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# The Banality of American Empire: The Curious Case of Guam, USA

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The headline of a 2004 *New York Times* article sums up well the curious existence of the island of Guam: “Looking for Friendly Base Overseas, Pentagon Finds It Already Has One.”<sup>1</sup> Guam (Indigenous Chamoru name Guåhan), known as the “tip of America’s spear,” has played a crucial role in securing US strategic interests in the Asia Pacific region for more than a century. Guam is also one of only seventeen remaining countries in the world that are recognized by the United Nations as colonies in need of decolonization. However, in media representations and critical discourse around US imperialism, Guam still occupies a paradoxical space both as a US military colony left over from the Victorian era that somehow does not signify colonialism or imperialism, and as a crucial military strategic partner that nevertheless remains invisible, or, worse, hypervisible, within US geopolitical imaginings. The island’s convoluted coloniality is thinly veiled by its status as an “unincorporated territory” of the US, as its citizens nominally benefit from many, though not all, privileges of US citizenship, while being denied any actual political power in Washington, DC, as well as in terms of their own immigration and borders. Further, as the so-called tip of America’s spear, the island is propagandized both internally and externally as being on the front lines of democracy, liberty, and freedom.

Guam’s obscurity can be challenged by the concept of banality, which describes Guam’s paradoxical status and the investment of imperial power in erasing its significance on the world stage. A banal space, like the US representation of its territory of Guam, allows power to function unchecked within public rhetoric and popular imagining, and allows the powerful to confine suffering and privation to the unexamined margins of meaning. The concept of banality interrogates and destabilizes this simultaneous fullness of Guam as a site for US military power and emptiness as a site for US critique, enabling the US to project force largely unchallenged over a significant part of the globe.

Our use of banality in this essay is similar to that of other political theorists, philosophers, and social scientists who have grappled with the issues of power relations within a community and the nature of power with regard to those who are placed at its edges. Using “banality” is meant to express a particular character that signifies how Guam exists in relation to the United States. The term’s use overlaps with elements of Giorgio Agamben’s notion of *homo sacer* as well as Mae Ngai’s notion of “differential inclusion.”<sup>2</sup> These theories, along with many others, analyze the constitutive nature of bodies determined by the formation of a community purposely to matter less or to matter not at all. These concepts are all bound by the notion that the act of attempting to exclude figures from a community, to mark them as exceptional, is a constitutive act of community formation, and as such the way these figures are meant to be understood as peripheral, particular, and less valuable simultaneously masks their centrality.

The concept, or framework, of banality assumes not only that subjects and objects of power are always already linked together, but also that this relationship is always elided, making the objects in the relationship appear as if they signify nothing. The famed definition by political theorist Carl Schmitt that the sovereign is determined by the ability to decide the state of exception can be instructive here.<sup>3</sup> To determine something as exceptional, as something that exists outside the normal order of power and consequence, does not happen in absolute terms, but always leaves marks. There is a friction, a roughness to the act, as the marking of an exceptional time or space always refracts back on a community, implying a failure, a breakdown.

We use the idea of banality here to try to illustrate exceptional sites or moments which are not perceived as a breakdown of principles, failures of ideals, or anything else, but rather perceived through veneers of inapplicability or insufficiency. To invoke the idea of a banality assumes that the emptiness of rhetoric does not represent a lack of power but rather an overabundance of it. It is not that something is missing, but rather that some profound force is present that is accepted commonly as nothing. Here, the discursive space is skewed such that Guam is perceived as nothing on a variety of levels, yet also as possessing incredible power on other levels. Even in conversations that are critical of these very points, the banality will overwhelm any potential link, reinforcing an emptiness that is full of power for particular colonial institutions, such as the US military and government.

Banality also invokes the idea of something being on the edge of consciousness or the borders of a community, where things also float along the edge of meaning or mattering. Much of our impetus to use the concept derives from the fact that conversations about exceptional circumstances and bodies that one finds in the work of Ngai and Agamben tend to develop distinct ideological factions, often resulting in political debates over rights or social suitability.

### **HACHA – If Not Puerto Rico, Then Why Guam?<sup>4</sup>**

In the spring of 2007, plans were being made by Famoksaiyan, a diasporic Chamoru activist group dedicated to decolonization, to organize a panel on the militarization and decolonization of Guam for the first-ever United States Social Forum, which was to take place that summer in Atlanta, Georgia. One of the organizers for the event was Michael Leon Guerrero, a fellow Chamoru (an Indigenous person of Guam) and long-time social justice activist in the US. Leon Guerrero was making a concerted effort to ensure that the Pacific and Pacific Islands be taken seriously as sites which needed attention and intervention by American antiwar, peace, and social justice activists.

Famoksaiyan was invited, and agreed to participate, forming a workshop titled “The Fire This Time: Life Under US Occupation.”<sup>5</sup> Cognizant of our audience’s limited knowledge about Guam and its invisibility to most of the United States and world, the workshop was advertised to appeal to those interested in decolonization, demilitarization, Indigenous rights, and the Pacific in general. Tiffany Naputi Lacsado, a longtime Chamoru LGBTQ activist in the Bay Area, California, made an effort to reach out to other sessions dealing with similar issues. She noted that, despite the emphasis of the overall organizing committee, there were very few other panels that dealt with militarization or decolonization in the Pacific.

One session in particular, proposed by an organization called The Green Institute and titled “Colonialism in the United States,” intrigued Lacsado, who contacted the organization to inquire if they might be interested in working with Famoksaiyan. The intent of the session was to create in those who participated “a deeper understanding of the many forms that colonialism takes within the United States” and, in general, “raising additional awareness of in-country colonialism in the US.”<sup>6</sup>

From the list of proposed speakers, it was apparent that The Green Institute approached colonialism in a more metaphorical sense than Famoksaiyan, as a concept that addressed unequal power relations. The session consisted of a panel of speakers, each of whom had “experience with a form of colonialism.” The speakers included a Black Panther chair; a mayoral candidate for Washington, DC; a Native American activist; and a migrant labor organizer.

