

Hotel America: Everything You Wanted to Know About Guam's Colonization But Were Afraid To Analyze from "Hotel California"

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Hacha – A Song for Colonial Guam

My task for this article was simple: to find a song that could be analyzed and discussed in such a way as to help give the reader an overview of the colonial relationship between the United States and its territory of Guam. A Chamorro song, one that draws from the history, culture, and language of the Chamorros, the island's indigenous people, would probably be the best choice. But, as Guam historian Michael Clement Jr. notes in his dissertation *Kustumbre, Modernity, and Resistance: The Subaltern Narrative in Chamorro-Language Music*, songs that explicitly address the colonial relationship that Chamorros share with the United States are in short supply (275-276). In conceiving this article, I could not settle upon any particular Chamorro song to perform this task. While certain songs seemed ideal to illuminate particular impacts American colonization has had on Chamorros, I struggled to find any that could provide a broader portrait. As I will argue later in this article, this difficulty was due to the majority of Chamorro songs necessarily expressing the complicated context in which Chamorros live today, which, in many ways, is built around denying their island's colonial status. This difficulty led to an interesting exercise in which I sought to follow the advice of the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek to "look away" at such dependencies and instead seek my critical possibilities in a song that has very little to do with Guam directly: "Hotel California" from the American rock band the Eagles.

Hugua – Musical Resistance

The Chamorros of the Mariana Islands, of which Guam is the largest and southernmost island, have the dubious distinction of being the first Pacific Islander people to be colonized by Europeans and one of the last to remain formally colonized. Throughout the last four centuries, the Chamorros have faced colonization by Spain, the United States, and, for a brief but devastating period in World War II, Japan, and historians note that music represented a key source of resistance to the imposition of new political and ideological regimes. In the seventeenth century, Spanish missionaries led the charge to forcibly convert the Chamorro people to Catholicism. Despite years of sporadic resistance, they succeeded, and, in the centuries since, Catholicism has become a central part of Chamorro culture. Under Catholic rule, Chamorros were forced to give up aspects of their culture, such as egalitarian views on sexuality and the matrilineal power of women. However, as Judy Flores notes in her article "Kântan Chamorrita Revisited in the New Millennium," Chamorros used their language in song form as a means to express otherwise taboo topics. During the American and Japanese colonial periods, songs provided a similar outlet, or as Guam historian Pedro Sanchez referred to it "Resistance the Chamorro Way." (156). Although in both historical periods Chamorros were kept out of nearly all formal channels of power and had little to no rights, they were able to resort to music

and songs in order to indirectly express their distaste for their colonial situation and mock their colonizers (Hattori 35).

Since World War II, Clement argues that the development of contemporary Chamorro music can be connected to similar movements across the Pacific, whereby cultural forms or languages previously forbidden or maligned by missionaries or settler colonizers were being rediscovered, reinvented, and revitalized (2). Many of these movements were explicitly tied to nationalist movements, pushes for independence or the return of sovereignty. Clement argues, however, that the nature of contemporary Chamorro music in many ways doesn't align with attempts by Chamorro scholars or community leaders who are seeking to create or identify forms of Chamorro nationalism. Even if contemporary songs appeal to aspects of a possible Chamorro national identity, they are still mired in a complicated colonial situation where, even if Chamorros articulate a sense of cultural national identity, it is engulfed within a larger sense of American political identity (30).

Popular Chamorro music is written in the context in which Chamorros live today, an in-between status where they live as part of, yet separate from, the United States. Their island is an unincorporated territory of the United States, a euphemistic way of referring to a contemporary colony. It has been so for 118 years, and shows little sign of changing, as the United States government has expressed little interest in supporting the island's decolonization. A large part of this reticence is due to Guam being one of the United States' most strategically important bases in the Asia-Pacific region.

There is currently a decolonization movement in Guam, which takes many forms, extending to the cultural, political, linguistic, and environmental realms. This movement is frequently blunted, however, as most Chamorros refuse to acknowledge the island's current political status as colonial. Although the United Nations identifies Guam as one of the world's seventeen remaining formal colonies, and there are a multitude of ways in which Guam's colonial status affects everyday life, Chamorros are often prone to accepting wishful illusions about being a full and normal part of the United States, rather than a possession and occupied territory. Guam is provided a local elected government and a non-voting representative to the U.S. Congress, but those who reside there, Chamorro or not, do not have the right to vote for U.S. president or vice president or to elect a voting representative to Congress.

