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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade
for the Eradication of Colonialism: first quarter review of developments and trends

Quito, Ecuador
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DISCUSSION PAPER

PRESENTATION

BY

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(GUAM)

Statement to the Regional Seminar on the Implementation of the
Third Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism

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The world has come to a consensus that colonization was not right and that colonialism should be eradicated. Whatever rhetoric countries once used to justify exploitation and expansion and their domination over other free peoples has been disproven. Although progress and development can come about through colonization it is neither the most effective or the most moral way of carrying this out.

The arc of history seems to clearly bend in one direction, from colony to decolonization. There are only 17 non-self-governing territories left in the world, and close to 200 independent nations, many of them former colonies. This truth however is not manifest in most of the remaining non-self-governing territories. In Guam for example, decolonization is something that people fear and don't understand.

The island and its people, the Chamorros are stuck in what I call "a decolonial deadlock." Although there have been some efforts at the governmental level and movements amongst activists at the grassroots level, most people on Guam remain very resistant to the idea that Guam can be or needs to be decolonized.

As a scholar whose research is invested in studying Guam's colonial history and theorizing the possibilities for its decolonization, I have studied this deadlock in many forms, always with the intent of understanding it. It is my ultimate goal to find ways to resolve this deadlock and help people understand the need and advantages to changing our political status to something more equitable.

From 2002 – 2004 I conducted an ethnographic study with more than 100 Chamorros ages 20 – 70, to discuss their ideas and thoughts on Guam's decolonization. The majority of these subjects were against the mere idea of decolonization, and had trouble discussing it in an objective way. Their resistance was animated by a set of strange and bewildering fantasies. These fantasies shaped their discourse in such a way that decolonization became deadly and dangerous. It was something that they felt threatened the very possibility of life on the island.

Many of the ideas they proposed were very irrational and shouldn't have been offered up in a serious interview. I questioned them as to whether or not they were serious or merely joking. Even after being given the chance to restate their opinions, they insisted that I take their comments seriously.

They argued that decolonization was impossible since it would mean erasing everything from the island save for that which people understand as being narrowly Chamorro. They saw decolonization as

being ridiculous because of the way it would require the local Chamorro to take over things that the colonizer once held sway over. These Chamorros articulated the “Chamorro way” of doing things through stereotypes, as if they were seeing the world through the colonizer’s narrowing gaze.

They argued that a decolonized Guam would defend itself with “slingstones and spears” and soldiers in “loincloths” and that the government of a decolonized Guam would govern the island by “barbequing.” In their minds on a decolonized Guam there was no electricity, indoor plumbing, air conditioning, internet, education, money, but simply people living in huts.

A second set of fantasies were based on images of societal decay and chaos that would surely result if the island was decolonized. People argued that decolonization should not be discussed or attempted since it would lead to the end of everything. The day after Guam was decolonized, the island would be invaded by North Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and a variety of other non-white ethnicities. The island would become addicted to drugs. The government would collapse into unbridled corruption. There would be riots, looting, total chaos. Everyone would starve.

There may be some element of truth or concern in each fantasy, but that doesn’t account for the irrational forms they take. These responses make perfect sense however if you consider the Chamorro in a colonial

context, and the ways in which they may have come to accept colonial caricatures of themselves.

These caricatures are derived from the premise that the colonized person needs the colonizer, and cannot survive or advance without them. Chamorros fill the discursive space with their own local versions of societal upheaval, breakdown or impossibility. But ultimately these fantasies come from the colonial fiction that in order for life to function in a colony, the colonizer must be in charge of you and your lands. If you remove him, everything will fall apart.

The clearest indication that Chamorros have a very limited understanding of decolonization is the fact that these conversations about it immediately moved towards decolonization equaling independence. In truth, decolonization means a change in political status to something that is equitable or fair based on the desires of the native people. It can manifest in many forms, it is not only independence.

But Chamorros responded to the topic of decolonization in an “interpassive” way. Interpassivity is a psychoanalytical term describing a defensive strategy that people sometimes use. It is characterized by discussing something in a very limited way in order to prevent any discussion about it from taking place. They responded with interpretations of decolonization that are so ridiculous, they are meant to completely shut down discussion and not let any further

consideration take place. Decolonization in any form, even in terms of integration with the colonizer is something to be resisted within the decolonial deadlock, because it challenges the sovereignty and control of the colonizer. So long as the colonizer is in charge, all is supposed to be well, everything will function and advance. But if you challenge that authority, even in order to become one with it, you disrupt your existence.

The representations of the UN in this decolonial deadlock range from it being non-existent to it being a devious interloper. One end of the spectrum makes the other possible. Because the UN has little to no presence on the island, the gap is filled almost seamlessly with negative fantasies such as the ones that Chamorros feel towards decolonization.

The UN is not seen as an impartial mediator or guide, but as something that challenges the authority of the United States, infringing on its sovereignty. They see it as interfering with the control that people trapped in the decolonial deadlock feel is essential to the order in their lives. They also create fantasies that absolve the United State of any culpability in the continuing colonizing of Guam. They blame the UN for not decolonizing the island, and they blame the inefficient and incompetent UN for not taking this process seriously. This is where the decolonial deadlock achieves its circular and continually reproducing status.

Those who fantasize that the UN is holding Guam back from decolonizing, thus argue that it should really be the US who decolonizes Guam. Thus reinforcing the idea that even in terms of self-determination, something that shouldn't belong to any colonizer, people on Guam feel that it should be the colonizer who determines the destiny of Chamorros. This is truly regrettable since the US is on record saying they do not support real decolonization for Guam. Due to its strategic importance and the bases the US possesses there, they have no interest in decolonizing the island. As a non-self-governing territory with little say over its destiny, the US is satisfied with Guam's current status.

The UN can play a critical role in resolving the decolonial deadlock and bringing about a change in consciousness in Guam. But it must have some sort of presence. I would encourage anyway possible for the United Nations to become involved and publicize its role in the decolonization process.

Si Yu'usMa'ase (thank you)