Taking note of this diversity, Lacsado asked the organizer of the panel if it would be possible for them to work together, to talk about colonialism and perhaps militarization as well. This suggestion, however, was rebuffed in a peculiar way: rejected through the specter of another, larger site of colonialism. The response Lacsado received was: “Look, Puerto Rico is a colony, and we haven’t asked Puerto Ricans to be a part of this. Why should we ask Guam?”<sup>7</sup>

### **HUGUA – Shadowed, Betwixt, and Banal**

This anecdote demonstrates how the smallness, foreignness, and assumed unimportance of Guam combine to give the island the aura of being shrouded in political banality. In this curious way, the island does not seem to matter, even at the point at

which it should: a twice-shadowed form, acknowledged but still irrelevant. In this constellation one can perceive the vague uncertainty of Guam's place in geopolitics today.

Speaking in political terms, anthropologist Ronald Stade noted in *Pacific Passages: World Culture and Local Politics in Guam* that Guam exists in a "liminal space, betwixt and between, somehow outside the normal order of sovereignty or integration."<sup>8</sup> Stade's characterization is meant to be political, but the ambiguity implied goes far beyond Guam not being part of the current global order of independent states.

Returning to the notion of banality as a profound colonial paradox, a quality that is both overtly uninteresting yet simultaneously exceptional, we believe can help explain the intriguing dynamic whereby Guam's existence can be fluid and ambiguous in most regards, but secure and concrete in light of its importance to the US military. In this essay, we interrogate the peculiar existence of Guam, how its status as a US colony and its strategic value to the US military intersect, or, rather, do not intersect. In order to illustrate this notion of banality, we also discuss a series of representations of Guam and its colonial status in texts meant to illuminate the structure or quality of the American empire.

### **TULU – Guam! Tip of America's Empire**

In the context of the US, Guam is designated by its colonizer, like the other spoils of the Spanish-American War, as an unincorporated territory, implying that it is not a part of the US, but, rather, literally a "possession" claimed by the US military. The island's status is distinct from other subsovereign US political relations, as it means Congress only applies certain sections of the US Constitution to Guam and its people.<sup>9</sup> According to the United Nations, Guam is one of only seventeen "non-self-governing territories" left in the world; "non-self-governing territory" being the UN term for a colony. In 2020, the United Nations is on the brink of its fourth decade of attempting to eradicate the scourge of colonialism from the world. Each year, representatives from Guam travel to New York City or to other United Nations gatherings in order to draw attention to their continuing colonial status. The United States as colonizing power has stated, however, that it considers Guam to be a domestic issue only, with no international dimensions, and has refused to recognize the United Nations categorization of Guam, thereby insisting that Guam is not a colony.<sup>10</sup>

For example, in October 2017, the US representative to the United Nations voted against a resolution to support Guam's self-determination, explicitly complaining that the resolution appeared politically motivated against the US, and protesting the challenges to the military presence, the status quo, and the disenfranchisement of the Indigenous people. The US specifically suggested that Guam abandon the "outdated preference for independence."<sup>11</sup> This devastating response signaled the complete refusal of the colonizer to support its colony's self-determination, which is clearly not in the former's financial interest. Although the US professes to promote democracy and liberty, such rhetoric is empty while it keeps Indigenous peoples in subju-

gation to support the US's imperial war machine. The refusal of the colonizing power to support the resolution was not shared by the majority of the UN nation states, however, with eighty voting in favor and only nine against.

Guam's banality again must be performed within international human rights institutions established to defend the rights of marginalized communities and individuals, such as the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN has a robust human rights infrastructure that spans the globe and is tasked with holding states accountable for human rights violations and preventing atrocities when possible. The Fourth Committee of the UN is the chief body in which political decolonization processes are mediated. The subjugation of the Indigenous peoples of Guam is a matter that falls (or at least should fall) within the purview of both these bodies. However, despite, or perhaps because of, its colonial subjugation to a highly visible and extremely powerful sovereign state, Guam is often overlooked, if mentioned at all.

The 2012 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for instance, makes no mention of Guam, or of Puerto Rico, which is also a longtime colony of the US, and instead focuses explicitly on issues affecting Native American, Alaskan, and Hawaiian communities. Guam's absence from the report is not a matter of ignorance, but rather due to the logistics of size and distance, at least according to Kristen Carpenter, the North American member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>12</sup> Guam is too small, and too far away, for the UN to consider: in a word, too unimportant. For the Indigenous people of Guam, as well as its sister islands in the rest of the Northern Mariana archipelago, this has meant that human rights violations affecting them are rarely discussed as such, if at all, within the preeminent global forum for decolonization and the preservation of human rights.

Throughout the political process of decolonization, Guam has sent multiple delegations to the United Nations General Assembly to discuss at great length the numerous social, economic, and political issues that are rooted in its colonization. Yet, alongside these interests of the UN, there remains the problem of parity, or a lack thereof, in the case of Guam and the sixteen other so-called non-self-governing territories (NSGTs) inhabited by Indigenous peoples. Self-determination, for instance, is the most fundamental right set forth by the UN in its charter, yet peoples in NSGTs categorically lack such a right. UN human rights bodies are not necessarily unaware of Guam, but they do not prioritize it when the nonviolent political resistance of some one hundred eighty thousand residents is compared to more popular issues, such as the overtly violent and illegal settlements of Palestine, the murder of Indigenous peoples in South America to make way for extractive industries, or the teargassing of Indigenous women and children at the US–Mexico border by US officials.

Lastly, on this point at least, as a matter of practical proximity, there are numerous UN field offices near Guam, particularly in the Philippines, Fiji, and Thailand that could take up the plight of the Indigenous people of Guam. However, as noted earlier, matters concerning US possessions are accepted widely within even such a progressive institution as the UN as merely domestic problems that can be resolved solely by

the US. When pressed on whether there could ever be a field office dedicated to the issues of NSGTs, Carpenter stated that it simply was not a priority of the Office of the High Commissioner. Even though the context was a side event on Indigenous peoples' issues in the United States, this idea appeared to seem too banal, perhaps, even for consideration.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the claims of the United States, Guam is a colony, although, as Chamoru scholar and politician Robert Underwood has noted, discussing its colonial status can be difficult, as Guam is a relatively “comfortable colony.”<sup>14</sup> In 1950, the United States Congress passed the Organic Act for Guam, allowing residents there the privilege of limited local self-governance. Guam is considered to be US territory and so people born there are considered to be birthright citizens. As the Obama administration argued in 2014, the rights of people living in Guam, even if they are US citizens, are not secure because of Guam's colonial status.<sup>15</sup> What would ordinarily be rights are instead privileges, as the US Congress has the ultimate say over what aspects of the US Constitution apply to Guam.

