiote—“as a food spice and dye, as body paint for war and rituals, and as pigments for arts, crafts, and murals.” He adds that “the leaves, roots, and bark have been utilized for their medicinal qualities.”⁶¹ These ethnographic comments about Mayan use of the plant resonate with later explorations of Chamorro uses of the plant in the poem, offering an Indigenous, transcontinental connection.

The final paragraph of the introductory page in the poem makes another shift, stating, “you can find achiote powder in the ethnic foods aisle of some grocery stores.”⁶² The move from history to ethnography to consumer culture traces the movement of the achiote around the world and through different societies. The statement seems somewhat incongruous, though, beginning with the second person pronoun “you” that calls the reader out directly and creates a relationship between the reader and the long history of the plant. In a contemporary moment, the plant exists not as a living entity but as powder packaged and marketed as “ethnic.” The assumed subject position of the reader, then, is someone not in Guam or another place where achiote plants are common. The designation of “ethnic” also distances the achiote and its Indigenous consumers from a mainstream society on the mainland United States.

The poem “*from Achiote*” consists of alternating sections about the speaker’s grandmother showing him how to use the achiote and a historical narrative about Father Sanvitores, the Jesuit missionary credited with bringing Catholicism to Guam. The arrival of Jesuit priest Diego Luis de Sanvitores in 1662 marked a turning point in Spanish control over Guam. In addition to giving the archipelago its current name to honor Queen Mariana of Austria, Father Sanvitores became the foremost missionary figure for the island, beatified in 1985 by the Vatican for his work in baptizing and converting the first generation of Chamorro Catholics. Though welcomed by some of the island’s leaders, called *chamorri*, Sanvitores found fierce opposition in others, and Chamorros today often have an ambivalent understanding of him as both savior and

conqueror.⁶³ The most well-known oppositional figure is Mata'pang, a *chamorri* whom Sanvitores had earlier baptized and nursed when he was injured in a fight. But after the priest baptized Mata'pang's baby daughter against his wishes, the *chamorri* killed Sanvitores. Mata'pang is later resurrected as an important figure of Chamorro cultural resistance. Like many other colonized peoples, the Chamorros experienced a huge population decline in the years after colonization, with many dying from warfare, disease, and social disintegration, especially following Father Sanvitores's work when the Spanish embarked on a more concerted campaign to colonize the island.⁶⁴

In "from Achiote," the grandmother embodies Chamorro cultural practices and Indigenous uses of the achiote, and the contrast between grandmother and grandson reflects a loss of cultural identity and assimilation to white American culture on the part of the grandson: "and when I rubbed my stained hands on my face and threw stones at the sky my grandmother called me 'mata'pang.'"⁶⁵ On the one hand, this exchange might be between any grandmother and grandson where the grandmother is chiding an unruly boy. On the other hand, the word "mata'pang," as defined two pages later, suggests a Chamoru-specific waywardness. Perez writes, "'mata'pang' used to mean 'proud and brave' used to mean 'alert eyes'—he led the rebellion against the Spanish before he was captured and killed—now it means 'silly' or 'crude' or 'misbehaved' or 'uncivil.'"⁶⁶

This transformation in the meaning of the word mirrors the shift in power from Chamorro natives to Spanish colonists, from the values of the Chamorro worldview to those of the new Catholicism. In the brief recounting of Father Sanvitores's influence on Guam, Perez highlights the moment when he baptizes Chief Mata'pang's newborn daughter against his wishes. This forced conversion to the new religion holds a conflicted place in contemporary Chamorro identity as many people try to balance Catholic faith with Chamorro cultural traditions and language. Ultimately, Perez's poem about the achiote plant underscores a non-static understanding of Chamorro culture and a transregional understanding of ecosystems. While flora and fauna on islands are generally shielded from interactions with non-native species, the imperial travels of Spain and the United States have contributed to the transformation of Guam's ecosystem in both productive and destructive ways.

