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REVIEW ESSAY

## POLITICAL RIGHTS ON THE ISLAND OF GUAM

by

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In an Afterword that extends the scope and adds value to Bordallo-Hofschneider's historical work (2001), Guam's esteemed historian, indigenous activist, and statesman, Robert A. Underwood, writes that "at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is instructive for us to read and reread Ms. Hofschneider's account" (Underwood 2001, p. 202).

For Underwood, the instructive value of rereading Bordallo-Hofschneider's account, which he takes to be both "unabashedly committed" and "historically accurate," is that it transports us beyond the past of "how our leaders worked towards political freedom from the very beginning" (Underwood 2001, p. 202) and into the present and future of the Chamorro struggle towards "political fulfillment." Moreover, in judging her work as having broken from the confines of colonial and colonizing historiography and thus furnishing us an "opportunity" to reflect on differences between Chamorro and colonizer perspectives, Underwood appends to her work a meta-commentary on six persisting political perspectives, three of which he classifies as "colonial", and three he identifies as "the main components of a Chamorro political ideology" (Underwood 2001, p. 204). In this my own lat-

est rereading of Bordallo-Hofschneider's historical work, I prevail on Underwood's Afterword as a frame to help us understand why it is important to read and reread Bordallo-Hofschneider's book, even if elements in that book provoke a rereading of the political present and future that is represented and enacted in the inclusion of Underwood's commentary. In the main, I will show how Bordallo-Hofschneider and Underwood's historical analyses mutually corroborate each other to provide an inspiring story that, as Underwood says of her work, helps to teach a history "which (is) worthy enough to be memorized by every Guam school child" (Underwood 2001, p. 202). But I will also conclude by teasing out a glimpse of a history in Bordallo-Hofschneider's work that, while clearly revealing those "components of a Chamorro political ideology" that Underwood would assert to be antithetical to colonial perspectives, also suggests moments of intertwining between Native and colonial perspectives in ways that complicate important and necessary efforts to distinguish them.

In his inventory Underwood identifies three colonialist (and colonizing) perspectives that serve to "justify the status quo." These beliefs

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are, 1) that “infrastructure development compensates for lack of political development”, 2) that “size (smallness) is an impediment to political development”, and 3) that “political development follows economy.” This last view he also calls the “Economy First” perspective (Underwood 2001, p. 207). In Economy First, which almost sounds like a good idea for a bad airline false advertisement, the operating idea is that concerns for economic welfare take precedence over demands for political development such that in heavily colonized place like Guam, unlike other places in the world, unfavorable economic conditions favor the status quo as opposed to urging its overthrow or transformation. For Underwood, the Economy First perspective also has an ideological corollary in response to the Native who might just dare to question the order. He calls this corollary the “you never had it so good” perspective (Underwood 2001, p. 207), or the (you are a) “privileged people.” A veritable silencing device, this corollary can also be viewed critically as another way by which the status quo is upheld.

“In the other direction,” says Underwood, are another three perspectives that comprise what he calls the “main components of a Chamorro political ideology,” and which “recur in every manner of expression (and) have staying power” (Underwood 2001, p. 203). They are, 1) a demand for fairness and equality in treatment, 2) a demand for respect, and 3) a readiness to fight for land, which Underwood takes to be “the only issue in Guam which radicalizes even the most mild mannered Chamorro ... the singular issue with the federal government which can turn the loyal military retiree, the police officer, the teacher, the nurse into Chamorro activists” (Underwood 2001, p. 211).

Underwood’s inventory on the distinctions between colonial and Chamorro political perspectives – informed through historical and cultural study, and seasoned by activism and statesmanship—offers an appropriate and useful frame for evaluating Bordallo-Hofschneider’s study. Following Underwood, we might view Bordallo-Hofschneider’s work to be a particularly significant historical ana-

lyses of how naval colonialism operated through a systematic privileging of economic (welfare) development over native aspirations for political change, and the ways in which it belittled if not silenced altogether the Chamorro story. Furthermore, in being critically attuned to Native voices and sentiments in the colonial archives, and informed by the politics of a re-articulated Chamorro movement in the 1970s and early 80s that would be expressed in terms of the principle of “self-determination” (Underwood and Souder 1987), Bordallo-Hofschneider’s work not only brings the past to life, but in Underwood’s assessment, brings it to the present and into the future in inspiring and instructive ways. The success is all the more significant no less because it is accomplished by an historian who is also *Taotao tano*, a person of the land.

