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CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ:  
POETRY AS STRATEGY AGAINST MILITARY OCCUPATION IN GUÅHAN (GUAM)  
THESIS

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
The University of Mississippi

by

ROBERT J. BRIGGS

April 2015

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is interested in hearing the voices seldom heard. It looks at the poetry of Craig Santos Perez, a native Chamorro from Guam, in an attempt to begin puzzling out the idea of transformation in Guam and the military's complicity in the process. While erasure seems to be trending and emerging as a term that would, on the surface, adequately bring attention to the loss of culture, land, and language in Guam, it has the tendency to overshadow and ignore the varying degrees that Guam has changed in the presence of military rule. Other forms of transformation include, but are not limited to, silencing, damaging, displacement, oppression, repurposing, appropriation, hybridization, recruitment, and assimilation. All of these, to some degree, are represented in Perez's poetry.

A hybrid project that includes a creative nonfiction introduction and an interview with the poet, this thesis examines the diverse forms of transformation through a close look at Perez's three books of his multi-book project. Perez's poetry creates focus and familiarity for readers. In other words, it emplaces Guam, an unfamiliar militarized "space" for most readers, and creates a personal connection to the vernacular spiritual place of Guam that is Chamorro culture. Also, I will show how focus and familiarity present in Perez's work result in shifted environmental commitments, especially as they relate to the consequences of military occupation. In doing so, I will posit the poetry into the current environmental justice discussion that exists among literary scholars and eco-philosophers like Rob Nixon and Ursula Heise, who have successfully demonstrated the important role the imagination plays in understanding, responding to, and doing something about anthropogenically driven environmental change.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Mom, Dad, Jaime, Meredith, Weldon, Liam and Natalia. You give me the strength and courage to be a better son, husband, father, student, officer, and human. Thank you for your support and encouragement during this process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest and sincere thanks to my advisor, Dr. Ann Fisher-Wirth. Without your enlightening graduate seminar, this project would have never happened. I am grateful that you recognized my interest in this poet and encouraged me to consider pursuing it as a thesis. Your guidance, kindness, and expertise cannot be repaid. I would also like to thank Dr. Jay Watson for holding me to a high standard and helping me work towards achieving the academic tone I lack. Some of the most complex, insightful, and complete thoughts that appear in this thesis are borrowed from your feedback. Dr. Chiyuma Elliott, I cannot express how great it has been to have you on this committee. Since the first time we met in the Hannah-Ford room and every time I met with you in your office, I left our conversations feeling confident, excited, and accomplished. Thank you.

In addition, I would like to thank Craig Santos Perez for giving his time to conduct the interview that I feel greatly contributes to the thesis as a whole.

Also, thank you Dr. Peter Reed for being the voice of Ole Miss that drew me so heavily to the program. Thank you Dr. Steven Justice for setting the bar high in my first graduate seminar. Thank you Dr. Erin Drew for your insight on space and place, which really sparked a new direction for this project. Thank you Beth Ann Fennelly for giving me a chance.

Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow graduate students. You made this experience memorable, enjoyable, and enriching. I am honored to know each of you.

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Craig Santos Perez:  
Poetry as Strategy Against Military Occupation in Guåhan (Guam)

“What we humans disregard, what we fail to know and grasp, is easy to destroy: a mountaintop, a coral reef, a forest, a human community.”

*–Ann Fisher-Wirth*

In 2010, the U.S. Department of the Navy published the Final Environmental Impact Study in response to a proposed plan to move troops from Okinawa, Japan to Guam. It states:

“The proposed actions on Guam would result in significant changes to the natural and built environments. Historically, there have been events—both naturally occurring and the result of man’s actions (anthropogenic)—that have also resulted in significant impacts to the island environment.”

*–Joint Guam Program Office, Department of the Navy, USA*



## Introduction

from LISIENSAN GA'LAGO<sup>1</sup>

“goaam” ~

“goam” ~

“islas de las velas latinas”

(of lateen sails ~

“guan” ~

“guana” ~

“isles de los ladrones”

(of the thieves ~

“Guahån” ~

“guajan” ~

“islas marianas”

(after the spanish queen ~

“bahan” ~

“guhan” ~

“guacan” ~

“isla de san juan” ~

“guaon”

“y guan”

~

“omiya jima” ~ “guam”

“the first province of the great ocean” ~ (hacha 15)<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Craig Santos Perez’s poetry is as experimental as it is complex. Many of his poems must be experienced visually, and they often stretch the boundaries and margins—literally and figuratively—of the page. Because of this, I have had to change text size and shift margins, when necessary, for the poems to fit on the page.

<sup>2</sup> Each Chapter in this thesis project will begin with an excerpt from Perez’s work as an epigraph. The purpose is two-fold: First, it exposes the reader to more of Perez’s poetry that this thesis does not have the capacity to fully consider. Also, I have selected specific poems, sometimes at length, that help develop the history of Guam and the current environmental justice crises Guam faces. These epigraphs will not be analyzed in this thesis, but they play an important role in shaping the reader’s expectations for the chapter that follows.

During my first two tours of duty in Afghanistan, I witnessed and participated in the environmental degradation of Afghanistan's landscape. Although I found myself in Eastern Afghanistan during both deployments, each experience offered me a new perspective from which to assess the military's impact on the environment during warfare. On my first trip, I was a helicopter pilot, which offered me the unique opportunity to visit multiple locations in my Area of Responsibility where I observed several instances of negligent and ignorant use of the resources and land. On my second trip, I flew airplanes out of, and back into, a single location, but the distance I could travel and the height at which I flew allowed me to reflect on the expansive system of systems—the intertwining air, ground, and naval supply routes, as well as the international coalition efforts that spanned across the nation—that the military required for the successful occupation of Afghanistan's rugged terrain.

On my first deployment, after a machinegun was accidentally removed from the back of my helicopter on a night resupply mission at forward operating base Bostick (the Afghan name was Naray, but U.S. forces changed the name to honor a U.S. soldier named Bostick who died in combat), my commander, co-pilot, and I returned the following morning to search for the missing weapon. After locating the machinegun in a local unit's armory, we waited for a Blackhawk helicopter ride back to our home of Jalalabad Airfield (renamed FOB Fenty after Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Fenty who died in a helicopter crash near Asadabad), eighty-five miles south of Bostick along the Pakistan border. We called it JBAD. With almost four hours to wait, we explored the small base that we had only ever seen before under the green tinge of night vision goggles.

Walking out of the latrine—the first I'd seen in Afghanistan with porcelain toilet seats—I began to notice the surrounding terrain. It was beautiful, with bright-green terraced

mountainsides, towering peaks, and a ferocious river that served as the eastern boundary of Bostick. I found myself captivated by the scenic view. As I pulled out my phone to take a picture,<sup>3</sup> a passing soldier offered a warning: “Careful, Sir, snipers like to hang out in the cornfields across the river and take pop-shots into the base.<sup>4</sup> The corn is only a couple feet high right now, so you are probably safe, but I wouldn’t hang out here too long.”

Offering my thanks, I was stealing one last glance at the contrast between the river and the terraced cornfields when I noticed something pouring out of a pipe protruding from the building I had recently exited. It took me a little longer than it should have to realize what I was witnessing (maybe because I had not slept since before last night’s mission), but once I figured it out, I was in disbelief. Who could dump human waste into a river that serves as the Kunar Valley inhabitants’ main source of drinking and irrigation water? Clearly, I had to be mistaken, so grabbing my commander as he walked out of the latrine, I asked him what he thought was pouring out of the pipe.

“Looks like poop-water,” he said.

A few months later, the U.S. military’s reliance on bottled water during wartime operations revealed another unexpected consequence the military’s presence had on Afghanistan’s environment. Without access to clean water, the U.S. military would ship in bottled water from neighboring countries to every major airfield throughout Afghanistan. We, as Chinook helicopter crews, would then distribute this water on pallets to the remote regions of occupied space. To save money, the Department of Defense promoted contracts to build water bottling plants near the major U.S. bases. One such plant, built in 2007, is a state-of-the-art

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for the picture.

<sup>4</sup> In her book, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*, Frances FitzGerald refers to “the politics of the earth” in her study of Vietnam where she asserts that Guerilla warfare and other forms of insurgency often incorporate the environment into strategy and tactics (142-5).

water bottling plant near Bagram Airfield. U.S. Army Colonel Larry D. Wyche, commander of the Joint Logistics Command, spoke about the project in this way: “The plant demonstrates the will of the Afghan people to *improve* their country” (NATO, emphasis mine). This statement serves as one example that demonstrates how first-world expectations about clean water can impact occupied nations, especially when locals begin to question why they should not also rely on bottled water.

I became aware of Afghan forces’ reliance on bottled water when several unique developments in the war required our company to resupply an Afghan outpost for the first time in over nine years of occupation. After the Taliban took a female humanitarian aid worker hostage in 2009, the threat in the area required an aerial resupply to an outpost where the traditional resupply method had been to ferry mules up and down the mountainside to the nearest U.S. base. Our mission was to sling-load a pallet of bottled water and a pallet of food to the top of the small mountain, which in itself was an incredibly simple mission. Knowing the damage that the wind from a Chinook can create, however, we asked the ground forces to call the outpost and ensure that the forces on the peak picked up all loose material from the landing zone. After receiving the “all-clear” from the outpost, I took the controls, hooked up to the slings, and began our climb to the peak. Cresting the mountaintop, I was not surprised to find the landing zone beleaguered with plywood and trash. As the wind vortices from our rotor tips began to disturb the earth beneath us, nine years’ worth of empty water bottles, discarded on the leeward side of the mountain, began to rise like a tsunami in front of our helicopter. Quickly taking the controls from me, the Pilot-in Command, Tom Petty, aggressively banked the helicopter away from the cloud of water bottles back down the side of the mountain.

After some terse radio calls and a refusal to resupply the outpost until the landing zone was clear, we left the supplies and departed for another mission to give the Afghans time to clean up. Upon our return, about an hour later, the air controller told us that the landing zone was clear but there was nothing they could do about the water bottles. "I've got an idea," Tom said, and we spiraled up in place until we reached an altitude where we could approach the landing zone from directly above.

Tom centered the helicopter over a hundred feet above the landing zone and began to slowly descend. Once the water bottles began to rattle and lift in place, Tom kicked the nose of the helicopter up to direct the wind and the empty water bottles down the mountainside. After several attempts using this method, we were closer to the landing zone, and Tom felt that the water bottles were far enough away to attempt the drop-off. Unable to see down the side of the mountain, Tom asked me to watch the water bottles; if they started to lift up again, then we would abort and try again. My focus was solely upon the empty water bottles; thus I did not see the piece of plywood that began to rattle just off the side of the landing zone, and before our crewmembers could say anything over the intercom system, the large piece of wood took flight and shot across the outpost like a Frisbee, striking a young Afghan soldier in the head, rendering him unconscious. We quickly dropped the supplies on the peak, reported the incident to the U.S. base nearby, and continued on to our next mission.

That was the last time we resupplied this particular outpost. To this day, I do not know if those water bottles were ever removed from the landscape. Several hours later, when our missions were complete and we were on our way home to JBAD, the air controller at that outpost called us on the radio to tell us that the Afghan soldier struck by the plywood was fine. He had a large gash on his forehead, but he was awake and responding well.

In 2012, I deployed to Bagram, Afghanistan, as a fixed-wing (airplane) pilot. Bagram airfield sits in the center of towering mountains on all sides, with mountaintops reaching over 19,000 feet equidistant to the north, east, and west. The mountains to the south are not quite so tall and there is a pass that leads straight to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The pilots who frequent Bagram affectionately refer to it as the “Bagram Bowl,” and because of the surrounding terrain, the atmospheric conditions are unique. For example, if a low-pressure weather system moves into Afghanistan and clouds settle into the valleys of the country, air travel becomes quite difficult. Days after the weather system has left the rest of the country, Bagram is still socked in because there are very few outlets for the clouds to disperse.

The Bowl’s atmospheric conditions have the same effect on the pollutants that originate from the airfield itself. The most common method to dispose of trash and human waste (if there is not a river conveniently located nearby) is to have massive burn pits where soldiers and locals constantly burn material that would otherwise pile up in place. Because of this, the air quality at Bagram rivals that of the most polluted cities in America. On a clear day, Bagram’s bubble of air pollution can be seen from miles out.

My experiences in Afghanistan revealed a need for the U.S. military to direct focus towards the immediate and long-lasting effects that its temporary presence creates when turning place into space. For example, to the U.S. military, the forward operating bases, airfields, and combat outposts constructed in the valleys of Afghanistan, it would seem, are simply *space* that the military holds on a temporary basis as a means to an end. However, in places that the military occupies more permanently, Guam for example, the local place is converted (often violently) into an Americanized place.

...

Several theorists help us to understand what I observed in Afghanistan. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan and ecoterrorists Ursula Heise and Rob Nixon have been significant to the development of ideas in this project in the ways they posit discussions on how we understand the differences between space and place.<sup>5</sup> Spaces are delineated “and defended against” whereas “Places,” as Yi-Fu Tuan asserts, in his seminal text *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, “are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied” (4). For the natives and indigenous people, these occupied areas are *place*—with history, particularity, deep culture—where alterations cause irreparable damage to the landscape and the culture. In short, the military considers its relationship with the land as a temporary use of a space. This idea differs from Tuan’s assertion that “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). While Tuan accurately identifies the human desire to turn space into place, he fails to consider the difference when a military force occupies a place for an indeterminate length of time. For military men, women, and their families who want their new assignment to feel like home, Tuan’s assertion may seem accurate. For the natives, however, the opposite is true, as the invasive military members at every level implement changes to transform their new environment into something familiar to the military or American culture—into place.

Wendell Berry argues that “mindless destructiveness” is a byproduct of unfamiliarity with one’s place and that “without a complex knowledge of one’s place, and without the faithfulness to one’s place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed” (68-69). In this way, the push to modernize and gain control allows for powerful militaries to take *places*, thick with particularity and rich in

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<sup>5</sup> Wendell Berry and Lawrence Buell, whose influential discussions on place cannot be ignored, have also significantly shaped this project. However, while Berry and Buell’s work is necessary and helpful, this project relies more heavily on Heise and Nixon’s work as they relate to my analysis of Guam and Craig Santos Perez’s work.

culture, and turn them into *spaces*—or extensions of the occupiers’ place—that displace natives. By this, I mean that when occupiers inhabit a new place they attempt to impress their own cultural hallmarks onto unfamiliar landscapes to make them appear more place-like. In doing so, the reverse process becomes true for the indigenes: their place (local, familiar, spiritual, the native world) becomes space (newly alien and “foreign,” even on ostensibly native land). To think of occupation in this way—whether in Afghanistan or in Guam—we can consider the process of occupation as a kind of dialectic between two different paths of transformation. In short, place and space are in constant negotiation as the occupied and the occupier struggle for tangible or noticeable placeness. Berry’s theories on place are informative and necessary, but they are limited because of their strict focus on the local. Ursula Heise’s theories on connectedness help bridge the gap between the local and the global.