Conclusion

While Perez's poetry may be difficult to grasp upon initial encounter, it offers up seemingly endless and fruitful avenues for critical exploration upon repeated readings. Indeed, Perez's project requires the reader to return again and again to the text, to flip back and forth between pages of the poems to make connections once overlooked. The sleuthing required to make sense of Perez's work is indicative of the kind of relationship embodied by Perez in his project of re-territorializing Chamorro

language by way of his body and the page. It is a process of re-scripting the relationships and meanings between people, language, places, nations, and histories.

In his useful phrase, “an ever-emergent empire,” Victor Bascara notes that US imperialism, though erased under the sign of American Exceptionalism, is in fact ever present in the archives of American culture and politics. He writes, “The year 1898 is then a particularly conspicuous manifestation of what came before and what would follow in increasingly occluded ways. Considering the well-established inability of an imperial conception of America to take root in dominant understandings of American culture, it is therefore understandable that the subtle and unexpected manifestations of empire would occupy the attention of revisionist scholars.”⁶⁷ Challenging the forgetting or refusal of empire, then, seems a Sisyphean project as US imperialism continually recedes from mainstream acknowledgement. For Bascara, however, Asian American cultural politics at the end of the twentieth century bears the traces of empire in a way that disrupts the always receding character of empire’s traces. In addition to recounting the history of Guam and its entrance into the sphere of American influence, this essay has taken up Perez’s poetry as an archive that spotlights empire’s traces. In its attention to re-territorializing language, land, and bodies, Perez’s decolonial poetics challenges an American military empire often effaced in the popular imaginary, connecting it to longer histories of the Spanish Empire and Catholic missionary work.

The cultural politics and history of Chamorros in Guam, as examined in Perez’s poetry, offer a specific counterpoint to dominant versions of transnational flows in its foregrounding of Indigeneity. In their introduction to a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* focused on “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kehaulani Kauanui write, “We want to emphasize in our ongoing discussion of native studies in the Pacific, the interrelational and contextual character of roots and routes. These are not intrinsically oppositional; if our roots are strong, deep, grounded, it may be precisely for their dynamic abilities to keep pace with the variable forces of change. And then again, many have not.”⁶⁸ Perez’s work plays with both roots and routes. Rather than simply claiming the Indigenous as the opposite of transnational flows, Perez writes of Guam as an “*articulated site of indigeneity*”—what anthropologist James Clifford defines as the refusal to choose one of two supposedly opposing notions of Indigenous politics: either Indigeneity as “essentially about primordial, transhistorical attachments” or as a “postmodern’ identity politics.”⁶⁹ What an understanding of articulated sites allows is a sense of active Indigenous participation in modernity and in transnational connections. This participation, however, comes without completely detaching Indigenous cultural practices from a people or place. It allows for a diasporic or transnational mode of critique that does not elide Indigenous presence while depending on it for claims of belonging.⁷⁰ As discussed above, Perez’s interest in the *achiote* plant, native to the Americas but brought to the Pacific Islands by Spanish conquistadors, best illustrates these webs of interrelationships that are enabled by imperialism but also create

alternative links between Indigenous peoples around the world.

It is not surprising that much critical scholarship on Guam to date has come from Chamorro and other Pacific Islander scholars from the island. Their perspectives seem to emerge from jarringly different epistemological locations than those that continental United States scholars might inhabit, a fact that Filipino/Pohnpeian scholar Vicente Diaz has examined in depth in his discussion of the (im)possibility of Pacific Islander studies under the rubric of Asian American or Asian Pacific American Studies.⁷¹ However, if transnational American Studies as a practice of interrogating the critical terms that define the United States and American culture is to continue productively in its endeavors to re-constitute imperial America in other terms, the sovereignty of Indigenous Pacific Islanders must be a central concern. Constituting American Studies in innovative, comparative ways also helps to reveal the erasures of American empire. The Discontiguous States of America, like the American Tropics, reconceptualizes the problematics of transnational American Studies in ways that insist on the importance of the unincorporated territories to the national imaginary, as well as questions US control of those territories. The challenge of Discontiguous States of America is to follow through with what sovereignty activists like Perez advocate. The self-determination of Indigenous peoples in unincorporated territories may not be simple independence, at least in the immediate future; but once achieved, it will finally offer an actual trans-national relationship between Guam and the United States.