Though it is was published for the first time in 2001, Bordallo-Hofschneider’s study had already been something of a classic for historical and political projects published in the preceding decade and a half. Scott Russell and the CNMI Historic Preservation Office, and Betsy Kalau, who initiated the effort to publish this important work, deserve a ton of credit for making it available to the general public. Produced in 1982 as a Masters thesis in history at the University of Hawai’i, the published version is the same study only supplemented with Underwood’s Afterword, good photographs, and slight reformatting by Russell. There is also a third, but unfortunate, difference between this publication and the original thesis manuscript in the large number of typographical errors that appear to be the result, ironically, of an electronic spellchecker. These, in my opinion, not only mar the publication, but also have the potential to reflect badly on the author. This is unfortunate because the errors are not in the original manuscript, which was as meticulously crafted as it was researched and considered.

On more substantive matters, and in my opinion, Bordallo-Hofschneider’s most important contributions to the study of Guam’s political history are threefold. The first is that her treatment of the movement for U.S. citizenship, the principal and most compelling

expression of the “campaign for political rights” in the first half of the twentieth century, is the first to show an active Chamorro political consciousness—typically silenced in colonial narratives—that utilized American citizenship and deployed a rhetoric of loyalty to contest the tyranny of naval rule. It is also in her analyses of this movement—a movement begun in a parade of petitions and resolutions in the first two decades of naval rule—that we encounter Bordallo-Hofschneider’s second major contribution: her historical unearthing and illustration of the systematic naval (mis)representation of Chamorro political sentiments and aspirations, a history that reveals gaping spaces between naval and native agency (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 60-64). The Navy’s favoring of ‘economics’ (welfare) over Native ‘political development’—as Underwood helps us understand one such gap—also helps explain why the U.S. Navy would by 1937 actively oppose a Congressional bill (spawned by Chamorro activism and lobbying) that could very well have granted U.S. citizenship to the Chamorros had the Navy not, in part, argued that the measure would have been “detrimental” to the Chamorro’s best interests. Among the first critical scholars to actively challenge naval (mis)representations of Chamorro aspirations (see also Underwood 1977), Bordallo-Hofschneider’s work also helps us understand the operation of larger colonial discourses particular to the Chamorros, and which only recently have received sharp critical attention among increasing number of Chamorro critical scholars of Guam (Underwood 1987; Souder 1992; PSECC 1993; 1993b; M. Perez 1997; C.T. Perez 1997; Camacho 1998; DeLisle 2001; Hattori 2004). Two discourses that Bordallo-Hofschneider challenges are, first, what Underwood calls the view that “what’s good for the Navy is also good for the native”, and second, a corollary view that in the colonizer’s records and narratives alone can one find historical truth. These colonial and colonizing discourses in history and historiography, I would further suggest, have also contributed to the systematic belittling of the Chamorros and their concerns, which Underwood above has also identified as “size (smallness) matters”

perspective. As mentioned, Bordallo-Hofschneider’s history reverses this practice and scaling by scrutinizing the colonial records and privileging Chamorro perspectives to enlarge our understanding of Guam and Chamorro history. Her work was/is thus an important part of an intellectual movement to raise the island and the region out of the discursive obscurity into which they have been placed and through which they have been narrativized (see Kushima 2001), and to relocate the Chamorro story into the larger human struggle for freedom. In this sense, Bordallo-Hofschneider allows us to appreciate the larger-scale significance of this local anti-colonial ancestral story, which in the scale of Chamorro and human political futures, *matters hugely*.

This book’s third major contribution is its assertion and chronicling of the centrality of land issues in that drama. Though not conspicuously contested in the prewar era, land issues came to a head after the war with the reestablishment of naval rule and the huge demand for land and other resources that America’s newfound hegemony required. Both, of course, brought mounting resentment and anger from a populace still grateful to the military for having “liberated” them from enemy hands. Though charged in and of itself, Chamorro unhappiness with military land condemnation procedures, especially when combined with new tensions and social dislocations created by American bombardment and physical transformation of the island into a huge military supply depot and communications and transportation hub, and amidst a revitalized clamoring for citizenship and home-rule, contributed to a general heightening of tensions between military and Chamorro leaders in the period leading up to, and forcing, the passage of the Organic Act in 1950 (Hattori 1995). Bordallo-Hofschneider’s attention to the prominence and centrality of land issues in the Chamorro testimonies at the Congressional hearings on the proposed Organic Act, held in Guam in 1949, provides an important and explanatory context for the eventual processes of the “radicalization”, in Underwood’s words, of many Chamorros in the 1970s and early 80s.