This colonial difference is not treated as something to be fixed, but rather something to be overlooked and ignored. Chamorros are known to exhibit high levels of patriotism to the United States, most prominently through high levels of service in the United States military and the enthusiastic celebration of local holidays such as Liberation Day which celebrate the United States as a global military power protecting the human race against tyranny. Despite a century of the United States keeping Guam and Chamorros at arm's length, sometimes treating them as an important member of the American family and other times excluding them, Chamorro identity remains strongly rooted in an American context. Movements to revitalize Chamorro culture and language have sometimes brushed up against a more explicitly nationalistic or independent consciousness, but, for the most part, Chamorros interpret even their discrimination or historical mistreatment at the hands of the United States as part of their path to inclusion and, it is hoped, eventual stability as part of the U.S. family. As a result, pushes for decolonization, or to change Guam's political status to something more equitable, are rejected as being frightening, as they force the Chamorros to imagine themselves outside of that American colonial context.

Tulu – “Decolonial Deadlock”

Elsewhere, I have referred to this difficulty in discussing critically Guam’s colonization and the need for its decolonization as a “decolonial deadlock.” (Bevacqua, *Everything...*) Much of my academic work is built around finding ways to break this deadlock and illuminate the colonial dimensions in Guam’s history and present. As such, I am regularly in search of new ways to push past the resistance that Chamorros can feel about engaging in these discussions. What are discursive artifacts or socio-political metaphors that can be used to help Chamorros today perceive the way that colonialism is around them and affects their everyday life? This is necessary in helping to build an individual and collective consciousness that at least recognizes, at a minimum, the need for decolonization. The impetus for this article continues this line of inquiry, as I search for a new and perhaps unexpected way of illuminating certain truths about Guam today, especially those that other Chamorros might prefer not to acknowledge.

Poring through my own personal collection and reading through academic articles on Chamorro music, I quickly became disheartened. So many Chamorro songs held some critical intent, but there was always a clear limit. They were written at moments in recent history in order to comment on the plight of the Chamorro people. The songs were sprinkled with mentions of wrongs committed in the past, at a strategic temporal remove: lands stolen, a language banned, a culture denigrated, but the Chamorro subject that was created through the song remained engulfed politically by the United States. The metaphors they proposed were always blunted and muffled. As Clement argues, the Chamorro forged through this variety of songs has critiques of the United States and may express disapproval over things that have happened since Guam became a colony of the United States in 1898, but the identity proposed remains largely at the level of *kustumbre* or culture. The Chamorro, like their island, remain a dependency upon the United States, the larger relationship not challenged in the songs, that larger colonial structure tacitly accepted. As a result, while the songs may take up a pride in Chamorro identity or lament ways they have suffered discrimination, they cede the terrain of political possibility, where we might find nascent emerging forms of Chamorro sovereignty, decolonization, or national identity, to the United States.

The commentary these songs might provide is authentic, but is not *gaiminagahet*, “truthful.” It expresses well the position they embody, feeling entangled in the United States, but, in terms of understanding the colonial reality, the songs leave much to be desired. The feeling of being trapped isn’t elaborated upon, but, instead, patriotically celebrated.

The primary example of this is KC Leon Guerrero’s song “Guam, U.S.A.” The song’s upbeat and active sound might give the impression it isn’t broaching any serious topic. It is divided into Chamorro and English, with the verses sung in Chamorro and the chorus sung in English. The English lines are almost like an exuberant celebration of Guam being Guam, U.S.A., a colony or territory of the United States of America (Bevacqua, “Guam ???”).

But the Chamorro verses, today incomprehensible to most (non-Chamorro-speaking) listeners, reveal hardly celebratory experiences. Both verses are about a Chamorro who travels to the United States, in the first instance to see life in California, and in the second to attend college. In both cases, he meets “Americans” who quiz him as to what or where Guam is. These verses indicate clear feelings of disrespect, a lack of recognition, and even a lack of belonging, alluding to the way in which a territory is not really part of its owner, just as Guam isn’t “really” part of the United States. But, when matched up with the rest of the song, this truth of Guam’s situation easily becomes lost. The structure of the song switches between being a moment of

venting for a Chamorro irritated at his second-class status, to being an introduction to “Americans” about what Guam is, to a vibrant celebration of the hybrid, contradictory nature of Guam, being both “of the U.S.A.” and also “the land of the Chamorros.”