Notes

¹ Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 108.

² Craig Santos Perez, "Preface," from *Unincorporated Territory [Hacha]* (Kane'ohe, HI: TinFish Press, 2008), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ The spellings of the names for Guam and the Chamorro are weighted with the history of colonialism. Rogers writes, "One of Legazpi's [the Spanish conquistador who claimed Guam for Spain in 1565] legacies in the Marianas was the first recorded use of names that were antecedents of what would evolve into the word *Guam*. Documents of the Legazpi expedition refer variously to *Goaam*, *Goam*, and *Guan* as the name of the island in the language of the Chamorros. By the early eighteenth century, the name had evolved into *Guana* and *Guahan*. In his authoritative 1806 history of early voyages in the Pacific, James Burney consistently used *Guahan* as the island's name. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Spanish governors used the similar title *Guajan*. Finally, the Americans would officially designate the island as *Guam* in 1908, over 300 years after Legazpi's landfall" (14). Perez himself uses various names for the island, attentive to the multiple histories attendant

with each designation. He seems to prefer “Guahan” as a name, but for consistency and by convention, I will use “Guam” throughout except when quoting others or discussing issues of naming.

⁵ Other such colonial territories include Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Sea and the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean, among others.

⁶ Interestingly, in addition to divisions concerned with land/ocean/environmental matters, the Department of the Interior also houses the Bureau of Indian Affairs that deals with Native American tribes on the continent.

⁷ “Definitions of Insular Area Political Organizations,” Office of Insular Affairs, Department of the Interior web site, January 11, 2007, http://www.doi.gov/oia/Islandpages/political_types.htm, accessed August 10, 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991). It is also worth noting that Anderson’s thesis centered on the production of nationalist feeling via capitalism and mass print culture. To that extent, the textual mediation of nationalism has always depended on shared language, a point that I emphasize in reading Craig Santos Perez’s poetry.

¹⁰ While ceding Guam to the United States in the Treaty of Paris of 1899, Spain sold the other islands—including the inhabited islands Rota, Saipan, and Tinian—to Germany. Japan invaded those islands during World War I and retained possession of them after the war. In the years between WWI and 1944, then, Japan instituted Japanese language and cultural transformations on the islands while using the land for sugar crops. While Spain had greatly limited travel between islands during its reign, traffic between the northern Mariana Islands and Guam effectively ceased under split Japanese and American rule. Japan’s imperial designs extended to Guam during WWII when Japan invaded and captured the southernmost island. After Japan’s defeat, while Guam reverted to American Navy rule, the other islands were placed under a United Nations trust territory, which meant that the United States gained access to those islands for military use. In 1975, the residents of the Northern Mariana Islands voted to continue association with the United States in the form of a commonwealth covenant, a status it currently maintains. Vanessa Warheit’s documentary film *The Insular Empire: America in the Mariana Islands* (Horse Opera Productions, 2010), chronicles the different experiences of Chamorros in the Northern Mariana Islands, versus on Guam, through the stories of four influential leaders of varying perspectives about independence or continued association with America.

¹¹ Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, “Between the Foreign and the Domestic: The Doctrine of Territorial Incorporation, Invented and Reinvented,” *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*, Burnett and

Marshall, editors (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

¹² Brooks Thomas, “A Constitution Led by the Flag: The *Insular Cases* and the Metaphor of Incorporation,” in Burnett and Marshall, 84.

