

Social Representations of the U.S. Military Presence in Guam in the Media

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Abstract

The presence of the United States military force has been felt by the island of Guam for as long as the U.S. and Guam have interacted. This study seeks to capture Guam's shared understanding of the U.S. military presence and shed light on the different perspectives of the local population of the island by utilizing Social Representations Theory. This theory acts as the framework to string together different people's words, thoughts, and emotions into a cohesive reality. In this paper, we analyzed videos of both the local population of Guam as well as those who have served in the United States military. We found that Guam held polemic representations of the U.S. military occupation, wherein the U.S. was viewed as both a Savior and a Colonizing Force. We concluded that this divide resulted from age differences and strong familial ties and connections to the military. The polemic representations may have substantial implications for the future of Guam, as they hinder people and their desires to change the status of the unincorporated territory under U.S. authority.

Keywords: Social Representations Theory, US Bases in Guam, US Military, Guam

The United States military shapes life in Guam in various ways. We hoped to capture the (un)shared understanding of the U.S. military presence on the island among the local population by utilizing the Social Representations Theory.

Globalization of the U.S. Militarization

The U.S. military has one of the largest global military presences, with an estimated 750 foreign bases as of 2023 (Bledsoe, 2022). The institution justifies its extensive global presence by stating that it must be prepared to respond to unpredictable conflicts around the world (Thee, 1977; Davis, 2011). Especially after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the United States shifted from a defensive posture that prioritized prevention to a more aggressive unilateralism that focused on peacekeeping, crisis response, and counterinsurgency. The U.S. claims its military presence and actions create and maintain “stability” between nations while reducing tensions between the U.S. and the nations it occupies (Harris, 2002).

However, the benefits of U.S. military globalization do not necessarily extend to the occupied nations. Antimilitarist movements against the U.S. military expansion (Davis, 2011; Vine, 2019) have highlighted the imperialist and colonialist motives of the U.S. (Na’puti & Bevacqua, 2015; Alexander, 2015; Dalisay, 2014). These antimilitarist movements have been instigated in foreign countries and U.S. territories, such as Okinawa, Japan; Vieques, Puerto Rico; Vicenza, Italy; Makua Valley, Hawaii; and Guam (Davis, 2011; Na’puti & Bevacqua, 2015; Vine, 2009).

U.S. Militarization in Guam

Over 500 years ago, Spanish explorer Magellan claimed Guam for Spain, initiating centuries of colonization. After Spain's defeat in 1898, The United States annexed Guam along with the Philippines and Puerto Rico, leading to the establishment of U.S. military bases in Guam until World War II (Alexander, 2015). During the war, Japan occupied Guam, but the U.S. reclaimed it in 1944. The U.S. Congress passed the

Organic Act of 1950, granting U.S. citizenship to the people of Guam, but Guam's colonial status remained and continues today. Guam is an organized, unincorporated and territory with no representation in Congress beyond a non-voting delegate. Meanwhile, the island's military significance expanded, as it became an ever more valuable hub in the global U.S. military network. (Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015). Guam accommodates a combined military force of 9,400 personnel, not including their dependents, from various branches of the armed services (Fong & Roy, 2024), and the military occupies 39% of the island's total land area with multiple military installations, such as Andersen Air Force Base, Navy Base Guam, Camp Blaz, and the Guam Army National Guard. These bases off-limits to the majority of residents who lack base access (Lutz, 2010).

Certain groups in Guam have strongly opposed the U.S. military build-up, citing, land seizures (Kuper & Bradley, 2021), military behavioral deviance (Lutz, 2019), exploitation of Guam's vulnerability (Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015), economic changes (Natividad & Kirk, 2010), and an unfair power dynamic between the military and the local government (Punzalan, 2013). For many in Guam, the military presence has done significant harm to Guam and its people.

Land Conflict

In establishing a global network of bases, the U.S. military has seized vast areas of land, which has produced conflict. In Guam, about 49,000 acres of Guam is federal land, and is primarily used by the military (Kuper & Bradley, 2021). The CHamoru people have expressed concern about the U.S. military takeover of Guam's land due to the negative impact on their environment (Vine, 2009; Lutz, 2019), especially regarding the relocation of the Okinawa Marine base to their island. Despite such negative public responses, representatives from the Navy have consistently refuted such claims (Lutz, 2019). Consequently, the "deafness" of the military to the land-related concerns of

Guam's people has led to increased tensions and sparked local decolonization and anti-build-up movements.

