

# **The Gift of Imagination: Solidarity Against U.S. Militarism in the Asia-Pacific Region**

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## **Abstract**

Drawing upon the works of historian Benedict Anderson and political theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, this paper will meditate upon the meaning of the term solidarity, what role imagination plays in empowering that concept, and how this might relate to transnational activism dealing with U.S. militarism in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **1. HACHA – Guam and the Korean Peninsula...**

On March 26, 2010, the South Korean Navy vessel *Cheonan* was mysteriously sunk near the border between North and South Korea, killing 46 of its 104 sailors. The South Korean Government was quick to blame its North Korean neighbor, and soon released a report that claimed to confirm suspicions as to North Korea's involvement. Even prior to this report's release, the United States unequivocally supported the stance of its South Korean ally and worked with South Korea's government to begin a series of large-scale multinational training exercises on the Korean peninsula. The report was criticized, however, by numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within South Korea, who felt that the recently re-elected conservative government was merely using the incident as an excuse to take a more aggressive and militaristic stance against the North (The PSPD Center for Peace and Disarmament).

Several months after this incident, I travelled to South Korea on a research trip to meet with members of communities who live around U.S. military bases in order to better understand how U.S. militarism, or the presence of U.S. bases there and the politics and culture that emerge from this proximity, has affected their lives. I visited four different areas in South Korea, some of which host existing U.S. military bases, while others are sites for further expanding training areas or constructing new military facilities. It was a trip that took me all across South Korea, but it was still intriguing that, no matter where I went, talk of the *Cheonan* sinking followed me and seemed to overshadow my research. Rightist elements in the country, as well as government officials, had begun to threaten organizations critical of the government's report. Amongst progressive activists in the country, events seemed very gloomy as the specter of possible war loomed. Although I was the one traveling to conduct research, many people I met seemed compelled to ask me questions about how Guam was dealing with the situation on the Korean peninsula. Were the people of Guam following the U.S. and South Korean governments' lead that the incident was North Korean aggression and that more aggressive actions must be taken, or were they suspicious like many anti-base and peace activists who saw it as a ruse to take tougher stands against North Korea that would stall attempts at reunifying the two Koreas? As much as I wanted to say otherwise, I was honest by saying that, on Guam, people knew little to nothing about the *Cheonan* incident and little to nothing about North Korea, as well. Despite the fact that

on Guam, North Korea is often synonymous with a danger that lurks close by in Asia, and that in February 2009 North Korea had declared that it possessed weapons that could hit U.S. territory, namely that such weapons “could hit Guam,” Guam’s local media did not cover the *Cheonan* sinking. The only mentions of it were from stories printed from international wire services (“North Korea...”).

Although Guam is located on the “edge of Asia” and is far closer to China, Japan, South and North Korea, and the Philippines than it is to the country that claims it as its territory (the United States), the two Koreas are for the most part abstract signifiers, not really carrying much discursive weight or meaning (Abrahamian et al.) These are places that exist, but their meaning is always curiously empty. North Korea, for instance, operates as a dangerous and negative signifier, meaning something to be feared because it might menace or threaten Guam. But so much of this view comes from the fact that the gaze through which Guam sees even the immediate region around it is filtered through the United States. There is an interesting way in which the imagined ties to America are so powerful that they can literally stretch the gazes of an island thousands of miles in the opposite direction in order to return to the Asia-Pacific and give meaning to the waters, peoples, and countries found there (Stade). Whether or not the average Guam resident knows anything about North Korea is immaterial because its meaning as a danger to world peace as founding member of the infamous “axis of evil” is imported into Guam and accepted with very little critique (“Congresswoman Bordallo Responds...”). As a result, Guam makes little effort to understand the situation in Asia on its own or what role Guam itself plays, but seems content to reprint U.S. State Department press releases or regurgitate Department of Defense intelligence reports (Dalisay).

## **2. HUGUA – Situating Myself...**

A question that frequently haunts me in both my capacities as a scholar involved in political activism and as a political activist involved in scholarship is how can we understand the relationships between people within a community and between communities, what are the narratives (or societal nodes) that propel people to action, and what are those narratives that paralyze people by making them feel empty, lost, or hopeless. Central to these sorts of questions is the concept of “solidarity,” or how people come to feel that they are bound up and connected to each other, fighting together in common cause.