What limits the potential critique in this song is precisely its authenticity and the close proximity it shares with Chamorro experiences. A multitude of dependencies form its subjectivity. There are parts of that experience that many Chamorros today don’t wish to confront or express, and so, the artifacts they create, such as “Guam, U.S.A.,” reflect that unwillingness, and, thus, their structure leads us away from truth, toward wishful fantasies. The Chamorro is driven, as part of their colonization, to feel like they are part of the United States and to crave colonial recognition and to desire statist inclusion. This is why even critiques of colonization, not just in lyrical form, always bear those marks of colonizing loathing and dread. Sometimes, it might be a fear of appearing anti-American; other times, it might be a compulsion to over-compensate and act super-patriotic. This drive taints the structure of what discourses they invoke in attempting to portray their reality.

Fatfat – Making No Sense

It is for this reason that it can be helpful sometimes to turn to using metaphors that may appear to be completely random and inappropriate. For example, in talking about the relationship between Guam and the United States, “Guam, U.S.A.” would reveal to most that, while the relationship might not be rosy at times, it is ultimately something that Chamorros celebrate and cherish. The song, through its contradictory commentary, justifies the relationship by naming Guam not as something colonial and oppressed, but as something wishfully included.

But a song that is free from the particular dependencies of Guam’s context can be helpful as an alternative reflective object. It can give a greater ability to see things, even if they aren’t actually genealogically related. Epiphanies can be created through the circumstances and randomness of the basic structures of life and the slips and tricks of reality that academic disciplines such as psychoanalysis and theoretical regimes such as poststructuralism are built upon (Freud). While one song may feel similar because the surface seems to reflect Guam’s reality, something that appears to be drastically different may actually share a greater structural similarity. By invoking something that is radically different from your own vision of your position, it may help you realize something about the structure that your own interpolation, or the interpolation of the singer, requires be downplayed, ignored, or forgotten.

I find that the non-sequitor analysis where you put together radically dissimilar objects can yield unexpected and insightful results. I am inspired to conduct this sort of analysis by the work of Slavoj Žižek, who often casually uses the metaphor of one object to illustrate the truth of another (vii). He doesn’t provide literature reviews to justify their association through shared origins, but, instead, sees their union as being an ephemeral moment of truth. Like two metaphors passing each other in the night, their differences revealing for a moment some truth, some structural unity, that they share. This is not to say that one couldn’t analyze something through metaphors that feel “similar” or are connected through a clear and obvious shared context, but such a practical approach has its own problems.

In most academic treatments, you have to bring sources together in respect to the venerability of the subject matter and the position from which you launch your inquiry. You cannot just use anything, but have to justify why this methodology is used, why this theorist is appropriate, and so on. There has to be a rationale for everything that can stand up to the scrutiny

of other scholars. This is a fancy way of saying that it has to “make sense.” But, as scholars from feminist Andrea Smith to French poststructuralist Michel Foucault argue, while this makes practical and rational sense, it can lead to certain intended or unintended consequences. For example, by conducting an analysis that “makes sense” you run the risk of infusing into the object of your analysis a stability, a coherency, or an order that actually isn’t there (Foucault). What you are studying may become more real than it really is and achieve a certain permanence that isn’t actually present. In my dissertation in Ethnic Studies, I discussed this in the context of sovereignty (*Ghosts, Chamorros . . .*). When situating the concept as the study of your analysis, the objects that you associate it with and the academic metaphors you use to create it will determine the depth of your critique. For example, as Andrea Smith notes in her article “American Studies without America,” should you use objects such as the U.S. constitution in your articulation of the U.S. nation-state, you may be using something that a scholar is supposed to (something that makes sense), but you could also reinvigorate its identity and strength it even as your critique is meant to weaken or challenge it. You may not be able to actually reveal much truth about the U.S. if the objects you use are too invested in existence of the U.S. itself. For Smith, invoking the U.S. constitution when attempting to discuss the birth of the U.S. is misleading, since it gives the impression that the U.S. was born out of a grand experiment in human freedom and progress instead of genocide, native displacement, and exploitation (Smith).

