

A Chamoru Story

By A Chamoru Woman: Hope A. Cristobal

As presented at the Nga Wahine Pasifika
Pacific Court of Women
Auckland, Aotearoa (NZ)
September 3, 1999

Buenas dias yan hafa adai mañelu-hu taotao Pasifiku! Si Yu'os ma'ase pot este na oportunidad ni en extende ham para bai en sangani hamyo pot I estorian i manChamoru. Greetings to the Maori people from my Chamoru people! *Si Yu'os ma'ase* Pauline Tangiora, Nganeko Minhinnick, Maria Clarke and the organizers of the Nga Wahine Pasifika. *Si Yu'os ma'ase* Corrine Kumar and the Asian Women's Human Rights Council and hafa adai to all my sisters and brothers from the aquatic continent of the Pacific.

My name is Hope Alvarez Cristobal. I am a Chamoru woman from Guam, an island in the Chamoru archipelago of the Mariana island. I am a mother of five children.

My people have lived on Guam for over 4,000 years and like the other indigenous people of the Pacific, our ancestors, our *manainas*, too, had a story of our creation, we had our mystics the *makana*, our healers the *suruhanas* and *suruhanus*. We, too, had a way of "governing" called the *matua* system. We were a spiritual people, we believed in the *tataotao* or the body, the *anti* or soul, and the *espiritu* or spirit. We believed in our *langit*, our heaven; and, we worshipped our ancestors' spirit as we had our other ancient practices. We lived in harmony with our *tano'*, our mother land and our island environment.

We were colonized by Spain for 230 years and for the first 30 years of that colonization, during the Chamoru-Spanish Wars, my people fought back. Our Chamoru chiefs organized battalion-sized forces of Chamoru warriors and defended our people and our homeland against the then "high tech" armed Spanish soldiers with their halberds, arquebuses and cross-bows. However, after 30 years, our lesser-armed native forces capitulated. What resulted of some estimated 100,000 Chamoru people was the reduction or depopulation to a few thousand Chamorus through the wars and then

through diseases brought by the colonizer. Later, the women practiced abortion and infanticide so that they would not produce Spanish children.

After the Spanish-American war in 1898, my homeland, Guam was sold to the United States as a spoil of war under the Treaty of Peace. The Treaty of Peace had a provision that instructively notes, "The political status of the native inhabitants shall be determined by Congress." From 1898 to date, over a hundred years now, we have been colonized by the United States of America; except for 31 months of occupation by the Japanese during WWII.

The Americans ruled us with laws such as ones that did not allow us to whistle in the streets; that did not allow any public display of religious practices such as processions; that instituted taxes on our lands. My dear sisters and brothers, we were not U. S. citizens, yet we were taxed for owning land. Many of our people did not register their lands to try and escape the taxes because my people were basically U.S. currency poor and refused to acknowledge the U.S. standards of land as a commodity. But there was, also, no guarantee that our people would be allowed to stay on the land or that they would not lose their lands. My *biha*, my grandmother, never registered our family land and as of 1970, our family land was still unregistered and "unsurveyed". It was not until my grandmother died and until our family was forced by the implementation of an alien land tenure system, that we had to comply by having our family land surveyed and registered. To the disappointment of my family (clan), we had already lost 5 acres to a government surveyor who had surveyed adjacent properties.

During World War II, my people suffered from Japanese atrocities as well as the bombing of our homeland by American forces including the destruction of the oldest capital city in Guam, Agana. During the post war so-called rehabilitation, the ancient city of Agana, save for a few war-ravaged homes, was bulldozed into Agana bay. Wartime ships bringing in immigrant workers and supplies brought in the brown tree snake that preyed on and has wiped out our native bird population. We are also aware of the issue of Japanese comfort women but Chamoru women still have not come forward to talk about these war crimes in our small community today. War reparations or rather, war restitution, was a subject of agreement between the United States and Japan after WWII and we were never made party to that agreement.

Yes, my people, the Chamoru people of Guam have been subject to other nations without their consent for over 330 years. Spain, Japan and the United States have all used our homeland to further their own interests and pursue the extension of their political and economic power.

Today, the situation that Guam faces is dire. We have been a colony of the United States for over a century; inscribed on the United Nations List of Non-Self-Governing Territories over 50 years; and, despite the 1898 Treaty of Peace between Spain and the U.S. and the United Nations Charter, the U.S. still has not demonstrated any interest in promoting decolonization and full self-government as the administering power of the NSGT of Guam. Our anomalous status as an unincorporated territory created by United States law is one of unilateral governance; making Guam subject to the plenary authority of the U.S. government. My sisters and brothers, the Chamoru people are but mere possession; our homeland, a piece of property; and I say, that the U.S.'s reputation as a champion of human rights in the world, is a farce.

The United States' unilateral policy on immigration has resulted in the systematic influx of outside immigrants and settlers to Guam with dramatic consequences on my people and this threatens the legitimate exercise of Chamoru self-determination.

Some of the unnatural effects on Guam of U. S. immigration laws are:

1. Before 1970, only 4, 188 individuals had ever been naturalized in Guam. The number of aliens naturalized between 1970 and 1989 (22,116) is almost equal to Guam's entire 1940 population of 22,190. During the period 1980-89, 12,511 aliens were naturalized in Guam (a 23% increase over the period 1970-79).
2. In 1990, over 50% of the population were not born in Guam.
3. In 1990, over 30% of Guam's population (or over 40,000 individuals) were non-U.S. born (nearly 300% above the 1970 percentage).
4. Between 1988 and 1997 almost 14,000 aliens living in Guam became naturalized U.S. citizens in Guam.