As a Chamorro scholar whose work deals primarily with theories of decolonization and the effects of U.S. militarism on the islands of the Chamorro people, one way in which these questions manifest prominently for me is in terms of seeking ways to build solidarity with other nations and peoples across the Pacific whose lands, islands, or skies host U.S. military forces and bases. Therefore this paper (as well as much of my work) is not about abstract research questions, but is instead both intensely personal and political (Wilson). As Guam remains both a strategically important base for the United States and also one of the few remaining official colonies in the world recognized by the United Nations, my research, often a blend of activism and scholarship, represents my twin desires to create work accountable to my indigenous community, but also relevant on a larger, global scale (Smith 139).

### **3. TULU – The Pacific Century...**

The twenty-first century has come to be known by many analysts as the Pacific Century because of the way in which the world is shifting militarily and economically away from the Atlantic Ocean toward the Asia-Pacific region (Bumiller). As a place often called “America in Asia,” the unincorporated U.S. territory of Guam, which the magazine *Foreign Affairs* once referred to as one of the six most important U.S. overseas bases, is a key part of this geopolitical shift (Widome). This Pacific Century has led to the United States intensifying its role in the Pacific by expanding and transferring certain bases in Japan, South Korea, and Guam in attempts to box in potential threats such as North Korea, Russia, and China. The Department of Defense states that, as a result of these transfers, Guam is set to receive, by 2014, close to 9,000 U.S. Marines and 8,000 dependents currently stationed in Okinawa, along with a slew of new military facilities, including an Army Air and Missile Defense Task Force and a berth for nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. The total price tag for this realignment of U.S. forces in Japan and Guam is estimated at \$15 billion and has been called one of the largest military buildups undertaken by the United States while not actively at war in a region (Harden).

It has also led to the regular holding of some of the largest peacetime military exercises in human history between the United States and its Pacific allies. The first among them was 2006’s Valiant Shield, held in the waters around Guam, which consisted of more than 22,000 military personnel, 300 aircraft, and 28 ships (Levine). Valiant Shield was again repeated in 2007 and 2010 with even more personnel and hardware (San Agustin). This increased strategic importance has also led to a rise in popular protest in countries such as the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan, where demands are constantly made to tear up existing military-basing pacts or at least renegotiate them on more equal terms (Shigematsu and Camacho).

In 2010, I was able to conduct research on various solidarity networks in the Asia-Pacific region and was fortunate enough to take two trips (the first to South Korea, the second to Japan) where I met with activists and community members who are organizing against prospective U.S. military bases within their countries. This paper draws from my experiences during those two trips and from the conversations that took place, but also from a larger philosophical and theoretical conversation about the nature of political communities and how they come into existence. Its ultimate intent is to talk about twenty-first-century solidarity in the Asia-Pacific region and how we might re-imagine the concept in the interests of demilitarization and peace.

Although this paper comes from conversations during my research trip, it is not an ethnographic analysis, so I neither propose an ethnographic framework nor outline a series of figures who will guide my analysis. Such work may be included in a future, more-detailed study, but is not meant to be included here. This paper is primarily a personal meditation, or my initial attempt at interweaving a theoretical discussion about sovereignty in the way I have seen it articulated, practiced, or dismissed with my research on U.S. militarization in Guam, South Korea, and Japan.

#### 4. FATFAT – Imagining Communities...

Before addressing the concept of solidarity, however, we must first attend to an issue that drives and focuses solidarity, that of imagination. In his essay “What is a Nation?,” nineteenth-century philosopher Ernest Renan discusses a set of general ideas of what may or may not constitute a nation of people. He lists a series of possible ways in which we might characterize a group of people as a nation, from religion, language, geography, and shared blood, but ultimately proposes that nations exist as nations because they represent groups of people who do not see themselves as bound together solely because of accidents of birth, geography, or history, but rather as bound together because they want to be bound together. Renan goes on to mention that nations are sustained as political organisms because of an imaginary daily plebiscite, a vote that each member makes each morning to remain a part of the nation or to reject it (19). Renan’s intervention was important because a nation was not a predetermined community, but something formed through an active process of seeing and believing.

In his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, historian Benedict Anderson would later build upon Renan and other works to argue that all nations are fundamentally “imagined communities.” In order for a mass of people with different backgrounds, languages, histories, and desires to feel or see themselves as a connected single entity, they can only do so through a mass shared imagining. This result happens when various discourses and discursive formations in the world surrounding them provide an intimate feeling of being a people coming from the same place and heading in the same direction. In order to accomplish this goal, cultures need to be blended together, histories and languages need to be standardized, and media needs to be disseminated and shared to result in peoples who, a generation before, would have seen themselves as being fundamentally different, but who now see themselves as traveling the same path in history (Bauman and Briggs).