In addition to these, Bordallo-Hofschneider's work was significant in other regards. For me, at least, hers was the first systematic treatment of how the pre-war Naval Government violated all of the fundamental tenets of American-style democracy (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 32-33), and how it essentially obstructed the realization of the political ideals it preached. She was also the first to substantiate suspicions that the level of democratic participation enjoyed by Chamorros under the pre-war U.S. Naval rule was actually lower than that experienced toward the end of the Spanish regime (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 35). This, to me, pushes back the date, and begs further cultural and historical analyses, of what we might call Chamorro modernities. But to continue, Bordallo-Hofschneider was also, again for me, at least, the first to problematize well-meaning depictions of Chamorro "adaptability" (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 3-4) to colonial rule, those views that disavow or downplay unwittingly the serious social and cultural dislocations and trauma of Guam's colonial history even as they attempt to celebrate Chamorro survival.

For me, these attributes not only corroborate, but enact, in its historiography, the very histories that recur in the second set of perspectives that Underwood has identified as the main components of a Chamorro ideology: the demand for fairness in treatment, the demand for respect, and the fighting spirit over land issues that can radicalize the most conservative of them all. These, to recall Underwood's assertion, are what separate, distinguish, the colonizer from the Chamorro. These are the important lessons that successive re-readings of critical histories like that of Bordallo-Hofschneider's will provide us about the present-day Chamorro political struggle. And the future evaluation of such struggles: in a futuristic act of historical imagination, Underwood wonders aloud in the present: "who amongst our current leadership will be remembered for advancing the cause of Guam's political fulfillment, who will be remembered for intelligent compromise and who will be judged harshly for ignoring our political fulfillment"

(Underwood 2001, p. 202). Who, in an imagining of an act of historical remembering and analyses in the future, will be identified as having been true to the Chamorro ideology, and who will end up to have been duped by the colonizer?

But if Underwood's studied and seasoned observations convince us to read and reread Bordallo-Hofschneider's political "history" for what it can teach us about the political present, I want to conclude this review essay with another history, one that I first encountered in Bordallo-Hofschneider's thesis, and one that suggests the need for yet another rereading of that political present and that imagined future's past as expressed in Underwood's Afterword. For it is also Bordallo-Hofschneider who first drew our attention to the interesting way in which Naval officials underscored their dependence and reliance on Chamorro welfare as a precondition for military success in the tropical outpost. I'll return to this specific moment momentarily, but I want to say that the reason why this notion of naval dependence upon Native struck me back in the 1980s was precisely because it seemed to reverse that colonial perspective, already identified by Underwood, that emphasized the historic and economic dependence of the Chamorro on America that legitimized then, and now, the colonial status, and also served as a way to muzzle any talk of change. Continuing with Underwood, we can also trace the continuity or endurance into the present of that other form of the colonial perspective: the one that dupes heavily-colonized people into not wanting to jeopardize their economic and social goodies by upsetting the status quo, and which likewise brings scorn upon those who would rebel: ingrates! "you never had it so good!" (for fuller treatment, see Underwood 1990). But I also want to ask, is it really the case that those who guard their welfare as a criteria for making political choices automatically colonized and thus less ideologically Chamorro? And I want to pose the post-colonial challenge for the Chamorro struggle for decolonization: in what peculiar ways is a genuine struggle for political fulfillment deeply intertwined with a colonial legacy?

If it endures as a colonial and colonizing perspective, that meandering “economics first” perspective also has origins in a particular historical moment in which the line between colonizer and colonized is explicitly blurred in profound interdependence between naval and native interests. As acting governor Dyer expressed it in his 1904 Annual Report, “the conditions are such that the interests of the Naval Station and natives are intimately interwoven. The one, as an organization, cannot escape, or live far apart, from the other, and the efficiency of the first depends entirely on the welfare of the second” (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 36). Dyer continues: “It is therefore incumbent on us for our self-protection and efficiency to give the natives such care as they are unable to get for themselves, to see that they are kept healthy...” Since Bordallo-Hofschneider, at least, it has become already customary, and rightfully so, for succeeding Chamorro historians to point out the patronizing condescension that informs these views (Hattori 2004; PSECC 1993a). But we must also consider the instructional value that moments of such “intimate interw(eavings)” suggest for an anticolonial and native-centered struggle (Diaz 2002; Diaz 2001; Diaz 2000; Diaz and Kauanui 2001). What does it mean, for example, that the same kind of interdependence, the same level of intimate interweavings, could characterize Chamorro interests and desires at this time (DeLisle 2001). Or that such native investments in the first half of the twentieth century could have themselves been prefigured in a longer history of Chamorro Catholicism, which arguably also bears as much witness to a history of Spanish colonization as it does to a Chamorro history of converting those who came to convert them (Diaz 1993; Diaz 1992). In this particular history, Chamorro and Catholic are not mutually exclusive categories.