Heise states in her book, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, “all the planet’s life forms are linked in such a way that they come to form one world-encompassing, sentient superorganism,” and no individual biosphere can “be grasped in any of its parts unless their underlying planetary connectedness is understood first” (19-20). In this way, interconnectedness is a term that allows us to see how globalization, a term that “has emerged as the central term around which theories of current politics, society, and culture in the humanities and social sciences are organized,” requires powerful nation-states to consider how military action and inaction are affecting smaller, poorer nations across the world (Heise 3).

Rob Nixon adds significantly to this discussion in his book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, when he discusses what he calls “calamities that are slow and long lasting, calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans—and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media” (6).



In other words, it is easy to pay attention to the spectacular, catastrophic events in military history within—or slightly removed from one’s generation: the atomic bomb, napalm, and drone strikes, for example. However, it is much harder to capture the violence that lingers years, decades, and sometimes centuries after military activity. Nixon stresses the importance of the role that writer-activists, like Guam’s Craig Santos Perez, play in representing this form of slow violence:

Writer-activists can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the human observer. (15)

Guam is emblematic of the slow violence experienced by native Chamorros who have been displaced, controlled, and transformed through centuries of colonial and military oppression. Most of the indigenous Chamorros have fled Guam through various means, including the military, but for those who remain in Guam, now a minority representing approximately 30,000 of a population surpassing 180,000 people, they have become victim to what Nixon calls “displacement without moving” (a concept that I will develop further in Chapter Two where I address the dilemma of Chamorros who have not left the island) (19). Required to give up their land to the growing military presence, natives are forced, out of necessity, to take part in the booming tourism industry or take a job on the military base. The irony is revealed, then, as the indigenous population has no choice but to become complicit in devastating the land and Chamorro culture by joining the forces responsible for the transformation.

...

In graduate school, I was reading a selection of poems from *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013) and *The Arcadia Project* (2012) when I first encountered Craig Santos Perez’s work. A

poet, editor, and teacher, Perez has authored three books of poetry: *from unincorporated territory [hacha]* (Tinfish Press, 2008), *from unincorporated territory [saina]* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2010), and *from unincorporated territory [guma']* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2014). The poem listed the names of soldiers in the U.S. Army and the conditions of their deaths while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. The shade of the text was slightly lighter than the rest of the poem, and everything except the name of the soldier had a strikethrough line over the text. The following excerpt from “*ginen ta(la)ya*” in Perez’s third book, *from unincorporated territory [guma']* demonstrates this formal structure:

[2008]

~~[U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Joseph Gamboa of the 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, from Merizo died in Iraq from injuries sustained when he came under indirect fire. He was 34]~~

~~[U.S. Army Spe. Philton Ueki was killed in Iraq. He was buried in California]~~

~~[Christopher Albert Quitugua died in Iraq after the vehicle he was riding in flipped after a tire blowout. He was 28]~~

~~[Guam Army National Guard Spe. Brian S. Leon Guerrero was killed in Afghanistan when the vehicle he was in hit an improvised explosive device. He was 34]~~

~~[Guam Army National Guard Spe. Samson A. Mora was killed in Afghanistan when his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device. He was 28]~~

~~[U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Anthony M. “Tony” Carbullido died from injuries he suffered when his convoy vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan]~~

~  
“i believe  
in the resurrection  
of the  
~

(guma’ 59)

This poem raises many questions about Perez's formal choices. First, could this poem, perhaps, be read as a sense of liberation (in death) from militarization, or, as I suppose, is Perez attempting to obliterate colonial influence through his use of shading and the strikethrough? In this way, Perez is showing that after death, only the body remains. The body, then, is stripped (in death) from any colonial influence that has attached itself to the person. This might also explain why Perez placed an overstrike through ~~Christopher~~, Albert Quitugua's Christian name, in the third epitaph. However, this does not answer why Perez chose to leave Albert, Brian, or Joseph, also Christian names, untouched. The closing phrase from this excerpt, "I believe / in the resurrection / of the / ~," offers two possible explanations: first, it might lead a reader to believe that Perez is distancing the Chamorro body from very specific colonial influences, or second, as I suggest, he is removing as much of the colonial and military modifiers without erasing the memory of the body. Additionally, leaving the parenthetical open ended serves as a reminder that Perez's poetry, in many ways a reflection of Chamorro culture, refuses to acknowledge closure. Confused and intrigued by the poem I encountered, I began to research the poet and the poetry. Several days later, I had amassed a plethora of information that included book reviews, blogs, historical accounts, memorial websites, interviews, and scholarly responses, but I did not know what to do with it.

Perez's name kept surfacing in my readings and my discussions. After some time, I began to realize that Perez's poetry afforded me a tool by means of which to interrogate and analyze my own experiences. Although Perez has not been to Afghanistan, and I have not been to Guam, his poetry connects our disparate experiences by shining light on the problematic practice of occupation, which he recognizes as inherently destructive towards the environment. As financial restrictions and international relations continue to influence the United States

government's decisions about restructuring and reorganizing its military, Guam is currently facing a drastic military build-up, which Chapter One will cover in more detail. Guam will face many troubles with the military build-up on the island, and by grappling with Guam's connection to (or involuntary dependence on) the U.S. military, Perez's explicit evidence of military influence in his poetry attempts to draw the same connections that I am making through lived experience. The hope, then, is that our dissimilar, yet shared, experiences can inform each other—and in turn, academic and military communities alike—in ways that provide for a more environmentally conscious approach to military occupation and land use.

Transformations of culture, land, and language, are central themes in Perez's work. For example, the following excerpt out of "*from preterrain*" embodies the struggle between the occupier and the occupied:

first narratives  
spoken appear briefly and begin  
again in script to keep  
opening i want to say *we'll learn to swim here* in  
the changing legends  
and the tongues  
our legends lose (saina 46)

This brief example demonstrates Perez's recognition that Guam's landscape is changed and changing. Learning "*to swim here*" characterizes, perhaps, Perez's fear that Chamorro culture is being lost in the battle for place, or, on the other hand, it demonstrates that Perez and like-minded Chamorros are not afraid of change. Rather, they wish to be the subject, agent, and director of change instead of the object and victim of military-driven transformation on Guam. The assimilation and unavoidable blending of cultures may prove inevitable, but Perez's poetry shows a weighted advantage in favor of the occupier who continues to transform the land into something culturally recognizable, something American.

Perez attempts to confront and consider the ethical and environmental justice implications regarding the massive military build-up on Guam. Although military and fighting forces in all nation states recognize the benefit in reaching great distances quickly, they can only reach these lengths by utilizing ports and bases throughout the world as stepping-stones. Since 1521, nations like Spain, Japan, and America have used Guam as a Pacific stepping-stone to reach across an expansive ocean. In this way, Guam serves simply as *space*, and bigger, more powerful nations rationalize the subversion of Guam's sense of *place* as necessary and acceptable collateral damage in their desire and need to maintain global might. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is not a stepping-stone in the same sense that I suggest Guam represents as a result of Guam's location and proximity to other nations in the Pacific region. Instead, Afghanistan is more like a foothold in a volatile region, the "placeness" of which needs to be respected for geopolitical as well as personal security reasons. By personal security, I mean that an occupier is more likely to respect native customs and culture when he or she is fearful that the occupied will revolt or attack if the placeness of a place is desecrated. However, even though the U.S. military understands the geopolitical value in recognizing Afghanistan's sense of *place*, it continues, under the auspices of security, to find the country and its inhabitant's physical and cultural *place* less valuable than the security that occupied *space* provides.

Perez's experimental poetry challenges this notion and introduces a unique and native voice to the discussion regarding environmental justice in Guam's utility for military purposes. Through an analysis of Perez's poetry, I hope to make clear that in situations like Guam's, military necessity should not be the only consideration. Furthermore, this analysis will show how military occupation imposes a global interconnectedness consistent with the theories Heise

posits.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it is the indigenous, authorial voices that need to be heard the most because they offer an example, rich in particularity and culture, that demonstrates the catastrophic consequences occupying nations ignore when they displace land, animals, and humans for their own purpose.

---

<sup>6</sup> While I suggest that military occupation imposes global interconnectedness, I also recognize that in other ways, it also ruptures this connectedness. For example, military occupation prevents Guam from participating on the global political stage. Also, military presence often severs cultural connections to the land by blocking access to land with spiritual connectedness as well as destroying ecological connections through the process of building military infrastructure. These ideas will be approached in later chapters.

## **Chapter 1: Guåhan's Colonial Legacy: Ecology, History, Spirituality**

from TA(LA)YA

~

The First Horse arrived mounted by damian de esplana [1673] he burned tomhom and rode  
to the southern villages hunting “rebels” in retribution for

sanvitores

burning houses, food stores and  
fruit trees and villagers

he took orphaned children to be baptized and razed [sic]<sup>7</sup> in mission schools

*[u.s. naval authorities gathered and burned chamorro-english dictionaries forbidding the use of chamorro  
except for official interpreting—1922]*

*reducción*

“duties necessary to the formation of a christian and political republic”

~

my grandfather walked down the san ramon hill in his white short sleeve button up shirt and  
dark green pants uniform of seaton shroeder school in “Agana” [*in spanish Agaña*]

*[In 1998, the legislature officially changed the name of the capital city—Agana—to the Chamorro  
name—Hagåtña]*

from the hill he could see the bishop’s house, the cathedral, the courthouse, latte park, plaza de espana, and  
the government house with the american flag and the guam flag

~

~

“the monitors tried to trick you and ask you something in chamoru” he says  
“and you got punished if you didn’t answer them in english”

~

he explains how to minimize your shadow depending on the angle of the sun

(hacha 37)

---

<sup>7</sup> Razed, as it is spelled here, means to “level to the ground,” which I believe was an intentional replacement of the word “raised” on the part of the poet. However, I placed the [sic] here to inform the reader that this is how it appears in the book and is not simply misspelled.

In 2010, the Guam Legislature passed Resolution No. 315-30, recognizing Craig Santos Perez as “a phenomenal ambassador for our island, eloquently conveying, through his words, the beauty and love that is Chamorro culture.” As this chapter will demonstrate, these words arise through a history, heavy with colonial and military influence, that began when Magellan first discovered Guam in the early sixteenth century. However, before discussing Guam’s history of colonialism, let us first look at the geology that makes Guam an important subject worthy of analysis.

One cannot convincingly argue for ecological significance without first recognizing the emerging debate regarding humankind’s influence on the ecosystems we inhabit. In the wake of a series of global climate crises, while humans continue to redefine their relationship to the natural world, scholars are developing knowledge that scientifically and statistically represents the extent to which human presence affects the environment. In 2000, geologist Paul Crutzen identified and coined the term “Anthropocene” to describe the present epoch in which humans are a leading factor in shaping the global environment (23). Against this backdrop, for us to consider humans complicit in shaping ecosystems, environments, and weather suggests a need at every level—from the individual to the international—to discern what it means to be a global steward. Stewardship at a global level matters in this analysis because our actions, even at the smallest level, are contributing to environmental change.

General acceptance of the idea of an Anthropocene has emerged only within the last two decades; scientific consensus places the beginning of the Anthropocene at the end of the eighteenth century, coincidentally lining up with the invention of the steam engine in 1784 (Crutzen 23). What many people fail to realize is that the identification of the Anthropocene does not stem from experiencing drastic changes in weather (which many in denial of climate



change use to argue against the radical voices for environmental reform). Rather, geologists analyze layers of sediment where they can accurately pinpoint the presence or lack of substances at that time. For instance, geologists found traces of “air trapped in polar ice” that “showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane,” in ice core samples dating as far back as 1784, the same year James Watt designed the steam engine that ushered in the industrial age (Crutzen 23). At the same time, standing armies were becoming normative as aspiring nations raced to colonize and stake claims on the discovered and undiscovered world, and then to inhabit these new colonies. Also, larger armies were themselves industrializing in their approach to warfare, which in turn rendered them far more potent (or disastrous) forces of environmental change. In this vein, rapid modernization in countries like England and Spain afforded these more technologically advanced nations a distinct advantage in reaching and colonizing island nations.<sup>8</sup> This race to build armies and occupy unclaimed, yet often inhabited, islands exacerbated the need for greater weapons, larger ships, and an elaborate supply system capable of reaching half way around the world. Thus, the military does not hover outside or beyond global, historical processes (as many like to think). Rather, the military sits squarely inside these historical processes, often serving as the driving force in creating the history itself. A self-perpetuating cycle, the rapid growth of militaries and colonies has resulted in the oppression and destruction of islands and their inhabitants.

In 1521, Magellan stepped ashore on the island of Guam. As historian Robert F. Rogers notes, Magellan, a Portuguese captain who defected from Portugal and entered the service of Spain’s King, “opened the age of European exploration of the Pacific; [this] also led inexorably

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<sup>8</sup> My research regarding colonization and standing armies in the eighteenth century shows that prior to 1660, standing armies did not exist. Instead, countries would conscript forces for battles and wars as necessary. However, as colonies began to grow, the need for regulars in the army became a necessity, if only to stand, literally, in the colony (Elliot 39).

to foreign domination of every traditional island society throughout that immense third of the earth's surface now called Oceania" (1-2). Guam is the southernmost and largest island of the Marianas, and although Magellan discovered it in 1521, as historian Laura Thompson notes, "for 150 years the Chamorros...remained little disturbed by the influences from the outside world" (5). In 1668, however, the Spanish Jesuit priest, Diego Luis de San Vitores, initiated the first permanent Christian mission on the island, and after nearly thirty years of bloodshed the population was nearly annihilated (Thompson 5-6). However, as David Atienza suggests, the annihilation had less to do with religious conflict between missionaries and natives—although conflict did contribute—than it did with the overall impact of "Uprisings and anti-colonial repression, epidemics, suicides, abortions, and 'collective flights' to other islands," of which Atienza points out that epidemics were the greatest cause in decimating "the native population to just 1,861 inhabitants by 1741" (18). The original population size is still widely debated, but conservative numbers place the estimated population at approximately 20,000 native inhabitants.