The blurring of these political lines creates new strategic possibilities for the United States in terms of the value and flexibility of its military bases in Guam. Guam was settled by the Chamoru people around four thousand years ago and was colonized first by the Spanish in 1668 and later by the US in 1898 as a spoil of the Spanish-American War. The initial intent for the island was that of a coaling station linking the US to Asia via military and economic interests across the Pacific. It was a battleground during the Pacific theater of World War II, lost to the Japanese in December 1941 and retaken by the United States in July 1944. Once retaken, Guam became a key site for launching US attacks directly at Japan.

At present, twenty-nine percent of Guam's two hundred and twelve square miles are occupied by US Air Force and Navy bases. Guam is considered a key US military strategic base because of its location on the edge of Asia, within close flying distance of multiple Asian capitals. Its location helps military planners overcome the “tyranny of distance” that plagues their bases within the US proper.<sup>16</sup>

Current US military plans for Guam involve large-scale military increases and the transfer of thousands of US Marines from Okinawa to the island. These proposals—which could overwhelm Guam's infrastructure, create economic hardship, and cause serious cultural and environmental damage—have been met with resistance from the local community and political leaders. At present, the US intends to transfer over forty-five hundred US Marines to Guam by 2025. Construction of barracks and training facilities such as firing ranges have been at the center of local frustration, as they often threaten Indigenous Chamoru archaeological and cultural sites.

Guam's value is not solely in terms of its location; its political status as a territory also provides important, but far less mentioned, strategic value. Guam is not a foreign nation, and, therefore, does not have the ability to limit the activities of the US military in its borders. As a mere territory and not a state, it also lacks political power within the US system. In other words, the US military can exploit the environment on Guam

in ways it might not be able to do elsewhere, for those who call it home have no say in what the military may or may not do.

Guam's relationship to this powerlessness or lack of self-determination with regard to militarization that takes place within its borders can be, to put it mildly, curious. Guam has no formal role in decisions about troops to be stationed inside its borders, weapons to be stored there, or training to be conducted in or around Guam. The value of Guam is precisely that the island's people have no formal control over the use of the island for military purposes.

This point was exemplified in Ronald Stade's dissertation, *Pacific Passages*. In 1993, at a time of significant civil protest on Guam around the US military presence, he conducted an interview with a Captain Douglas from the US Air Force, who, using highly gendered discourse, articulated the value of controlling and dominating an island like Guam as a colony. The explicit coupling of "people on Guam" and "possession" evokes the context of slavery:

People on Guam seem to forget that they are a possession, and not an equal partner .... If California says that they want to do this, it is like my wife saying that she wants to move here or there: I'll have to respect her wish and at least discuss it with her. If Guam says they want to do this or that, it is as if this cup here [he pointed at his coffee mug] expresses a wish: the answer will be, you belong to me and I can do with you as best I please.<sup>17</sup>

### **FĀTFĀT – The Secret Guam Secret**

The flyer that Famoksaian produced to publicize its session at the US Social Forum implored people to attend in order to "learn about one of the United States' well-kept secrets." The flyer and the proposal for the Famoksaian panel implied that Guam is generally secret, invisible to the world and to the United States. However, the panel's target audience was not America or the world in general, but, more specifically, social justice activists gathered at the US Social Forum. Like most sessions, the panel aimed to reach out to the audience, to inform them about something of which they had little or no knowledge but should know about and act upon. Yet, as already mentioned, Guam is hardly a secret; the United States does not refuse to admit to "owning" or militarizing Guam. Guam may be geographically distant from the United States, but that in no way implies that it is a secret base or some disavowed territory. The United States has no qualms about claiming Guam, and, given the plethora of statements from military commanders and planners, it is no secret that Guam is a key US military base.

The secret that the flyer refers to, then, is a bit more complex. As Martha Duenas, another member of Famoksaian, noted about the rationale for using the metaphor of a "secret," "[o]ur enemy isn't ignorance; it's that people just don't care. It's not that they don't know, they don't care even when they do know." The articulation



of Guam as a secret at the US Social Forum, amongst thousands of already engaged, already conscious activists, exceeds the idea that Guam is a place that has been kept secret from them and moves instead into the idea that Guam and its status may be something that they help to keep from themselves. This notion of a secret hints at the productivity of banality as a concept.

One could argue that the lack of interest at the US Social Forum in the issue of Guam is due in part to the fact that the Left has historically lacked a counterhegemonic foreign policy. Rather, global US military operations are born of “bipartisan cold war ideology that has shaped American elite thinking since the 1940s, organized around the idea that the US rightly enjoys military and economic primacy because its interests are the world’s interests,” according to Aziz Rana.<sup>18</sup> Such an argument appears to be reasonable and rational in explaining Guam’s liminal status. However, even in reviews of these very ideas, one can find examples of a curious banality. Take, for instance, a review of Rana’s book *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, by a progressive writer for the website *Politico*. In David Greenberg’s attempt to argue that American foreign policy, and, by extension, its colonial holdings, are far from imperial, he ends up invoking Guam: “[M]ost of the world envies the unprecedented freedoms enjoyed by Americans, even those in Guam, Puerto Rico or other parts of the ‘empire.’”<sup>19</sup>

It is here that there may be some overlap with the most famous theoretical study of banality, that of Hannah Arendt and her thesis on the banality of evil. By definition, banality means lacking in originality or novelty. Banality is ascribed to things that are considered commonplace or lacking new and interesting qualities. Arendt built on this notion in her observation of the trial of a former high-level Nazi official, Adolf Eichmann. She was perplexed by his bland, ordinary character that seemed to contrast with the inhuman crimes of which he was accused. In Arendt’s words, Eichmann was “terrifyingly normal,” and, though the outcome of his actions was evil, he himself could not have been described as such, because of his disassociation from the consequences of his actions.<sup>20</sup> We use the idea of banality in order to contrast it with the idea of there simply being nothing there. We argue that there may be something quite potent, which yet appears as nothing.

Banality elides certain subjects from the critical conversation. With banality in effect, even a subject which may be essential to a conversation can be made to appear insignificant or unimportant. This emptiness, however, should not be interpreted as a lack of value or a lack of power. In truth, as we will discuss in the next section, rhetorical emptiness and banality surrounds Guam, providing a great deal of value for the United States, and, in particular, its military.