Cultural Disrespect

The U.S. military has displayed cultural disrespect towards foreign cultures, which sparked anti-base movements around the world (Davis, 2011; Vine, 2009). U.S. Military personnel tend to have negative reputations in foreign bases they are deployed to due to acts of cultural insensitivity and disrespect. Even the military personnel themselves are aware of their widespread lack of cultural competence and complain that the training they receive from Department of Defense (DoD) is insufficient in preparing them for cultural interactions with foreign communities (Malkawi, 2017). The DoD itself fails to demonstrate cultural respect when planning base location in Guam. The U.S. military attempted to establish firing ranges on the sacred land spaces of P̄gat (Lutz, 2019; Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015), where the CHamoru carry out traditional practices, reserve a resting place for ancestral spirits, and collect herbs and plants for traditional medicine. There are also many historically significant landmarks in P̄gat, which further highlight the insensitivity and disregard of DoD's firing range plans for this area (Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015).

Vulnerability to Endangerment

The presence of military bases raises the likelihood of foreign forces targeting those areas, thereby increasing the vulnerability of the local populations. This illustrates the dangers the U.S. military poses for the populations who live in these countries or territories such as Guam. This danger is compounded by the U.S. embrace of operational unilateralism, and willingness to launch preemptive attacks without the consultation of the host nation's or territory's government. (Davis, 2011). For Guam, its geographic location in the Western Pacific and its U.S. territorial status make it susceptible to foreign attacks. In 2017, during a dispute between U.S. President Donald

Trump and North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong Un, the latter devised a threatening plan to launch four missiles off the coast of Guam—the nearest U.S. territory to their nation. In turn, the U.S. would have retaliated with destructive force, sparking a devastating war with the island caught in the crossfire (Borger, 2017). This incident illustrates the ongoing potential danger U.S. military occupation poses for its host countries and territories.

Physical Environmental Change

The construction of major military projects, such as military base sites, fundamentally alters the landscape, providing both beneficial and damaging results (Lutz, 2019). The DoD properties have used their grounds for combat training and weapons testing, which ultimately left the grounds despoiled and contaminated by harmful toxins and munition pollution. To resolve these issues, the DoD has promised to clean up the locations most affected—those classified as “hazardous, toxic, and radioactive”—through the DoD's Pacific American Climate Fund (PACAM) for islands such as Hawai'i, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and American Samoa (Bordallo, 2017; Frain, 2018). Due to Guam's limited political power, however, the congressional delegate from Guam cannot effectively advocate for DoD's PACAM funding for the territory (Frain, 2018). In addition to the endangerment of the community and their health, the violation of NEPA policies threatens further degradation of coral reefs, marshlands, tropical rainforests, and limestone forests. These natural structures not only protect the land's freshwater supply and alleviate climate change but also serve as habitats for a variety of wildlife and vegetation (Frain, 2018).

Although these environmental damages are prominent in U.S. territories overseas, the same consequences and complaints can be found in almost any host country for the U.S. military (Davis, 2011). For instance, the U.S. military bases in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines left locals with feelings of resentment and bitterness. An initial, sense of security was transformed into feelings of violation after

the U.S. military damaged local environments (Davis, 2011). For example, In Vieques, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Navy used part of their territory as a bombing range test site, which left the land decimated, even years after the U.S. military's departure (Vine, 2019).

Economic Changes

Countries that serve as host nations to U.S. bases reported economic growth, particularly in trade and investment. An analysis shows that the presence of the U.S. military in these countries produces an increase of “approximately \$28 million [in trade] per 100 service members deployed (Heo & Yu, 2017). There is no doubt about the contributions of the U.S. Military to economic growth in Guam. (Natividad & Kirk, 2010).

However, the presence of military personnel and their dependents fuels competition with the local population for essential resources, particularly housing (Gilbert, 2022). Gilbert showed that the median price for a single-family home in Guam in 2022 was \$420,000. The Guam Chamber of Commerce also reports that the approximate monthly rent expense for a 900-square-foot furnished space is \$2,200 (2022). Meanwhile, the latest U.S. Census Bureau reports that the median household income in Guam during the prior year was \$58,289 (2022). Local households without any military relations are at a disadvantage for varying reasons. Veterans, service members, and eligible surviving spouses who would like to purchase a home can apply for a VA Home Loan (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2023). Service members distort the local rental market. The DoD has set the lowest possible Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) for military personnel at \$2,736.75, including utilities (Reyes, 2016). The increasing cost of living on the island is reaching the upper limit of what most residents can afford, while the high demand for housing creates a further disruption as the market tailors its prices and its available spaces towards the US Military (Gilbert, 2022).