In terms of theories of community or national formation and identification, both of these interpretations tend to the more descriptive and more conservative side of the possible political spectrum. For instance, in Renan’s case, his logic is horribly circular. His argument boils down to a *Forrest Gump*-like truism that, “A nation is because a nation is.” Or, in other words, people exist as a nation simply because they want to exist as a nation. What is implied but grossly under-theorized in Renan’s argument is the role that “solidarity” plays in creating an imagined community. To borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, what are the “structures of feeling” that create the need or the naturalness of being and belonging to a community? What are the forces that push and pull people to belong, which might compel them to re-vote each morning to continue to remain part of a nation (64)?

For Chairman Mao Zedong in his infamous essay “On Contradiction,” the stuff that forms an imagined community is contradiction and the mental calculus that a national people make to prioritize and overlook various contradictions before and around them. He makes this argument most prominently through communities involved in liberatory or anti-colonial struggles, particularly how they are forged through shared enemies that allow the small, minute difference between tribes, accents, religions, and so on to fade to nothing when compared to the larger violent, oppressive contradiction that stems from an unequal relationship with a foreign power. But as China and other anti-colonial movements from nineteenth-century Latin America

to twentieth-century Africa have discovered, that solidarity and shared imagining are very fragile and prone to breaking once the enemy disappears or is transformed (Lynch 140).

For the Slovenian Lacanian Slavoj Žižek, in his text *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, one of his many arguments is that every form of human community is created through an imagined solidarity around some secret or trauma. Communities consciously assume that they exist because, on the surface, they admit to thinking, feeling, and believing the same things, but unconsciously are bound by elements beyond their control. Unconsciously, they exist because of a shared unwillingness to have something mentioned or dealt with in public.

With Anderson, Žižek, and Mao, we move into a larger view of imagined communities, where existing nation-states are not the only form of created community, but all of life is a process of each of us establishing the limits and the borders of ourselves with the people and the world around us. A particular nation is a multitude of imagined communities, all of which exist within that nation in some way, but beyond and in antagonism with it in others. Human life is therefore about trying to create the connections one wants and struggling against or accepting those one can't change. In each of our lives, we strive to find an ethical balance through which we feel that we can grow and engage with the world around us, without it, with its demands, with its suffering, and with its vastness overwhelming us (Derrida).

This fact that the world is not given but always a product of the borders that we imagine ourselves might appear as a shocking development or as something that will call into question the "real" relationships we feel we have with others in our lives. This response, often the critique of theories that come from postmodernist or post-structuralist blends, claims that there is nothing "real" about them; they form always-changing ideologies or discourse. In the work of feminist philosopher Judith Butler, for example, starting with her seminal work *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* formations such as the family, sex, and gender could be considered imagined properties or "discursive formations," as well.

And so while this version of the world can paralyze, it can also animate. For, after all, it means that each of us has the ability to go beyond whatever fate hands us. So what we feel connected to, the battles we choose to fight, those people whom we choose to call our brothers and sisters in solidarity are not results of the accident of our birth, but are forged through our ethics and through our politics (Rorty). From different corners of the earth, the most geographically, historically, or culturally disconnected parties cannot only know of each other, but can also imagine each as being an integral part of our own struggle, our own lives, and the vision we have for the world. We can make their struggle part of our own. We can fight together.

## **5. LIMA – Empire and the Multitude...**

In order to now connect this point to the Asia-Pacific region and the prospects for solidarity there, I'd like to discuss the version of globalization offered by political theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their two books *Empire* and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. According to their theories, as the globe has become locked together through increasing military, economic, political, and informational means, the nation-state (the cornerstone of European modernity and imperialism) is being surpassed, so can no longer

effectively regulate its own borders, or even its own powers. This formula, which builds an international fraternity and order based on the primacy of nation-states, is no longer the stuff that makes a nation sovereign, or which authorizes a state's right to provide security. The location of sovereignty in this world inundated with late capitalism has shifted, instead, to an organism that links the globe together, effectively crossing borders and bodies, through the fantasies of perpetual peace backed up through the realities of perpetual war. Hardt and Negri call this supranational organism "Empire."

This in no way means that nation-states are powerless, but far from it. Nation-states do not simply fade from view, but rather their existence now depends upon the ability to articulate their actions within Empire, whether as embattled in a global war or a global peace. To paraphrase a familiar characterization, the monopoly of violence that the state enjoys is now continually usurped, in ways either productive or constraining, by this globalizing tendency. As Paul Passavant and Jodi Dean note in their article, "Postmodern Republicanism," "Of course, state institutions continue to exist. But now, when governments intervene to keep the peace, their police forces—whether we are talking about Seattle, Washington or Genoa, Italy, act in the name of Empire" (3).