### **LIMA – Guam is a Hell of a Drug**

The framework of banality can help us capture the strange, sometimes obscene way that Guam is represented in relation to the United States and how the US military openly benefits. Pop culture representations in the United States often use Guam as a

punchline for jokes, portraying it as an island for exiled gay people, a sybaritic paradise, or an overseas military base. In media terms, the island is referred to in a litany of demeaning ways, such as “backwater colony,” “dot on the map,” “Trailer Park of the Pacific,” and “Sleepy Hollow (of the Pacific).”<sup>21</sup> By virtue of its ambiguous political status, Guam can be considered part of the United States one moment and foreign the next. The phrase “foreign in a domestic sense,” a determination made by the US Supreme Court in the 1901 case *Downes v. Bidwell*, is often used to explain this exceptional position for Guam as well as the other colonies of the United States, including Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.<sup>22</sup> The island often refers to itself as the site “where America’s day begins,” despite the fact that much of the United States does not know that Guam is part of America. Both “foreign” and “domestic,” Guam functions simultaneously as the Other, in a racist conceptualization of the Indigenous Chamoru people as profoundly inferior, and as an object of possession and dominance, a colonial territory won through and dedicated to the pursuit of war, and a resource to be exploited. Guam continues in many ways to be represented in this paradoxical manner in discourse both international and local: it is both Othered and owned, both inferior and important. This is a common colonial strategic representation which may be seen throughout history.

Interestingly enough, this dense cloud of ambiguity over Guam in political and cultural terms dissipates completely when it is considered in terms of its military value to the United States. Guam is clearly one of the most important US bases in the Asia-Pacific region and has been referred to as “Fortress Guam,” “America’s unsinkable aircraft carrier,” and, even more ominously in light of Indigenous sovereignty, “America’s permanent aircraft carrier.”<sup>23</sup>

The paradox of a place like Guam, as a site that is in one instance racially inferior and too small to matter, but also in the same manner highly valuable for the promotion of the US imperial military complex, is expressed in the many references, or “Guam mentions,” scattered throughout US political rhetoric, to an island that may “tip over,” an “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” the place “where America’s day begins,” and many more such propagandistic slogans invented to simultaneously highlight and erase Guam’s importance. The countenance, rhetoric, and desires of George W. Bush’s secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, played a crucial role in providing the narrative frame for the 2004 *New York Times* article.<sup>24</sup> Rumsfeld’s views transformed Guam from the “trailer park of the Pacific” into a “power projection hub.”<sup>25</sup> According to an American diplomat in Japan, “Rumsfeld keeps saying, ‘What about Guam? Let’s build up Guam,’” and, according to a local businessman on Guam, “Rumsfeld is high on Guam; he was heard asking, ‘How are we going to do Guam?’”<sup>26</sup> This voice is not one marked by cold, calculated, rational planning, but, rather, infused with excitement.

We use banality in order to comprehend this dynamic, where a site so crucial to American interests, which is spoken of with such strategically important affection and interest, can somehow also be a place which the Pentagon not only forgot existed, but even forgot it already owned. The US can afford to forget about Guam’s existence

since there was no potential challenge to its use, even for exceptional purposes. In fact, it is precisely this horridly asymmetrical relationship of emptiness and powerlessness on one side of the equation, with full, invigorated, sovereign excitement on the other that defines banality. Scanning the article's representations of Guam, it becomes brutally evident that Guam has nothing, save for that which is derived from the military planners, admirals, and diplomats, to infuse into, transfer to, or build on it. What we see here is the colonial difference: Guam's exceptional status, and the general lack of knowledge about it, all operate as a barrier of false innocence, through which interventions into Guam are cleansed of any prior stain, so that the island may be (re)discovered in militaristic excitement and enjoyment.<sup>27</sup> This dynamic alluded to in the article "Ideologies of Land and Sea: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Carl Schmitt, and the Shaping of Global Myth Elements" created the situation where the rhetorical dreams and wishes of military men for distant island outposts carry the weight of enacting policy, of dictating reality. The title of the article reifies that doctrine of sovereign discovery, by naturalizing the ability of the United States and its military to determine Guam, to act as if there is no preexisting binding link that defines, or guides, their gaze or intervention, no existing relationship that could restrict or inhibit the enjoyment of this space. It is, after all, as Slavoj Žižek notes, within the holes, the blind spots of the symbolic network, where there seems to be an emptiness in signification, that the subject is allowed enjoyment.<sup>28</sup> The key here is that the banality of Guam enabled Rumsfeld, the United States military, and the United States in general to appear to produce something, or claim to do so, to discover something, to take control and possess something which in fact already existed and which they already owned, indeed for over a century at the time. Banality recognizes that Guam is already present and that gestures directed towards it take place to make it mean nothing, to make it appear as nothing.

### **GUNOM – The Rumsfeld Doctrine**

The political philosophical musings of Rumsfeld's doctrine of power can help us further understand not just Guam's strategic value to the United States, but how political banality increases the island's value as a military asset. The US currently controls approximately one thousand military facilities around the world, constituting what the late historian Chalmers Johnson referred to as a "sea of American bases."<sup>29</sup> As they can be found in almost every corner of the Earth, these military facilities are not uniform in terms of their force projection, size, diplomatic entanglements, or history. Taking a page from the philosophical musings of Rumsfeld himself, it is important to consider, when interrogating this sea of bases, the ways in which they are known or unknown. This is of particular importance in the period following September 11, 2001, because of the emergence of what is known as the Rumsfeld Doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

Rumsfeld's revolution of military affairs extended to many aspects, such as the upgrading of military technology, privatization, and the development of the next gen-

eration of nuclear weapons. In terms of colonial banality, he emphasized a movement away from large, “fat,” existing overseas US bases, toward, instead, a new generation of smaller, less visible overseas bases. These bases would be relatively cheaper and easier to maintain and would be located strategically, so that the United States could strike quickly and easily anywhere around the globe.<sup>31</sup> In short, Rumsfeld’s dream was that the United States could bomb and destroy any locale in the world within two hours of mobilization.<sup>32</sup> Rumsfeld was neither the first nor the last person to articulate this gospel; however, the exceptional power he held in the George W. Bush administration makes him essential in understanding the impact of the strategic shift he brought about in the use of overseas bases.