¹³ Thomas, 83. For an account of continuities between continental expansion and empire, see Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹⁴ Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 32. Originally published in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau’ofa (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific), 1993. One of the main points forwarded by Hau’ofa is the need for the people of Oceania to regain control of defining their own world, to wrest such control from foreigners. Thus, Margaret Jolly writes, “As Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa has suggested (1994), outsiders’ representations of the Pacific matter not just because of their geopolitical and discursive hegemony but because Islanders have, in part, come to see themselves through the Outlanders’ lenses” (509).

¹⁵ The Loft Literary Center is a nonprofit arts organization dedicated to fostering reading and writing cultures in Minnesota. Their web site is at <http://www.loft.org>. NAISA is a young professional association dedicated to supporting research, cultural work, and activism in the academic fields of Native studies. Their web site is at <http://www.naisa.org>. I emphasize this context of my encounter with Perez’s work to mark an institutional and academic space where Perez’s work becomes visible.

¹⁶ The founding editors explain on the web site for Achiote Press, “Achiote: a shrub or small tree indigenous to Central and South America. Introduced to the Pacific and Asia by the Spanish in the 17th century, Achiote now has firm transnational roots. Achiote produces pink flowers and red spiny seed pods. People have used the seeds as a dye for clothing, arts and crafts, as body paint in times of war and celebration, as spice and coloring for food. Other parts of the Achiote tree have been used to make various medicinal remedies for sunstroke, burns, fever, sore throat, blood disease, eye and ear infections, and hypertension. Achiote has also been used as an aphrodisiac. We named our press after the Achiote tree because we believe poetry has the very same powers to enrich our surroundings, inspire our passions, enhance our senses, and heal our wounds.” <http://www.achiotepress.com/about.htm>, accessed July 15, 2010.

¹⁷ The Poetry Foundation runs a blog with posts from different contributing poets at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet>. Perez’s personal blog is at <http://craigsantosperez.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁸ Rob Wilson, “From the Sublime to the Devious: Writing the Experimental/Local Pacific,” *boundary 2*, 28.1 (2001): 124.

¹⁹ Wilson, 123.

²⁰ “The Page Transformed: A Conversation with Craig Santos Perez,” *Lantern Review Blog*, March 12, 2010, <http://lanternreview.com/blog/2010/03/12/the-page-transformed-a-conversation-with-craig-santos-perez/>, accessed July 15, 2010.

²¹ Perez, [*Saina*], 15.

²² Perez, [*Hacha*], emphasis in original, 8.

²³ “The Page Transformed.”

²⁴ My students, like many Americans, I would presume, veer towards two options when confronted with the paradoxical status of Guam and other unincorporated territories: they should either be granted independence (Guam as sovereign nation) or they should be incorporated fully into the United States (Guam as a state of the Union). The binary formulation of the situation belies the complexity of unincorporation, though, and as much as activists like Perez advocate for political sovereignty, they also acknowledge the inevitable messiness of cultural identity for Chamorros and of political alliances necessary for such a small but strategically located place like Guam. Thus, there is no clear end point to the struggles of the Chamorro people though there are identifiable, incremental goals that would offer greater self-determination.

²⁵ These Chamorro words are translated throughout the poem.

²⁶ Perez, [*Hacha*], emphasis in original, 37.

²⁷ Perez, 39. Gaps exist between words in the original. Because Perez’s poetic lines are so deliberately placed and spaced on the page, it is difficult at times to retain a sense of words’ visual placements in relation to each other in in-line quotations.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁰ Vicente M. Diaz, “Pious Sites: Chamorro Culture Between Spanish Catholicism and American Liberal Individualism,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, editors (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 312–39.