Power Dynamic

The presence of the U.S. military in other nations generates an almost co-dependent relationship between the two countries. Due to its political status, the local government of Guam exhibits nominal power but lacks significant authority. Guam has a delegate to represent the island in the House of Representatives. However, this elected official can only introduce new legislation but cannot vote, as per the Guam Congressional Act of 1972 (Punzalan, 2013). Likewise, the people of Guam, despite being recognized as U.S. citizens, are not eligible to participate in presidential elections, and Guam does not elect members to the U.S. Senate. The U.S. military is not accountable to the people of Guam, but it claims the authority to exploit the island and its resources for strategic imperatives.

Despite being an unincorporated territory of the United States and with no effective national representation, the residents of Guam remain divided on the U.S. military presence. One reason why the military presence enjoys significant support in Guam comes from a strong veteran population on the island. According to the 2010 Census, there were 14,047 veterans living in the four Island Areas (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) in 2010, with half of those veterans calling Guam “home” (Kromer, 2016). On the other hand, many people feel exploited, particularly in regard to land. Guam, objectively, has the highest ratio of U.S. military spending, military hardware, and land seizures from indigenous populations of any place on earth (Lutz, 2010).

That is why we propose to use the social representations theory to capture the shared meanings of the U.S. military presence in Guam. This theory offers a new way of looking at and understanding knowledge and communication (Howarth, 2006) or how social groups create reality together through their members’ everyday talk and actions (Moscovici, 1988). In this paper, our use of social representation theory will allow us to

examine how the people of Guam think, feel, and act toward the presence of the U.S. military in Guam.

Understanding U.S. Military Presence in Guam Using Social Representations Theory

The study of social representations focuses on dynamic and diverse social phenomena (Höijer, 2011). The theory of social representations examines shifts in how people view social issues or objects, and once these representations are formed, they are used as tools for understanding, engaging with, and participating within the social sphere (Moscovici, 1988). History is adopted and altered by the processes of social representation. Because of this, social histories can be understood as explanations of the past, which are arranged in the form of a shared narrative that gives a community a sense of continuity and may predict future possibilities associated with a community identity (Mathias et al., 2023). By using Social Representations Theory, we can identify and dive deeper into the relationship between Guam and the U.S. military. It will allow us to capture the shared meanings, attitudes, and emotions that the people of Guam associate with the U.S. military presence.

Hegemonic, Emancipated, and Polemic Representations

Moscovici distinguishes the difference between hegemonic, emancipated, and polemic representations to address the complicated question of how universally accepted social opinions or beliefs must be for them to be considered social representations (Hoijer, 2017). Hegemonic representations express the collective identity and are shared to a certain degree by most members of a group (Ben-Asher, 2003). The majority of a political group, a country, or any other large social group share hegemonic representations (Hoijer, 2017). An example of a hegemonic representation would be if many people in Guam held anti-military rather than pro-military views. Emancipated representations are information that has been independently produced by

subgroups within a community (Ben-Asher, 2003). It has to do with subgroups that, in relation to the interacting sections of society, construct their own interpretations with some kind of autonomy (Moscovici, 1988). For example, because some people lack exposure to oppositional views believe that the U.S. military presence is beneficial to the island of Guam. While others who have been exposed to information that portrays the U.S. military in a negative light, reject the U.S. military presence in Guam. Lastly, polemic representations pertain to social conflict, confrontations between groups, and debates within a community (Hoijer, 2017). In the heat of a disagreement or social struggle, subgroups create polemic representations; they indicate rivalry or differences within the representations (Ben-Asher, 2003). For instance, some people may be against the U.S. military presence in Guam, but there are others who are more accepting of the U.S. military occupation. Because ideas and social thinking are complex and frequently shifting, the classification of social representations into these three categories is vague.

Media and Social Representations

Media influences society, is embedded in collective memory, and generates feelings or responses (Cohen et al., 2022). According to Abric, the place of media “has long been key to the study of psychological phenomena” (Abric, 1987). Even though oral and verbal material has mostly been the focus of theoretical and methodological approaches to social representations, the connection between social representations and media has been the subject of several kinds of research (De Rosa & Farr, 2001). Some studies see the media as a source, a means of expression, and a method for the creation of social representations (Cohen, 2015; Da Silva et al., 2020; De Rosa & Farr, 2001; Sarrica et al., 2015). The impact of media on short-term memory may be higher than that of written material, as media, whether it be through videos or images can make complex ideas or events easier to understand (Cohen, 2015).

Method

This study seeks to capture the public's understanding and a population's (non)consensus on the presence of the United States military in Guam. To do so requires a qualitative study, looking at the personal and day-to-day experiences of individuals with the U.S. military occupation. Conducting this approach is advantageous to the overall research by providing an in-depth look at how individuals on both sides (civilians and military affiliates) perceive these respective social groups.