5. After 1987, over 10,000 citizens of Pacific nations Freely Associated with the United States have come to reside in Guam under the terms of agreements with the United States.

As a small island, the impact of immigration is immediately felt. Even by U. S. national standards, Guam's 225 square miles is disproportionately an annual destination of choice for immigrants, consistently ahead of 20 other U.S. states and territories.

This assimilationist policy vis-à-vis my people, unnaturally increased Guam's population growth rate while diminishing significantly the social, economic, cultural and political institutions of my people. And, the voting eligibility of these new settlers affects our ability to retain political control over our homeland and our cultural institutions.

As Chamoru women, our task of enculturation becomes more difficult; our traditional roles curtailed as we spend less time with our children due to the economic needs of our families. Our *manainas*, for example, now spend time in U.S. funded caretaker programs.

In the Post WWII era, expansive U.S. interest in, and the taking of, lands in Guam was for regional strategic platform. Initially, during the first two years, 80% was held under U.S. military "trespassory occupancy" with notice on the owner's return to their lands as a punishable offense under penalty of death. Then, land condemnations and the establishment of leasehold arrangements with private landowners and military control over the government of my Chamoru people. For four years, the military acquired tens of thousands of acres of land through a controlled "judicial" process that expressly limited appeals and legal representation by Chamoru land owners who were not U.S. citizens. No where in their U.S. Constitution does it allow them to take lands from non-citizens! However, on August 1, 1950, we were made citizens by a unilateral law called the Organic Act of Guam. That law also established my homeland as an "unincorporated territory" of the U.S. and at the same time, it reserved lands within 90 days of its enactment.

This midnight transfer of Chamoru lands allowed the U.S. to hold 44,478 acres or 33% of the 135,680 acres of fast lands making up my homeland. Sixty-three percent is on the developable northern plateau that contains our potable aquifer. The rest is mostly around the Pacific's only

potable water reservoir which is a major military munitions storage area and from where the bombs that dropped on Vietnam came from. And, Guam's only deep-water port---there, the military holds 80% of all fast lands within a two-mile radius of the center of the harbor. Since 1977, 3,200 acres were deemed excess and approved for transfer back to Guam but those lands have not yet been turned over to date.

Traditionally, since the 17th century, Chamoru women controlled the disposition of land in our homeland. The U.S. government's land grab policies have however, usurped our matri-local land tenure practices. During the last 10 years, however, a resurgence of the restoration of Chamoru women's rights have occurred...this is manifested in women taking leadership positions in all sectors of the Government of Guam and the Roman Catholic Church.

My dear sisters and brothers, our stories here today are the same. Except for the cast or the characters which are different, the plot is the same. But our stories are also stories about our continuity, our survival; because as long as we are here, we have strength and with the help of our creator, God, we shall overcome!

In an attempt to help heal my people from the effects of colonization, I had the honor of following in the footsteps of our esteemed Chamoru woman leader, the late Senator Cecilia Cruz Bamba who established the first Political Status Commission that initiated the process of Chamoru self-determination. Cecilia Bamba's work eventually evolved to the creation of the Guam Commission on Decolonization for the Implementation and Exercise of Chamoru Self-Determination (Guam Public Law 23-147) of which I had the honor of enacting into law during my term as senator in the 23rd Guam Legislature in 1996. This Guam law sets up a plebiscite for the eligible Chamoru voters on their preference for Guam's decolonized status.

Coinciding with the decolonization commission law is the Chamoru Registry Advisory Board (Guam Public Law 23-130) which establishes a registry of Chamorus. I enacted this law to institute the evidence of our existence and to promote my Chamoru people. Both laws remedy the silence and lack of action by the U.S. in asserting its responsibility in implementing the process of decolonization of the Chamoru people of Guam as embodied in the U.N. Charter and international convention.

It is critical to note that the outcome of the plebiscite is an expression of the colonized people's views about a future status and that the vote itself is not decolonization. Decolonization, however, will only occur after a change in Guam's status that either extends an independent sovereignty to Guam, or Guam being fully integrated into the sovereignty of another nation.

The plebiscite on decolonization preferences of the colonized people will be held most likely in year 2000. Significant momentum in the community is anticipated as consciousness raising and awareness movements get underway. Professionally, as an educator, I feel that the role of Chamoru women will be critical in the education process of the decolonization choices since a majority of teachers are Chamoru women.

The success of our Chamoru quest for freedom and decolonization will depend on our resiliency against the forces of colonialism which are an insidious and sometimes subtle assault against our people. The Guam process of decolonization will depend on the U.S. government... whether they will allow us to exercise our right to self-determination and whether they will recognize our Chamoru rights. My presence here gives me much hope that our meeting here will bind us in solidarity as we listen and learn from each other's plight as a people.

Nihi ta na'fan metgot hit, sa' I dignidad yan I libettat humahatsa I espiritun I taotao-ta, taotao Pasifiku. Let us be strong in our work because it is dignity and liberty that raises the spirit of our people. *Biba taotao Pasifiku! Biba taotao Guam!*

Ki'ora, Si Yu'os ma'ase and thank you.

Si Hope Alvarez Cristobal
September 3, 1999
Auckland, New Zealand

9/10/99 9:56:03 AM