The import of the Rumsfeld Doctrine is evident in a 2006 *Foreign Policy* article that lists the six most important United States military bases in the world: Camp Anaconda in Iraq, Bezmer Air Base in Bulgaria, Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, Guantánamo Bay, the isle of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and, lastly, Guam.<sup>33</sup> Camp Anaconda is the base most widely associated with the Rumsfeld Doctrine, due to its being born from the shock-and-awe invasion of Iraq in 2003. The need to establish new American bases in the Middle East was part of a shifting vision in the United States to anticipate potential threats from Asia, and so Iraq and Afghanistan were ripe for both “regime change” and “permanent bases.”<sup>34</sup> In the case of Bezmer and Manas, the Rumsfeld Doctrine achieved a greater sense of consistency through the creation of a leaner, meaner, more high-tech, and, crucially, less visible military. These bases encompass, first, “forward operating sites,” which have all the weaponry and technology of a base, including missiles, airstrips, telecommunications equipment, and support staff, but do not have a large personnel presence; and, second, “cooperative security locations,” which are “bare bones” facilities that US military personnel will use only in case of emergencies, and will at all other times be operated by local contractors in the host country.<sup>35</sup> These sites are designed to elide the older rules of military engagement to, instead, project a force that metaphorically duplicates the thrust of a missile: quick, surgical, and loaded with shock and awe. According to the Pentagon, these new bases are not to be referred to as such: They merely make up a new network of invisible sites at locations throughout the world, the names of which Americans cannot even pronounce, and which, indeed, most Americans never hear of, until a so-called preemptive strike is launched from one of them.

Beyond these smaller and lesser-known bases, there are others that are politically ambiguous, somewhat invisible, and banal, and such bases therefore haunt, in various ways, the prevailing global progressive and conservative frameworks. These sites are not necessarily small, and not necessarily unknown, but rather exist in such a way that they escape the imagination of the world; their smallness or invisibility becomes the pragmatic excuse for their exceptionalism. Sites such as Guam, Diego Garcia, and, despite its notoriety, even Guantánamo Bay, which are today military colonies of the United States, tend to fall off of any map of the family of global sovereign nations.<sup>36</sup> Other than their geographic locations, it is precisely this ambiguity and this

banality that is so valuable to the United States military in terms of its ability to project power and authority in an increasingly interlocked and globalized world. These sites are ambiguous political postmodern holes in the formal rules, which therefore fall outside the accepted reality in the eyes of those looking to end war or to stop United States imperialism and colonialism.

In short, a critique of the sort we are offering here is necessary because the invisibility and banality of US overseas military bases is something that the Department of Defense has explicitly begun to take into account when planning for the realignment and redistribution of forces. The intent is to hide the extent of America's incursion into the rest of the world and to keep as intangible as possible these forms of military colonialism.

### **FITI – Implicating Empires**

Reorganizing banality as a theoretical framework is key in terms of understanding how these shifts of American power can go uncontested and unchallenged. In order to better illustrate the productivity of banality as a framework, it is crucial to examine rhetoric surrounding the discussion of Guam within conversations about or representations of the United States. The banality of Guam and its status is best apparent, and paradoxically also least apparent, in conversations where there is a clear and manifest connection between Guam and ideas of American colonialism, imperialism, and militarism.

In a general sense, given the pragmatics of size, Guam's distance from the US and its smallness can always be used to dismiss or explain away Guam's invisibility or the fact that Guam may not be considered relevant to larger discussions about the United States as its existence today.<sup>37</sup> Debates on American imperialism and militarism always mention Guam, but always in a peculiar manner, as if it carries little potential meaning beyond a brief reference. Here, again, is the power of a veneer of banality, a veneer where something that could and indeed should be considered very substantive nonetheless can be taken as unimportant or irrelevant simply as a matter of course. We introduced this essay with an anecdote making this point, but it can also be seen through a variety of scholarly and mainstream texts that attempt to illuminate or grapple with questions of the nature of America's contemporary or historical empire.

A case in point is Chalmers Johnson's *The Sorrows of Empire*.<sup>38</sup> In his text, a treatise on the birth, development, and maintenance of the growing network of American military colonialism, we do find Guam mentioned three times, yet never in any substantive way, and rather as emptied of all its potential content. What this means is not that the island was written out of the book, but that Guam was written around, casually and briefly mentioned to acknowledge its existence, without any meaningful reference to its importance.

Despite the fact that Guam plays a significant role in securing and balancing American military interests in the East Asian region, which Johnson spends much of the book discussing, and in which field he was a noted expert, Johnson never mentions

Guam in the East Asian military context.<sup>39</sup> The three mentions of Guam all relate directly to it being one of the territories captured by the United States in 1898, following the Spanish-American War. In each of these instances, Guam is only mentioned in passing; never is any specific historical or contemporary descriptive information or force attributed to Guam, and, instead, it is merely casually listed alongside other, physically larger sites of American imperial acquisition in the tropics: Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. For Johnson, it is through the historical and contemporary struggles of these larger nations and peoples that concepts such as American colonialism, imperialism, and militarism can be illustrated.

This sort of treatment is not unique to Johnson's work, but common in these relatively progressive texts on American imperialism. We find a similar example in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.<sup>40</sup> Zinn's text is considered one of the key canonical texts to present a progressive interpretation and builds a critical consciousness of American history and its interventions around the world. Here, too, Guam is mentioned several times, but each mention, as in Johnson's text, is as empty and banal as the next. Guam is invoked primarily alongside Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines; once again, as a site for the building of American imperial consciousness and empire, but nothing more. Each of the other locales is ascribed a localized and specific history, chock-full of American racist and imperialist interventions, but no such specific attention is extended to Guam.

This is the most common sort of banal citation of Guam with reference to its historical relationship to the United States. Even contemporary mentions of Guam as a current colony of the United States can take on the same curiously empty character. A case in point is the anthology *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order*, which brings together the voices of activists and academics to chronicle past and current struggles against globalization and make recommendations for future struggles.<sup>41</sup> In this text, Guam is introduced in the book's first chapter, in a list that frames Guam as a perfunctory or given part of the US empire, something to be named initially, if only to be moved past, so that our attention can be shifted to more interesting or lurid imperial sites or activities. In attempting to situate the United States as an imperial power and also explain why the public of the United States has so effectively resisted seeing itself as imperial, the editors write: "The reason was fairly plain: Despite the dependent status of Puerto Rico, Guam, and a scattering of islands, colonization was never the American imperial style."<sup>42</sup> This statement makes Guam seem like an ordinary, easy part of empire or the imperial equation. That the banality of Guam, its exceptionalism, is here referred to not through colonialism, but rather through its so-called "dependent status" helps to animate a more important and critical analysis.

