Spaces to Speak: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Examining Social Tensions in Programs for Women

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Abstract

This essay explores an interdisciplinary framework for examining barriers to effective programs, services, and partnerships among diverse populations. In an interdisciplinary fashion it foregrounds border and post-colonial theories to uncover and examine the social borders or "entangled tensions" that arise when differing cultural norms collide. In particular, the article investigates the entangled tensions and social conflicts Chuukese women experience as they move from different and competing social structures. Identifying and understanding where and how these tensions exist provides an opportunity to re-evaluate how programs, services, and partnerships can be re-fashioned in ways that provide alternative lenses of identity. To demonstrate how we can approach and use this framework, I first examine border theory as it applies to unseen entangled social tensions that abrade understanding; second, I apply the theory to health services for Chuukese women; and, third I identify three social borders that may help inform programs for women.

Background

In 1986 the United States, through an executive and legislative partnership, signed the Compact of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. Under the compact, these island nations, commonly referred to as the Freely Associated States (FAS) of Micronesia, guarantees the US exclusive use of FAS land and seas for military purposes in exchange for, among other things, visa-free travel and indefinite residency to the US and its possessions (2011 US Government Accountability Office Report 3). According to the US Government Accountability Office report on the Compact of Free Association, 56,305 compact migrants are living in the US and it possessions with the 18,2999 or 32.5% migrants living in Guam and 11,294 or 21% living in Hawaii (21%) (12). Over 95% of the compact migrants living on Guam come for the FSM island of Chuuk (14).

More research is needed on the effects of the compact migrants and the social, economic, and political impacts they experience as they move to foreign social structures and customs. While most compact migrant research has been aimed at assessing financial impacts to government and education programs of the affected locations, more research is needed to identify the social impacts to the compact migrants themselves. Micronesian migrants to the United States as a group have not been studied in-depth, with current migration work being done in more general terms (Hezel 5).

An Interdisciplinary Step

The roles of Chuukese women and how they are impacted has taken a back seat to US "compact-impact" Federal reimbursement, and by perceptions that are largely influenced by public perception on law enforcement and crime. Yet, given the centrality of women to Chuukese society, there needs to more interdisciplinary research examining the diminishing role of the Chuukese

matriarchal social structure in Guam. Much of the current research on Chuukese women has been framed in disciplinary epistemologies bounded by traditional cultural roles and historic examinations. To be sure, this body of knowledge is extremely important for many reasons; however, more research is needed that seeks to integrate disciplines in more holistic ways. This is significant when we understand that the purpose of interdisciplinary research is to gain insights, and produce more comprehensive understandings that extend beyond the confines of the disciplines themselves (Repko 14-16). In 2007, Sally Aboelela, in "Defining Interdisciplinary Research: Conclusions from a Critical Review of the Literature", employed systematic literature reviews, examined interdisciplinary typologies, and conducted interviews with high level interdisciplinary groups to define interdisciplinarity as the following:

> Interdisciplinary research is any study or group of studies undertaken by scholars from two or more distinct scientific disciplines. The research is based upon a conceptual model that links or integrates theoretical frameworks from those disciplines, uses study design and methodology that is not limited to any one field, and requires the use of perspectives and skills of the involved disciplines throughout multiple phases of the research process (13).

Examining the changing role of Chuukese women requires this type of research because first and foremost, Chuukese women bind the fabric of Chuukese society. Second, as Chuukese women move to Guam there are at least three cultures they must operate within -- Guam's indigenous culture, Guam's western culture, and their own Chuukese culture. The FSM migrant women on Guam suffer complex, social displacement challenges. While Guam grapples with social and economic tensions, political self-determination, land rights, and an increasing military presence, FSM migrants often become public targets for consuming a large portion of public assistance and social services funding; yet, data from Guam's Bureau of Statistics and Plans 2011 Statistical Yearbook shows only FSM migrants using only 17% of Medicaid services, as one example (Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans 2011). While, there is conflict and debates about the levels of reimbursement by the US Federal government to the Government of Guam, much of the social impacts affecting Chuukese women have been silenced because of these debates.