That is why there is a value to trying to analyze an issue through a completely different lens. The lack of practical association may allow you to more easily perceive the aspects that those invested wish to remain hidden or would rather forget. An object without any serious attachment can help you forgo the web of discourse created to argue that something exists a certain way, and it can make it easier for you to propose and support an alternative interpretation. Part of this may stem from simple luck, but it is also tied to the basic structures of life, and so, by shifting the context in a radical way, those basic structures, such as the relationship of unequal power between Guam and the U.S., can hopefully become clearer.

The song that I would like to use in order to help illustrate Guam and its historical and contemporary colonial relationship with the United States is “Hotel California” by the American rock group the Eagles. It is important to note again that in this analysis I am not claiming that this song was written with Guam in mind or that Guam and “Hotel California” share any history that might indicate in a rational way that truth of both could be created through their being forced together analytically. The song has nothing to do with Guam, and so, in the methodological terms I have established for this article, it is ideal.

Lima – Introducing Hotel America

“Hotel California” is one of the Eagles’ most enduring hits, released on the album of the same name in 1976. The song has been interpreted in so many ways, but most revolve around its being a poetic portrayal of the double nature of life in southern California. From the outside, Hollywood may look fantastic, akin to a castle, or a luxury hotel on a hill, but this façade masks something far more insidious. The lyrics describe the singer wandering, looking for a place to stay. His dreams seem to come true when he gets a room at the Hotel California. Things soon turn ugly and desperate, as he sees the darker side of this one-time paradise. People try to kill their demons, their vices, their addictions, their dark sides, but they fail. At the end of the song, the singer is trying to run away, but there is no escape. The final line of the last verse states that “you can check out any time you like / but you can never leave.”

As the singer struggles with temptation, truth, and finally an inability to escape, I feel an interesting connection between this song and Guam's colonial history and present. There is almost certainly no such direct intent from the creators of the song, but, nonetheless, as the lyrics filter through my mind, fragments of my memories and my ideological suppositions become attached to different lines, verses, words, and so on. It is the notion of the hotel being inescapable that truly makes this feel like Guam today. The way it seduces you, makes you feel as if it is the answer, but then allows no turning back. That is, after all, the ultimate message from the song, that while the Hotel California seems to make dreams come true, its most defining feature has nothing to do with dreams, but rather the fact that it cannot be escaped. It cannot be left behind. For Guam this structure is very similar; that feeling of being colonized by the United States as once a promise of paradise, but this structure becomes riddled with problems upon closer examination. And it feels inescapable, as if, despite the problems, you could never find anything better to replace it.

Gunum – The Desert Before the Current Colonizer

On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair
Warm smell of colitas rising up through the air
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim
I had to stop for the night
There she stood in the doorway
I heard the mission bell
And I was thinking to myself
“This could be Heaven or this could be Hell”
Then she lit up a candle, and she showed me the way
There were voices down the corridor
I thought I heard them say . . .

The singer is Guam in this song, and therefore Hotel California refers to the U.S. or “Hotel America.” At the start we see Guam in a desert, a desolate wasteland. There is a distinct Hispanic flavor to the land that Guam is wandering, and that fits very perfectly with Guam being under Spanish control prior to 1898. The mission bell evokes both Spanish Catholicism and a certain historical footnote. In Guam, whenever a ship would arrive in the nineteenth century, the bells of the cathedral in Hagåtña would be rung to inform everyone. As Guam gazes at the woman in the doorway with the bells ringing, it evokes a moment similar to the transfer of power from Spain to the U.S. in 1898.

The figure of the woman may seem strange given the fact that the U.S. and every other country in the world was obsessively patriarchal and controlling of women at that time. It makes perfect sense, however, when you consider her purpose in the song. She exists not to dominate Guam, but to entice Guam. In the illustrations of Manifest Destiny, the actors, those doing the heavy lifting, those doing the seizing of obvious destiny, are always male. The figures that inspire and lead them, however, tend to be female. It is, after all, not Uncle Sam, looking like some grimy pedophile from *Law and Order SVU* who sits outside of New York City, welcoming the tired and hungry huddled masses to the U.S. It is, instead, a woman, one who possesses the ability to seduce, to comfort, and to make welcome.

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Manifest Destiny was spurred by a similar set of feminine figures who operated as empty vessels, angels or spiritual figureheads, that were the wombs through which men could produce the greatness of the nation and the empire. The woman in the song functions in the same way. You wouldn't want to become a part of this hotel for the ugly and violent men there, but this woman changes everything. Through her you may find comfort, through her you may find safety and happiness.