What we can glean from this is that Guam is far from absent in these texts, though it always seems to appear in a generic, empty way. Guam is so banal in its position that it is never too small to mention, but always too small to mean anything. Guam's inclusion or visibility in critical American studies or liberal texts is predicated on

the assumption that it must be relegated to a minute link in a chain of equivalencies.<sup>43</sup> There is no single chain that has a monopoly on mentioning Guam, but most of them can be tied in some way to American violence. Guam is one of the territories seized in 1898; or a site occupied, attacked, abandoned, and later invaded again and reoccupied during the course of World War II; or it is one of America's military bases today; or one of America's official colonies; or one of its unincorporated territories. When Guam is brought into these rhetorical chains, it becomes a link to some possible malfeasance or injustice but is rarely presented as having an essence or existence of its own.

This is the curious paradox of Guam, a site constituted through a very stark package of American colonialism, imperialism, and militarism, yet which, apparently, cannot signify any of those violences. Theorizing Guam using the notion of banality, this emptiness becomes very potent. There is, in fact, great power in the near-erasure of a major military base such as Guam in a world-ranging empire, the power to make an uncommonly significant place appear empty or null.

### **SIGUA – Guam! Island of Colonial Laundering**

A site of American colonialism, militarism, and imperialism becomes emptied of the possibility of signification. Thus, banality, a term laden with notions of vagueness, liminality, and uncertainty, is apt for understanding this curious phenomenon whereby a key point in the constitution of American empire becomes a mere dot on a map, a mere node: one link in a long chain, and nothing more.

An anecdote from one of the stronger voices of American progressive thought of his time, Gore Vidal, explicates some of the stakes involved in understanding banality. During a 2004 interview for his book *Imperial America* on the progressive radio show *Democracy Now!* Vidal, in recounting his career as novelist, playwright, and critic of self-serving American adventures in other people's backyards, made a reference to Guam:

I remember years ago, *Time* magazine, in one of its numerous attacks on me, on my first book of essays, which was heaven knows when, thirty, forty years ago, I refer to the American empire and things that we were doing that were not very good across the world, and I referred to the empire. And *Time* magazine dismissed me. It was an awful review. "He's the sort of person that says that the United States has an empire. Well, we've got Guam, that's true. That's all we have got." I pointed out that we had troops and so on in over a thousand other places around the world. That seems imperial to me, but there we are.<sup>44</sup>

The *Time* reviewer attempted to diffuse Vidal's assertion of American empire by asserting its existence in a particular way, through the use of an example that has the uncanny ability to simultaneously take the meaning or vitality out of the very object it proves to exist. Guam is the peculiar exception that lies at the banal edge of American benev-

olence and international morality that straddles the boundaries of empire but does not, cannot, embody the violence and exploitation that might lie beyond one exceptional outpost, in the realm of empire proper. Guam is a site which is invoked to stop the critical eye from wandering into American machinations around the world; it provides a point where the construction of America as an imperial power is consistent and true, but also emanates as nothing, empty and meaningless.

Vidal rejects the reviewer's attempted deactivation of his effort to write of the extent of US imperialism. He refuses the particular banal conception of Guam as a singularity or imperial limit of the United States, making clear that the US military cephalopod stretches its manifold tentacles to grasp "over a thousand other places around the world." The curious aspect here is the way that Vidal makes a gesture similar to that of his reviewer. For Vidal as well, Guam, while still included in a larger chain of equivalencies which measure and attest to the breadth and scope of American empire and military networks, apparently cannot embody this notion on its own. Guam must first be emptied or erased of any particular historical or actual significance and placed alongside a thousand other points of Conradian darkness, in order for it to count. On its own, despite its unusual colonial status and military importance, it is insufficient or unable to represent US imperialism. This is the ultimate point of all the different texts cited in the past two sections—what power accrues to the United States in having a colony which no one considers to be a colony?

US colonialism, militarism, and imperialism all pass over and through Guam and do not emerge as smelling dubious or inequitable, but rather fresh and welcoming, or, much more commonly, like nothing at all. This is banality at its best. Where there is actually an abundance of power at play, there appears to be nothing to be upset about, nothing to critique, nothing to inquire further into, nothing to see here.

Such political banality allows a type of ideological laundering to take place. Crimes against humanity and violations of human rights that critical conversations might normally assume to be against alleged principles of the United States can nonetheless be reported and invoked without apparent concern within the sphere of banality surrounding Guam. In June 2006, for instance, the United States Air Force and Navy held "Operation Valiant Shield" off the coast of Guam. Referred to as a "massive armada" by press in the United States, this exercise, designed to encourage cooperation between branches of the United States military and elicit more transparency from China, consisted of more than twenty-two thousand personnel, three hundred flying vessels, and twenty-eight ships.<sup>45</sup> Most media reports covering this event mentioned Guam simply as the site where this gargantuan operation was taking place, referring to it as an "American territory" or "American island."<sup>46</sup> In particular, an MSNBC article covering this exercise referred to Guam in an incredibly curious, tragic, yet productive way, calling Guam simply a "U.S.-owned island."<sup>47</sup> All of the labels which currently capture or hold Guam emphasize in different ways the island's existence as a footnote, shade or partial refraction of the United States. This is so whether the intent is legal, political, patriotic, strategic, or multicultural: Guam, USA; Guam: Where America's Day



Begins; Guam: America in Asia; protectorate; possession; dependency. Even though typical news references to Guam might lightly or subtly evoke imperialistic fantasies of empty land, terrain to be defended, or real estate to be bought and sold, the writers make no attempt to occlude such possible connections, for Guam, quite simply and clearly stated, is US-owned.