In an interdisciplinary fashion, this article foregrounds the use of diaspora border theory, and post-colonial studies to uncover how Chuukese women redefined and resituated their roles from their traditional roles in Chuukese society in the wake of colliding and competing societal structures. An examination of this question requires a discussion of diaspora border theory, post-colonial studies, and an overview of the traditional roles of Chamorro and Chuukese women, to uncover borders of entangled tensions. These tensions are often unseen or understood through the eyes of the host nation or country. The article then applies these borders to selected studies in access to health services and in spatial organization. The article is laid out in this fashion.
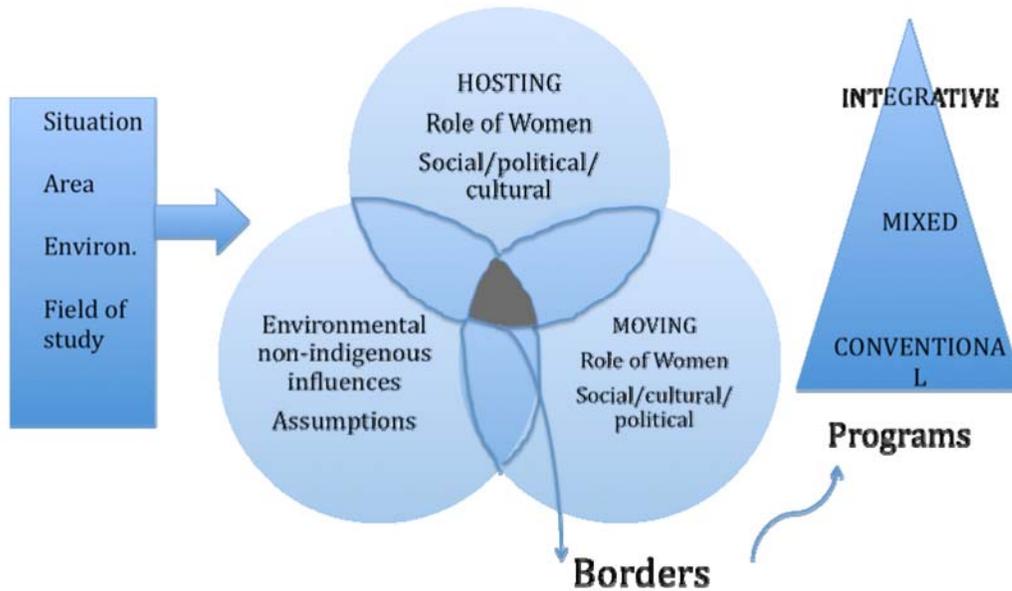
Diaspora Border Theory

Marginalization, conflict and disruption because of intense competing values and a replacement of identities are some of the consequences of diasporic communities (Clifford 244). Anthropologist and interdisciplinary scholar on post-colonial discourse James Clifford tells us that while diasporic theories and discourse have been traditionally understood as "transnational movements", often bounded by "nation-state or of global capitalism", understanding effects of diaspora theories in more contemporary and intersectional avenues allows for 'post colonialisms' that expands the lens of traditional anthropological discipline underpinnings (Clifford 304). The

argument Clifford poses is that diasporic theories must be criticized in the way that it constraints and limits application to post-colonial discourse (304). Here marginalization and identity disruptions can occur beyond a transnational movement, and these effects are not bounded by a diaspora model of "history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing-support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined in this relations" (305). Clifford argues that current theories and research address the paradigmatic conventions of anthropologic examinations because "old" ways of understanding effects on diasporic populations are no longer contained in transnational movement. Because as Clifford writes, these paradigms do not reflect new shared and "adjacent meanings" of "travelling" and movement, Clifford writes "it is now widely understood that the old localizing strategies – by bounded *community*, by organic *culture*, by *region*, by *center* and *periphery* – may obscure as much as they reveal" [my emphasis] (303)