Corpus

Because we argue media is a means of expressing social representations, we have chosen the media as the data for analysis in capturing Guam's (un)shared understanding of the military presence on the island. We analyzed six videos that detail the history of the U.S. military build-up in Guam and feature interviews among military veterans, military officials, and locals who shared their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward the US military bases on the island.

In total, these videos spanned one hour, 59 minutes, and 48 seconds of online footage. Their length ranged from 6 minutes and 45 seconds to 56 minutes and 41 seconds. The videos selected are from YouTube channels that specialize in distributing global news onto a mainstream platform. We searched for videos using phrases such as "*US military presence in Guam*," "*US bases in Guam*," and "*US military in Guam*." Videos from media outlet channels like *The Wall Street Journal* and *AJ+* were selected, while the remaining videos were published by *PBS Guam*, the local Public Broadcasting Service network, summarizing the influence of the U.S military on the people of Guam, as well as detailing the lives of the CHamorus during and after World War II. The statements that were taken from the videos to be used as codes were only those that pertained to Guam's relationship with the United States and its military. The breakdown of the video listings is as follows:

Social Representations of U.S. Military Presence in Guam

Video #1: *PBS Guam: Island of Warriors*

Video #2: *Over 1/4 of Guam Is Made Up of America's Military*

Video #3: *An Inside Look at the U.S. Strategy in Guam to Counter China's Growing Threat* | *WSJ*

Video #4: *How The U.S. Territory Of Guam Became An American Colony* | *AJ+*

Video #5: *Should U.S. Territories Like Guam Be Independent?* | *AJ+*

Video #6: *PBS Guam: War for Guam*

Data Analysis

We analyzed the spoken words in the videos using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2016). With six videos adding up to roughly two hours' worth of footage, each video was assigned a number, and each team member was assigned at least two videos to analyze. We watched each of the videos a few times, paying close attention to the words spoken by the narrator and the interviewees. Each member of the team analyzed their assigned videos, and then we met together to combine our individual analyses.

The first step in our analysis was generating initial codes. For each video, we coded the statements or accounts that we perceived as capturing aspects of the interviewees' understanding of the military presence in Guam. The second step involved reviewing our codes and grouping together those that express similar ideas. Some codes became subcodes of more general ones. Codes that did not belong to more general codes were set aside but not discarded. The third step was examining the grouped codes and labeling them as themes and subthemes. We engaged in team discussions and refined our classifications until all our themes and subthemes made sense to us. The fourth step entailed reviewing our themes to identify patterns and create a cohesive picture of how

the military buildup in Guam is understood based on our data. We created a table for each video to facilitate easy interpretation.

As we analyzed the videos and captured social representations, we kept in mind Moscovici's words (1988, as cited in Codol 1982): "It is not so much the individual or group contribution to these representations that allows us to call them social representations; it is the fact that they have been shaped by an exchange and interaction process." As such, because group members discuss and deliberate on the issue, their interactions and communications enable their individual thoughts and feelings to converge, transforming something individual into something social. Those converged ideas are what we captured in our themes. We discussed these in detail in our results section.

Results

After conducting a thematic analysis of the videos, we found two prominent mega themes of how the U.S. military presence in Guam is viewed: as a "Savior" or as a "Colonizing Force." The mega theme of the "U.S. military as a Savior" was supported by only two themes of patriotism amongst the CHamorus and protection against foreign threats. The mega theme of the "U.S. Military as a Colonizing Force" tells a progressive story with its five themes, which were "Deception," "Resource/Population Exploitation," "Negative Consequences of the U.S. Military Occupancy," "Failure to Acknowledge Guam," and finally "Advocacy for Guam's Independence."

U.S Military Viewed as a Savior

As the data of this study were analyzed, it could be deduced that the island of Guam, as depicted in the media, views the United States and its military as its savior mainly due to the historical relationship between the island and the U.S. Patriotism for the island, and in turn, for the U.S., developed due to the gratefulness of the CHamorus

for liberating the island from Japanese occupation. The “patriotism” from the events of the Second World War has been passed down through the generations and inspired younger individuals to be enlist in the military. On the other hand, Guam’s tactical location resulted in a profound military buildup on the island after its liberation. This gave the island access to an arsenal that could aid its defense from foreign threats.

Patriotism

A large portion of Guam’s older generation showcases a strong sense of patriotism, which is due to a feeling of gratitude toward the U.S. military for liberation from the Japanese occupation in 1944. Codes from those indigenous to Guam during the occupation included thinking the U.S. marines that saved them “Had to be God,” (Leon Guerrero, 2015, 35:20) and that the camps burst into song, thanking Uncle Sam, a patriotic U.S. government icon, for his return to the island. As the years went by, this patriotic generation passed down this fervor for the military, instilling their sense of patriotism into their children and grandchildren. In most families, that ideal of being patriotic has found its way into their family customs, as the young men in some families from Guam want to enlist to follow in the footsteps of those who enlisted before them, “CHamorus indigenize their own military service, creating such a strong sense of identity.” (Bevacqua, 2021, 3:13 in Video #2).