³¹ The second volume, *from Unincorporated Territory* [*Saina*], continues this experimental project of interweaving poems begun in [*Hacha*] with some new formal characteristics. The overall structure of interwoven long poems remains the same. This second book’s sections, however, are more regularly divided with a fairly consistent sequence of excerpts repeated in each. Perez numbers these sections in four languages—Chamorro, Spanish, Japanese, and English—acknowledging and mobilizing the complex colonial legacy of Guam in an act of memorializing rather than forgetting the past. Excerpts “*from tidelands*” and “*from aerial roots*” draw forward pieces of the first volume to anchor the new poems.

³² Perez, [*Hacha*], 25 and 88. Again, it is difficult to capture the spacing of words here. Deleted words on the second page are gaps in the text.

³³ Perez, “The Page Transformed.”

³⁴ Perez, [*Hacha*], emphasis mine, 12. Both Michael Lujan Bevacqua and Diaz, other scholars also originally from Guam committed to Indigenous and Chamorro sovereignty, use Chamorro words similarly in their essays. Bevacqua comments in the Notes to his essay, “The subheadings in this chapter (*hacha, hugua, tulu*, etc.) are ancient Chamorro numbers. In modern Chamorro they have been replaced with Spanish numbers (*uno, dos, tres*, etc.). I use them to number section headings in my written work as a small gesture of decolonization.” Michael Lujan Bevacqua, “The Exceptional Life and Death of a Chamorro Soldier: Tracing the Militarization of Desire in Guam, USA,” Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, editors, *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 50. Previously published in *The Contemporary Pacific* 6.1 (1994): 86–109. And Diaz points out in a footnote about references to Chief Kephua Memorial Park in Agana, “I prefer to use the name ‘Kepuha’ rather than the more conventional ‘Quipuha’ for an added irony found in the Chamorro orthography. In the vernacular, the name ‘Kepuha’—the seventeenth-century chief who is said to have welcomed the Catholic mission to Guam—is translated as ‘dare to overturn’ (as in ‘dare to overturn a canoe’). . . In favoring the use of ‘Kepuha’ to the hispaniced (anglicized) ‘Quipuha,’ I myself dare to overturn histories and practices that would themselves dare to obscure indigenous meaning systems. But then again, for the majority of other names and places referred to here in this article, I defer to Hispanic and Anglo conventions in the tactical interest of communication and out of sheer historical and cultural necessity” (n. 5, 336).

³⁵ Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 1.

³⁶ The Guam Organic Act of 1950 officially transferred control of Guam from the US Navy to the Department of the Interior and civilian rule though the island remains a key location for the US Navy which thus maintains significant control of Guam’s resources and land.

³⁷ Rogers, 182.

³⁸ See Rogers, 170.

³⁹ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

⁴⁰ Paul Carano and Pedro C. Sanchez, *A Complete History of Guam* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1964), 1.

⁴¹ See Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, eds., *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁴² Bevacqua, emphasis mine, 33.

⁴³ A video clip of this exchange went viral on the YouTube web site as commentators at various blog and online news sites ridiculed Representative Johnson's seemingly ludicrous remark. Conservative critics in particular pointed to Johnson's comments as evidence of Democrat stupidity. Others argued that Johnson's remarks were clearly figurative and tongue-in-cheek, stating in a joking manner a serious point about the overrunning of the small island with American military personnel. Admiral Willard, in his response, emphasized that Guam is the Westernmost location of the United States and thus vital as a military site for the security interests of the nation.

See also, Blaine Harden, "On Guam, planned Marine base raises anger, infrastructure concerns," *The Washington Post* (March 22, 2010), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/21/AR2010032101025.html> (accessed August 3, 2010).

⁴⁴ Perez, 83. The words in the box offer intriguing suggestions of connections to other poems and images. The only un-struck-through word, "attadok," appears untranslated earlier in "from Aerial Roots" (49).

⁴⁵ The sites listed in order are: <http://www.petitiononline.com/haleta/petition.html>, <http://decolonizeguam.blogspot.com>, and <http://jgpo-guam-cmtf.blogspot.com>. As of December 22, 2010, the third site is no longer available. This unstable nature of the Web and Perez's weaving of links between a book and the Internet are also suggestive of the uneven relationships between Guam and other cultural/political bodies that are ever-changing.