We have reached an intriguing point of purity here. One of the largest peacetime military exercises in the history of the world takes place around one of the world's last remaining formal colonies, yet produces little more than a mention of the colony itself, namely, solely that it belongs to the power under which it is being so militarized. The colonial relationship, the network of legal cases and symbolic talking points that most crucially make possible the construction of empty land and ownership, is transformed and replaced with the force and commonsense weight of rights and authority. The forms of violence, power, and unpleasant *-isms*, historical or current, are transformed into waves of natural effects. What appears to remain, if noticed at all, is a pure point of force or right.

The first Valiant Shield exercise was such a success that the US military turned it into a biannual activity, which sometimes includes the participation of foreign countries who bring their ships and troops into Guam.<sup>48</sup> This training takes place without any consultation with, much less permission of, the local government in Guam. Guam and the islands around it in the Marianas and the rest of Micronesia make up the largest training and testing area in the world, almost a million square miles.<sup>49</sup> Guam, a hundred-and-twenty-year-old colony of the United States, sits at the center of the largest military “playground” in the world.

### **MANO'FULU – First Guam, then Diego Garcia, then the World ...**

The intersections of Guam's political status, military importance, historical context, and geographical distance all combine to create this curious emptiness. This emptiness produces not just ownership, but an ownership that persists almost beneath its mentioning. It is a type of ownership that, through its lack of signification and lack of meaning, ends up producing a potent site, a source of stability and security. The emptiness of Guam is an assurance of America's sovereignty, an assurance that no other force will interfere with or contest it. Banal Guam is, returning to Rumsfeld's buzzword, a site which you own and you use, even if you do not know you own it.

Banal Guam is a site of numerous violent contradictions that apparently signifies none or very few of the images and issues it actually does. Banal Guam is boldly and unabashedly used to increase the power of the United States, to secure its interests across half of the globe, with no apparent side effects.<sup>50</sup> If Guam is a ghost here, it is a ghost which does not appear to haunt anyone or any place. The banality of Guam and its relationship to American power is best expressed through a passage from the 2009 book *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the US Military Base at Diego Garcia* by anthropologist David Vine.

Vine discusses the violent history of ethnic cleansing by and conspiracy between British and American governments in order to create an almost completely secret military base in the Indian Ocean. Guam is mentioned in his book several times, most significantly in the following passage:

“[Diego Garcia is] the single most important military facility we’ve got,” respected Washington-area military expert John Pike told me. Pike, who runs the website [GlobalSecurity.org](http://GlobalSecurity.org), explained, “It’s the base from which we control half of Africa and the southern side of Asia, the southern side of Eurasia.” It’s “the facility that at the end of the day gives us some say-so in the Persian Gulf region. If it didn’t exist, it would have to be invented.” The base is critical to controlling not just the oil-rich Gulf but the world, said Pike: “Even if the entire Eastern Hemisphere has drop-kicked us” from every other base on their territory, he explained, the military’s goal is to be able “to run the planet from Guam and Diego Garcia by 2015.”<sup>51</sup>

The words of this military analyst bear powerful weight in terms of understanding the stakes of challenging political banality. It is easy to assume that the value that Pike is ascribing to Guam and Diego Garcia is their location, as one sits well-positioned between Africa and Asia in the Indian Ocean, the other on the edge of Asia in the Western Pacific. Location, however, is not the value he invokes. Many other similar islands are near the Marianas in Micronesia and the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. What makes these sites so powerful is their uncontested political status as US colonial possessions. Even the names are colonized and Westernized, the Indigenous peoples erased, down to their own words for themselves: Diego Garcia, instead of Fōlhavahi or Hollhavai; Guam, instead of Guåhan or Tåno’ Chamoru. These colonies are unaffected by the geopolitical games between countries that plague the existing sea of other US bases around the world. Sometimes countries assert their sovereignty or their national agendas against the bases, refusing to renew or sign basing agreements favorable to the US. Sometimes there are popular and community-based movements which protest the bases and pressure the politicians of a nation to take positions against their country’s security agreements with the US, as in Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands, for example.<sup>52</sup> Whether or not anyone in the US knows anything of Guam and Diego Garcia, or, referring to the earlier *New York Times* article, even if people do not remember that the US controls the fates of these islands, Americans can safely assume that these bases will remain arrows in their quivers, tips to their spears. Pike’s comments draw attention to that thick layer of banality that marks these valuable sites as ultimately safe and beyond contestation. Their value lies in their colonial status, not primarily their location.

From this, we can see the broader implications of this essay and the notion of banality and its importance beyond just the situation in Guam. Guam is not alone in

possessing this contradictory or ghostly status, but rather is simply one of many significations of both emptiness and potency. Banal Guam has the ability to mean nothing, and yet, at the same time, to be a site from which, combined with one or two banal exceptions, one nation can perhaps dominate the world. Banality as a concept allows us to perceive that productive relationship between an apparent void of relevance and a large, unchecked cache of power.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Brooke, "Looking for Friendly Overseas Base, Pentagon Finds It Already Has One," *New York Times*, April 7, 2004, A17.

<sup>2</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Each section of this essay is designated with an Ancient Chamoru number: Hacha for first, Hugua for second, Tulu for third, and so on. As part of Guam's colonization, these numbers were replaced with Spanish and later English numbers. Using them again, in a scholarly format such as this, while building together the parts of an argument, is meant to be a small act of decolonization.

<sup>5</sup> The full session description and group information were posted on the United States Social Forum website at <http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/4144>. Link no longer active.

<sup>6</sup> The full session and organization description were posted at <http://www.ussf2007.org/en/node/677>. Link no longer active.

<sup>7</sup> Tiffany Naputi Lacsado, personal communication, May 12, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Stade, *Pacific Passages: World Culture and Local Politics in Guam* (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 1998), 47.

<sup>9</sup> "Definitions of Insular Area Political Organizations," US Department of the Interior, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/politicatypes>.

<sup>10</sup> *Let Freedom Ring: The Chamorro Search for Sovereignty* (1997; Indio, CA: The Cabazon Band of Mission Indians), VHS.

<sup>11</sup> US statement at 72<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations Fourth Committee, October 4, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Kristen Carpenter, personal interview, May 12, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Carpenter, personal interview.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Underwood, "The Status of Having No Status" (speech, Mangilao, Guam, April 26, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Neil Weare, "Citizenship in US Territories: Constitutional Right or Congressional Privilege?" *Centro Journal* 29, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Halloran, "Guam Seen as Pivotal US Base," *The Washington Times*, March 10, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Stade, *Pacific Passages*, 192–94.