Native Chamorros maintain a deep spiritual connection with the land. Chamorros refer to their ancestors as Taotao Tano': people of this land. Or, Taotaomona: "Before Time Ancestors" (Rogers, 25; Thompson 24). While little is known about the religious beliefs of ancient Chamorros, Sanvitores' account shows that ancestor worship is central in Chamorro belief (Thompson 169). The taotaomona, or anite, were the "invisible guardians" of Chamorro descendants, and among "tales of headless *taotaomona*," they are considered to have supernatural strength. The abode of the taotaomona spirits, as "aged natives say" is the banyan tree, which Thompson suggests is a belief that survived from ancient times (171).

"The ancient Chamorros sang their myths" (Thompson 172). While most of the ancient literature is lost, the *chamorita*, a folksong "composed to variants of a single tune, survives."

These ancestral survivals remind us that Chamorro identity is linked to the land itself. Because Chamorro spirits remain on the island as protectors, the bodies of the dead are buried under stone-piled houses, in caves, or in earthenware urns. However, “as the older generation dies out,” as Thompson notes, the legends are being lost, “for under the influence of the Americans, the young people have become skeptical of old beliefs” (173). In spite of dying beliefs, the *taotaomona* remains the strongest surviving ancestral belief. Many native Chamorros believe that they are capable of incredible feats of strength if joined by a *taotaomona* partner. Thompson speaks about the *taotaomona* partner belief in this way:

The concept of the *taotaomona* partners is a variation on the guardian spirit cult which has frequently been found in rapidly changing marginal cultures. It is one means by which individuals attempt to gain strength from their old culture and recapture its values in order to cope with the baffling problems presented by their changing environment, due in this case to the advent and rapid growth of Western influences. (176)

The fact that ancestral beliefs such as the *taotaomona* persist today is evidence that even after centuries of colonial influence and transformation, the Chamorro connection to the land has survived. However, these beliefs continue to face the challenge of transformation through the influence of outside forces.

Presently, Guam is experiencing a massive military build-up. The U.S. Department of the Navy has expressed that the overarching goal to increase the military presence in Guam results from a need to “locate U.S. military forces to meet international agreement and treaty requirements and to fulfill U.S. national security policy requirements to provide mutual defense, deter aggression, and dissuade coercion in the Western Pacific Region” (FEIS iii). For decades,

there has been a “long-simmering” and growing resentment of U.S. military presence in Japan, especially in Okinawa. Okinawa is the largest of the islands of Japan, and it hosts a large concentration of U.S. military forces. While some Japanese citizens have complained about noise from the base, most citizens were “incensed by the misconduct of U.S. troops stationed there, including the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old Japanese girl by three U.S. military personnel” (Kovach). As U.S. troops are being permanently withdrawn from Okinawa, they are relocating to Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, which currently occupies one-third of Guam’s physical landscape. In the Final Environmental Impact Survey (FEIS), the Department of the Navy lays out the proposed plan for, and the environmental consequences of, the military build-up on Guam. Explicit in this proposal is the U.S.’s need to maintain a foothold in the Pacific Rim. In fact, “Without specifically mentioning” China’s naval build-up “or recent claims of sovereignty over much of the South China Sea and East China Sea,” as Frank Quimby notes, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Lynn told University of Guam students “that the rise of Asia economically and militarily is the most significant change in the U.S. strategic environment” (376). Since September eleventh, 2001, and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States’ ability and need to react quickly to conflict within the Middle East and Asia has been, and continues to be, paramount to military strategy. Consequently, with the planned withdrawal from Japan, Guam proves to be the U.S. military’s most strategic, and perhaps only, location for providing this capability. Guam’s fate, then, is once again a result of proximity and location in the Pacific.

The military build-up in Guam, which began in 2010 and is scheduled to be complete by 2016, will assuredly cause irreversible damage to the landscape, the culture, and the economy of Guam. As in the occupation of Guam over the last several centuries, the native Chamorros will

once again have to adapt to the new, sizeable force that will arrive in mass over a very short period of time.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 that requires federal agencies to examine the environmental effects of their proposed actions, the Department of the Navy produced the Environmental Impact Study (EIS) in regards to the military build-up on Guam. As laid out in the FEIS, the Department of the Navy is projecting that the build-up will bring “approximately 8,600 Marines and their 9,000 dependents relocated from Okinawa (Japan) to Guam” (ES 5). The Department of the Navy also recognizes the need to “Develop and construct facilities and infrastructure to support the personnel, training, and operations on Guam and Tinian for the relocated Marines” (ES 6). Additionally, the Navy will require a new “deep-draft wharf” and subsequent improvements to shore-side infrastructure that will provide the capability in Apra Harbor of housing transient nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and their personnel (ES 6). Consequently, because the military will need the ability to defend itself against ballistic missile attacks, it will need to build facilities and infrastructure to house and support 630 members of the Army and their 950 dependents (ES 7). In response to these shifts in military personnel, the Navy is projecting that approximately 2,000 Department of Defense Civilians will relocate as a supporting workforce. Finally, the need to bring “off-island” workers for construction purposes will culminate to a peak in 2014. The Department of the Navy projects that “At this peak, the total increase in Guam residents from off-island would be an estimated 79,178 people (ES 7). This unprecedented rapid growth in population presents unforeseen complications and implications.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Chamorros will experience further displacement and dependence on the U.S. military for jobs and food. “Such displacements,” as Rob Nixon

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<sup>9</sup> Guam’s population, prior to this build-up, was approximately 150,000 people (approximately 30,000 of these are native Chamorro). Adding over 78,000 people will be in an increase of over fifty-percent in four years.

argues, “smooth the way for amnesia, as places are rendered irretrievable to those who once inhabited them” (7).

These implications are not unique to Guam. Rather, they are emblematic of the issues present in all forms of military occupation, and although Guam’s circumstances are unique and require specific analysis, we must consider Guam’s relationship to globalization. Against this backdrop, Nixon suggests that “from a postcolonial perspective,” there is an aversion or “reluctance to engage the environmental repercussions of American foreign policy, particularly in relation to contemporary imperial practices” (33). In this way, “as Greg Garrard noted in 2004, ‘the relationship between globalisation and ecocriticism has barely been broached.’” Garrard is not talking specifically about Guam, but as Nixon suggests, the global relationship is surrounded by an “ecocritical silence around U.S. foreign policy that has been especially resounding” (33).

One way in which the military is complicit in determining Guam’s role in globalization is not only by treating the island as a military port, which it does, but also through creating a Chamoru diaspora to various military bases around the world. In an excerpt from “*ginen* (sub)aerial roots,” Perez speaks about displacement in this way:

By the 1890s, almost a thousand Chamorros *permanent loss* lived in Honolulu and California as part of the whaling industry. Between 1937 and 1941, the Navy recruited hundreds of Chamorros as mess attendants. The Guam Organic Act of 1950 granted Chamorros US citizenship *this cage can be either solid material wish [sic] mesh or*. In the two decades of wars in Korea & Vietnam, thousands of Chamorro men were drafted into the military. By the 1970s, these Chamorros were scattered across various militarized US cities: San Diego, Long Beach, Vallejo, Alameda, and Fairfield *o say can you see*

1980: 30,000 Chamorros live off-island *removed from*. 1990: 50,000 Chamorros live off-island *removed from*. 2000: 60,000 Chamorros live off-island *removed from*. 2010: more of [us]

live off-island than on-island. On YouTube, you can watch *red blood* Chamorros celebrating Liberation Day in *white bases* Hawai'i, California, Texas, South Carolina, Nebraska, Arizona, Nevada, Washington, Florida, and New York *blue passports*

(guma' 39-40)

There exists a tendency to rationalize displacement at this level with affirmations that quality of life for Chamorros has improved with various forms of opportunity, including military assimilation, that have led to economic wealth and improved public systems. However, the questions, which will be revisited in the chapters that follow, remain: was the acquisition of land and displacement of the natives ethical? If there are natives actively seeking decolonization today, should the military continue to build and grow its military presence? What are the environmental consequences of previous, current, and future military activity in Guam and on the Chamorro people? These questions are not easy to answer, if answerable at all, but attempting to understand Guam in terms of place and space might help.

## Chapter 2: Emplacement: Reoccupying Space

*from tidelands*<sup>2</sup>

shingari  
cruz del ancla  
anchor

kaeri return  
regresar a

~

root ne  
arraigar

remember  
ni kaite oku  
recordar

~~2 militarization and colonialism destroying the chamoru people of guam. these fangs dig deep. during and immediately after world war two, brown tree snakes invaded guam as stowaways on u.s. naval cargo ships. by 1968, the snakes colonized the entire island, their population reaching a density of 13,000 per square mile. as a result, guam's seabirds, 10 of 13 endemic species of forest birds, 2 of 3 native mammals and 6 of 10 native species of lizards have all gone extinct.~~

~~the u.s. plans to introduce — this time intentionally — a more familiar breed of predators to guam:~~

(saina 38)



To begin puzzling out the idea of transformation in Guam and the military's complicity in the process, we must first recognize that there are various forms that transformation can take. While erasure seems to be trending and emerging as a term that would, on the surface, adequately bring attention to the loss of culture, land, and language in Guam, it has the tendency to overshadow and ignore the varying degrees that Guam has changed in the presence of military rule. Other forms of transformation include, but are not limited to, silencing, damaging, displacement, oppression, repurposing, appropriation, hybridization, recruitment, and assimilation. All of these, to some degree, are represented in Perez's poetry.

This chapter examines these diverse forms of transformation through a close look at Perez's three books of his multi-book project, as well as excerpts from recent ecopoetry anthologies. Against this backdrop, we will look at Perez's poetry under three headings. First, we will look at how Perez's poetry creates focus and familiarity for readers. In other words, it emplaces Guam, an unfamiliar militarized "space" for most readers, and creates a personal connection to the vernacular spiritual place of Guam that is Chamorro culture. Next, we will look at how the focus and familiarity present in Perez's work result in shifted environmental commitments, especially as they relate to the consequences of military occupation. Finally, we will situate the poetry in the current environmental justice discussion that exists among literary scholars and eco-philosophers. In doing so, this final section will develop the discussion along the lines discussed in the introduction that demonstrate explicit connections between Perez's poetry, Yi-Fu Tuan's discussion of the difference between space and place, and work by prominent ecocritical literary scholars such as Rob Nixon and Ursula Heise, who have successfully demonstrated the important role the imagination plays in understanding, responding to, and doing something about anthropogenically driven environmental change.

### ***Focus and Familiarity: Emplacing Guam***

When using an excerpt of a poem for an anthology, it is common practice to place the word *from* before the title of the poem. The use of the word *from* indicates to readers that they are only getting a portion of a greater work. Perez personalizes the use of the word *from*—regularly reserved for titles of poems in anthologies—through his use and understanding of the long poem as it applies to his poetry. In an interview with *Lantern Review*, Perez explains that his “multi-book project, from *unincorporated territory*, formed through [his] study of the ‘long poem.’” Perez continues to explain that he “began to imagine each book from [his] own project as a book-length excerpt of a larger project. One difference between my project and other ‘long poems’ is that my long poem will always contain the ‘*from*,’ always eluding the closure of completion” (Iris). In the same way, the Chamorro language, culture, and the island of Guam, throughout Perez’s poetry, avoid taking on definitive identities. Therefore, the atypical use of the word *from* requires further analysis, as it provides even more volume to the meaning of the titles and the poems themselves, which consistently, if not always, point towards a greater, deeper understanding of Chamorro culture.

There are two implied readers in Perez’s poetry. The first is the native Chamorro who has lost or is losing what it means to be Chamorro. The second is the outsider, and this can take many forms: tourist, occupier, stranger, intruder, and student: but never fellow native. However, Perez’s masterful stroke as an artist comes when he asks each reader to consider the other’s perspective. In short, he asks the insider, the native, to look at Chamorro culture and Guam from the outside. By doing this, Perez recognizes that “long residence allows us to know a place intimately,” as Tuan notes, “yet lacks sharpness unless viewed from outside and reflected upon” (18). In this way, Perez is privileged, so to say, because his displacement has afforded him the

advantage of accessing the outsider and insider viewpoints. This suggests that Perez is identifying Chamorro complicity in its own systematic oppression by not willfully considering Guam's place on the global scale. Reflection is a powerful tool because it allows the reader to consider what it is he or she has never thought to ask about what he or she does not know. This is where true learning takes place, in reflection.

Although the U.S. considered the acquisition of Guam in the Spanish-American War a great strategic victory, it “did not construct any major bases on the island before World War II” (Closman 16). The people of Guam, although technically citizens of a U.S. territory and subject to American will, did not benefit from the same constitutional rights that the U.S. affords to the contiguous states, Hawai'i, Alaska, and incorporated territories. Additionally, Guam's distance from the U.S. coast and its proximity to Japan during WWII left it vulnerable—like Hawai'i—to attack. These islands did not benefit from the protection that the ocean provided the contiguous United States, and, as a result, when WWII began, the island of Guam suffered from the misfortune of its proximity to Japan. Perez gave the following account regarding the Japanese occupation of Guam:

What most of the world doesn't know is that my homeland, the Pacific island of Guåhan (Guam), was bombed by Japan on December 8, 1941, around the same time as Pearl Harbor (but in a different time zone). Two days later, around 3,000 Japanese soldiers landed on Guam. At the time, the Governor of Guam was U.S. Naval Captain George J. McMillin; he signed a letter of surrender shortly after the invasion. To signal that Guam had fallen, Japanese soldiers placed an American flag on the ground and shined flashlights on it. *The first American territory to fall*

*into enemy hands. The Japanese military occupied Guam for three years.*  
("Surviving Our Fallen,")

Given this little known historical fact, readers can sympathize with the resentment and cynicism within Perez's poetry. In fact, "Guam's Motto, 'Where America's Day Begins,' ironically reminds us that many Americans do not even recognize Guam as a territory" (Lai 2). While the majority of the Chamorro population continues to remember the U.S. fondly as their liberators from Japanese occupation, it is worth considering why there remains a large percentage of native Chamoru who fight for decolonization.