The line that this hotel, this new country, could be heaven or could be hell is very telling. It speaks to the drama that Chamorros underwent in 1898 after their island had been taken by the U.S. in their "splendid little war." Chamorros were very mixed over their new masters, with most worrying that a new hell on earth awaited them once the Stars and Stripes flew over Guam. Others felt the opposite, as if the U.S. would be the answer to so many of their desperate prayers and take them to heights the Spanish would get winded even dreaming about. This confusion and indecision over whether or not they should become part of the U.S. or owned by it is a historical moment that has largely been forgotten today as Chamorros have accepted U.S. rule over them and their islands.

In the nineteenth century, the racial imaginary that Chamorros used for envisioning the US was very limited; in fact, primarily a certain class of Americans, namely the *bayenerus*, or whalers, dominated it. These were men who came mainly from New England and would spend months and years sailing the Pacific hunting whales. They would come to Guam to resupply and would spend several days desperately attempting to live life to its fullest before they were crammed back into their depressing ships. Whalers were well known for coming ashore in Guam and eating, drinking, fighting, and raping (Cunningham and Beaty). When Americans first took Guam, there were several reports of Chamorros, especially those close to the Spanish, fainting at the prospect (Palomo). But if you only knew of a place through rapes, drunken brawls, and STIs, then you might think too that American control over the island would be hell.

But there were those who saw the arrival of the U.S. as if my favorite Cure song was playing, "Just Like Heaven." They felt that the Spanish had been poor colonizers. Even if they had made Chamorros "civilized," they had done little else to the island, and so Chamorros, especially those in the middle class, saw America as offering many new opportunities. The biggest proponent of the American takeover in 1898 and 1899 was *Påle'* Jose Torres Palomo, who was the first Chamorro Catholic priest and has a beach named after him that few people ever visit. Although he had been very close to the Spanish, when America arrived he began to see them in a very different light. He argued to anyone who would listen about how America was a younger and more vibrant nation. Spain had had its glory days, but they were long gone by 1898. America was an active and high-spirited nation that was looking to build its own empires, and so Guam would benefit greatly from this (Farrell). For Palomo and some of his friends, the U.S. would offer Chamorros a greater chance to participate in their government and run their island. In retrospect, they were completely wrong, as the U.S. created a government that was less progressive than what the Chamorros had under the Spanish, and they actually had fewer freedoms and rights. But, that being said, this was the contrast as Guam stood in the doorway to the Hotel America. Would it be a hell, or could it be a heaven?

The candle that the woman carries should be a familiar image for those familiar with colonial discourse. The world of the colonies, the world of the non-Europeans, was a dark and terrible world in this imaginary. People wallowed in chaos and disarray, unable to see because of the darkness of their own filth and backwardness. Only the light of civilization and religion that the colonizer brought to the colonies changed this. With their candles held forth, they had the

power to give form and stable meaning to the colonies. They, once they have enlightened and illuminated things, can lead the colonized to levels unimaginable before, and unattainable without Europe's glowing, guiding hand. In this first moment, Guam is being "liberated" by entering the Hotel America from two depressing landscapes. The first is that of a former colonizer, the second of Guam itself and its own primitivity. Without this guiding light, Guam might wander forever in the desert of the past, unable to go anywhere, or become anything, but simply stare, waiting.

Fiti – Hotel Promotion

Welcome to the Hotel California
Such a lovely place (such a lovely place)
Such a lovely face
Plenty of room at the Hotel California
Any time of year (any time of year)
You can find it here

When you read these words of the chorus alone, completely abstracted from the rest of the song, they don't seem bad at all. In fact, they are actually quite friendly and warming. They sound like an advertisement for a hotel, one of the many ways that companies try to reach out to you by associating themselves with positive and warm and fuzzy things to help you not just spend your money but also spend your social trust on them.

In my interpretation, this chorus is a hyping of the U.S. It is a selling point, something that people on Guam often use to justify their inclusion and their loyalty. This chorus represents the benevolent, moral, multicultural, and beautiful part of America. It is such a lovely place. It has such a lovely face, especially when you are outside looking in. Although "American" traditionally has a white face, the one that is advertised to both itself and others is the face that morphs at the conclusion of Michael Jackson's "Black and White" video. It is a face that changes from one color to the next, one religion to the next, and one race to the next.

