

A History of Guam's Historiography: The Influences of "Isolation" and "Discovery"

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Because of British hegemonic residues, the histories of Guam and the northern Mariana Islands are sometimes omitted in overviews of Pacific histories. One might say that this history of historical interpretations rings of the externally imposed "belittlement" of Guam and its supposed isolation that Epeli Hau'ofa so ably outlined in his "Our Sea of Islands" essay concerning the Pacific islands in general (Hau'ofa 1994). This history is faithful to the "islands in a far sea" mentality that European explorers first introduced when, after sailing great ocean distances, they finally came upon islands that they immediately folded into the context of European voyaging epics, islands that became tiny points in a great expanse of water.¹ Couple this with the unbreakable reality that these voyagers' European origins were centers of power toward which all things emanated and returned, and one recognizes the colonial mindset of the inconsequential smallness of islands whose exploitation was seen to be not only inconsequential but also merited. But indigenous voyaging traditions between Pacific islands contradicted this mentality as indigenous societies clashed, melded, and traded within a larger region (Hau'ofa refers to this as "world enlargement") that European explorers either could not have imagined or, once the Pacific's geography was better known, consequently relegated to smallness within a folded and fenced-in world where the great Pacific expanse, along with European cultures and political powers, loomed large beyond comparison.

Once this smallness and the convicted primitiveness of Pacific cultures could be held in authoritative hands, colonial and imperialistic possessions began. It was only a matter of time before Guam's and the rest of the Pacific islands' historical literature began to depend upon European impressions encased in a variety of primary sources reconstituted into secondary-source, historical interpretations. One source has been Levesque's multivolume translation of a vast reservoir of original European documentation on Guam and Micronesia (Levesque 1992-2003).

While Guam's historical literature has traditionally been directed primarily by the comings and goings of European explorers and, most influentially, by Spanish and, later, American administrators, there are, as in all historical literatures, significant early exceptions such as Jane Underwood's demographic studies of population shifts on Guam and in the northern Mariana Islands through conjectured causes—both environmental and human—including devastating epidemics from outside sources (Underwood 1973, 1976, 1991), Laura Thompson's important ethnographic studies of the Chamorro people—particularly in and around the village of Merizo (Malesso')—before and after the Japanese occupation of Guam (Thompson 1947), and Robert Solenberger's studies of the changing roles of rice in Chamorro society as well as the social and cultural importance of the Chamorro retention of ancestral lands for inter-communal agricultural production despite the severity of Spanish control and administration over the Chamorro people, including the seizure of readily available lands (Solenberger 1967).

But generally in Guam's pre-1980s literature, secondary renditions often regurgitated Guam's colonial past, absolutely beginning with Ferdinand Magellan's accidental arrival on Guam in 1521, followed by the appearance of other Europeans, usually with scores—and perhaps as many as one hundred—Chamorro proas or canoes surrounding European ships, often followed by the killing of a few Chamorros, by the watershed arrival of Father Diego Luís de San Vitores and his missionary colleagues in 1668, by Chamorro resistance and its brutal suppression by key Spanish military commanders, by the islands' subsequent depopulation (with the impact of warfare versus European diseases on the extent of this depopulation still forming an historical controversy), and a subsequent long demoralized period and place—what Robert Rogers described as an 'Oasis in the Ocean'—marked by a Spanish colonial period structured by the doings of various Spanish governors (Rogers 1995). While this regurgitation feels demoralizing in itself, there are enough variations available to be teased out to add what seems to be some unintended depth to this history. In at least the past few decades, however, some scholars—several of them indigenous—have challenged historic notions and approaches that have helped free Guam's history from this European-directed time span of events and consequences by placing Chamorro lives more within the context of their own lived history.