Frank Quimby comments on this national identity crisis when he writes, "In 1998, Guam leaders paradoxically marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the island's relationship with the US. Many praised the benefits of a century of social, economic and political development," which Quimby credits for contributing to an "economy that annually generates a US\$4 billion gross domestic product (GDP) and a standard of living that is the envy of Islanders across the region" (357). However, although the United States might not take part in the same tactics of torture, starvation, and death that the Japanese are remembered for, in many Chamorro minds, they are still an occupying force that subverts Chamorro culture while taking their land and resources. Atienza refers to this as fostering a "sense of victimization, demonizing the previous" occupier to cast oneself in better light (22). In other words, Guam lost one despotic ruler only to be replaced by a less destructive one, the U.S. military. This is why, as Quimby argues, Chamorro "leaders used the centennial of US annexation to frame their annual appeals...denouncing what they call the island's colonization and militarisation," and asked the United Nations for assistance in "the self-determination struggle of the Chamorro people—the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants who are now outnumbered in their homeland by a settler population" (357). Perez

shares in the sentiments of Chamorros seeking decolonization, and his poetry embodies these sentiments and the complexity surrounding Chamorro identity, an identity threatened by further transformation. There are the obvious transformations that take place with military presence: buildings, runways, ports and other forms of infrastructure that transform physical space, but often ignored, because they are not seen, are the cultural and spiritual connections between the indigenous population and the land and surrounding sea.

For the Chamoru, spiritual connections to the land and sea are strong, yet clouded in uncertainty regarding their origin. Scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians have looked at linguistics, ceramics, and the “chronology of colonisation” in an attempt to estimate the trajectories of colonization in Guam and the Mariana islands (Fitzpatrick); however, they continue to find estimating origins a challenge. For years, archaeologists and linguistic historians such as Hsiao-chun Hung, Olaf Winter, and Mike T. Carson have argued that voyagers from Taiwan and the Philippines were the first humans to settle in the Marianas (Hung). However, in 2013, Scott Fitzpatrick and Richard Callaghan have simulated data that prove that this is impossible because of the prevailing currents and winds and no access to “adequate sailing technology like the double-hulled canoe with fixed mast and standing rigging” (842). While Fitzpatrick and Callaghan’s data suggest possible sources of Chamorro origin, their conclusions suggest that “additional linguistic, genetic and archaeological research is needed to resolve the question of Chamorro origins” (851).

Regardless of this uncertainty, spiritual connections are evident and prominent in Chamorro culture. Rogers writes in *Destiny’s Landfall: A History of Guam*:

As a consequence of separate development...the Chamorros are not a ‘mixture of Caucasoid and Mongoloid elements—they are simply what they are, from past

evolution and drift among local groups.’ This view holds that Chamorro culture and the flora and fauna of the Marianas were adaptive; life and human culture evolved to fit the specific local conditions of the Mariana Islands within the oceanic environment that dominates these islands. The Chamorro language expressed the idea cogently: the Mariana Islands are *tani’ tasi*, land of the sea. All life in the islands responded to the vibrations of the winds, waters, and tides that embraced the Marianas. (23)

That “all life in the islands” depends on the sea is crucial to understanding Guam’s importance in a global discussion about environmental change. This idea that environmental crises are better understood in ocean ecosystems over terrestrial ones is echoed in Steve Mentz’s article, “After Sustainability,” where he suggests that oceans offer a unique conceptual framework for environmental understanding. Mentz states that the “sea proves useful” because it allows the humanities to “add ocean stories to emerging models of ecological resilience, which measure the tendency of ecosystems to tolerate disturbance after perturbation” (588). The last line of Roger’s excerpt seems to suggest, and Perez’s poetry both implicitly and explicitly states as he imagines reoccupation, that the meaning of Guam is place-focused. In other words, the placeness of Guam itself, when taken cumulatively, represents a kind of ecology in which the fate of the place and the fate of the people cannot be disentangled.

Perez attempts to represent this spiritual connection to the land and sea in his poetry. In many of Perez’s poems, there exists a struggle to define what it means to be Chamorro, often resulting in defeat. In “*from tidelands*”<sup>8</sup>, Perez’s poem emphasizes Guam’s inability to define itself with a story of its own:

what is our *story*  
who will listen to these stories

i have told what stories  
have you listened to will tell those stories  
who said don't tell stories  
*what is your story*  
who is telling the stories  
i am listening to *is this my story*  
who said what takes place according to story

~~8 this year, at least 3 other military aircrafts have crashed in or near andersen air  
force base.~~

~~u.s. colonial presence has not only damaged our bodies of land and water, but it's  
deteriorated our physical bodies as well. the military used guam as a decontamination  
site during its nuclear testing in the 1970s, which resulted in massive radiation and  
agent orange and purple exposure. high incidences of various kinds of cancer and neuro-  
degenerative diseases, such amyothrophic lateral sclerosis, parkinsonism dementia,  
and lytico botig plague the chamoru people. toxic chemicals have sneaked into our~~

(saina 107)

In the first nine lines of this excerpt, Perez asks nine deictic questions about Guam's stories. These questions convey confusion with self-definition and an inability to explain one's history separate from outside influence. The confusion that exudes from this poem is a reflection of the feelings in the indigenous people of Guam who experience difficulty separating their unique cultural history from the history of colonialism and military occupation that overshadows—and has potentially defined—their existence. Attempting to give a voice to the Chamorro people of Guam, Perez's use of the page's space emphasizes the separation of Guam from the over-arching or, as this poem demonstrates, under-lying power and influence of the U.S. military. By this, I mean that Perez deliberately places the text concerning the U.S. military underneath the questions about Guam's stories, or, said another way, Guam's stories must grow in the persistent presence of U.S. militarization. He never provides answers to these questions, but Perez's deictic use of pronouns, whose meanings require additional context to decipher, encourages the reader to look elsewhere for information (Lai 13). In this way, the reader becomes a student. By placing the reader in the role of student, Perez is encouraging him or her to consider the

“conceptual contradictions in many current discourses about place” (Heise 8). As a student, the act of seeking out the information Perez omits from his poems helps the reader learn about Chamorro culture while simultaneously confronting and exploring colonization and militarization’s impact on the island. While the reader, as student, may not agree with Perez about the political situation, he or she cannot not avoid learning about what it means, to a Chamorro, to be Chamorro.

Perez’s use of the strikethrough function in “*from tidelands*<sup>8</sup>,” as well as in other *from* tidelands excerpts, not only emphasizes and attempts to eradicate the destructive power of the U.S. military but also thereby mimics it. In this sense, the strikethrough is an impressive gesture in the way that it allows Perez to create a word, or occupy a page, and yet destroy it in the same move. More so than anywhere else in Perez’s poetry, the “*from tidelands*” poems, which appear in all three books of his multi-book project, demonstrate the environmental impact military presence and activity have on the land and the population. Paul Lai points out that in book one, “*from tidelands*” first “appears in a three-page sequence at the end of the first section of the book; reappears in the third section, alternating pages with “*from Aerial Roots*”; surfaces in section four in between stanzas six and seven of “*from Stations of Crossing*” as an interlude; and then again emerges at the end of the volume on alternating pages with “*from Descending Plumeria*” (9). In this way, the poem “*from tidelands*” interacts with the book as a whole in the same way the tide interacts with lands that experience tides and tidal flow. Paul Lai compares this phenomenon with the “push and pull of ocean waves, determined by the moon and celestial forces beyond human control,” which at a fundamental level, represents and describes the overwhelming feeling the people of Guam, Perez included, hold against their involuntary interaction with America (10). Placing the military commentary in a footnote further emphasizes



the military's complicity in transforming and destroying Guam by highlighting how the island of Guam is an afterthought to the advancement and expansion of the U.S. military as a global power. In academic writing, a footnote is a useful tool to recognize that a bit of information is worth recognizing as related to your study; however, it is not central to your argument. I propose, then, that Perez is not using this tactic as a form of textual violence to combat the actual violence that has occurred on the island between the natives and the occupiers. Instead, the use of the strikethrough and footnote is an attempt to reoccupy the space of the page—an act of reclamation—by gradually pushing the U.S. military and colonial influence into the background and, eventually, off the page entirely.

It is clear that Perez is unwilling to accept the idea that this destruction is destined to be the defining factor of his people; however, with a sense of futility conveyed through tone, his poetry illustrates that every effort to strike these catastrophic events from Guam's history is futile. Perez, it would seem is attached to the place he imagines Guam to be. Lawrence Buell speaks of the dangers of place-attachment in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* when he suggests that “those who speak on behalf of place-attachment need to face certain intractable ambiguities inherent in the concept of place,” one of which is that there is a “fraught relation between environment and emplacement” (66). Perez's subtle recognition of this “fraught relation” is present throughout his poetry, especially in “*from tidelands*,” where he shows that for his ancestors' stories to survive, Chamoru people must continue fighting against and falling into what Lawrence Buell identifies in his book as “sentimental environmental determinism” where they reject “anthropogenic construction” (66).

Perez recognizes the destructive effects that the U.S. military has imposed on the island of Guam and that have had lasting and irrevocable consequences on the environment and the

people. His poetry suggests that Chamorros must determine how their story will survive in this place. “Place-attachment,” as Buell suggests, “implies adaptation,” and for Chamorro culture remain attached to Guam, Chamorros must recognize that ‘transformation of the physical world is inseparable from [its] becoming’ (66). Considering this, it is worth looking at how the two implied readers of a poem like “*from tidelands*” might benefit from their respective reading.

The native might read this poem as a challenge to find his or her story within a changed and changing place. The outsider, however, might read this as a call to grant Guam the place in which to accomplish self-determination. In other words, self-determination, for Chamorros, might mean being the catalyst and origin of transformation on Guam. In short, while Perez is against occupation, he is not averse to change and can envision change and transformation as part of Guam’s identity and existence. Against this backdrop, Perez confronts past, present, and future destruction and educates his readers about the driving forces behind the consequences—environmental and cultural—related to military influence.

There are, however, environmental implications to Perez’s strategy of constructing the reader in this particular way. For example, pushing the non-native reader out of the story or stories and positioning him or her in the footnote risks alienation. In other words, asking the reader to confront the local and indigenous material and language of these poems from the inside/outside vantage points represents the rejection of Heise’s concept of interconnectedness in which she asserts that “In spite of [our] conceptual differences, what...[we] share is a sense that all Earth’s inhabitants, regardless of their national and cultural differences, are bound together by a global ecosystem whose functioning transcends humanmade borders” (25). Considering this, by emplacing readers in specific ways, Perez risks geopolitical responses to his work that would have negative consequences for Chamorro activist agendas that seek self-determination,

especially when the most powerful geopolitical leaders are against Guam’s self-determination. As a result, political leaders and media sources might see Chamorro activism as a rejection of change and cooperation with geopolitics, a perception they will exploit. While the majority of Perez’s readers will be predisposed to agree with him, Perez combats the risk of geopolitical backlash by emplacing readers differently throughout his poetry.

Emplacement of the implied reader across the oeuvre changes with different poems. One such emplacement is that of the occupier as well as the occupied. Chamorro culture, fraught with political, environmental, and social injustice that the island of Guam and Chamorros have experienced since Magellan pulled ashore, is in a continuous battle on two fronts. On one hand, Chamorro activists are struggling with the occupying force, the U.S. military, and on the other, activists for self-determination are facing an internal struggle with native islanders who have chosen to accept their fate as a colonized island under military control. In the poem, “*from ta(la)ya,*” Perez depicts this emplacement through the eyes of his grandfather as a prisoner of war during the Japanese occupation:

“*ichi ni san shi go roku shichi hachi kyuu juu*” my grandmother recites from the couch when  
she  
sees him bowing

[*the japanese military forced men to dig massive and elaborate tunnels in yigo and agana to connect military encampments*]

she struggles to get up from the couch and stands next to him and tries to bow also but her back

instead she sings:                                *eighth of december nineteen forty one*  
   *people went crazy right here in guam*

*oh mr sam, sam, my dear uncle sam*  
*won't you please come back to guam*

i want to ask her about this song but he suddenly interrupts the singing with a harsh voice :

he says ‘*doko ne ekamashu?*’

he stands at attention, says it’s japanese and spells it to me

he says it means : “where are you going?”

he continues: “ya—ma—uchi—ekamasho”

he bows deeply

he says it means “I’m going to my house in the hills”  
(hacha 80)

The decision to place this poem in-scene is an extraordinary formal choice. The poem opens with his grandfather chanting a phrase in Japanese. We quickly learn that Perez’s grandmother is also present, and we can infer that they are recounting their experiences during occupation. Perez’s grandfather was imprisoned in a forced labor camp for three years following the Japanese occupation in 1941; his experiences during WWII, as Perez states, were the inspiration behind the long-poem “*from ta(la)ya*” (“Surviving Our Fallen”). Placing this poem in-scene and emplacing the experience two generations back has a powerful impact on both readers: the occupied and the occupier. For the occupied, it reminds the indigenous population that their culture has survived these struggles. For the occupier, it creates a sense of empathy for the natives and an ethical obligation to make reparations for their predecessor’s abandonment during the three-year occupation. It also reminds the occupied, as well as the occupier, that even with the absence of the Japanese, the Chamorros never escaped military control.

Another intriguing aspect of this poem is the title. The use of the parenthetical to break up the word *talaya* is meant to create two meanings: the word *taya* in the Chamorro language means “nothing,” and the word *talaya* means “throw fishing net” (“Surviving Our Fallen”). The idea of throwing a fishing net is woven throughout the poem. In another excerpt of this poem, aside from the title, Perez lists the headlines of several major newspapers, one of which reads, “U.S. Territories: A Recruiter’s Paradise: Army Goes Where Fish Are Biting” (*Arcadia Project* 268). Perez elaborates on his reaction to this headline:



latent knowledge from the “latte” period<sup>10</sup> of Chamorro heritage where indigenes built large stone structures, latte stones, on which they built their homes. Again, we see an occupying force ignoring the local knowledge so deeply rooted in the indigenous population.

Emplacing the reader is a powerful tool that Perez uses throughout his books of poetry. It has the effect of providing the reader with a multi-faceted and varied perspective from which to envision Guam from both the inside and outside vantage points. The only potential weakness in this approach is that Perez does not consider the perspective of military culture, nor should he. To do so might weaken his position as a Chamorro activist, and even more problematic, he would completely alienate any U.S. military audience who might take offense if their ideas do not mirror his suggestions. Instead, he leaves that perspective open for the military reader to form in his or her own mind, which if one takes the time to experience all of Perez’s work, as I did, might result in a shared understanding of Guam’s place.