There is also plenty of room, for both people and possibilities. There is the seductive idea that anyone can make it big in America, anyone can seize his or her destiny in America. The chorus is thus welcoming, these notions become embedded in Guam after it moves into the Hotel America, and they become the commonsensical rhetoric that justifies continuing to stay there. No matter what else happens, you probably shouldn't leave the hotel since it's so lovely and it has room for everyone. In the context of the song itself as well as my interpretation, the words of the chorus are haunting and almost taunt the guests with the fact that they may not be able to leave.

Gualo – Remembering to Forget

Her mind is Tiffany-twisted, she got the Mercedes-Benz
She got a lot of pretty, pretty boys she calls friends
How they dance in the courtyard, sweet summer sweat
Some dance to remember, some dance to forget

So I called up the captain,
"Please bring me my wine"

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He said, "We haven't had that spirit here since nineteen sixty-nine"
And still those voices are calling from far away,
Wake you up in the middle of the night
Just to hear them say . . .

In the first stanza we get a sense of what the hotel offers beyond the advertising. There is a beauty to it, a shiny sort of glitziness. But as the first line states, the mind of the woman who represents this hotel is "Tiffany-twisted" and has the "Mercedes-Benz." The wealth, the richness of the hotel, warps it and warps those who live there. We see that while there is so much prosperity in the U.S., so much opportunity, there is also a loss, a rotting from within. The wealth leads to materialism; it leads to a worshiping of things that don't matter, that don't exist. It means sacrificing the people around you, the environment, for the sake of money and the possession of things.

By entering this hotel you gain so much. The fancier things of life are laid about you, and you can wear them to elegant dinner parties, but there is a corrupting as well. Money starts to matter too much, and you lose loyalty to the things that matter in your life. The lady has "a lot of pretty, pretty boys that she calls friends." In other words, her materialism and her craving for excess leads her to feel no fidelity to any single person, but rather she moves back and forth, in disloyal circles, to anyone who can satisfy her needs at any given moment. This lack illustrates how the "capitalist" spirit that is supposed to be at the core of what makes America great has little actual attachment to the U.S. and would quickly take up another lover should it offer to yield more financial pleasure.

For so many in the U.S. and around the world, Hollywood represents so much that is great. Heroes win. Love is celebrated. The bad guys lose. There is a recognizable, even predictable, beginning, middle, and end. Blockbuster storylines are told, and American greatness is quietly transmitted to movie theaters and DVD racks around the world. But, as the song notes, this veneer obscures an ugliness, and people struggle over what to remember. It can be seductive to pretend that those simplistic and idealistic representations are who you really are.

As a party takes place in the courtyard, we are told that "some dance to remember, some dance to forget." This line corresponds almost perfectly with the theories of French philosopher Ernest Renan on what constitutes a nation. For Renan, there are two somewhat contradictory requirements that a community must embody in order to be a sustainable nation. First: that it have a very good memory. And second: that it be very good at forgetting things. Those things that reflect the shared and inspiring sacrifice of the nation, those things that indicate a glorious past and the possibility of a glorious future, have to be remembered in almost oppressive ways. Those things that complicate those possibilities, the events that stain the nation as unjust, terrible, and immoral, are to be forgotten, and their relationship to the present is to become fuzzy and preposterous (Renan).

This is true for any part of the nation, from the whitest of the white, the blackest of the black, or the most Chamorro of the Chamorro. Your participation in the nation requires that you believe in the nation. It is the same in the hotel. Your continued stay requires that you be able to remember how wonderful it is and forget everything else. For Chamorros, their Americanization required that they remember with high-definition 1080-pixel clarity that America saved them and liberated them from the Japanese in World War II. Therefore, without America, Guam would be nothing (Souder). This helped Chamorros suspend their rational ability to perceive the colonial difference between themselves and the U.S. and gave them the impetus to start to feel like they

should belong to the great American nation. This required they forget the racist and demeaning ways they had been treated by the U.S. for four decades prior. It required that they have a holiday that celebrated the American return in 1944, but not the American abandonment of Guam in 1941 (Bevacqua, *These May or May Not*). Living in the Hotel America is all about your memories, what you choose to remember and what you choose to forget. The more you can forget, the happier and more comfortable you will be. The more you remember, the more difficult it would be to simply smile and dance the night away.

Sigua – Attempting to Escape...