⁴⁶ Perez, 91.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁹ For a teleological account of development in the region, see Mansel G. Blackford, *Pathways to the Present: U.S. Development and Its Consequences in the Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Craig Santos Perez, *from Unincorporated Territory [Saina]* (Richmond, CA: Omnidawn Publishing, 2010), 17. In the notes at the end of the book that explain the footnotes, Perez also offers himself as a contact person for those interested in decolonial activism and Chamorro independence.

⁵¹ Perez is quick to note that, by and large, he is not an activist like the others who provided testimony before the United Nations. His literary activism aims to shift Chamorro and other American understandings of Guam and Chamorro culture, but he

distinguishes such work from explicit political engagement. In a blog post, he writes, “i’ve never considered myself an activist; if anything, i think what i do is ‘literary activism’ as i try to raise awareness of the struggles of my people through my poetry. in 2007, i became involved with a chamoru activist group called famoksaian. at first, i held writing workshops during the group’s annual conferences.” “Poetry, Politics, & Why I am Not an Activist,” Blog post, (February 24, 2010) *Harriet: A Blog from the Poetry Foundation*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/02/poetry-politics-why-i-am-not-an-activist/> (accessed August 2, 2010).

⁵² Bevacqua, 42.

⁵³ Margaret Jolly, “Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and Foreign Representations of a Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 19.2 (Fall 2007), 509.

⁵⁴ Perez, 28–30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, emphasis in original, 87.

⁵⁹ Mark Jaffe, *And No Birds Sing: The Story of an Ecological Disaster in a Tropical Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

⁶⁰ [*Hacha*], 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Rogers writes of the origins of “Chamorro” as the name of the Indigenous peoples of Guam: “By the time Spain claimed Guam in 1565, the indigenous people of the Marianas would be called *Chamurres*, the Spanish version of the local term, *chamorri*, which is what the islanders called members of their high caste. The early Spanish sailors also interpreted *chamurre* to mean ‘friend.’ Eventually, the local people would be known variously as Marianos, Chamorris, and finally Chamorros after Father Diego Luís de San Vitores arrived to establish a Jesuit mission on Guam in 1668. The word *Chamorro* to describe the island’s people is, therefore, apparently indigenous in origin as well as perhaps an adaptation of the old Spanish word *chamorro* for “bald” or “shorn” (“beardless” in Portuguese), which described some island men who wore only a topknot on an otherwise shaved head. No known records of Magellan’s stay at Guam reported an indigenous name of the island, a curious omission for one of the most significant landfalls in human history” (6). I use “Chamorro” as the commonly accepted spelling for the name of the people and the language though Perez sometimes uses “Chamoru,” a spelling considered more reflective of the Chamorro language rather than Spanish.

⁶⁴ Rogers writes, “The decline in population from the estimated 12,000 on Guam in 1668 when Father San Vitores arrived to fewer than 2,000 people twenty-two years later was disastrous” (70). Rogers spells the priest’s name differently than Perez and Vicente Diaz do; I follow the latter scholars’ spelling except when quoting from Rogers. Perez also offers different population numbers in his book: “[*after the death of sanvitores, the native population dropped from 200,000 to 5,000 in two generations as a result of spanish military conquest]” (21).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁷ Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 28.

⁶⁸ Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13.2 (Fall 2001): 321.

⁶⁹ James Clifford, “Indigenous Articulations,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13.2 (Fall 2001): 472.

⁷⁰ For an analysis of how queer of color critique often forwards a diasporic approach that dismisses Indigeneity in this way, see Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.1–2 (2010): 42–68.

⁷¹ Vicente M. Diaz, ““To “P” or Not to “P”?: Marking the Territory Between Pacific Islander and Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7.3 (October 2004): 183–208.