### ***Environmental Commitments***

Readers new to Craig Santos Perez might identify that he holds contempt and anger towards the U.S. and its military’s effect on Guam and the Chamorro people. However, to simply read anger and contempt in the poetry is reductive, an injustice to the multi-faceted and historical references found within its lines. As Paul Lai emphasizes in his essay, “Discontiguous States of America: The Paradox of Unincorporation in Craig Santos Perez’s Poetics of Chamorro Guam,” “The process of reading and interpreting [Perez’s] poems reveals the complicated histories of Guam and engages the reader in rethinking the paradoxical status of the island that is

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<sup>10</sup> Chamorro latte stones were large, uniquely shaped stones used as foundations for main buildings. The stones predate contact, and they are so prominent in Chamorro culture that archaeologists have divided Mariana history into a pre-latte period, which lasted until approximately 800-1000 A.D., and a latte period for the time thereafter, when Chamorros erected great stone pillars (Rogers 31-4).

within yet without the United States” (2). To illustrate this point and to look at the environmental destruction facing Guam, we will look closely at excerpts of Perez’s “long poems” and their relation to the military’s impact on the environment of Guam.

Perez addresses devastating consequences of the military build-up in his poem “*from tidelands [latde/latte]*”:

ta katga—*For too long*

*we’ve embraced the U.S. Military as our Liberators our Savior our Holy Father  
What we’ve been shown through the DEIS is that the Military is a Devil  
in uniform  
tempting us with false promises of wealth and prosperity—The Devil  
is also in the Details*

latde  
set deep  
in the ground  
[intermediate prelatte phase : 500 bc—1 ad]  
propped  
with buried  
stone

*According to the DEIS  
the height of the buildup will bring more than 80,000 new residents to Guam:  
8,600 Marines, 9,000 dependents, 7,000 transient Navy personnel, 600-1,000 Army personnel, and  
20,000 foreign workers  
causing a twenty-year population growth over the next five years—*

*—like the Invasive Brown Tree Snakes* (46-64)

For a population of approximately 150,000 Guam residents, this drastic and unprecedented population boom promises unfathomable repercussions for Guam’s environment and culture. Perez hints at his awareness of the potential environmental effects with his allusion to the “*Invasive Brown Tree Snakes.*” In his poem “*from Descending Plumeria,*” Perez uses footnotes to critique U.S. militarization by tracing “the history of U.S. military occupation” which accidentally caused the “importation of brown tree snakes that decimated the native avian life of

Guam” (Lai 14). To think of the U.S. military as an invasive species provides an immediate, ecological way to understand complex global, geopolitical processes.

The brown tree snake did not belong in Guam’s ecology, and for that reason, played a role in the degradation of the island ecosystem. Zoologist Thomas H. Fritts, whose ecological study of snakes and lizards led him to research the accidental introduction of the brown tree snake on Guam around 1950, spoke about the impact in this way:

Birds, bats, and reptiles were affected, and by 1990 most forested areas on Guam retained only three native vertebrates, all of which were small lizards. Of the hypotheses to account for the severity of this extinction event, we find some support for the importance of lack of coevolution between introduced predator and prey, availability of alternate prey, extraordinary predatory capabilities of the snake, and vulnerabilities of the Guam ecosystem...This complex of vulnerabilities is common on oceanic islands. (113)

This description about the “extinction event” makes the “invasive species” analogy for the U.S. military incredibly powerful as a critique of the U.S. as a species that is out of place in the ecology of Guam. Furthermore, this is akin to Mentz’s suggestion that “changing scale matters, and local variation does not preclude global consistency” (586). In other words, Mentz is saying that local instability in ecosystems does not negate that global change is consistent, and if humans want to move beyond sustainability, which Mentz argues is a necessary mindset to ensuring human existence on earth, we require “different models for thinking about nonstable systems” (586). Literary studies, then, provide “visionary narrative glimpses” of these models that show how “cultural meanings emerge through encounters between human experiences and disorderly ecologies” (588). For example, the phrase “lack of coevolution” in Fritts’s excerpt is



reflected in the first half of Perez’s poem “*from* all with ocean views,” where the lineated text is pieced together as a “collage of language from various travel magazines” (saina 131):

‘for years this was an  
insular  
culture’ ‘the windows as captivating  
as the views  
framed’ ‘i like seeing  
animals in their | authentic | environment’ ‘be-  
cause even dying | cultures have | a wild side to  
flaunt’ (saina 82)

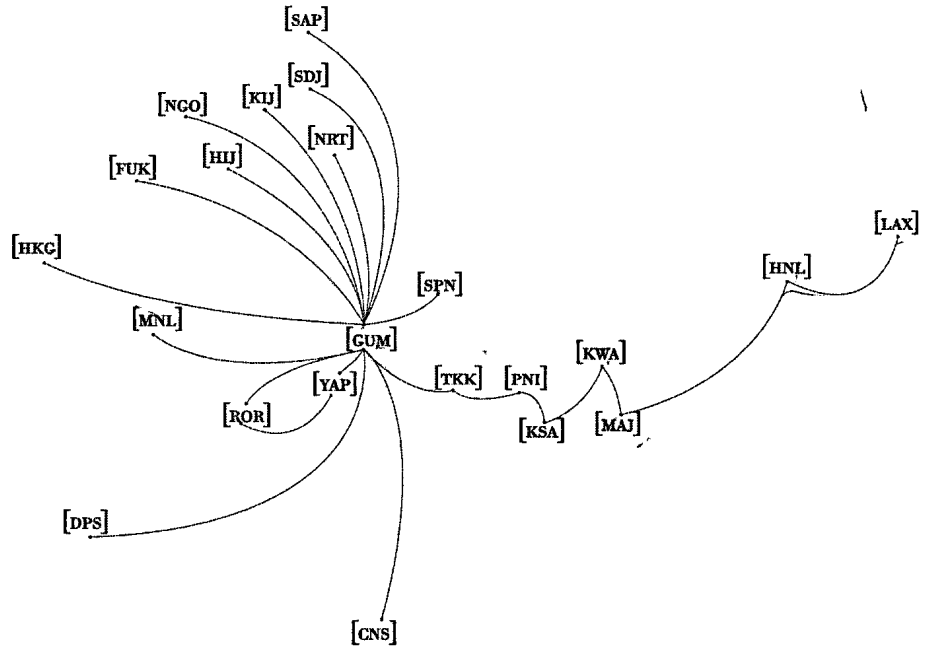
We can read the “animals” Perez refers to in this poem as the military members invading the island, and Perez is suggesting they belong in their “authentic” environment. This is ultimately what all weeds, pests, and invaders like the brown tree snake are: life forms out of place, transforming their natural environment in ways that conform to their needs. There may not be anything intrinsically evil or wrong or destructive about them, but the fact that they are out of place means that they become dangerous and pose a threat by simply doing what they do, being themselves. In the second half of this poem, “*from* all with ocean views,” Perez steps out of the implicit in the predatory invasive species analogy:

**‘guahan is** a whistleblower disclosure filed today by public employees for environmental responsibility against andersen air force base occupies northern end of guam hosts 36th wing pacific air forces violations rampant poaching by base officers illegal trapping coconut crabs resale trophy deer endangered fruit bats disappeared flock rare mariana crows wiped out hunters paving beaches striping vegetation for nesting endangered hawksbill turtles threatened green sea turtles shoreline projects dog trails to run unleashed wildlife tracts unsafe ordnance detonation practices officers treating sensitive wildlife habitat like personal beach resort (82)

The use of a lighter shading to accuse the U.S. military members on Guam for environmental destruction has two purposes. First, it visually represents that these accusations and the voices that speak them are not fully heard. In fact, when Perez began speaking at the United Nations to represent Chamorro culture and Guam's initiative to decolonize, the U.S. delegate stood up and walked out of the room (Perez "Interview"). Perez said he would later learn that this is a political tactic commonly used by government and political officials to send a message. The lighter shade of the text could also represent a silencing of the flora and fauna that are slowly disappearing because of human interaction and growth in the natural world, a trend that is increasingly damaging as Americans continue to handle Guam's limited resources in the same way they treat the seemingly endless and bountiful wildernesses that exist in the expansive contiguous United States. Recognizing that his words are being silenced or ignored, Perez reverts to a different medium to portray his message.

Visual images play an important role in Perez's work. In his interview on the "Blood-Jet Writing Hour," Rachele Cruz asked Perez to read from "*from tidelands*." He responded, "I can't even read that, it's purely visual." Cruz encouraged him to at least read the portion that was not crossed out, to which he replied, "I wouldn't even know how to read this page. Whenever I look at these pages, I just feel silence" (Perez "Interview"). While "*from tidelands*" certainly evokes powerful ideas through imagery, Perez also incorporates images like the following that can tell an entire story in a picture:

*[ Guam: Pacific hub to Asia ]*



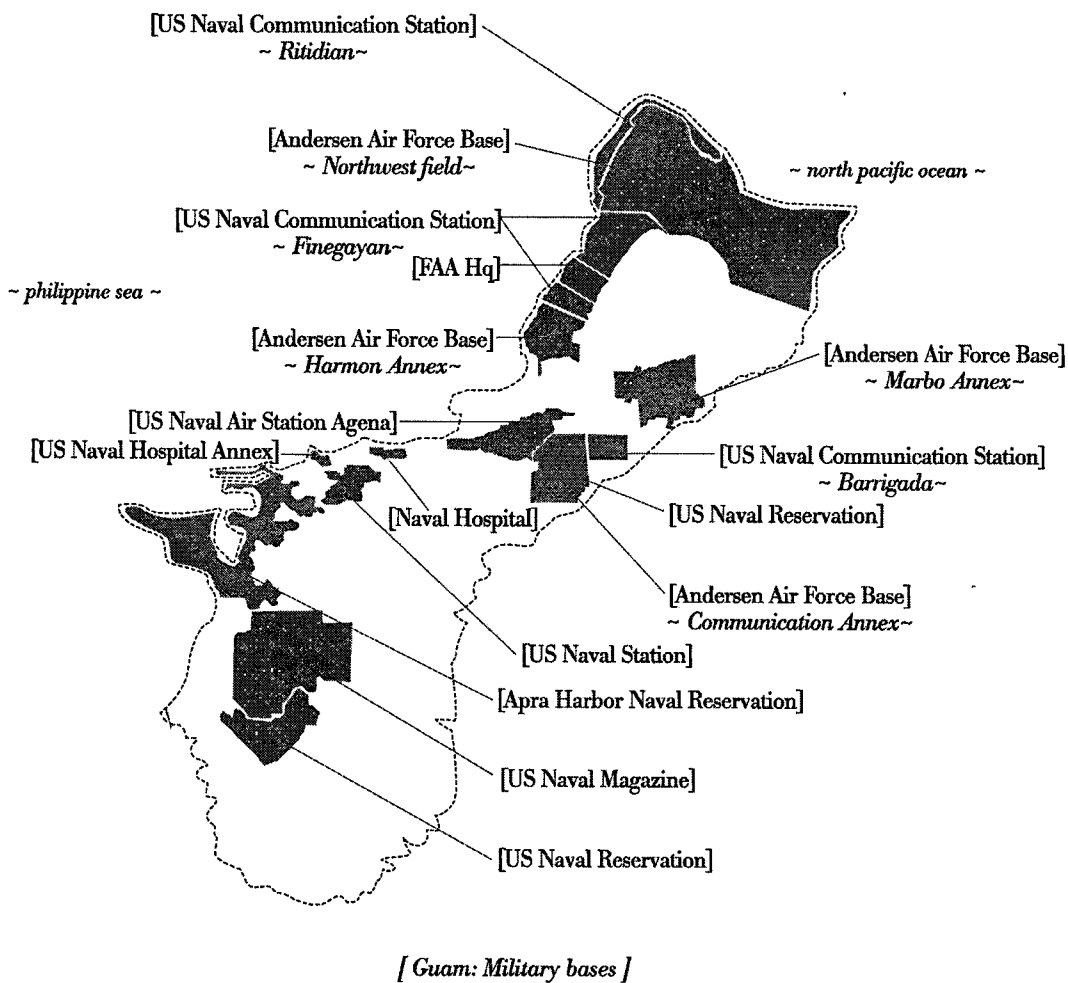
This experimental poem tells a powerful story. Reminiscent of the last few pages of an airline magazine, Guam appears to be a hub of air travel in the Pacific geographies. It also harkens back to images of trade winds and ocean currents that Spanish galleons used in navigating to Guam before embarking to further destinations. For writer-activists like Perez, visual images are very powerful. Not only are visual images more mainstream, which provides a greater platform and, as a result, more agency, but, also, they are often easier to digest.

Rob Nixon also uses visual imagery in his work to give agency to the “environmentalism of the poor.” For example, he emphasizes the importance of visual images in his work to represent how rising waters as a result of climate change threaten to disrupt and destroy island nations like Guam and the Maldives. For most nations, militaries have been the central driving force in gaining and holding land and power. With geopolitical struggles for land use and

resources, militaries will continue to be used as imperial arms of control and coercion. However, with a global population of nearly eight billion people and an estimated rise of three billion people by 2050, the world's resources are being depleted at an alarming rate (Brown 78).

Aquifers are being depleted faster than they can be replenished. Species are becoming extinct at unprecedented levels. Water levels are predicted to rise, which will result in even less land, and land previously used for agriculture, such as the river deltas in China, Indonesia, Mississippi, and India, will soon become unusable. Nixon represents this dilemma visually with the “ghostly seabottom scene” where the president of Maldives, Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, sits underwater at a desk with the “minnow nation's” flag planted in the seabed behind him (264). This scene, as Nixon suggests, is a “preview of the aftermath” (265). While this example from Nixon shows a projected future of climate crises, it “speaks directly to [the] concern with the environmentalism of the poor and the representational challenges posed by slow violence” (264). Indeed, 43 island nations were represented at the 2010 Cancun climate talks where they “announced that they face ‘the end of history’ if the rich countries fail to act decisively and in concert against climate change” (265-6). The main difference between Nixon and Perez's use of the visual is that while Nixon's approach directs focus on the global, Perez uses the global to draw attention to the local.

Guam's usable land will continue to become more and more scarce, and Chamorros, with the current build-up, can expect to lose more land, resulting in more Chamorros leaving or falling prey to what Nixon describes as “displacement without moving.” Before the military build-up began, Perez published this image in his first book of poetry to visually depict the land occupied and reserved for military purposes:



This image shows the military land holdings at approximately one-third of the island. However, much of the land not controlled by the military is uninhabitable. For that reason, Chamorros are forced out of cultural lands and into increasingly populated cultural centers. Nixon considers this to be the “temporalities of place,” where “place is a temporal attainment that must be constantly renegotiated in the face of changes that arrive from without and within, some benign, others potentially ruinous” (18). Chamorros face the latter as they are moved or displaced from their lands to “less hospitable environs.” Nixon writes about displacement in place in this way:

I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers

rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable. (19)

Soon, wars will be fought over resources instead of land or ideology. For this reason, it is time to re-envision and reevaluate the environmental commitments for sustained military forces.