Mirrors on the ceiling,
The pink champagne on ice
And she said, "We are all just prisoners here of our own device"
And in the master's chambers,
They gathered for the feast
They stab it with their steely knives
But they just can't kill the beast

Last thing I remember, I was
Running for the door
I had to find the passage back
To the place I was before
"Relax," said the night man,
"We are programmed to receive.
You can check out any time you like,
But you can never leave!"

The mirrors on the ceiling are often a common image used when illustrating decadence and hedonism. While you are on your back having sex, you can watch yourself and your partner(s) as if you are enjoying the act from within and without (no pun intended). You experience the physical pleasure of the act, while also potentially enjoying the sex as a voyeur and observer. But I see these mirrors instead as being a key moment in recognizing your position in the Hotel America. As you lie in bed, as you wake in the middle of the night, you stare at yourself, and the truth stares back at you.

The imagery of people gathered with "steely knives" unable to kill a beast is particularly potent. For this scene, I imagine so many of the communities of the U.S., especially those with histories that contradict the greatness of the nation, particularly those of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders, circling around the beastly core of the nation, trying to vanquish it. The steely knives they carry are the critiques, the traumas, the oppositional identities, the blood memories, everything that they use to jab and gash this beast in an attempt to slay it. These blades are the consequences of colonization and displacement, the incarceration rates, the overthrow of kingdoms, torn-up treaties, and the legacy of treating races of people as disposable. In the master's chamber, which you can imagine in so many ways, as a site that exemplifies the core of where America's power is born, they attempt to slay this terrible beast.

For these groups, their place in the U.S. is always problematic. Everyone in the hotel is named a "guest," but this is so even if you didn't actually enter of your own choice. You were

Hotel America

not welcomed into the hotel, even if the current version of you feels like you should have been and wishes you had been. Maybe you were kidnapped and forced to live in the hotel and work there. Or maybe you were living there peacefully when the hotel owners came along and forced you off your land and built a hotel there. They then rounded up you and those like you and forced you to live on the grounds and work in the casino. Even if you like your life in the hotel, you always have a reason to go and try to kill the hotel owner. Your journey “to” the hotel was not pleasant, not something ideal for the promotional literature of the hotel, and so, the more you remember that, the more you might feel compelled to grab your own steely knives and try to slay the beast.

But, as the woman in the song states, "we are all just prisoners here of our own device." This adds a necessary dimension to the song. I noted that those who have been forced into the hotel have reasons to try to set fire to it. But the majority of them do not ever really wish to. The reason is because after so much time and history has passed, people feel such a loyalty to the flow of history that they become fearful at the prospect of opposing it. For example, you can argue that it was wrong for Chamorros to be colonized and forced to become Catholics, or that it was wrong for Africans to be sold into slavery and taken across the Atlantic, but what does that mean for today? Despite the immorality and disgusting nature of those crimes, most people don't understand or comprehend how that might connect to today. Without America or without that oppression you would be something that you wouldn't recognize and would probably be repulsed to know you could have been. In the minds of most who stay at the Hotel America, without the hotel they would be nothing but primitive savages, or nothing but backwards natives. Without that trauma, without that rite of passage, you wouldn't be the important First World citizen that you are today. The scars you bear are the proof that you belong, and, even if that belonging can always feel tainted, you are still fearful of what your life might be like without that scar (Hartmann).

The end result is that even those who should be more critical of the U.S., and should make more demands upon it, because of how they have been historically treated, don't necessarily do so in a fundamental way because of that fear of losing what America has given them. Even if they may feel no patriotism or no love for the country, they see and feel the beast as an intimate part of them. While they may loathe it and be unable to reconcile everything they might feel, they still feel a loyalty to the beast for giving them what they know today, and which feels stronger and safer than the thing that they would have become otherwise.

The last stanza feels written for Guam itself. It is there that we get to feel the in-between position of the singer who attempts to leave and is told that he may check out – metaphorically, through drugs, alcohol, other narcotics, or life choices – but he can never leave. Guam is a place in need of decolonization, of moving to a new level of its political existence. It has been a colony, a territory, for more than a century and continuing to be a mere colony won't help it grow any further. Guam as an unincorporated territory holds the potential to not just become a full member of the U.S. but also become independent from it.

This is very different than places such as Hawai'i or Texas, where, even if people may talk about leaving the union or restoring the kingdom, U.S. law is clear (with the Civil War to prove it) that no incorporated territory of the U.S. can leave it. A state can never leave. I would argue that Hawai'i should have the right to leave, especially given the fact that it is, beyond a reasonable doubt, a sovereign nation that was overthrown. Other peoples with similar arguments, such as those displaced by white settlers, should be given the same chance.