They argue that the globalized world, with changes in technology, culture, politics, economy, and environment, has not only given rise to the possibility of speaking and acting globally, but also created specific forces or organisms through which that global possibility is felt and enacted. Hardt and Negri name these forces "Empire and the Multitude" (393). Each is built on a different primal human impulse and manifests in drastically different ways in the world. Empire comes from humanity's impulse to destroy, to clamp down, and to contain things. It is not chaos, but it is order through force. Empire is built on the principle that man must constantly be at war, destroyed and contained in order to make peace. Fear is what drives Empire and what pulses throughout its networks. What is not known is feared and what is feared must be dominated.

Nuclear weapons, their development and their presence in the world, are intimately tied to Empire. They are world-killers, triggers that can easily lead to obliterating the entire world. Nuclear weapons, their possession and their possible use, are the keys to being able to act globally, to assert oneself as capable of mastering the power that Empire provides, or perhaps to stand alone and defend oneself against its tide (Barsamian). Robert Greene, author of *Security without Nuclear Deterrence*, states that they help tie the world together both as weapons to be obtained and produced in order to dominate the world and also as things that should be eradicated to protect the world. The inverse of this point is that, as humanity's capacity for war and violence grows, so does its potential for the opposite. The Multitude exists through the impulse for humanity to trust, to share, to learn, to grow, so see itself as more than what its people are, meaning that people imagine what they can be and have some faith that humans are not beings of brutal chaos that cannot be trusted with freedom.

Both these forces break down traditional boundaries and borders, but for different purposes and with different images of humanity in mind. Empire dominates; it transgresses borders in order to clamp down. We can find some metaphorical evidence for this claim in the political theories of one of the twenty-first-century's most quoted, but least appreciated thinkers, former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney. According to Ron Suskind's book *The One Percent*

*Doctrine: Deep Inside the Pursuit of America's Enemies since 9/11*, Cheney during his tenure proposed that U.S. foreign policy and military strategy be based on his innocuously named "1% doctrine." For Cheney, this notion meant that, if the United States suspected that a foreign nation had a one-percent chance of threatening or attacking America, then the federal government must treat that chance as a 100-percent certainty.

An important distinction that Hardt and Negri make is that, while it can become easy to say that the United States is this "Empire," such is not the case. America, however, does have a privileged place in relation to this organism because of its economic, political, and military power (182). This infrastructure of power and force is rarely articulated in negative terms by its architects, but rather spoken of as a positive entity, something that can bring order to the world to help maintain the peace. In her article "Bases, Empire and Global Response" from her edited volume *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts*, anthropologist Catherine Lutz outlines and critiques a list of such justifications for bases that ranges from the need for American bases because of global security and enforcing peaceful trade to the ability to respond rapidly to humanitarian disasters (20-29).

As a result, the United States and its military possess, far more than any other nation today, the power and will to cross almost any boundary, or to find some pretext for transgressing any border. In 2005, the Pentagon's Strategic Command reported to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that the U.S. military had at last reached the point of "full-spectrum global strike" capability, where the problems that plagued previous empires (distance, isolation, and geography) no longer held sway over the ability of the U.S. military to strike (Arkin). With its network of more than 900 overseas bases, the U.S. military now had the ability to deliver conventional or nuclear weapons to "any dark corner of the world" at a moment's notice (Gerson 47). But with this "sea of bases" in every continent and in more than 100 different nations, the United States cannot only consider every corner of the globe its responsibility, but also concretely act to assert its interests. These bases, which may have initially been created for defense purposes, soon take on the further use of being points through which American military, economic, and political power can be projected both within the countries hosting bases and also into the regions surrounding them. These bases are a key way in which the United States can pursue its own form of globalization, which, according to Žižek, is the means by which it can think locally, yet act globally (20).

The Multitude crosses borders, as well. Social and human-rights movements, along with anti-war, nuclear-abolition, and peace movements, whether their members or their ideas, can cross boundaries and challenge not only individual governments, but also the very world order. Hardt and Negri both take into account the ways in which progressive communities have taken on the network of globalization to create their own counter-examples or counter-globalizations, or as we can see in examples of the World Social Forum and other smaller versions, "worlds with room for many worlds" (80). We can find many examples, for instance, in the volume *The Greening of Sovereignty*, edited by Karen Litfin, where the rhetoric of one-world-one-environment has led to national sovereignties being threatened in the name of the needs of the Multitude (3).