### *Guam as Place or Militarized Space*

From its inception, the poem excerpt of “*from ta(la)ya*” presented in the anthology *The Arcadia Project* begins with death as a result of war. The opening line of this excerpt is placed in brackets: “[SUMAY CEMETERY],” and Perez links the topic of death with the military in the next lines: “thru naval / station gate once / contained 19th century / grave marks—” (*Arcadia Project* 267). As is customary in Perez’s poetry, these lines hold several meanings—some historical—that one must investigate to understand. The brackets serve to separate, as though imprisoned, the cemetery itself from the rest of the poem. Although the “thru naval” line might suggest to the reader that the dead buried in the cemetery are a result of military conflict, which is uncertain, it is further meant to illustrate that the cemetery is located on a U.S. Naval base only accessible through a military checkpoint. The fact that it contains “19<sup>th</sup> century / grave marks” indicates that the dead contained on the military base preceded the U.S. occupation and build-up of infrastructure on the land. Furthermore, the next page of the poem reveals the following lines:

...kept  
immaculate—

good  
photo op—

sponsorship is required  
to access

(19-24)

The lines “sponsorship is required / to access” allude to the previous page where one must be in the U.S. military or have an escort on the Naval Base to visit the cemetery. Or, in other words, one must defer, and thus in a sense transfer allegiance to, U.S. authority for access to ancestors. Perez’s palpable sarcasm highlights how U.S. forces have taken Guam’s historical and sacred grounds and transformed them into “photo ops” for visiting tourists and service members currently stationed on the island. The military thus appropriates Chamorro culture to add color and uniqueness to an otherwise militarized space while displacing Chamorro people from their cultural sources, denying occupation of their sacred ground, which is another example of “displacement without leaving.” The current military build-up promises to expand the military presence, which will include acquiring more land for infrastructure and training, and, as a result, further displacement.

When the U.S Department of the Navy published the executive summary of the FEIS, the first line read “The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires federal agencies to examine the environmental effects of their proposed actions” (3). This sentence is also seen in Perez’s poem “*from tidelands [latde/latte]*” (in response to the EIS in draft form):

ta katga  
we carry

*The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969  
Requires federal agencies to examine the environmental impacts of their proposed actions—  
So the Department of the Navy prepared  
the Draft Environmental Impact Statement [DEIS]  
to assess the potential impacts associated with the military buildup on Guam*

gi ya hita pa’go  
with us now  
and yet to come—*Unleashed*

*last November  
the DEIS is a nine-volume 11,000 page document*

(20-31)

Using phrases like “*Unleashed / last November*” and “*the DEIS is a nine-volume 11,000 page document,*” Perez intentionally compares this document, and by extension the military, to an invasive species (a new predator) so thick in content and complexity that it is impossible to oppose or understand. Looking closely at this small excerpt, we see many of the common complexities in Perez’s poems. Perez’s poetry is experimental, requiring the reader to investigate and make connections throughout his unconventional “long poem.” It is “densely layered,” incorporating “theoretical, historical, and political critiques” of the treatment of Guam throughout history (Lai 6). As seen above, Perez commonly uses the technique of combining the English and Chamorro languages to further his message.

The translation of “*ta katga*” is “we carry,” and it alludes to a plaque that is found near the remains of Chamorus at one of the Tomhum pillbox fortifications that Japanese used for coastal defense. The plaque reads:

Here lie the remains of Chamorus from times past, ancestors who have bequeath [sic] life and spirit to those who have followed them. We carry that spirit with us now, and into times yet to come. At this place let us remember those who came before, honor their remains, and resolve to honor their spirit by our action now and through the challenges of our future. (Villaverde)

This allusion in Perez’s poetry to the plaque emphasizes the spiritual culture that is deeply rooted in the Chamorro people. In fact, the *taotaomonas*, “ancestors before time,” are the spirits that are believed to inhabit the jungles and forested areas on Guam. Rudolph Villaverde notes that “some of the *taotaomonas* are described as headless and having deformed bodies” (“Our Early Ancestors”). The *taotaomonas* are incorporated into the first chapter of Perez’s second book, *saina*, which can be translated as Lord, Father, Master, Parents, Supreme Being, or Elder. On



the opening page of the first chapter, Perez writes, “gue’la yan gue’lo, kao sina malufan yo?” which loosely translates to “Grandmother and Grandfather, can I enter?” (saina 11). “It is said,” according to Perez, “that when one enters the jungle or does anything in the jungle, one must ask permission from the taotaomonas.”

The juxtaposition of several languages is not only a unique aspect of Perez’s writing style, but serves as yet another representation of the permanent impression that colonization and military occupation have left on the islanders of Guam. However, this code switching is also a tool that Perez uses to reoccupy the page with the Chamorro language. By constantly changing the way he incorporates the Chamorro language into his poetry, Perez creates an even more complex meaning to the written words. For instance, although he provides the translation in the aforementioned poem immediately, he often places the Chamorro language, without translation, in brackets to signify the imprisonment of the Chamorro language. At other times, he will bracket the word in the poem and provide a footnote at the bottom with the translation (*hacha* 24). Additionally, Perez will often butt the two languages up against each other without any punctuation or identification, as seen below in the half English – half Chamorro version of George Orwell’s famous quote:

people sleep peaceably in their beds at night because todo I taotao mantrikilo  
manmaigu gi puengge sa. (“Surviving Our Fallen”)

The translation of “todo I taotao mantrikilo manmaigu gi puengge sa” is “rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.” Constantly changing his incorporation of the Chamorro language into his poetry, Perez is not only representing the dynamic Chamorro language that has been transformed through colonial influence, but also using the infusion of Chamorro into well-known English phrases to reoccupy the page. In this way, Perez re-appropriates Orwell’s scenario for

Guam in an attempt to emancipate the Chamorro language from the bondage of the English and Spanish influence. Therefore, Perez is using his native language as a call to action, invoking the strong spiritual history of his people who have survived centuries of oppression. He is reminding the reader of Guam's unique voice and their indigenous practices that have continued to exist—albeit in changing form—for centuries, despite the constant oppressive and destructive practices of occupying military forces. Perez is not using this provocative technical strategy with language militantly. Instead, he is simply taking back the space on the page that was taken from the Chamorros when Spanish and American occupiers forbade their native language.

Perez's poem "*from ta(la)ya*" introduces the discussion of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The lists of Guam soldiers who lost their lives in Iraq or Afghanistan, as I have said, is a striking visual tool throughout Perez's oeuvre. It not only emphasizes the Chamorro body, raising it above the surrounding text, but it is evidence of the globalization and interconnectedness that Guam experiences as their bodies are removed from Guam and the world because of, and through, the military. Not only is the print a different shade, but also, Perez strikes through the titles and ranks of each person so that only their name precedes the conditions of their deaths. There is a duality to this purposeful choice to strike through the text of anything that ties Guam's soldiers to the United States, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the other theaters of U.S. neo-imperialism (268). However, this textual strategy threatens to further isolate Guam. In other words, by striking through these global ties, Perez risks leaving Guam more "islanded" than ever. If Perez's goal was to honor the fallen as individuals with names, not attributed to a greater entity, then he would have omitted the rank and "U.S. army" entirely. However, Perez wants the reader to focus on his intentional eradication and separation of the "U.S. army" from the young men of

Guam. This sentiment arises in an essay Perez wrote commemorating the ten-year anniversary of 9/11 where Perez discusses his guilt:

Oddly, I feel survivor's guilt. Not the guilt [that] those who survived 9/11 must feel. Not the guilt of those who have actually fought in and survived America's wars of terror while their friends died right next to them. I feel guilty for escaping the net of militarism. A net whose pull is strong on Guam and in the psyches of many Chamorros. ("Surviving Our Fallen")

Perez continues by describing the anger that exists within this guilt; that any man from Guam should ever feel guilty about not serving in the military/war. For Perez, the native Chamorro's decision to join the U.S. military is often birthed out of a belief that the U.S. liberated Guam from the Japanese. In other ways, Perez sees Chamorros joining the military as a last-ditch effort to avoid becoming displaced without moving. It appears as though Perez might desire a Guam that exists in isolation, a self-determined island nation responsible for its own commerce and survival. The problem, though, is that not all Chamorros agree with his reasoning, and if Guam were successful in decolonizing, it might lead to inner turmoil in regards to Guam's geopolitical position.

**Chapter 3: An Interview with Craig Santos Perez**

*ginen* fatal impact statements

~

DEIS Public Comment : “I cannot sit back any longer. We, as a whole, need to stop being shoved around, and push back“ [sic]

—*The revolution will not be on Facebook*

—*If it isn't on Facebook, it probably wasn't very successful*

—*Or it was so successful that there is no more Facebook*

DEIS Public Comment : “What scares me is that I am a young female that is a target to those men who will be arriving”

DEIS Public Comment : “Thousands of horny GIs running around the island is not going to make the night life too fun, and will definitely increase the number of prostitutes on island”

DEIS Public Comment : “What if the people on Guam get outnumbered?”

DEIS Public Comment : “I request an extension of the public commenting period”

DEIS Public Comment : “And if they do take the lands that they want, then what will the meaning of Guam be?”

(guma' 57)

Manipulating Space, Establishing Voice, Decolonizing Guåhan:  
An Interview with Craig Santos Perez

*By Robert Briggs*  
(25 July 2014, University of Hawai'i, Manoa)

In the Introduction, I suggest that to conduct a critical analysis regarding military presence in Guam requires attention to the voices that emerge from the island of Guam. Allowing the world to continually ignore the voices of those who are displaced, oppressed, and erased would be to tolerate and promulgate the same unjust environmental practices that have led to—and continue to contribute to—the rapid degradation and transformation of the cultural and physical environment.

In the interview that follows, the questions were initially designed to follow a few primary themes that fit the original idea of the project: erasure, poetic form, militarily occupied space, and how Craig Santos Perez's poems engage with and situate readers in Chamorro culture. However, many of Perez's answers raised different key issues that required further exploration. First, while the original project focused on erasure of land and damage to the environment, a key term that continued to surface was the *body*. Whether we are talking about bodies of land, bodies of water, or the human body, military occupation affects them all. Guam's human bodies, for example, are removed from the island as they are recruited to, and appropriated for, specifically military purposes. In this way, erasure seemed an ill-fitted term to describe the military's impact on Guam's bodies. Instead, erasure is simply one form of the various ways land, culture, humans, and languages are transformed through military occupation. Another theme that emerged from Perez's answers is that of disease and illness. Although it is commonly known that exposure to chemical run-off in Guam has led to high levels of cancer among Chamorros, there are less baleful, often ignored, forms of disease that develop from the slow

violence of progressive ailments: diabetes, obesity, high blood-pressure, and other chronic maladies. In this way, the arrival of military forces into a new region brings certain cultural changes, especially in diet, which introduces the imposition of western industrial foods on the indigenous populations. As Guam, Oceania, and the entire Pacific world have reacted to these dietary changes, SPAM, for example, became a byword for a whole constellation of diseases and metabolic disorders. In fact, Perez who jokingly referred to himself as the “SPAM-MAN” in an interview he conducted in 2012, wrote the following poem, “*ginen the legends of juan malo [a malologue]*,” regarding SPAM’s dominance in the Chamorro diet and culture:

Rub the entire block of SPAM®, along with the accompanying gelatinous goo, onto your wood furniture. The oils from the SPAM® moisturize the wood and give it a nice luster. Plus, you’ll have enough left over to use as your own personal lubricant (a true Pacific dinner date). Why didn’t you tell me about the “In Honor of Guam’s Liberation” SPAM®! I’m trying to collect them all! Once I was on a diet and SPAM® faded from my consciousness. Then I met my future wife, who’s Hawaiian, and SPAM® became part of my life again (a true Pacific romance). Maybe the economic downturn will help people appreciate SPAM® instead of loathing it. SPAM® doesn’t have to be unhealthy; I eat SPAM® every day and I’m not dead, yet—just switch to SPAM® Lite. Despite rumors, SPAM® is NOT made of such odds and ends as hooves, ears, brains, native peoples, or whole baby pigs. The name itself stands for *Specially Processed Army Meal, Salted Pork and More, Super Pink Artificial Meat, Snake Possum And Mongoose, or Some People Are Missing*. My uncle is the reigning Guam SPAM® king. He won the last SPAM® cook off with his Spicy SPAM® meatballs. I will never forget the two-pound SPAM® bust of George Washington he made for Liberation Day, toasted crispy on the outside with raw egg yoke in the hollow center—the kids loved it! Only a fool would start a company in Guam that provides SPAM® protection. For Xmas, I bought a snow globe featuring a can of SPAM® sitting on an island. Turn it over and a typhoon swirls madly, unable to unseat SPAM® from its place of honor. I have a souvenir can I bought after seeing Monty Python’s SPAM®ALOT on Broadway in New York City. It cost me \$10 and is the most expensive SPAM®

I've ever bought. I will never eat it.

(guma' 28)

SPAM, according to this poem, is an inseparable characteristic of Chamorro identity. Even though Chamorros recognize the negative consequences to health that SPAM embodies, this poem represents how deeply the natives have become affected by—and addicted to—colonial diets. While these are just a couple of the key issues raised during the conversation, Perez's responses afforded me the opportunity to remove some of the self-imposed boundaries of the interview and allowed for further exploration regarding Guam and its relationship with the U.S. military.

At first, this project intended to grapple solely with the U.S. military's impact on the environment, using Guam as a case study to suggest the greater problem of military occupation on a global scale. By focusing specifically on the global environmental implications of military occupation, I inadvertently risked replicating the same injustices Guam has experienced for over three hundred years: subverting and ignoring Chamorro culture as a means to serve my own ends. Although I will undoubtedly do this to some degree, the questions and answers in the interview demonstrate that islanders and island poetics are not easily juxtaposed with mainlanders and poets from the continents. Instead, Guam, Chamorro culture, and Craig Santos Perez's poetry must be considered on their own terms, separate from, yet a part of, the larger discussions of global stewardship and environmental justice. By conducting my analysis in this way—looking at the whole through its parts—I hope to understand the whole better. Perhaps more importantly, I will be able to understand and explain Guam and its ecological significance more fully.

Caribbean critic Antonio Benitez-Rojo has attempted to theorize Caribbean island poetics and archipelagic cultural styles and forms, which can also inform the poetics emerging from the

Pacific geographies.<sup>11</sup> In *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Postmodern Perspective*, Benitez-Rojo confronts the myth of colonialism, and he refers to his reading of the Caribbean in this way:

The Caribbean area [is the] scene of the most extensive and intensive racial confluence registered by human history... [this] strip of coast has seen the creation of poetry, drama, essay, story, and novel on the basis of ethnological differences present in their respective locales. In this way, little by little, a literary geography of the Caribbean has been taking shape, one that attends to the theme of skin color, or rather, to the theme of its irreducible memory, expressed in ethnographic, economic, political, and sociological terms.