Influential narratives over the course of Guam's history of historical writings are organized according to the appearance of various early European explorers, the actions and non-actions of Spanish governors over three centuries, and throughout fifty years of two-year-termed U.S. naval governors. A good non-action example would be the Spanish non-response to massive Chamorro depopulation. The first census of 1710 revealed that—although published interpretative variations eventually find middle ground in the 3,500 range—3,539 Chamorros (the most commonly cited number) remained out of early or pre-San Vitores 'contact' estimates ranging from as high as 100,000 to as low as 35,000 Chamorros living in the Mariana Islands. Regardless of the unrecoverable correct number, this figure represents a massive decline in the Chamorro population that went even further after the forced centralization of Chamorros onto Guam (with the exception of a few hundred "refugees" on Rota—Underwood 1973) and into the established, church-centered enclaves of Pago, Inapsan, Inarahan (Inarajan/Inalåhan), Merizo (Malesso'), Umatac (Humåtac), and Agat (Hågat) enforced by Joseph de Quiroga y Losada following his administrative destruction of many Chamorro villages after his 1680 arrival on Guam. By the 1758 full census, only 1,711 "native Indians" remained, along with 170 soldiers and 830 "Spanish & Filipinos." This Spanish non-action is evident in the paucity of details concerning any Spanish effort to, if not stem the tide of this decline (often linked to an impending or even realized "extinction" of Chamorros), then render some form of medical response, particularly to the several epidemics and disease outbreaks that pepper the Spanish record.

To find any reference to a Spanish effort on this front is to hold a wilting moment of history that cannot be extended into the context of Spain's centuries-long colonization of the Mariana Islands. And yet as scholarship has concerned itself with the chronological and interpretative "facts" of Guam's history, such a blatant gap in the telling of the Spanish colonial era—extending, of course, to the northern Mariana Islands—has gone unaccounted for and has yet to materialize simply because it is not part of this regurgitated record. Granted, Spanish army physician José Romero Aguilar merited a few historical, inconsequential references for allegedly

doing nothing to treat children dying from a whooping-cough epidemic that swept through Guam in the chaotic months following U.S. Captain Henry Glass' seizure of Guam in 1898 (more than 100 children died in Hagåtña alone) (Sanchez 1988: 75). "Lepers" were apparently examined at the governor's Presidio on January 1803 by Juan Manibusan and José Bermejo (qualifications undeterminable) (Driver 2007: 5), while Irishman William George, an apparently untrained "medical practitioner," discovered several "lepers" at the men's "hospital" in Saipan and the woman's "hospital" at Adelup on Guam to be suffering from syphilis ulcers, not leprosy (Driver 2007: 22). Even more interesting for contemporary times, Governor Felipe María de la Corte made a lone, perhaps incredible connection between the appearance of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis-Parkinsonism-dementia (lytico bodig) and the Chamorro use of the cycad seed, which has been one of the leading candidates for the origin of this unique disease in the Mariana Islands (Corte y Ruano Calderón 1875: 57). But these historical nuggets have no story to follow, no concentrated and analytical abode to which they could be drawn.

In an 1844-commissioned report, Spanish Governor Gregorio de Santa María briefly mentions health care on Guam, relating the presence of an Englishman who had functioned as a "pilot and doctor" on a whaling ship who married a woman from Guam in 1842, then continued to practice his "profession" on the island. But Santa María also mentions the "cirujanas" (suruhãna in Chamorro)—"the people who really practice medicine here"—whose secretive herbal concoctions were revealed "to no one" (Driver and Brunal-Perry 1996: 22). Is this paucity in the Spanish record of concern for the health and well-being of Chamorros due to an already patterned form of care through the suruhãna? If true, what was the relationship between Spanish authorities and the suruhãna?

Past scholars have influentially conveyed ideas about Guam's "isolation," as well as about its salvation from this isolation through its "discovery" by Magellan and others and from the presences of these governors throughout Guam's post-European contact history. Even after its so-called "discovery," Guam still lumbered back into what Paul Carano and Pedro Sanchez describe in one of the first comprehensive histories of the island—*A Complete History of Guam* (1964)—as a "Century and a Half of Obscurity" (and here one must ask, "Obscurity for who or for what?"), to which they devote an entire chapter.² This book, while valuable for retelling a history that had not previously been revealed in as comprehensive a form and for offering valuable material about hallmark periods of Chamorro history, nevertheless conveyed these ideas of isolation and obscurity to school students for many years. As the Chamorro people supposedly wallowed in this obscurity in the context of world events, scattered European explorers made enough footnote-sized marks to drive, by their presences, the entire chapter and subsequent chapters. Thirty years later, in Robert Rogers' 1995 *Destiny's Landfall* (the next comprehensive history of Guam), the island became important primarily "because of the enduring imperatives of geopolitics, an enormous and underestimated force in the histories of small, strategically located islands, straits, and canals" (Rogers 1995: 1).