Clifford and others contend that new and redefined cultural formations now exist in new ways and in new forms. Clifford's argument here is that paradigms and models are no longer sufficient to explain and understand how these new formations occur and how they are formed, in part because travel and communication are not constrained as they once were. Supporting this argument Clifford points to Roger Rouse's research on Mexican Anguillan communities in Redwood City (Rouse as cited in Clifford 303). Here Rouse contends that communities and new cultural formations now arise outside of the diaspora models through "continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information (Rouse as cited in Clifford 303). As the "new" or redefined communities arise in the areas they "inhabit", they now operate between two worlds, one in which their identity is still connected to the "homeland" through technology (transportation and communication), and the other in which they now live. Rouse and others argue that these places inhabited by migrant populations are "borders" or spaces where discourses of "marginality" become central because of the collisions that occur between "old" and "new" (304).

The debate from post-colonial theorists argues that borders spaces should no longer be examined in defined models of diaspora constrained by geo-political understandings. This means that an anthropological discipline underpinned by research, bounded by ethnic culture, must continue to examine these spaces outside of borderlines or geo-political crossings (304). Clifford further extends Rouse's argument by positing that by focusing on essentializing features of diaspora model, theorists and researchers miss an opportunity to explore what those cultures -- either those moving to locations or those who have been colonized – "define themselves against" (307). The following model helps to define how I approach applying this notion:

Post-Colonial Studies: Muted Voices

History, anthropology and post-colonial theories allow for deconstruction of hegemony as a way to piece out various ways that used to oppress and marginalize, just as important, these areas also allows a way to reclaim our identity, our being, and our thinking; to make sense of what was imposed, how we incorporated foreign values, how we responded, and how we adapted.

The Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci redefined the concept of "hegemony" to describe the processes of moral and intellectual leadership through which subordinate classes of post-1870 industrial Western European nations *consent* to their own domination by ruling classes, rather than being simply forced into accepting inferior positions. The concept allows analysis of the subjugation of one class or group over another, through its systems and structures of imposed values and hegemonic definitions. This concept is often applied to colonized indigenous populations whose histories and cultures were obscured in texts, images, and other forms of communication, both to others and to themselves. This means that voices of those most marginalized are silenced, distorted and not heard. Research in colonized populations outside of the 'western' centric views is critical to uncovering indigenous forms of expression. For many colonized populations, examining and exploring cultural and historical texts enables a greater understanding of how communication and other forms of expression were used to retain values and aspects of their society amid colonial forces. But it may not be enough.

Gayatri Spivak internationally known for her work on the oppression of women, tells us power dimensions have constructed ways of thinking into a "worlded world" of idealogies, operations, conformity, and of western thought that silences the most vulnerable populations (1998). Concomitantly, subalterns' experiences are captured in ways that are foreign to their ways of knowing and being; their experiences and stories are told by those who fashion the story. For the subaltern, there are no spaces to speak. This is significant when we consider that the patriarchal views of male superiority have greatly diminished decision-making and the power strategies

Chuukese women employ. Spivak theorizes the limitations of post-colonial theory in allowing those who are not theorists to speak; she contends that only by listening to the voices and experiences of the oppressed and subjugated, and by extension examining those experiences, can the academic world give agency to the subaltern. Spivak also cautions against the equivocation and representation of the subaltern to be conflated in normative paradigms (1998). This means that even those within similar cultures can be subsumed and silenced by dominant norms even when they have deep anthropological connections. The interdisciplinary approach presented here is mindful of the delicateness of allowing historically marginalized voices to speak. The approach purposefully uses border theory as a way to focus on the entangled tensions, or new cultural formations that arise in colliding social structures; it attempts to de-center the dominant voice., allowing Chuukese women to exercise their voice in a "worlded world".

Uncovering the Borders: An Overview of the Roles of Chamorro and Chuukese Women

Exploring the social effects of Chuukese women migration to Guam through diaspora borders first requires establishing the social matriarchal borders they find when they move to Guam; these are the borders in which they must operate. Subsequently and equally important, is establishing the traditional elements of Chuukese society and how it conflicts with the traditional and contemporary roles of Chamorro women.