Benitez-Rojo is suggesting that the writing that emerged from the Caribbean was informed by the island geography and identity. The “literary geography” Benitez-Rojo refers to in this passage speaks to his belief that the history, culture, geopolitics, and sensibility of the region, together with the problems of its underdevelopment, perhaps a product of the colonial plantation system, adds to the island’s story. In this way, Benitez-Rojo’s work reinforces Perez’s idea that the “space of a page is an excerpt of an ocean. Words are like islands, sentences like archipelagoes” (Perez). While one might be able to draw parallels between the plantation machine in the Caribbean and the military machine in the Pacific, the differences between the two regions are too great for Benitez-Rojo’s work to be completely relevant. Rather, the Pacific geographies and islands in Oceania have unique circumstances that prevent them from being fully included in these theories. Laura Thompson writes, referring to Guam, “nowhere else in

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<sup>11</sup> Edouard Glissant, a poet, writer, and academic, also made significant contributions to theories of island poetics in the French Caribbean. Significantly influenced by colonialism, Glissant’s body of work includes “Poétique de la Relation” (Poetics of Relation, 1990), “Traité du Tout-Monde” (Treatise On the Whole World, 1996), and “Philosophie de la Relation” (Philosophy of Relation, 2009), as well as many novels, poems, and essays that greatly inform colonialism’s impact on the Caribbean and the U.S. South.



the world is found quite the same medley of culture traits which fuse within the boundaries of this tiny tropic isle.” Thompson notes that “dramatic Catholicism from old Spain; spicy culinary arts and crafts from Mexico; bullcarts, carabaos, clothes and cockfights from the Philippines; public schools, politics, and sanitation from America—all blend with survivals of the ancient culture to form the changing life of Guam” (5). While the works of Benitez-Rojo can help contextualize and situate the discussion of island poetics in academic discourse, the disparate experiences between the two regions demand a slightly different analytical approach. This suggests a need for scholars, scientists, militaries, and world leaders to recognize that no single form of occupation, colonial or military, is like another. The problem, then, remains: what lessons can we learn from the military occupation of Guam, and how do those lessons translate to the practice of military occupation globally? In other words, what does a close look at a poet from Guam reveal about military occupation on a global scale, and why does it matter? To begin answering these questions, we turn to Perez.

In other interviews with Craig Santos Perez, the focus typically revolves around the poet’s career or the political aspects of his writing. For example, in the “Blood-Jet Writing Hour,” Rachele Cruz’s questions revolve around the process of publishing and poetry contests that Perez participated in before getting his first and second books of poetry published. In “Words on a Wire,” Benjamin Alire Saenz posits questions regarding the political agenda in Perez’s poetry, as well as how Perez integrates his academic and poetic career with his cultural, political, and activist roles and how they collectively participate in the “cultural revitalization process that is happening on the island now” (Perez “Interview”). The following interview that I conducted does not attempt to challenge any of the provocative questions asked or raised in the interviews that precede it. Instead, this interview hopes to build on these questions and add a

unique view of Perez's poetry, especially how his poetry uses space and form to grapple with militarization and military occupation through centuries of colonial rule.

In 1995, when Perez was fifteen, his family moved to California. Perez earned a B.A. from the University of Redlands in Literature and Creative Writing and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of San Francisco. He is now a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. His dissertation examines articulations of indigeneity in Native American and Native Pacific literature and theory. He is currently serving as the Director of Creative Writing in the English Department at the University of Hawai'i, at Manoa. Perez co-organizes a reading and lecture series called *Native Voices*.

Perez was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* 2010 Book Prize for Poetry and the winner of the 2011 PEN Center USA Literary Award for Poetry. In 2011, Hawai'i Dub Machine released Perez's first audio poetry album, *Undercurrent*, that he recorded with Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) poet Brandy Nalani McDougall.

Perez is the cofounder of Ala Press, coeditor of *Chamoru Childhood* (Achiote Press, 2009), and the guest editor of several "special issues" focusing on Chamoru and Pacific literature. His poetry, essays, and book reviews have been published in national and international scholarly and literary journals. He has performed, lectured, and conducted workshops in parts of the Pacific, the U.S., Canada, Asia, Europe, and Russia.

**Robert Briggs:** Scholars have yet to settle on a conclusive definition for ecocriticism and/or ecopoetry. For this reason, the boundaries of the canon are continually shifting to include and exclude material for consideration. Your poetry is featured in several recently published ecopoetic anthologies, and it appears as though scholars agree that much of your poetry fits within the developing field. How do you feel that

your poetry fits into the field of ecopoetics and ecocriticism? In what ways do you use your poetry to confront human interaction with the natural world?

**Craig Santos Perez:** I have been grateful that scholars have included my work in discussing ecopoetics, especially since much of the field is predominantly focused on American writers. However, this is shifting. The critical anthology *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* focuses primarily on writers from postcolonial contexts, and scholars like Rob Wilson and Hsinya Huang have theorized a "Trans-Pacific Ecopoetics." Other critics in indigenous studies have also conceptualized an Indigenous Ecopoetics. I feel like my work fits, in different ways, in all these contexts.

Poetry is one form to re-imagine our connection to the natural world. I attempt to expose how colonialism, militarism, and capitalism have degraded the environment and endangered animals. I also try to show how indigenous perspectives about how all life is interconnected and sacred can provide a map through which to address the ecological crisis.

**Briggs:** In all three books of your multi-book project, you speak towards the high enlistment rate of Guåhan natives into the U.S. military. Will you please weigh in on the current generation of Guåhan citizens' feelings towards U.S. military presence in Guåhan? Are there any sons and daughters of Guåhan that truly believe the U.S. liberated Guåhan? In Afghanistan, I received mixed reactions from locals about America's presence in their country; sentiments changed from one valley to the next. I imagine that in Guåhan, being a smaller island nation, it might be easier to gauge a

collective impression from the 30,000 Chamorros still living on the island. In your experiences, are the sentiments just as varied or do they seem heavily one-sided?

**Perez:** Sadly, the majority of Chamorros still believe that the U.S. liberated Guåhan, and they would rather become fully incorporated as a State of the Union. I'd even say that the majority of Chamorros who live off-island believe this as well. The main reason is because many Chamorros are employed by, and benefit from, the military. The other reason is because of the colonial education system on Guåhan. Chamorros are so deeply dependent on the U.S. (for food, income, and even culture) that it is difficult to even imagine life without the U.S.. In this sense, decolonization is even slower than colonial violence.

**Briggs:** Your poetry often incorporates, interacts with, and honors members of your family. Your grandparents have a particularly heavy influence in your multi-book project. Will you elaborate on your grandfather and grandmother's experiences with the Japanese and U.S. military during WWII? How have their experiences and stories shaped your generation's feelings towards military presence in occupied space within your native land?

**Perez:** My grandparents had traumatic experiences during World War II, and sadly in the histories of the war their stories were often absent. In the past few decades, however, many of these stories have been recorded and circulated. Poetry is my way of honoring the legacy of their stories. Some people of my generation and my parents' generation feel that the U.S. military is our savior because they liberated U.S. from Japanese occupation. However, there is a growing number of Chamorros who

see U.S. presence as a re-occupation and not a liberation, especially because the U.S. has disenfranchised Chamorros from our land, our health, our families, and our political independence.

**Briggs:** Would you mind taking a minute to tell us about your childhood growing up in Guåhan? What do you remember? What smells, tastes, sounds come to mind when you think of Guåhan? After returning to Guåhan 15 years later, what was missing? What new smells, tastes, and sounds were present?

**Perez:** I remember all my family members. I remember the food that we cooked and ate together. I remember going to church and to the beach. I remember my friends at school and after school. I remember playing sports. I remember coconut and plumeria flowers. I remember Spam and the Holy Communion wafer. I remember typhoons and humidity and power outages. I remember mangoes and guava. When I returned, much of my family, and most of my friends, were missing. I don't think I remember new smells, tastes, or sounds—but what was new was the feeling of being lost and unable to find my way home.

**Briggs:** Lawrence Buell argues, and I am paraphrasing, that it is impossible to extricate the activism from environmental literature. Without labeling you as an activist, in what ways do you feel poetry offers a unique ability to approach and interrogate the U.S. military's impact on Guåhan's environment that other narrative forms cannot accomplish?

**Perez:** Poetry is unique because it weaves many different narrative and discursive forms. Poetry can be verse and prose. Poetry can be lyrical, elegiac, comical, and tragic. Poetry can be historical, political, cultural, personal, and spiritual all at once. Poetry can make connections between nature, humans, and all beings in ways that are surprising and unfamiliar. Above all, poetry inspires, humanizes, and empowers. Since the military attempts to disempower us, poetry is a powerful weapon to interrogate and resist the impacts of militarization.

**Briggs:** Rob Nixon, in his book *Slow Violence*, suggests that military presence displaces inhabitants temporally, geographically, rhetorically, and technologically. Nixon states, “Such displacements smooth the way for amnesia, as places are rendered irretrievable to those who once inhabited them” (7). Applying Nixon’s conclusions to an island nation like Guåhan, how have you and your family witnessed and experienced slow violence? In your opinion, do you feel like the damage to your native land is recoverable?

**Perez:** The military has taken land from my family. Once you are removed from land, you are also removed from residence and food source. Entering the U.S. wage economy means finding a job, and for many Chamorros the only job they could find was to enlist in the military. Military service is the number one vehicle of migration for Chamorros—so that today more Chamorros live off island than on-island. So not only does militarism take our land, but they take our bodies off our island. Yes, I do believe that native land is recoverable. Part of that recovery must be imagined, and to me that is where literature and other cultural arts become vital.

**Briggs:** One of the consequences of slow violence, as Nixon alludes to in his “Introduction,” is the radiation from military testing of nuclear power. Places like the Marshall Islands where many nuclear tests occurred are “still in part governed by an irradiated past . . . , long forgotten by the colonizers, [that is] still delivering into the world ‘jellyfish babies’—headless, eyeless, limbless human infants” (7). In your poems, you allude to your grandmother being ill, which I inferred developed through her interaction from the military’s chemical runoff into the water of Guåhan. Can you take a minute to discuss your thoughts on the environmental consequences of military practices in Guåhan?

**Perez:** Yes, the prevalence of cancer on Guåhan is one environmental consequence of military contamination. During the testing of the Marshall Islands, Guåhan was "downwind." In addition, many of the ships involved in those tests were decontaminated in the waters near Guåhan. Another military practice that has caused illness is the militarization of our food supply. As opposed to growing or catching much of our food prior to U.S. occupation, imported foods became the norm, including SPAM, white rice, and Coca-Cola. Guåhan has very high rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diseases caused by colonial diets.

**Briggs:** At the end of the first book in your multi-book project, *from unincorporated territory [hacha]*, you dedicate the book, in part, to Aaron Shurin “who continues to teach [you] the prosody of being a poet” (97). Please tell us what prosody means to you as a poet and how that has changed since beginning this project.

**Perez:** Prosody is important because it reveals the aural, visual, and technical elements of poetic form and expression. My teachers, like Aaron Shurin, taught me that a poem is most powerful and resonant when multiple prosodic elements are activated. Since the beginning of this project, I have learned more about poetic technique and effect. Writing a multi-book project also allows me to explore different prosodies in different books.

**Briggs:** On 28 April 2013, you wrote a piece for “*Evening Will Come*”: *A Monthly Journal of Poetics—the Erasure Issue*. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines erasure as “the action of erasing or obliterating.” Can you explain the role erasure plays in your poetry? Did the role of erasure change throughout your multi-book project *from unincorporated territory*? In what ways have colonization and military presence in Guåhan caused, accelerated, or illuminated this action?

**Perez:** Erasure is ever-present in my work in the sense that it's the silencing that I am always writing against. I try to dramatize that erasure in various ways, including with strikethroughs, blank space, font color, and narrative gaps/absences. Throughout my work, I explore different techniques to capture erasure. Colonialism has caused erasure in many ways: erasing our language, culture, and history through educational systems; erasing our land through urban, military, and tourism development; erasing our people through migration; and erasing our political sovereignty through oppressive governmental policies.

**Briggs:** I love your use of brackets within your poetry. In your first book, you often place Chamorro words within brackets. Starting in your second book, you often place



the words “we” and “our” within brackets. Will you please explain how brackets work in your poems?

**Perez:** Brackets allow me to make an editorial comment about certain words. By bracketing the Chamorro words, I wanted to insert them as opposed to the English words, as an act of language reclamation. For the “[we]” and “[our],” I wanted the reader to think about who the “we” is by thinking about what the bracketed “we” is standing in for. How do we claim a “we”? What “we” are “we” a part of? How do “we” mobilize?

**Briggs:** As a poet, your skill-set includes the mastery and manipulation of language to convey meaning and message. Throughout centuries of colonization, occupying forces have subverted, omitted, and influenced language among Guåhan natives to the point that natives of Guåhan, like your grandmother, have never heard the number “hacha” in Chamorro. Do you feel the Chamorro language can ever fully recover from colonization? Will the scars remain? How do you view these scars as a part of Guåhan’s (hi)story?

**Perez:** In many ways, I feel that being a poet is not about mastery and manipulation of language, but more about struggling with and failing at conveying meaning and emotions. Sadly, I’ve never felt fluent in English, and my Chamorro language skills are very fragmented and incomplete. Most of the time I don’t even know what to say about how I feel or what I remember or what [we] have lost or how [we] can recover and heal. Yes, the scars will remain. But for me the goal is not to fully recover, the goal is to strive towards a life of dignity, self-respect, and empowerment. In terms of

language, that means keeping it alive, vibrant, and an essential part of our existence. Yes, it is already happening.

**Briggs:** In your poem “*ginen organic acts*” from *from unincorporated territory [saina]*, you have text in the upper right hand corner of the page and text in the lower left hand corner of the page with the middle completely empty (52). When reading this poem, I made a big circle in the middle of the page and wrote: how can we interpret this space? In Chapter Three of the same book, you wrote: “no page is ever truly blank” (65). Can you describe how space works in your poems? What goes through your mind as you navigate a page, a chapter, a book?