As Chamorro scholar Anne Hattori observes in her review of *Destiny's Landfall*, however, this "linear formula," in which European appearances and actions lead Guam's historical narrative along, "continues the canonical practice of tokenizing Guam as a pawn of its Spanish, American, and Japanese colonizers while simultaneously stressing Guam's importance in the context of its strategic location in geopolitics while undercutting the potential to understand the

significance of Guam's history in its own right." Hattori also argues that narratives like Rogers' deny "the Chamorro people their role as agents of historical action," subsequently subverting "local history" as it is most revealed in the canonical "privileging of alien voices" and Rogers' "dismissal of Chamorro activity" (Hattori 1997: 275).

Destiny's Landfall, on the other hand, was a considerable, perceptual jump from the ideas conveyed in Carano and Sanchez's 1964 *A Complete History of Guam*. Rogers attempted to integrate Chamorro values, practices, and linguistic terminology into his text while clearly rejecting notions of the island waiting to be discovered by the outside world. But it was the constant, driving influence of European exploration and eventual administration—and here is a central issue in Pacific historiography—that has brought about criticism of the book's approach by contemporary scholars such as Hattori and Vicente Diaz (Diaz 1996). Although *Destiny's Landfall* has a narrative goal of avoiding the linear-driven narrative exemplified in a book like Carano's and Sanchez's text, Diaz stresses that a failure to live up to this ambition reveals "an absent or repressed history of colonialism and colonial discourse that seeks to contain . . . the more dangerous and frightening elements of countercolonial discourse that historically articulates itself through indigenous grassroots activism." In this sense, Diaz argues, "historiography has big stakes in preserving and policing order, even if it tries to do this by claiming the space of opposition, whether as anticolonial or antiracist or by using the language of sympathy or benevolence, such as pro-Chamorro" (Diaz 1996: 196).

Carano and Sanchez's influential text accepts ideas about Guam being "discovered" and its handicapping "isolation." This is why the authors devote early pages to the Renaissance, the travels of Marco Polo, the Christian Crusades ("the Crusades and Guam," they write "are bound together by the thread of history" [Carano and Sanchez 1964: 36]), European trade routes to the East, Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America, and, finally, the completely fortuitous arrival of Ferdinand Magellan on Guam on March 6, 1521: his "discovery" of Guam for the rest of the world. "In the hearts and minds of the Guamanian people," the authors confidently assert (apparently on the basis of this snapshot of European history), "Ferdinand Magellan is an outstanding hero" (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 39). This is clearly evident, they maintain, in Guam's March 6 "Discovery Day," which annually includes a recreation of Magellan's "landing" on Guam in pursuit of a stolen skiff that was probably taken by Chamorros in accordance with Chamorro standards of reciprocity. The imaginary Magellan and his crew burn down several huts each year and kill several Chamorros, as reflected in Antonio Pigafetta's account of that day in 1521.

But in a different text, Ronald Stade (1998) recounts a public meeting in rural southern Guam organized by prominent "women keepers of the Chamorro tradition" from the mannakihilo Hagåtña social class whose objective was to convince less academically based Chamorro men and women to change the long tradition of this Discovery Day to a "Chamorro Spirit Day" ("Espiriton Chamoru Day"), a tradition that most southern Guam residents ("whose Chamorro language skills," Stade emphasizes, "far exceeded those of these women") rejected with comments such as "I don't need a Chamorro Day, because I wake up every morning and am thankful and proud that I am Chamorro. We can't change history! What happened, happened. Why should we hate Magellan or America?" (Stade 1998: 68.)