In the Asia-Pacific region, we can see the machinery of Empire all around us. Guam is one of two bases from which John Pikes, U.S. expert on global security, notes that the

Department of Defense intends to “rule the world” by 2015 (Vine 10). It and Diego Garcia are two of the most important overseas bases from which the United States military intends to build its global security plans for Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. As noted critic of American foreign policy Joseph Gerson acknowledges, in the plans of the Pentagon, “all roads lead to Guam” (61).

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, the strategic needs of the U.S. military have led to many governments acting against the wills of their people and cracking down on peoples’ movement while forcing military programs, wars, or basing agreements upon them (Fabros). The leviathan that is this network of overseas network military bases, spawning 900 official facilities and costs conservatively estimated at \$692 billion each year, makes far easier to see the grasp of Empire as tangible and corporeal (Lutz 1). For peace and anti-base activists it always feels as if Empire, or its infrastructure, has the upper hand, or that it is always more powerful and more in charge than anything the Multitude can muster (Implicating Empire).

This powerlessness was articulated by activists and farmers across South Korea during my trip there. Some of these activists had already lost critical struggles, such as those from Pyeongtaek, where hundreds of farmers were displaced to expand two U.S. bases, while others were facing potential displacement; in the case of Mugeon-ri, in order to expand infantry and artillery training ranges, and, in Gangjeong, to create a dock for Aegis destroyers. Both facilities are to be jointly used by U.S. and R.O.K. militaries.

While all the people I encountered argued that there was true strength in grassroots efforts and the will of the people, with some going so far as to call farmers the soul of the nation, they nonetheless felt that there was too much working against them. In Gangjeong, the Mayor Kang Dong-Kyun framed the opposition to their struggle as one that mirrored Hardt and Negri’s characterization of Empire and the Multitude as a battle between the forces of life and death. His small town hosts some of the most beautiful (UNESCO registered) coral in the world; the soil there was infamously rich on the island of Jeju (Smith). He argued it should be kept safe as a place that can exhibit the beauties of life and help feed the soul of humanity, not a place that can be used to bring death and destruction to the world. But as his village was a small one on the southern coast of Jeju, and considered less modern and more traditional than most other towns or cities in South Korea, it was a place where the machines of death could easily be stored (Dong-Kyun).

This viewpoint was echoed by the Director of the Pyeongtaek Peace Center, which was created during the area’s struggle to protect a group of farmers who refused to be removed in order to expand nearby U.S. military bases. While touring the fences of these military bases, and looking at the land that was taken, Director Kang Sang-Won noted that, if this had happened in a large city, there would have been protests everywhere, the media would have covered it with passion, and, in his opinion, it would have been stopped. But because it was a story of farmers and peace activists against their own military, police, government, and the United States—the most powerful country in the world—they lost. He argued that both militaries and governments can get away with unpopular policies such as this one if they hide them away and take advantage of smaller communities (like farmers) who cannot hope to fight back (Sang-Won). In much of the discourse produced by these community activists around their struggles, there was a clear

feeling of their smallness and their atomization compared to the monolithic power and authority of those pushing for more militarization.

Returning to the theories of Hardt and Negri, a key aspect to what they are proposing is nothing new. Noam Chomsky and others have long argued in similar fashion that globalization is not good or bad, but it is a process that can be used for various means. In most cases it is conducted to impose or to engulf things, to dominate economies or ensure that events develop along certain predetermined paths. But, at the same time, this globalization is also the Multitude, meaning it can also bind people together in ways unimaginable before, or can reshape the world without it even knowing it. What their version of globalization offers that is more powerful, yet at the same time less believable, is the idea that the Multitude is not a weak countervailing force to Empire, or just some errant counter-narrative that emerges in response. It is instead a force equally powerful and equally capable of transforming the world. This argument is a simple one that builds from both the theories of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, where power and resistance are not stacked up in a hierarchy where one supplements the other, but they are, in fact, co-constitutive, meaning that both hold the same potential (73).