Access to Defense

After liberating Guam, the United States built up its military forces on the island during the Cold War, deeming Guam as a tactical location for forces to defend against the Soviet Union and to roll back communism in Asia. The end of the Cold War did not lead to a significant pull-back and in recent years the rise of China’s military power and ambitions in the region has prompted the U.S. military to add additional forces and capabilities to the island, equipping Guam with air defense systems designed to prevent short-ranged ballistic threats by firing missiles to intercept said threats. Rear Admiral

Nicholson states, “...it makes it easier for us to defend the area [Guam] when we have additional resources here” (2021, 4:44 in Video #3). Moreover, individuals from Guam who are actively in the military share the same sentiment, with lines like “Free Guam so we can get bombed?” (Rivera, 2018, 8:48 in Video #2) and “Guam could have a defense agreement with the military...” (Bevacqua, 2018, 8:56 in Video #2), showcasing that Guam views the military presence as a resource in terms of defense from other nations.

U.S. Military as a Colonizing Force

Although some might agree that the U.S. military is indeed a savior to the island, some people of Guam view the United States military as a colonizing force that impacts the island negatively. Through the media data, it can be deduced that the U.S. military deceived the people of Guam with the supposed “shiny” benefits that come with joining the armed forces. Additionally, the rapid and extensive military buildup on the island resulted in the exploitation of resources and population. The negative consequences of the U.S. military go beyond the aforementioned situations and also impacts medical care for veterans, and the cost of living for the general population of Guam. Finally, the United States’ ignorance of Guam is palpable, contributing greatly to the ongoing debate over Guam’s status as a territory.

Deception

From being liberated and introduced to the power of the U.S. and its forces came a perception of the U.S. military as a powerful source of defense, economic fortune, and opportunity. Our findings, however, revealed many feel the U.S. military has consistently tricked the people of Guam to exert dominance as it prioritizes its interests over Guam civilians. The initial U.S. annexation and later “liberation” has resulted in the continuous occupation of Guam by yet another foreign entity, contradicting the perception of the idea of it as a liberator and provider. As explained by Michael Bevacqua, the people of Guam look at the “shininess and niceness of the military” and

see “a clean green place that offers all these economic possibilities and opportunity” (Bevacqua, 2014, 7:24 and 7:47 in Video #1). Furthermore, that sense of patriotism discussed in the section above, combined with the traditional CHamoru values of generosity and reciprocity, led to the CHamoru people feeling indebted and favorable towards the U.S. military. These positive sentiments opened the door for the U.S. military to strike deals and influence the people of Guam to support their self-interest. According to Jose Garrido, his grandfather, who felt that he owed the U.S. military for liberating Guam, had given up his land to them for as little as \$7.10 (Garrido, 2021, 37:55 in Video #6). The people of Guam, in their optimism and pride, perceived the U.S. military as great and felt obligated to support it, doing so by offering their lives and land. Many, however, have since decided they have been met with unfair compensation and exploitation.

Resource, Population Exploitation

Tying in with the deception of the CHamorus by the U.S. military, locals were exploited for both their land and people. Many locals had to surrender their property to benefit the U.S. military to prove their patriotism and to prevent dire consequences. Jun Stinson, an Al Jazeera journalist, states how “CHamorus who had just survived a brutal war were coerced into signing over their lands by threats, the need to prove their patriotism, and fear of military backlash” (2018, 7:05 in Video #4). CHamorus were “coerced” into sacrificing their land after the events of a traumatic event, that being World War II.

In addition to the exploitation of the CHamoru people’s patriotism, those who decide to serve in the U.S. military are taken advantage of by their pride, most noticeably after traumatic world events that aim to benefit the military entirely. When asked if she would rejoin, local veteran Maggie Aguon mentioned, “I would go again. In a heartbeat. And become a soldier. For my country, for my island. It’s called pride” (2014, 24:21 in Video #1). Although her statement appears patriotic, her pride can also

be seen as having been exploited. Aguon was one of the first soldiers deployed following the events of 9/11— a woman of Guam once again called upon following a traumatic event to make a sacrifice for a nation’s global ambitions, and one that denies Guam its full right.