Carano and Sanchez's book also maintains that "the ancient Chamorro religion had no organized priesthood, no temples, no defined creed. It seemed primarily to be a religion of myths, superstitions, and ancestor worship" (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 23-24). The European historical record, however, provides a fairly rich (albeit piecemeal) collection of references to Chamorro veneration of ancestors, a primary story of creation that is repeated time and again throughout decades and centuries of accounts, and numerous references to Chamorro beliefs and adherence to protocol for encountering the *taotaomo'na* – the ancestral spirits.

Carano and Sanchez's "Century and a Half Obscurity" chapter begins after Magellan's departure to the Philippines (where he was killed by indigenous inhabitants), then examines the arrival of Father San Vitores in 1668, a moment that would usher in the brutal oppression (originally unintended) of the Chamorro people for the sake of converting them to Catholicism and the unleashing of European diseases that would eventually decimate the Chamorro people from estimated pre-contact levels ranging between 35,000 and 100,000 people to less than 4,000 by the year 1700 (a mere 32-year period). So, according to this historical perspective, Guam was fully rescued from obscurity by the arrival of San Vitores and by Guam's connection with the so-called outside world, regardless of the consequences. From there, out of obscurity, Guam's history was defined, packaged, and delivered in accordance with the arrival and actions of a variety of Spanish and non-Spanish Europeans.

I think in the case of Stade's recounting of the unexpected conflict over the proposal to change the traditional Discovery Day to one more devoted to the spirit of the Chamorro people, we have here a real-life event, if you will, of societal and historical criticism that has been so well expanded and nuanced upon by Hattori and Diaz that it marks a change in historical approaches to Guam as a whole. There were of course petitions by Chamorros against the oppressive American military rule over Guam as early as 1901 (three years after the United States seized Guam from Spain during the Spanish-American War) and numerous petitions thereafter until the Japanese invasion of Guam in December 1941. The petitions for self-governance, civil rights, and U.S. citizenship resumed soon after Guam's retaking by U.S. forces in July and August 1944. Chamorro appeals for civil rights and civilian rule were doggedly thwarted by the U.S. Navy until the advisory Guam Congress finally walked out in protest in 1949, leading to the 1950 Guam Organic Act under which Guam continues to function.

But historiography in the case of Guam was not really changed by these events, as reflected in Carano and Sanchez's text (taught in Guam's public schools for many years) on the centrality of world events for interpreting Guam and its people's history. And so a text that approaches Guam's past, through the appearance and actions of Europeans and by confidently narrating how, at least until World War II, Guam's history was "one of physical and cultural stagnation" and how life during most of the Spanish era had "become lazy and indolent" because "there was no need for them [the Chamorros] to work too hard," had a significant impact on historical interpretations of Guam's past for many years (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 1, 107).

In terms of the overall state of the historical literature about Guam, this mistaken, diffidently non-penetrating take on an island positioned to be isolated, waiting to be thrust into the historical force of world events, made the overall scholarship and interpretation of Guam's past subservient to this perspective until more grassroots occurrences, along with the textual, printed verbalization of these events against the clouded soul of historical interpretation itself,

occurred (the southern Guam meeting on the proposal to change the traditional Discovery Day is but one small example). By the 1980s, substantially more critical works throughout the Pacific had helped to change historical approaches to Guam that finally placed the Chamorros as people and as culturally unique individuals of history with a present directly involved in their histories, which promised to be as complex and rich as the complexity of Guam's past, society, and culture is. Works such as Anne Hattori's *Colonial Dis-ease* (2004), in its critical look at the colonial dimensions of U.S. naval health policies as instruments of control over the Chamorro people, is an obvious example of this progress, as is *Governing Guam*, a middle-school textbook authored in 1994 by the Political Status Education Coordinating Commission. This latter text intends to encourage Guam's students to critically examine the histories of Guam penned by non-Chamorros who, the Commission stresses, "wrote from their perspectives and [because] these writers do not fully know and understand the Chamorro people and culture, they are unable to comment on Guam history in the same way as Chamorros can" (Political Status Education Coordinating Commission (Guam) 1994: iv). Unfortunately this text essentially remains confined to the classroom and is not a commonly referenced source, although its impact on Chamorro students in the public schools may change this.