**Perez:** The space of a page is an excerpt of an ocean. Words are like islands, sentences like archipelagoes. The ocean is not aqua nullius, but it is full of life, story, voyages, and burial. Space gives shape and location in my poems. As I navigate this space (as I write a poem), I think about what I carry with me on a particular poetic journey (page, chapter, book), who I have left behind, what my destination is, what is guiding me. Space can also be land, which is similarly deeply storied. In this case, words become landmarks and scars.

**Briggs:** Continuing on the topic of space and placement of text on the page, at what stage of writing do you arrange the words on the page? I am curious to know if the placement comes during creation, revision, editing, or publishing?

**Perez:** The placement of text comes at any given time, sometimes during creation but sometimes during revision. Sometimes the publication into book format changes the arrangement. I try to stay open to the poem in the process of making.

**Briggs:** Transitioning from space on the page to occupied space in Guåhan, you mention throughout your poetry that the U.S. military currently occupies approximately one-third of Guåhan’s physical landscape. Considering the current military build-up, how do you see the animals, land use, and land ownership being affected? Have any consequences of the build-up already surfaced?

**Perez:** Animals that are already endangered will be placed into even more precarious existences, especially those that dwell near the live firing range complex. More land (and water) will be used for military purposes, which means more development to house the influx of population. Rent and real estate prices will rise and force Chamorros out of the market—this happens because military personnel sometimes receive housing stipends to rent and low interest loans to purchase homes—inflating the market. All of these impacts have been happening for decades—the military buildup will simply exacerbate many of these problems.

**Briggs:** Finally, I would like to discuss attrition. Most Chamorros, as you note in your poetry, have left Guåhan, and more and more continue to flee Guåhan with the increasing military presence. Furthermore, in your third book, in the poem “*ginen tidelands [apra harbor, Guåhan][minimum dredge depth: 49.5 feet][turning basin: 1,092 feet radius][channel width: 600 feet]*” you strike through words such as “toninos” (dolphins), “atuhong” (humphead parrotfish), “halu’u” (gray reef sharks),

and others followed by the words “permanent / loss—” (42). Can you close by telling us how you envision Guåhan in 10, 20, 50 years? What will the new normal look like for Guåhan if decolonization is successful? For that matter, how do you define success regarding decolonization?

**Perez:** In the coming decades, I envision there will be more loss: loss of land, loss of healthy environments, loss of species, loss of indigenous population. There will be further militarization: more weapons, more weapons training, more soldiers, more enlistments, more war. Chamorro culture, language, and people will be pushed further into endangerment and precariousness. At the same time, I believe that the decolonization movement will strengthen and grow, will create safe spaces for culture, language, and politics. A handful of young activists will become politicians and vocal leaders, and many of [us] will continue to build networks of solidarity across the Pacific region and indigenous world. Global geopolitical struggles and climate change will radically re-shape the world in 50 years, and I believe that Chamorro who are children now will grow up to survive, resist, adapt, love, remember, and sing of the strength and beauty of [our] culture and people. For me, that is successful decolonization.

**Conclusion:**

*ginen* the micronesian kingfisher [*i sihek*]

[our] nightmare : no  
birdsong—  
the jungle was riven emptied  
of [*i sihek*] bright blue green turquoise red gold  
feathers—everywhere : brown  
tree snakes avian  
silence—

the snakes entered  
without words when [we] saw them it was too late—  
they were at [our] doors sliding along  
the passages of [*i sihek*]  
empire—then

the zookeepers came—  
called it *species survival plan*—captured [*i sihek*] and transferred  
the last  
twenty-nine micronesian kingfishers  
to zoos for captive breeding [1988]—they repeated [*i sihek*]  
and repeated :

“if it weren’t for us  
your birds                    [*i sihek*]  
would be gone  
forever”

what does not change /

last wild seen—

(guma’ 24)

This thesis looked at the practice of military occupation on the island of Guam. It did so by intertwining my own personal experiences in Afghanistan and the military with Craig Santos Perez's poetry as it grapples with a non-native, military presence on his home island of Guam. The results are inconclusive, but they have hopefully raised awareness that the colonial impact, military presence, and current military build-up on Guam have transformed and will continue to transform Chamorro culture and the ecology of Guam in a myriad of ways. Perez portrays this transformation in his poetry through the imaginative use of literature, history, and visual images that blend in a way that emplace the readers inside and outside of Chamorro culture.

Understanding that a difference between space and place exists is crucial to the ideas in this thesis. How we understand our natural environment dictates the way in which we interact with it. Yi-fu Tuan tells us that "Place is security; Space is freedom: we are attached to one, we long for the other" (3). In many ways, culture is uniquely shaped by—and in—physical environments. Americans inherently treat space as unlimited because North America feels vast and limitless. For this reason, American connections to the land develop through their ability to move freely without fear of how their actions might impact a virtually inexhaustible pool of resources. The reverse is true for the inhabitants of island nations where space is extremely limited. "Space," as Tuan notes, "is given by the ability to move," and in Guam, that space is transforming as the military appropriates land and resources for growth. While an expansive ocean provides seemingly endless resources, the ocean itself is uninhabitable for humans and Chamorros, out of necessity, are constantly negotiating for space.

In Chapter Two, I claim that there are two implied readers in Perez's work: the native and the outsider. I, however, have spent little effort in considering the occupier's stance. What if we were to turn the focus on military culture? What if the military adopted a simultaneous

insider/outsider perspective on space and place as it relates to military presence? What would it look like if militaries earnestly and actively took this into consideration? For centuries, militaries have attacked the environment to gain an advantage over their enemies: General Sherman's path of destruction across the U.S. South; the British setting fire to "Romanian oilfields to prevent the Central Powers from capturing them" in World War I; in World War II, the "scorched earth" tactics used by Germany and Russia; and in the Korean War, the U.S. targeting of dams in North Korea (Austin 1). For this reason, the international community has put in place certain restrictions on warfare that are meant to protect the environment. However, these restrictions are often, if not exclusively, limited to wartime activities, which, in practice, are often subverted for military necessity. The problem, then, is accountability. Nobody is, or can be, held accountable for their actions. Additionally, international law of war fails to consider the environmental destruction that occurs because of militaries outside the temporality of war.

While the global political stage continues to contest military occupation practices, these discussions, often limited to warfare, do not consider the long-term environmental damage that occurs from wartime preparation, peacetime military practices, and remnants of war that exist in post-war countries that have lasting effects on the land and the people. For instance, "the environmental damage in the 1990-91 Gulf War was not unilateral. The region is now littered with as much as 300 tons of armor-piercing depleted uranium (DU) ammunition used by Coalition (largely US) forces" (Austin 2). The underlying problem with this example demonstrates the global community's propensity to only consider places affected by wartime activity during the time of war itself, which, as a result, ignores permanent installations, such as Guam's, that do not have the violent, short-term war experience that makes quantifiable assessments of damage more accessible. Instead, Guam suffers from slow violence that is often

speculative, which results in less attention and further degradation, as Rob Nixon argues in his book, *Slow Violence*.

We have an “ethical responsibility” to consider redrawing “the boundary between the war survivor and the war casualty” (Nixon 231). In other words, the aftermath of warfare often results in more deaths than are attributed to the war itself. These “deferred war deaths” embody the human and environmental toll that military technology places on society. However, even if we recognize this post-war destruction, we still fail to consider the collateral damage inflicted upon entire regions and cultures that experience damage because of their proximity to military activity, or, in Guam’s case, long-term occupation. The evidence of damage in Guam as a result of proximity to military activity, for example, is best represented during the Cold War nuclear arms race where much of the U.S. nuclear weapons testing occurred in the Marshall Islands, which sit southeast of Guam in the Pacific Ocean. The nuclear drift and decontamination practices, as Perez suggests, may be the root cause of high levels of cancer among Chamorros. The problem with this claim, as environmental lawyer and scholar Jay Austin argues, is that “the ability of ecological and public health sciences to predict long-term damage currently is quite limited” (7). For this reason, it becomes increasingly difficult for affected nations to hold anyone accountable for their environmental and human ailments. Nation-states like Russia, China, and the U.S., then, use this uncertainty to shroud their complicity in environmental damage, keeping themselves from claiming responsibility. Additionally, “scientific methods for evaluating the impacts” of military activity are proving “incapable of assessing” certain impacts on culture, “such as the claim that environmental damage has ‘driven the gods away’ or otherwise destroyed the spiritual meaning of a place” (Austin 15). This inability to assess environmental impact is emblematic of the struggle Chamorros feel when trying to identify their



place amidst militarized space. Many of the locations on Guam that hold deep spiritual meaning, like Tomhum and Sumay Cemetery, have been transformed by U.S. occupation. For this reason, we need to revisit the ethics and environmental justice issues raised when land is appropriated for military use.

We are currently in a time where change and reformation are possible. With the rise of environmentalism and advances in military technology, the global political stage is set for an important discussion on the environmental impacts of military occupation and activity. Physiologist Arthur Westing asserts that “although military activities now contribute only about 3 percent to total human activities worldwide, every bit of ameliorative action is valuable in the increasingly dire environmental circumstances prevailing today” (Austin 171). While three percent seems like a small number relative to all human activity, environmental engineer Asit Biswas notes that “nearly 85 percent of the total energy used by the United States government is for military purposes. For example, the fuel used by an F-16 training jet in less than one hour is nearly equivalent to what an average U.S. motorist uses over a period of two years” (Austin 306). Westing continues to suggest that some military activity, especially in more powerful nations, is disproportionately higher in its capacity to destroy and points out that “163 of the 192 current sovereign states maintain regular armed forces” (Austin 172). These numbers are meant to be staggering and are a call for every nation to consider its ecological footprint in terms of military occupation and activity. The U.S., with one of the most powerful and omnipresent militaries in the world, has an even greater responsibility to ensure its practices do not add to the narrative of decline.

One possible change that would assist in reducing the environmental impacts of military activity would be to pull militaries back within the borders of their nations, reducing their

ecological footprint. Guam, however, sits in a grey area, holding a precarious situation; it is a part of the U.S., yet not fully included in its sovereignty. Where do we draw the line? Guam, pre-Magellan, was self-determined and self-sufficient. While Guam is only one example of military occupation and the environmental repercussions of military presence on an indigenous people and their land, it is a tremendous example of how centuries of military rule and occupation have transformed the land and culture. Guam is a palimpsest of colonial influence, yet even over three centuries, the Chamorro identity, while transformed, still survives.

There is no easy solution to the environmental problems associated with military occupation, if there is one at all, but we have an ethical responsibility to consider how military presence and occupation affect a sense of place. To take place and essentially convert it into militarized space is to assume one entity's value is greater than another. If both entities are human, then the decision, in theory, is easy: no human life is more valuable than another. However, this scenario is complicated when it is the subversion of the environment or culture for human purposes under question. Many of the arguments posed in this thesis are anthropocentric, but what if we were to consider the environment as equally valuable as human life?

As this paper demonstrates, the role of the imaginative in representing environmental damage is crucial to revealing what is lost due to militarization. It is not my intent to disparage the U.S. military or to call for its dismemberment. Instead, I hope to identify and represent a need for the U.S. military, and all militaries for that matter, to consider what happens to a place when it becomes occupied. Each place, before the military enters, has a story, a history, and a spirit. The land is not only a resource, but it is inextricably linked to the culture of its indigenous population. Forced displacement is akin to Heise's discussion of deterritorialization; she argues that "when imposed from the outside, [it] is sometimes accompanied by experiences of loss,

deprivation, or disenfranchisement” (20). In this way, the displacement of natives from native land ruptures the link that indigenous culture holds with the natural world (20). The United States is a relatively young nation that became a melting pot of culture, and, with a large area of land, it has been easy for all of those cultures to exist simultaneously. In fact, the space available in the U.S. has led to the most individualistic society in human history. We move hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles to attend schools, acquire jobs, or change scenery. Chamorros on Guam, which is only thirty-three miles long, do not have that luxury. They are at the whim of the U.S. military and government, and as the military appropriates land for its needs, the indigenous population has no other choice but to fall into obscurity or leave their native land.

The research and analysis in this project should not stop here. Although no two occupations should be approached the same way, the theories and concepts evident through analyzing Perez’s poetry can certainly inform the practice of military occupation and colonial influence globally. The practice of looking at the literature and art from indigenous populations can reveal the place that existed and the placeness that continues to exist despite military presence. As globalization continues to change, blur, and erase borders, it is paramount that we recognize the military’s capacity to transform the place it occupies. To do this, we require a change in perspective, a change that we can acquire by looking at literature that emerges from transformed places.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: PICTURE OF NARAY DISTRICT, KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

The picture below was taken at Forward Operating Base Bostick (Naray) in Afghanistan. This is the same picture I describe taking in the creative non-fiction introduction after leaving the latrine (see pages 3-4). The building on the left is the latrine. The green terraced fields across the river are the cornfields that, when fully grown, hide Taliban snipers. On the other side of the large mountain on the left side of the picture is Pakistan. The pipe pouring waste into the river is not visible at this angle.



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### EDUCATION

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Major: American Legal Studies

Overall GPA: 3.11/4.00; Graduated 05/2006

### WORK EXPERIENCE

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UNITED STATES ARMY,  
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Unmanned Aerial Systems Company Commander – 03/12-Present  
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Fixed Wing Student – 12/11-03/12  
Fort Huachuca, AZ 85613

Military Intelligence Captain's Career Course Student – 05/11-11/11  
Hunter Army Airfield, GA 31409

Executive Officer – 01/11-05/11  
Jalalabad, Afghanistan 09310

CH-47 Platoon Leader – 01/10-01/11  
Bagram, Afghanistan 09354

Hunter Army Airfield, GA 31409

Flight Operations Officer, Assistant Operations Officer – 10/08-01/10

Primary training manager and trainer for the unit, responsible for the Aircrew Training Program, train based on the unit's wartime mission, maintain standards, and evaluate proficiency. Earn rating in the C-12, conduct flight in five airplanes, including aerobatic flight. Present executive summaries, direct complex training on military decision-making process and participate in complex exercise with foreign officers. Responsible for crew training and basic building blocks for collective training, assist instructor pilot in ensuring crews are properly trained, and develop proficiency in aircraft. Responsible for planning, coordination, and management of all flight missions, flight records, and flight schedule; establish flying hour program, and battle track all missions.

## CONFERENCE PAPERS PRESENTED

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“Poetic Warfare with Craig Santos Perez: An Eco-Critical View of CSP and the Military’s Impact on the Environment.” University of Mississippi. Apr. 2014.

“Confederate Mythology and The Great War: Bayard Sartoris and Post-Traumatic Stress in Faulkner’s *Flags in the Dust*.” United States Military Academy. Sep. 2014.

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