Guam is not a state; it is an unincorporated territory. Territories can be bought and sold: that is partially why they exist. Should Guam seek independence, it should be allowed to go without any resistance. But, as the song indicates, the Hotel America is "programmed to receive" only. "You can check out any time you like / but you can never leave." This is why, should Guam ever attempt to leave this Hotel America, it would probably meet the same refusal as the singer. In the U.S., you are given a Kantian freedom, one of discussion and debate but not action (Kant). You can talk about the evils of your government and condemn it from one corner to the other. You can mentally check out or assert yourself to be part of something else. But, despite this fantasy, you can never really leave. You are still going to be stuck, and this freedom doesn't extend to anything that might violate or endanger the hotel. In other words, Guam can have its independence movement or its decolonization movement, where it can talk about the evils of colonialism today, but that doesn't mean it can actually have decolonization. One of the paradoxes of the U.S. is that it is willing to take anything and assert every corner of the globe as essential to its interests. It is, after all, at the top of the world, lording above everything. But this means that it has an inherent disinclination or cognitive dissonance toward losing anything. Even if Guam should attempt to leave the U.S., this might be resisted, simply because the U.S. isn't supposed to lose anything.

Manot'fulu– Forgetting the Fantasy

We have concluded our journey into the Hotel America, and, by placing its own metaphoric structure alongside Guam's, we can more clearly perceive Guam's colonial status today. As a final point, we should ask ourselves, how can Guam, or any other guest, leave this hotel? As the desperation in the song indicates, this is no easy task. One of the initial insights we have to consider is the truthfulness of the narrative that the song provides. As it recalls a traumatic journey into what is both a paradise and a hell, where the singer is torn between the desire to leave and the dependency that keeps him stuck, how might these twisting and conflicting emotions distort the story itself?

If we return to the first stanza of the song, we see a crucial element missing. The hotel tempts the singer by what it might offer, and he chooses to enter. But Guam, per history, did not choose to become part of the United States. Your average Chamorro today may say they are happy to be part of the US, and may not be able to imagine a life without it, but that doesn't change the history itself. As a people who feel loyal to the U.S. and dependent upon it, desperately hoping to become a full and real part of it, history is a potential enemy. History is a song that has to be rewritten.

Because of one's unwillingness to confront the fact that one was forced into this union, one attempts to rewrite things to appear as if one did choose. That is, of course, the primary reason why Chamorros celebrate in no way the actual moments that they became attached to the United States, their being taken from Spain in 1898 and their being bestowed U.S. citizenship in 1950. These are both moments where the Chamorro is forced into a relationship with the U.S., one that they later approved of, but, in that moment, did not have any democratic right or power to choose (Bevacqua, *Scenes of Liberation*). World War II, where Chamorros suffered under Japanese rule and hoped for an American return, is instead recast as the moment when Chamorros choose to join the U.S. In doing so they hope to form a compelling, seamless fantasy, one that will give them no pause over their loyalty, one that will seem to give them no problems

in their identification. History is distorted to make your desire to be American either a matter of uncoerced choice or natural destiny.

The result is this song, where the entrance to this problematic place is blamed on the singer. No matter what they see themselves caught in while they are in the hotel, the blame ultimately falls nowhere near the hotel itself, so long as the singer volunteers to enter it and stay there. This fake choice is the fantasy that creates the hotel's power and gives it, or the colonizing nation, the appearance of being without end, as something that cannot be escaped. The moment you give in to this fantasy, that you chose to enter and choose to stay, you begin the process of ensnaring yourself. Once that fantasy that makes you feel like you must be there, that you choose to be there, has been dissolved, you can begin the process of seeking your escape. It all relies upon you finding a way to overcome that unconscious dependency that will always seek to create fictions and fantasies to keep you in place.

In seeking liberation from such comfortable confines, there is a value to a non-sequitor-style analysis such as this. It might be difficult to come up with a coherent social and decolonial program derived from an understanding of the world based on random rock lyrics. But there is, nonetheless, a tactical value to it. It can help you, even if just for a moment, to cleanse your view. It can allow the defining walls of your ideological confinement to at last appear, as they may shine through the random structure of something completely unexpected.

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