## **6. GUNUM – A Commanding Behemoth...**

The question for so many people's movements throughout the Asia-Pacific region remains how to tap that potential, how to push the Multitude from being some idealized dream into a network of strength and action. In order to address this issue, I will provide a brief introduction to what we might call a significant part of the infrastructure of Empire in the Asia-Pacific region: PACOM, or the U.S. Military Pacific Command. Here is a description from its website:

U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) is a Unified Combatant Command of the Armed Forces of the United States. It encompasses about half the earth's surface, stretching from the west coast of the U.S. to the western border of India, and from Antarctica to the North Pole. There are few regions as culturally, socially, economically, and geo-politically diverse as the Asia-Pacific. The 36 nations that comprise the Asia-Pacific region are home to more than fifty percent of the world's population, three thousand different languages, several of the world's largest militaries, and five nations allied with the U.S. through mutual defense treaties. Two of the four largest economies are located in the Asia-Pacific along with 10 of the 14 smallest. The AOR [Area of Responsibility] includes the most populous nation in the world, the largest democracy, and the largest Muslim-majority nation. More than one third of Asia-Pacific nations are smaller island nations that include the smallest republic in the world and the smallest nation in Asia.

This strategic military behemoth is just one of many that the United States holds, when, in terms of military strategy and planning, it carves the world up into ten different unified commands. But these commands are not abstract or without form; they are instead communities imagined and forged together in the name of Empire.

Although PACOM counts the countries within its domain, it does not exist to imagine half the world through these countries, with distinct borders and sovereignty, but instead signifies the designs of the United States to imagine that part of the world in their own way, according to their own strategic desires, which have both global and regional ambitions. As a result, PACOM does not just see this part of the world as disparate bases or islands or countries, but as a chunk of world that belongs to the United States, that is America's to control and to defend, even sometimes against the people of that region who don't want America there (Hosseini-Zadeh).

An infrastructure to support this part of the world exists, along with think-tanks, rooms in the Pentagon or in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and researchers around the world working for groups such as Project for the New American Century or the RAND Corporation, where men work with huge maps before them (Khalizad). They collect news, receive reports, write reports, and are responsible for what America does with that part of the world and what plans America makes for that region. They exist to think of the Asia-Pacific through the impulse of Empire. That part of the world is a giant board upon which places such as Guam are each different pieces, and their fates are not just a game, but these planners' livelihood.

This imagery may initially seem nefarious and abstract, but, in my research, it is hardly so. As both an activist and a scholar, I have a very lively online presence through numerous blogs and websites that deal with Chamorro and Guam-related issues, meaning I have regular communication with some of these men from these far-away-rooms. Many of them are avid readers of my websites and sometimes post comments or email me with questions or critiques about my writings and events on Guam.

At times I am surprised at how much more they seem to know about Guam than the people living here. How closely they read whatever comes out of Guam that they can get their hands on, and so even if their machinations are things I wouldn't agree with, it is surreal to see their "ownership" over Guam, or the way they imagine themselves to not really to be a part of it, but rather holding its future in their hands. Those men in those rooms imagine everyone across the Asia-Pacific region as being all connected to each other in ways that we may not see or that most others in the countries and colonies of this region may not perceive or imagine. As a result, their particular gaze, their way of imagining this part of the world, can create, unintentionally perhaps, quiet and silent bonds between the Asia-Pacific's indigenous inhabitants.

## **7. FITI – Learning from Empire...**

When I think about issues of peace and genuine security in the Asia-Pacific region, I am always haunted by these images of men in back rooms (Gordon). I am haunted not only because of the audacity of the United States in making these plans and treating Asians and Pacific Islanders like chess pieces, but even more so because of how we who are interested in issues of demilitarization do not do more of the same. I am always inspired to meet other activists from places such as the Philippines, South Korea, or Japan, to tell them my stories, and to hear theirs. These shared moments help me connect and help our communities connect. Sometimes these very first lines of communication can become regular ways of sharing and working together, but they also always signify how distinct we and our communities are from each other, as well as how isolated we are. Although we may share similar fights or antagonists, we don't reach that

crucial level of imagining and belonging that brings us and the communities we represent to an entirely new level of ethics and responsibility (Critchley).

I do not mean that the variables of our fights are the same, or that someone from Guam should claim to know all about South Korea, or vice versa. It also doesn't mean that people on Guam should tell people in South Korea what to do or vice versa. It means rather that there is some foundational way in which we see that our struggles and our destinies are linked; that we can feel the pulse of the Multitude breathing within our lands, our lives, and our struggles. These results do not happen overnight. Globalization makes them possible but not always actual. These sorts of relationships happen without most people realizing them. They are identifications that take place because the foundation is laid for people to imagine and feel that they share something primal or something so valuable that, even against differences of geography, history, language or culture, they feel on some level that they are one. It takes organizations, it takes shared media, and it takes lines of constant, regular communication, but also familiar shared imagery, shared histories, stories, or goals.