Ancient Chamorro society operated and managed their resources in a collective nature through avuncuclans[1] that were both matrilineal and matriarchal (Aguon 7). Matriliny allowed for kinship connections to be traced through the mothers' family, Aguon describes it as "…children belonging to their mothers and not their fathers. They became members of their mothers' clans and inherited rights to live on and use their mother's clan land" (6). Children were initially raised in their father's clan; however, upon reaching a certain age would be sent to live among their mothers' kinsmen because the child's membership was derived from the mother's clan. Aguon writes of the emergence of women's roles from the shadows of western written history:

> In ancient Chamorro society, women were as important [as men], and in many ways, more important than men. They controlled the land upon which their extended families lived and farmed. They anchored the Chamorro home and family, and the whole Chamorro society…The Chamorro women of the Spanish times quietly ensured the survival of the Chamorro culture (vi).

Women were important to the civil aspect of Chamorro society, they played an important role in settling disputes, engaged in decision-making and were allowed to speak openly and publicly in clan matters. Today, as in the past, women continue to hold roles of leadership and decision-making in public, government, business and private sectors. In contrast, Chuukese women are not allowed to speak in public as this role is reserved for men; further, the men, not the women, are responsible for raising children (Moral 279). While the normative response is to see Chuukese women as powerless, this is not the case as the understanding of power is conceptualized and exercised in a very different way, and thus one is cautioned to not equate the lack of public speaking or civil participation to a lack of power.

Central to the Micronesian social fabric is the concept of the extended families. Extended family members include those relatives beyond the western nuclear families; this was important to ensure self-subsistence of the clan – each member having a role and responsibility to the group to

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[1] Avuncuclans is matrilineal descent with the wife living in the husband's territory

ensure continued survival.

The framework of Chuukese Society is the matri-clan where kinship is traced through the mother's lineage and where the husband resides in the wife's property/land. This matri-group structure is fundamental to exploring and examining Chuukese women's status (Moral 273). In Chuukese society all activities arise from and revolve around sustaining and strengthening the matri-group; identity arises not from the individuals but from the identity of the group as a whole, because of this, individualism and self-identity are only discussed or recognized in terms of the roles one is bestowed. Characteristics such as kinship relation in the group, age, and sex are used to determine ones role, duties, responsibilities, and hierarchy (Moral 274).

One of the most important roles for the Chuukese woman is maintaining the link between the land and the clan; she is responsible for ensuring unity between the two and because of this her role is vital (Moral 275). Moral states, "the pillars of the Chuukese social structure are found in the basic triangle formed by women, land and *eterekes*[2]. Land and *eterekes* constitute a vital, structural, functional, and transcendental unity, and women make it possible, protect it and maintain it", the role is symbolic in that woman maintains the balance 'between the men and the land' (275). Her sphere of power in this way, arises from her fertility both through the nurturing of the land and through her ability to have children. In this way, the matri-group provides fierce protection to her.

By comparing and contrasting the traditional and contemporary roles of Chamorro and Chuukese women, as discussed above, we can now see three distinct borders that Chuukese women must navigate when they move to Guam: 1) the adoption of the western nuclear families into the structures and practices (dwellings, homes, social); 2) increased power of women in both public and private realms; 3) the freedom and acceptance of women to speak in public and to hold positions of open leadership and decision-making. The following section applies these borders to spatial organization, accessing health care, and seeking assistance in intimate partner violence.

Applying the Borders

The diminishing importance of the matri-group and the nuclearization of the family is one diasporic border conflict that has abraded our understanding of Chuukese women. In this case, several important studies on woman's health and access to services can shed light on the effects of diminishing aspects of their culture.

A study of selected female cultural groups (N=53) living in Hawaii was conducted to determine the relationship between culture and intimate partner violence, also known as IPV (Magnussen 9). The study aimed to determine the cultural barriers and perspectives that prevent women from seeking and receiving care. Focus groups were conducted with 53 culturally diverse females; Chuukese women constituted the largest cultural group with 22 participants. Because of the often-practiced aggregation of Asian Pacific Islander (API) health data, health status is often misleading and confounded for Pacific Islander women. In this case, the number of API's reporting IPV was lower when measured against other groups and disparities to access of IPV resources. The interview guide contained questions that were geared to uncover levels of perceived acceptable behavior as it related to partner violence, both by the victim and by the partner.