<sup>18</sup> Aziz Rana, "The Left's Missing Foreign Policy," *n+1 Magazine*, March 28, 2018, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/the-lefts-missing-foreign-policy>.

<sup>19</sup> David Greenberg, Review of *Two Faces of American Freedom*, *Washington Post*, November 12, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/12/AR2010111203209.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas White, "What did Hannah Arendt Really Mean by the Banality of Evil?" *Aeon*, April 23, 2018, <https://aeon.co/ideas/what-did-hannah-arendt-really-mean-by-the-banality-of-evil>.

<sup>21</sup> See, *inter alia*, Seth Kantor, "Guam: US Showcase? Not with Present Policies," *Guam Tribune*, August 31, 1984; Orville F. Desjarlais Jr., "Sleepy Hollow No More," *Airman*, April 4, 2006; Tom Perry, "Dot on the Map Retains Large Strategic Stature," *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 2002; Patrick Goodenough, "US Has Big Military Plans for Small Pacific Island," *CNSNews.com*, June 11, 2004; Brooke, "Looking for Friendly Overseas Base," A17.

<sup>22</sup> US Supreme Court, *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 US 284. 27 May 1901.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Lujan Bevacqua, *Chamorros, Ghosts and Non-Voting Delegates: GUAM! Where the Production of America's Sovereignty Begins* (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2009); LisaLinda S. Natividad and Victoria-Lola Leon Guerrero, "The Explosive Growth of US Military Power on Guam Confronts People Power: Experience of an Island People Under Spanish, Japanese and American Colonial Rule," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 8, no. 49 (December 6, 2010): <https://apjpf.org/-LisaLinda-Natividad/3454/article.html>; Tiara R. Na'puti and Michael Lujan Bevacqua, "Militarization and Resistance from Guåhan: Protecting and Defending Pågat," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 837–58.

<sup>24</sup> Brooke, "Looking for Friendly Overseas Base," A17.

<sup>25</sup> Julie Dawson, "Small Island, Big Military Presence," *InCharge*, Fall 2004, <https://www.incharge.org/military-money/military-life/guam-andersen-air-force-base-cost-of-living-schools-housing-employment-recreation/>.

<sup>26</sup> Brooke, “Looking for Friendly Overseas Base,” A17.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Connery, “Ideologies of Land and Sea: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Carl Schmitt, and the Shaping of Global Myth Elements,” *boundary 2* 28, no. 2 (2001): 173–201.

<sup>28</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Secrecy, Militarism and the End of the Republic* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Editorial Board, “Digital War: The Rumsfeld Doctrine,” *Business Week Online*, April 7, 2003; Richard Walker, “Rumsfeld Doctrine: Failed Legacy,” *American Free Press*, October 23, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Phar Kim Ben, “The Pentagon’s Paradigm Shift in Asia,” *Asia Times Online*, June 10, 2003, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/EF10Dg01.html>; Esther Schrader, “US to Realign Troops in Asia,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/may/29/world/fg-asiamil29>; “Pentagon to close 35 percent of overseas bases,” *The Associated Press*, September 23, 2004, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4683277>.

<sup>32</sup> Michael T. Klare, “Imperial Reach,” *The Nation*, April 7, 2005, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/imperial-reach/>.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Widome, “The List: The Six Most Important US Military Bases,” *Foreign Policy*, May 13, 2006. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2006/05/13/the-list-the-six-most-important-u-s-military-bases/>.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Engelhardt, “Can you Say Permanent Bases? The American Press Can’t,” *Tomdispatch*, February 14, 2006, [http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/59774/a\\_permanent\\_basis\\_for\\_withdrawal\\_](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/59774/a_permanent_basis_for_withdrawal_).

<sup>35</sup> Klare, “Imperial Reach.”

<sup>36</sup> Andy Worthington, “Guantánamo’s Ghosts and the Shame of Diego Garcia,” *Indymedia*, October 20, 2007, <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/10/384112.html>.

<sup>37</sup> *American Quarterly* and *Amerasia* have special editions that provide critical dialogue around the role of the Pacific in understanding the contours of American empire. See “Pacific Currents,” ed. Paul Lyons and Ty Tegan, *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015); “Transoceanic Flows: Pacific Islander Interventions Across the American Empire,” ed. Keith Camacho, *Amerasia Journal* 37, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*.

- <sup>39</sup> Chalmers Johnson, “Baseless Expenditures,” *Asia Times Online*, July 9, 2009, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/KG09Dfo2.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KG09Dfo2.html).
- <sup>40</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492–Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
- <sup>41</sup> Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney, eds., *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
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- <sup>43</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, Verso, 1989), 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Gore Vidal, interviewed by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!* June 4, 2004, [https://www.democracynow.org/2004/6/4/imperial\\_america\\_gore\\_vidal\\_reflects\\_on](https://www.democracynow.org/2004/6/4/imperial_america_gore_vidal_reflects_on).
- <sup>45</sup> Allison Batdorf, “Massive Armada Taking Part in Carrier Exercise Near Guam,” *Stars and Stripes*, June 21, 2006, <https://www.stripes.com/news/massive-armada-taking-part-in-carrier-exercise-near-guam-1.50626>.
- <sup>46</sup> Valiant Shield 2 took place the following year and was then made into a semi-annual event.
- <sup>47</sup> Derek Levine, “China to Observe Huge US Military Exercises,” *MSNBC*, June 19, 2006, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/13420741/ns/world\\_news-asia\\_pacific/t/china-observe-huge-us-military-exercises/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/13420741/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/china-observe-huge-us-military-exercises/).
- <sup>48</sup> Dana M. Williams, “15,000 troops on Guam, Northern Marianas for Valiant Shield Exercise,” *Pacific Daily News*, 16 September 2018, <https://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2018/09/16/15-000-troops-here-valiant-shield-exercise/1324243002/>.
- <sup>49</sup> See United States Navy, “Mariana Islands Training and Testing Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS),” <https://mitt-eis.com>.
- <sup>50</sup> Denise Da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- <sup>51</sup> David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the US Military Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 10.
- <sup>52</sup> Ayano Ginoza, “R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire: Okinawan Women and Decolonizing Militarized Heterosexuality,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2016): 583–91.

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