My narrative has its own characteristics, being a kind of compartmentalized text based on bemoaning ideas of an island's isolation and its condemnation to that isolation until some tiny sliver of European civilization arose one morning (or perhaps one afternoon) over the horizon. The context and the force of those ideas, however, rest uneasily upon the reality of time and its passage in the equally contextual and forceful moments of life that constitutes the idea of reality, but a reality that cannot be subject to the consternation of these time-folding ideas of "discovery" and "isolation." My text also presumes that those predominantly male authors writing these histories did not have (even if they should have) an alternative perspective that would have, almost from the start, recognized the Chamorro people for the distinctive people that they were. And that they are. While one can argue that writers such as Carano and Sanchez should have endeavored to correct, to remove this narrative shield and thus finally see the Chamorro people and their society for what they really were (and as they should have been seen by the first Spanish explorers), the hindsight denied by American hegemony should also be rightfully acknowledged in the moments of thought and action that also make up life and reality.

Historical criticism is not meant, however, to have or to employ such sympathy, but is rather designed to respond to epochs of interpretation that, when looked upon across historical time, reveal the layers of change that permit me to criticize these ideas of isolation and discovery. And in many respects that is all that one can really do if the meaning of criticism is to have any power over the making of history and the interpretations of that making. It was Greg Dening's (1980) anthrohistories of the Native and the arriving stranger that enabled the anthropological frames of indigenous peoples in history to be coupled with anthrohistories of the stranger as well, rather than allowing the privileging history of the stranger to support the anthropological narrative needs of the stranger to understand the Native. And it was within this equitable frame of inquiry, without the propelling sensationalism of encounter, that the idea of the story of the past, of the cultural fabrics of both sources of anthrohistories, became a natural consequence of this frame to such an extent that reality and truth had a far better chance of encompassing the passionate and the mundane of life as it might be seen upon a beach of witnesses looking left,

looking right, looking to the sea at a ship or beginning to solidify a sense of the consequence of the stranger's arrival, or to reconfirm what was instinctually correct from the very start. And as the theater of encounter played its lived acts out from day to day, light to dark, perceived good to perceived evil, these strangers and Natives could then, in the context of the consequences of their real powers upon each other, determine their own realities in the encounter. While hegemony maintains a status quo, it also functions as a constant sign and proof that this equality of frame of historical reference has not been kept intact in the stories of encounters. To continue to rely instead primarily on inherited chronological events to tell a story means that this equitable frame is in fact inequitable and without life, allowing the hegemony of the stranger to grow in strength.

Hau'ofa's ideas about the sources of island "belittlement," belittlement's impact on Pacific peoples' images of themselves, and its promotion of economic and geographic determinism to make indigenous lives dependent upon administrators from larger land and economic sources—along with the multifarious ways that lived lives in their movements and relationships across the vast ocean that their ancestors first settled refute this determinism—remain relevant for the past and future tellings of Guam's history. He rightly points out the determinist impact that the structures of island smallness, dependency, and limitations has historically had upon Native self-images and visions, while, in fact, indigenous peoples "busily and independently redefine their world in accordance with their perceptions of their own interests, and of where the future lies for their children and their children's children." Ordinary peoples of the Pacific "plan for generations, for the continuity and improvements of their families and kin groups" and Hau'ofa effectively demonstrates how such daily practices contradict these externally affected senses of smallness. Local social commerce, communication, cultures, and politics, Hau'ofa points out, span across and beyond the spectrums of smallness that bureaucrats involved in "aided development and Pacific Rim geopolitics" have a stake in preserving (Hau'ofa 1994: 159). One could say that preserving a chronological narrative, rich in administrative details and actions (sometimes bloody and sometimes savagely lapsed or converted into non-actions) in Guam's history (and replicated around the world in colonial and imperialistic contexts), also demonstrates a preservative stake that, at its most crass level, keeps the values and even the end results of colonialism the central consequence and reality on the beach.