Five common themes percolated from the discussions: Living within a Collective; Cultural Protective Factors; Cultural Barriers to Helpseeking; Gender specific Roles; and Belonging to a

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[2] Meaning matri-group

Place (12). The results analyzed along these themes were revealing for Chuukese woman in terms of diasporic borders, particularly in the nuclearization of families and the subsequent diminishing protection from the matri-group. For example, in the theme "Living Within a Collective", women expressed the importance and influence that the group and members of the extended family had on their decision to report IPV; many do not report the abuse because of an overwhelming obligation to keep the group's reputation intact at all costs. For Chuukese women, the important factor was the head of clan providing intervention, help and assistance in IPV, or the in cases where they lived away from their homeland, help from a pastor was sought (12). There was no mention of reporting IPV's or seeking help outside of the clan or religious structures. The nuanced understanding here is to recall protection of the matri-group and the role of women as previously discussed -- that is everything arises from sustaining and maintaining the clan and the land – reports or accessing services that requires "reporting" intimate partner violence threatens the group, as a result there will be decreased or diminished protection of women. I am not proposing here that reporting of IPV not be pursued, only that programs and services may need to find more culturally sensitive ways to encourage reporting that doesn't threaten them further. More research is needed to determine the causes of IPV; however, this article does not explore these causes.

Another diasporic border that has impacted the social effects on Chuukese woman is the increased acceptance of women on Guam to speak publicly, and to participate in decision-making. These borders, while seemingly progressive in the western sense, are actually a weakening of the Chuukese women's power. A deconstruction to ascertain power spheres here is required to understand the nuanced contestation. Consider, as previously discussed, that Chuukese women's power resides in her ability to maintain unity between men and land, and the ability to have children; this concept is fundamental to Chuukese society. However, fertility here, as Moral writes, "does not point to anything other than the relevance of her role, her responsibility in (pro)creation, sustenance and maintenance (continuity) of the family group" (Moral 276). In this way, her role is defined and bounded no further beyond that which it has been bestowed. Chuukese women are further constrained because they are not allowed to speak in public and have no "open" role in decision-making. This concept presents itself as an 'avoidance behavior' and is dictated by the "male-superiority" and "incest taboo" elements of Chuukese society. These elements come from the "social structural aspects of siblingship" (Marshall 200); in Chuukese siblingships older children have more authority over younger ones of the same sex. Brothers have authority over sisters; first borns have special privileges and all the males in the mother's clan are classified as "brothers" (Moral 276). Moral writes of these elements, "The fundamental rule of this taboo is: the brother has to be kept physically away; he should ignore his sister's sexuality and anything to do with it. Therefore the sister has to erase any kind of sexual connotation from her behaviour, body and presence." These elements result in avoidance behavior and dictate compulsory silence from women; they are not allowed to speak publicly and do not openly participate in decision-making (276). The social border of women speaking publicly and participating in decision-making has, conversely, increased authority of Chuukese men and has eroded the protection of women in abusive relations. Moral contends that interventions to domestic abuse has been perceived by husbands as an 'encroachment' of their authority, and has bolstered the power of a husband over his wife. Evidence of this can be found from the IPV study under the theme Cultural Barriers to Helpseeking power of this authority:

> Women's responsibility in a relationship is to "keep the peace." There is shame associated with IPV becoming known. Even with injuries women may choose to stay in an abusive relationships out of duty and to preserve family honor. Women

do have the choice to stay, take a break or to leave; but women are expected to be strong and resilient in family and marital life (Magnussen 12).