The CHamoru people do not have the same rights as U.S. citizens residing in the states. With Guam having one of the highest U.S. military recruitment rates in the nation, residents are still unable to vote for president, showcasing once again how the small population is given unfair advantages but remains subservient to their higher power while being exploited in unseen ways. Maria Hinojosa, a PBS journalist who interviewed Guam veterans, states “[Guam veterans] can enlist in the military, but they can’t vote for the president who will send them to war,” (2014, 9:03 in Video #1). This lacking state-level rights, including representation in the Congress and the ability to vote for the president of the United States.

Negative Consequences of the U.S. Military Occupancy

Following years of increased U.S. military presence in Guam, the island and its residents experienced varying adverse effects. The surge in militarization contributed to a significant rise in the cost of living and an increasingly unaffordable real estate market, transforming life in Guam into a source of economic strain. Securing everyday essentials became a difficult task, which contributed to a rise in Guam’s poverty level that was “50 percent higher than the national average” (Hinojosa, 2014).

These negative consequences not only impacted the local population but also resulted in adverse consequences for the dedicated service members from Guam. Following their service, veterans are not afforded the promised proper treatment, leading to prolonged settlements and increased obstacles when seeking medical care. In Video #1, multiple veterans spoke out about the lack of funding for the VA’s office, as well as a distinct lack of accessibility to treatment centers that specialize in PTSD, with

the nearest treatment center being in Hawaii or Alaska. Former governor Eddie Calvo advocated for the local veterans, stating, “The federal government has not done its part to assist a very patriotic group of American citizens” (PBS, 2014). Although Guam has one out of eight of the adult population as a veteran, one of the highest in the U.S., Guam is third to last in medical spending per veteran. The money that is spent on the local veterans does not align when comparing the recruitment rates and assistance they receive upon return.

Another negative consequence of the U.S. military is making the ultimate sacrifice. Due to the few opportunities, and rising cost of living standards, more than a few people end up enlisting in the U.S. military. However, during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Pacific Islanders had the highest rate per capita of casualties and deaths, which was six times higher than the rest of the country (PBS, 2014).

Failure to Acknowledge Guam

The U.S. Military’s ignorance of Guam can be observed in other facets. When asked about the military’s opinion on Guam’s political status, Major Timothy Patrick states that “[the question has] nothing to do with the military” (2018, 5:18 on Video 5). The Public Affairs officer then expressed that the Department of Defense also has no opinion regarding the subject (2018, 5:27 on Video 5). The absence of insight into an important matter for the island further exhibits the U.S. military’s undivided focus only on the resources that the island can provide and nothing more.

Unfortunately, the ignorance of the supposed “savior” nation goes beyond its armed forces. Individuals from the mainland U.S. often fail to locate Guam on the map. Many assume the island is anywhere but the Pacific, typically in Central or South America, or even Africa (2014, 9:21 on Video #1). It is a disheartening realization that the island seems invisible to the mainland U.S. population despite its significant and strategic contribution to the U.S. efforts in global defense. Nevertheless, the palpable

ignorance of the U.S. military and its adverse effects equates to a reevaluation of Guam's political status and the island's association with the United States.

Advocating for Independence

Given all these negative consequences of the U.S. military presence, ranging from deception to exploitation to ignorance, the desire for independence from the U.S. military arose amongst the CHamoru people of Guam. To be free from U.S. military dominance meant that the CHamorus would gain back their sacred lands, identity, and freedom from being caught in the crossfire of international conflicts between the U.S. and its enemies. With a lack of autonomy came the lack of the authority to refuse the U.S. military from grabbing their sacred lands for firing practice ranges. Ritidian, or Litekyan, once a site frequented by locals exploring its historical significance and collecting medicinal plants, now stands inaccessible. As Michael Bevacqua, scholar and activist for Guam's independence, states "...You can't say, 'I would like to go and visit a sacred site to my ancestors,' because there's a fence, there's a gate, there's a pass procedure" (2018, 7:12 in Video #5). To some CHamorus, independence meant a return to an identity that more closely aligns with their ancestry, free of U.S. influence which has thoroughly permeated into Guam's culture. Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero, an activist with Independent Guåhan, stated that "Independence is a way for us to redefine ourselves and to return to who we were intended to be by our ancestors" (2018, in Video #5). Perhaps one of the most significant motives behind the independence movements was to escape being caught in between US military conflicts with its enemies, which threatened the lives of the people on the island. Leon Guerrero stated that her purpose in supporting local independence movements was to make Guam a safe and enriching environment for her children: "So if this is the place that is their [her children's] home, I want to make it safe" (2018, in Video #5).

Discussion

The results of our study shed light on how people in Guam experience the military presence, such as deceptive benefits of US occupancy, trauma bonding between Guam and the U.S. military, modern-day colonialism, as well as the division and disempowerment of the CHamoru people. The findings showcase that many modern-day CHamorus view their relationship with the U.S. military as almost parasitic. A significant group on the island advocate for some changes to U.S.'s dominating presence in Guam. These ideas are discussed more in-depth in this section as we explore the motives behind those interviewed to look at how the island of Guam views the presence of the U.S. military presence.