As a story, this history requires (and should have always had) equal positions on the beach—not in the sense of indigenous versus stranger as they stand there looking left, looking right—but in the inevitable structures of storytelling that are destined to grow out of encounter. And better yet, the slowed-down-life-as-we-know-it-now lives of the Chamorro people, then, and made responsive to the demands that life and reality make of us, should help to defuse the structural belittlement of Guam's history if it is to be told at all. But of course we all know the way the world went. Whether or not the historical record actually makes this possible is beside the point. It is the removal of the belittlement of structure that determines the intentions of the teller, the historian.

David Hanlon (2003) points out a kind of ambulatory movement of surmounting this structure, beginning metaphorically with the shady but adaptable beachcomber James O'Connell, who managed to accommodate Pohnpeian society of the late 1820s and early 1830s (he left Pohnpei on the Salem trading brig *Spy*), including extensive tattooing of pain and indigenous

history on his body. Somehow a copy of Jane Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* (1810) had survived along with O'Connell and, after showing the book ("the English method of tattooing" as he described it) to Pohnpeian women, several took pages—especially those with drawings and figures—in an effort to "record a consciousness of O'Connell's world within their own histories" (Hanlon 2003: 20). The women wove them into their shoulder wraps, whereupon the first rainfall to hit the pages decimated "the history of the white man," thus rendering tattoos as the far more resilient means of historic preservation. And until James Davidson's 1954 inaugural address at the Australian National University pressing for an island-centered historical approach to sweep asunder the practice of colonial histories dependent not only upon the doings and desires of European explorers among non-historical islands, but upon the dimensional acts of colonial practices, Pacific historians painted on an empty canvas when, in actuality, its fibers roared with histories (Davidson 1955). The "fatal impact" approach that Davidson's followers pursued (Moorehead 1966) placed islands as victims but nevertheless continued to render Natives as they were conceived through the decisions of Europeans. And although history along Davidson's initiative led to works that could be "islander-oriented," the resulting narratives were not only still under the purview of European writers but also followed alien conventions, styles, and standards of European history as a whole, thereby supporting an "imperial arrogance and intellectual colonization" that Davison had originally railed against (Hanlon 2003: 23-24). If we lift the veil of the past belittlement of Guam's history, we will find that the island's histories are well represented in the larger colonial practice of Pacific history as well as now, more particularly, in their functional role in the continued decolonization of this history.

The continued transformation of Pacific history includes the expression of indigenous knowledge and the practice of its epistemologies and, subsequently, its consciousness. It is this decentralization of colonial structure and mind, along with the consequent centralization of indigenous thought, that Hanlon seemed to have had in mind when he optimistically voiced his belief in the "persistence and creativity of nativeness" to express history in forms, structures, and timelines alongside academic histories that may finally retain their "place and purpose as contributing, not colonizing, forms of historical expression in Oceania" (Hanlon 2003: 34).

What comes afterward cannot help but know the real subject of its story.

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Notes

¹ References to remoteness as an island's defining characteristic are not exclusive to historical reviews, as evidenced by Hiroshi Kakazu's conviction that "remoteness, oceanic and smallness are the most distinguishable characteristics of any island society" (Kakazu 2009: 17).

² L. M. Cox's *The Island of Guam*, composed in 1904 but revised and "enlarged" by three other writers, was eventually published in 1917 by the Government Publications Office in Washington, D.C., representing the first English language compilation of historical knowledge about Guam's event-centered past. Nelson and Nelson (1992) was the second rendition (completed in 1934), followed by Paul and Ruth Searles' 81 page manuscript, *A School History of Guam*, published in Hagåtña in 1937 by the Naval Government Printing Shop. Cox described Felipe María de la Corte y Ruano Calderón's 1875 *Memoria descriptiva é Histórica de Las Isles Marianas* (Madrid, Imprenta Nacional) as constituting "probably the best account of these islands ever printed" (Goetzfridt 2011: 11).