I use this language and these metaphors that we find in U.S. military discourse because the U.S. military and PACOM see us as being part of the same strategy and the same plans, meaning that their efforts are emboldened by the ways in which we can always be played against each other, often without even knowing it. When people resist and challenge this power as individual countries or colonies, the region itself can be used to threaten them, with potential blackmail used to pit the Asia-Pacific's residents against each other. For instance, Guam as a receptacle for several thousand Marines from Okinawa and also as a new site for training those Marines holds the intriguing quality of being both a solution and a threat when dealing with Asian governments like Japan. This is true for most nations throughout the Asia-Pacific region that might begin to question their current defense agreements with the United States. The specter of Guam as a place where U.S. forces can be sent is always present in those negotiations, meaning that, should the countries of Asia become too recalcitrant, the United States can always house military personnel on Guam and leave Asia "defenseless."

This interesting place of Guam can even appear in the discourse of activists themselves, something I witnessed many times during my trip to Japan. As a representative of Guam, I was constantly asked questions about how the people of the island felt about the prospect of thousands of U.S. Marines being transferred from Okinawa to Guam. The conversations that emerged sometimes surprised me, especially in the way in which groups of people who regularly condemn or protest U.S. militarization in Japan were regularly comfortable with U.S. militarization on Guam.

During a working group on how Japanese activists can stay in solidarity with anti-base movements in other countries across the Pacific, there was much discussion about how to seek peaceful resolutions to potential conflicts with countries such as China and North Korea, and about how populations in South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines who don't want the U.S. military in their backyards should have the right to demilitarization. While these webs of international and national solidarity were being formed, an interesting sort of no-man's land coalesced around the case of Guam. Although geographically and demographically small, Guam's discursive presence was surprisingly large in the various conversations because of it being the proposed new host for close to 10,000 American Marines from Okinawa.

Although there was a consensus that the Marines should leave Okinawa, there was no consensus over where they should be sent. Variations of the phrase that the Marines should be sent “home” were frequently tossed about, but a point of contention was whether or not Guam counts as “home,” meaning a full and equal part of the United States. Although the relationship that Guam has with the United States is similar to that which Okinawa once had with the U.S. military (and continues to have with the Japanese mainland government), the idea of Guam being a colonial or an unequal participant in this process was scarcely mentioned. Guam’s role in this realignment is not its own choice, although local leaders had been asking for years that America increase its presence on Guam in order to boost Guam’s economy. The military realignment was something negotiated by the Governments of Japan and the United States in order to solve mutual problems. Guam is a convenient nearby solution that allows the United States to create new much-needed facilities (that are not as easily built in Okinawa) while also appearing to realign its forces in the Asia-Pacific region. For Japan, this move allows the nation to appear to be listening to the people of Okinawa by finally closing Futenma, long called the most dangerous U.S. base in the world because of its location in the middle of a densely populated area, but at the same time expanding an existing base in Northern Okinawa at Henoko (“U.S. Japan wrangle...”).

In these negotiations Guam was reduced to the site of their shared solution. It was a mere point, without interests of its own, or simply a piece of America’s vast military holdings that might fit perfectly with the delicately forged compromise between the Japanese and the U.S. governments. Chamorro activist Victoria Leon Guerrero’s work often reminds people of Guam’s place or non-place in a massive military buildup of which it sits at the center.

Guam’s government was not present at the negotiations where Japan and America agreed to the buildup. Guam was not at the table when two governments decided how the island would be affected in the near future. They didn’t ask permission or get Guam’s input. While most people on Guam talk about whether or not the buildup is a good thing, we always seem to forget the most important issue: that this realignment is fundamentally an issue of choice. Guam’s people were not asked if they wanted this change; they were not even invited into the discussion. We who live on Guam were never at that table. We’re still not (Leon Guerrero).

The notion of Guam not being at the table, or of Guam excluded from negotiations about its own destiny, might imply that discussing demilitarization and peace activism in the Asia-Pacific region would require Guam’s active inclusion in forming solidarity. In that working group, however, Guam was again not given a seat at the table.

Given the interests that characterize the U.S. Department of Defense and the Government of Japan, motivations for excluding Guam are understandable. Japan and the United States are not interested in demilitarization or decolonization, especially not in the case of a small territory like Guam. In their minds, this realignment is an agreement made between nations, about things that they claim as their own: lands in Okinawa for Japan, lands in Guam for the United States. We might assume that a gathering of peace activists would see itself in solidarity with anti-base activists in Guam, yet this was not truly the case during my travels. Given the fact that most activists present during my discussions accepted the right of the United States to militarize Guam, the surface purpose of their meeting might have been to forge bonds of solidarity with Guam, but the sometimes implicit exclusion of Guam meant that a more foundational solidarity

was being formed with the United States. This deeper solidarity was tied to the issues that form the fraternity of modern nation states: shared nationalism, mutual recognition of borders, and claims to territory. By excluding Guam from the negotiating table, the activists accepted that Guam did indeed belong to the United States.