The “Benefits” of U.S Occupancy

At first glance, it appears that there are benefits to the U.S. military occupation of Guam through the social representations of the people in Guam as portrayed in the media. Despite Guam being tiny and isolated, they are protected and defended by one of the strongest militaries in the world. Enlisting in the U.S. military includes many incentives for Guam residents, particularly economic mobility. Furthermore, those born in Guam have received U.S. citizenship since the 1950 Organic Act. A considerable number of CHamoru take pride in their association with the powerful American nation. This connection has given rise to family traditions, fostering a profound sense of relief and security that originates from being freed from the Japanese occupation during World War II.

None of these benefits, however, were seemingly for the people of Guam, and were more of a byproduct of the U.S.'s necessity to build up the island as a military force. Patriotism in Guam emerged and is maintained organically, and the United States did not instill nationalism within them. Yet, the U.S. still benefits from the island's patriotism and uses it to pursue its global power projection. While Guam does receive

substantial protection from potential invaders, that defensive prioritization by the U.S. is driven by its strategic importance as a key outpost in the Pacific. Whatever benefits the U.S. seemingly gives to Guam, they do so with the ideology that Guam is of some use to them, resources or otherwise.

Trauma Bonding

Those feelings of liberation and security led to many Guam residents viewing the U.S. military presence as essential to the physical and economic survival of their island. In the case of any foreign confrontation, many believe that Guam would not be able to defend itself. The U.S. military, however, has coerced CHamorus into giving up land, exploited the island's space and people to in pursuit of its global strategy, and has frustrated political movements on island that advocate for independence and land preservation. The clear imbalance of power in the relationship between Guam and the U.S. military reveals a trauma bond. This irregular cycle of reward and punishment by the U.S. military to the people of Guam can be seen through the contradiction of helping them to then taking advantage of them.

Despite the power asymmetry and political disregard, some people of Guam see the US as "Savior," defending them from any foreign invasion and economic hardship. Reid (2024) refers to this paradoxical psychological response, where "victims" develop an emotional attachment to their abusers as trauma bonding. This cyclical state involves complicated interactions, abusive control dynamics, power imbalances within the relationship, as well as inconsistency in administering punishment and rewards (Raghavan & Doychak, 2015). On one hand, Guam and its people are promised citizenship, defense, and resources, but on the other, they are politically disregarded and economically inferior, and their wishes for the land to be respected and defended are instead taken and used for military advancement.

Modern Day Colonialism

Guam's and the United States' relationship since World War II illustrates the military's impact on the current state of the island. As an unincorporated territory, Guam lacks representation in the U.S. government. Its people cannot vote for their commander-in-chief, and yet, they hold one of the highest military recruitment rates. These individuals show pride and patriotism for their island and country. And yet, they receive the least in return, especially when it comes to mental health assistance. Additionally, CHamoru landowners and descendants share their stories of how they were paid an unfair price for their property to build U.S. military infrastructure. Underrepresentation and exploitation of land and people are the most common aspects of colonialism, being utilized as a method of control over the region. Guam can be described as a colony, given the island's overall status. However, reverting to other terms, such as "unincorporated territory," masks this notion.

Division and Disempowerment Caused by Colonialism

Given the positive and negative representations of the U.S. Military presence in Guam, these polemical representations can be thought to divide and disempower the people of Guam, especially between older and younger generations. As mentioned in the results, the older generation of CHamorus held captive by the Japanese during World War II perceived the U.S. military as a savior. Consequently, they demonstrated patriotism toward the U.S. by enlisting in the military, giving up their lands, and instilling patriotism within their children. As the years passed, however, the younger generations' attitudes toward the U.S. military shifted to some seeing it as a colonizing force. They noted the negative impacts on their land, people, living conditions, and security as caused by the U.S. Military's exploitation of Guam's colonial status. Because of these starkly different representations, there is bound to be conflict and disagreement amongst the CHamorus on the future of their island, whether they advocate for statehood or complete independence. As they are divided, they are disempowered; they

will have greater difficulty uniting to make unanimous decisions on political matters. Being stuck in this state of disagreement will keep them stuck in the most detrimental state with the greatest consequences on their island—colonialism.