Thus far we can now see the borders that Chuukese women must negotiate and the entangled tensions that result; yet the picture cannot be complete without uncovering how Chuukese women (re)define or adjust their identities in ways that give them voice and agency. Spivak in the "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argues that adopting colonizer customs, manners, and language is required for the colonized to be heard (Spivak 24-28). Although Guam is not a colonizer, the theory remains relevant as one relocates and resituates there. Research and other ways to uncover indigenous forms of expression are crucial when we consider that Spivak theorizes the limitations of post-colonial theory in allowing those who are not theorists to speak. She posits that only by listening to the voices and experiences of the oppressed and subjugated, and by extension examining those experiences, can the academic world give agency to the subaltern (Spivak 24-28).

Although there is limited research on how Chuukese women have (re)adjusted or (re)defined themselves to cope with contrasting social structures on Guam, research that has been done is revealing and opening up new areas of research and theory. One adjustment to cultural and social change is the constructing of homes, or spatial organization, to accommodate avoidance behavior in order to "adhere" to traditional Chuukese social elements (Quan Bautista 79). As discussed previously in this essay, avoidance behavior seeks to ensure that no contact or even presence between and among siblings occurs; there is no "sharing of food, personal items, water, perfume, and water" (Rubinstein as cited in Quan-Bautista 80). Quan Bautista found in her research of Gill Baza, a subdivision of homes owned by FSM citizens, that homes were constructed with many doors to allow women to enter and exit quickly to accommodate this behavior. Another example cited padlocked doors frequently used to ensure protection of personal items from 'brothers' (81). The following quote from Quan-Bautista describes the great lengths to construct homes in ways that guard against accidental and embarrassing predicaments:

> Many structures have several doors to allow different ways for women to enter and exit, especially important for going to the privy. One semi-cement unit, where Kirin sleeps has four exterior doors: one to a sleeping room and three to a living room where important family meetings are held. Having several doors makes it easier for women to carry food or children without having to pass in front of seated men (81).

In apartment dwellings the contact and presence of brothers and sisters is even more difficult and described as "unbearable" by many women (80). Often it is much easier for women to use the public restrooms than to deal with the awkwardness of moving around the apartment in a brother's presence (80).

While construction of homes to accommodate traditional elements of Chuukese society is one way that women have adjusted, another way is through organizations and associations, particularly as it relates to women's health. For example, in a study "Understanding Cervical Cancer Prevention and Screening in Chuukese Women In Hawai'i" women suggested ways to facilitate increasing awareness and understanding of cervical cancer by using women's groups, associations or organizations as a way to 'legitimize' the acceptance of discussing women's reproductive health issues (Wong 15). This is significant because not only is this one way to get important health information to women but it also re-establishes the power spheres through the women's group; in effect it can halt the diminishing power of the women in the matri-clan. This is important to note because it is one indicator of how women adapted by recreating traditional groups structures.

Other women in the study suggested educating Chuukese men on the topic as one way to promote education and screening. As one respondent suggests, "If the husband understands the importance, then they can let their wives go for Pap smear. This kind of test, both wife and husband have to agree on whether she goes or not" (15).

Following Clifford's diaspora borders, this essay has uncovered three distinct borders on Guam that affect Chuukese women when they move from a matrilineal-patriarchal social structure to Guam's matrilineal-matriarchal society. These borders include 1) the adoption of the western nuclear families into the structures and practices (dwellings, homes, social); 2) increased power of women in both public and private realms; 3) the freedom and acceptance of women to speak in public and to hold positions of open leadership and decision-making. These borders become significant when we understand that Chuukese woman do not speak publicly and that their power and decision-making roles are drastically diminished when nuclear families become the norm. Through their stories and the examination presented here we have found that Chuukese women have not yet redefined themselves against these borders, per se, but that they are accommodating and resituating their social structures through spatial organizations and effective use of women's and faith-based organizations and associations.

The research highlighted in this article demonstrates that researchers are finding innovative and effective ways to engage Chuukese women and FSM migrants in their stories that open up new theories, concepts, and scholarship. These are important to consider as research in health, seeking assistance in domestic matters, and spatial arrangements provide new ways to evaluate programs, services, partnerships and collaborations in ways that provide new insights, new lenses, and new ways of thinking and understanding in spaces of difference.

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