This brings us to the perceived power of the Defense Department and the assumed weakness of solidarity movements. Both are, in this instance, meant to represent the twin impulses of Hardt and Negri's *Empire and Multitude*, forces that exist not to respect the particular claims of nations, but always to push beyond them. The Department of Defense, for instance, has an uncanny ability to invoke the aura of national sovereignty when this strategy suits it (as in the case of claiming Guam as sovereign U.S. soil), but also to surpass those borders when this action suits its interests. The activists, as representatives of the *Multitude*, were supposed to take on the same force and see the issue of demilitarization not through the simple lens of moving troops from Nation A to Nation B, but actively question the borders drawn to give appropriate political and national meanings to those points. This passage does not generalize about the activists I encountered in Japan, but rather recounts a moment that exemplifies the delicate nature of solidarity in the Asia-Pacific region and how a key point in understanding the wider map of militarization in this region of the world can be overlooked by understanding solidarity through a national framework.

The ability to actively critique or challenge U.S. militarization in the Asia-Pacific region is difficult for one who stays within his/her own particular national borders. And because the imagination of the military, at its highest levels, always stretches beyond those borders, we will always be limited to taking on only part of that potential fight, a small slice of it, never being able to address and fight at that larger level. So long as the U.S. military alone imagines the peoples of the Asia-Pacific through that impulse to contain, destroy, and dominate, then America will always have the upper hand. It will be more powerful than those who seek something else, while also using the possibilities that a globalized world represents far better than those who wish to remake or change events in the name of the *Multitude*.

## **8. GUALO – Finakpo'...**

On my recent solidarity trips to Japan and South Korea, one impetus for this paper came from my varied interactions with activists in those two countries. In Japan I attended the 2010 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, speaking before thousands of people in both Nagasaki and Hiroshima during events meant to commemorate the anniversaries of the atomic-bomb attacks there. The conference was full of activists from all over the world, most of whom had done this sort of work for years and for whom solidarity was already a neat and tidy system. It boiled down to: 1) meet person from other country, 2) ask him/her what the problems are in that country, and 3) listen intently with one's face signifying deep thought or deep disgust. Repeat with roles reversed, and solidarity has been accomplished!

When I was in South Korea, however, the majority of the people I met were farmers and students, people whose experiences with international activism were quite limited and nearly all of whom had no idea what or where Guam was. All of these communities were grateful to listen to me and grateful that I would listen to them. More than once, however, I was asked, what was

the point of this sharing? What is its power? Is there really any point to it? One farmer in Gangjeong was very direct after being introduced to me, a person from a small island in the Pacific. Through an interpreter, he asked me what I could actually do when I went back home to help him and the other villagers? Would my understanding of the issues help them grow more food? Would it help them sway the local government? Would it help keep them strong if they laid their bodies in front of bulldozers to stop construction of the Navy base?

Although this farmer was not a social-movement scholar or an expert in the intricacies of transnational activist or anti-base movements, his sentiments nonetheless struck directly at the amorphous core of solidarity work. There is no roadmap for imagination. There are no step-by-step instructions to creating a consciousness in which one sees one's struggle in that of another. When do we see another's struggle as something that doesn't compete for attention with our plight, but is intimately tied to ours? How can we see another's fight as just as necessary as our own and how can we act on that transformation? Like most things dealing with imagination, they happen all the time, and sometimes they happen without us even realizing it. As an object of study or even as an object of one's work as an activist, it is something that can be frustrating to attempt to forge, but inspiring to no end when it has at last appeared.

I have come to understand that solidarity has to be more than me simply taking one story or learning the details or the history of one fight. Solidarity requires more. It means that we must see each other as sharing something bigger and as not only knowing about that connection, but also building upon it. One must create and nurture and grow based on that connection, until what begins as a seed of imagination—a mental projection or a map created mainly on politics, strategy, or hope—no longer remains an abstract map, but becomes something that lives and breathes on its own, that people believe in, that people feel around them and upon which they create power. This, for me, is solidarity: not only imagining what a different world might look like (even if that world is not what one might want), but more so imagining the relationships with those others who can help build that world.

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