Social Representation Theory: Theoretical Implications

Social Representation Theory enables us to examine in more detail the complex relationship between Guam and the U.S. military. By applying the Social Representation Theory, we were able to capture the collective understandings, attitudes, and emotions of Guam residents toward the U.S. military presence here in Guam. While most codes we found dealt with themes of “Resource/Population Exploitation,” “Failure to Acknowledge Guam,” or “Advocating for Independence,” we also found themes of “Patriotism” and “Access to Defense.” The CHamoru people who experienced World War II felt relieved and thankful to the U.S. military for rescuing them from the Japanese, viewing them as saviors. Those who were born later than the war and the generation of people who had their parents and/or grandparents taken advantage of after the war often viewed the U.S. military as a colonizing force that exploits the people of Guam and has caused so much economic and social stress. By using the theory of social representation, we have come to recognize a “double-edged sword” understanding of what the U.S. military presence means to the people of Guam. We identified polemic representations, which are usually viewed in the context of an opposition or a struggle between groups. The results of our study suggest that many people view the U.S. military as a threat and express resistance towards continued occupation, while others feel a sense of gratitude for the U.S. military presence in Guam and are proud to be a part of the United States. The value of media as capturing social representations of the U.S. military in Guam proved to be very significant. Using media as a source, we were able to give a more in-depth glimpse into the military in Guam, where regular civilians might be restricted. Having unlimited access made it easier to expedite the process of

analyzing the themes. It made it very accessible to gather data and refer back to them throughout the research.

Shared Meanings of US Military Presence in Guam: Practical Implications

Significantly, both social groups are heading towards alleviating the existing tensions. Both sides must understand each other to lessen the conflicts of that society—one in which both U.S. military personnel and indigenous CHamorus can live peacefully alongside each other. From Video #5, Bevacqua mentions that independence does not mean separation; rather, a defense agreement could be met wherein military bases could continue to stay in Guam if the US promises to defend the island from rising international threats. This would enable Guam to have a greater degree of economic and political freedom. Hence, we hope this research reaches individuals involved in the field of politics and the military as well as those who are planning to enlist in the military, as our findings may further educate them on the matters that Guam currently faces, moving them in a way to take a step further and bring a change to the island's existing situation.

Given the insight from the perspectives of numerous Guam veterans, advocates, military personnel, and interviewees, we aim to convey that our discoveries and analyses contribute to a sense of empowerment and encouragement. Additionally, we aspire to spread awareness of the local advocacies that the indigenous CHamorus fight for until this day. Not only do we hope this paper reinforces and inspires more CHamoru advocates but also educates members of the U.S. military (whether or not they reside in Guam) of the challenges and hardships that militarization brings to the island.

Limitations of the Study & Future Implications

Several limitations were raised during the course of this research study. Because our data set consisted of primarily media content, each video contained its own narrative bias that would shift and present itself in a way that limited the authenticity of

the responses. Although our results were fruitful, we felt there was insufficient data to accurately depict the social representations of the CHamorus in Guam towards the U.S. military. Future improvement on this study would require an additional research design method, such as surveying, interviewing, or focus group discussion, to gather more in-depth data from the people themselves. This would allow for a rich source of close data responses reflecting the social groups more effectively.

Reflexivity

The authors of this study, despite coming from diverse backgrounds, have reasons that affect our drive to pursue this subject matter. The U.S. military presence in Guam exerts an impact on our lives, whether it be through direct or indirect means. As residents of Guam, nearly all of us share a unique connection with the U.S. military, influencing our lives in various ways.

For example, some of the authors have immediate and/or extended family member(s) who have served or are currently serving in one or more branches of the U.S. military. Additionally, some have close family members who have experienced war as soldiers or civilians. Another one of us has plans to join the military solely to secure a financially stable future and to pursue college at a graduate level. They were inspired by both friends and family members who are currently serving in the Air Force. They see the military as a gateway to success, as evidenced by close ones. Some individuals participated in a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program and earned certification upon completing three years of the program during their high school years. One of them enlisted in the United States Air Force, fulfilling a four-year active-duty contract before transitioning to the United States Air Force Reserves in Guam and is still currently serving. Meanwhile, some of the authors provided an “outsider-looking-in” perspective because they have no relations profoundly affected by the military. Having a contributor with this background provided a valuable perspective that helped us maintain a balanced standpoint and avoid leaning too heavily toward bias.

The diverse backgrounds of the authors involved in the study underlie the multifaceted nature of the impact of the U.S. military presence in Guam on the lives of its residents. Whether through direct personal experiences or an “outsider-looking-in” perspective, the intricate connections between the people of Guam and the military influence their lives in unique and complex ways. The multiple array of backgrounds enriches our understanding by providing a balanced viewpoint that mitigates potential biases. As we navigate the complex relationship between Guam and the U.S. military, this study serves as a testament to the various and significant ways in which the military presence has shaped the experiences and perspectives of the island’s residents.

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