But to return to the American period proper, it is also important to recognize that Dyer’s observation in 1904 cannot help but express the same logic contained in the famous originating decree, promulgated by President McKinley and given to the U.S. Navy in 1898, that empowered and mandated the *simultaneous*

*establishment of a military outpost on the island AND the benevolent assimilation of its native inhabitants* (36). Contrary to how some have seen these as separate and self-contradictory (Maga 1988), the Navy’s twin objectives of military purpose and civil administration were simply not mutually exclusive pre-occupations.

But let us also return to another moment in Bordallo-Hofschneider’s historical account, this time to her treatment of the aforementioned Governor Willis Bradley, supporter extraordinaire (or just rare) among *i san bi-yong*/outsiders who supported Chamorro political rights. Because of this political sympathy and especially because of actions he took at local reform, Bradley is still admired and respected in Guam and Chamorro political historiography. As a supporter of Chamorro political aspirations, Bradley is believed to have upheld sentiments opposite to those colonizing perspectives, like the “economics first” viewpoint that not only justifies the status quo, but might also mark the colonized mindset of its subscribers. Yet, even in Bordallo-Hofschneider’s accounting, Bradley enjoyed a kind of political and ideological kinship with Chamorro political leaders, not simply because he supported their political aspirations before the war, but more profoundly, because of common motives and rationales, such as what underlay the strong opposition he and many (most?) Chamorro leaders felt against the move between 1945 and 1950 to transfer federal oversight over Guam from the Department of Navy to the civilian Department of the Interior. The shared reasoning, of course, was that Bradley and those leaders believed such a transfer would only spell Guam’s economic ruin; that the transfer would, as Bradley had warned in a letter to Chamorro leaders after the war, “bring tremendous financial hardship to the people of Guam” (in 182). Bordallo-Hofschneider takes this, and similar sentiments in the 1970s and 1980s to be “grounded”, reasonable, and even “natural.” This is another key moment in history where one finds an important coming together of colonizer and colonized, where the colonial agents like the Navy, or Naval officials, gain a kind of favored status among the colonized “despite the un-

democratic and patronizing character” (Bordallo-Hofschneider 2001, p. 182) of the Navy prewar performance or its postwar craving for land – the “singular issue”, as Underwood observed earlier, that could radicalize the most mild mannered of Chamorros. It is as if radicalized Chamorros took action by calling for the retention of naval oversight. This is not unlike the political dilemma that present-day liberals or progressives encounter in an increasingly impoverished American working class’ increasing level of support for the party that arguably contributes directly to their poverty (Frank 2004). This ideology, I would suggest, is an exceedingly and troublingly conservative one which contains, if not privileges, social and cultural issues over economics (Micklethwaite and Wooldridge 2004). Or to put it more precisely, renders political and economic choice to be the principle forms for expressing social and cultural issues. I would concur with Underwood that this conservative ideology is, in the context of its expression in Guam, a colonial and colonized ideology. But I’m getting increasingly unsure about the extent to which this ideology and Chamorro ideology are oppositional.

In summarizing the political events and the sentiments leading up to the passage of the Organic Act in 1950, Bordallo-Hofschneider also draws a parallel with those that would re-emerge several decades later, in the 1970s and early 80s, which of course constituted her (and Underwood’s) own historical present. That past/present saw a robust resurgence of political activism, especially a Native consciousness that explicitly questioned Guam’s political status as one of an enduring colony, and one responsible for the social and economic troubles the island had begun to experience. It was also a period that saw the revitalization of Chamorro political consciousness, led and exemplified by the likes of Underwood and Bordallo-Hofschneider themselves (Souder and Underwood 1987; Underwood 1984; Bordallo’s Masters Thesis, published in 2001). For both Bordallo-Hofschneider and Underwood, the political clamoring of the 1970s and 1980s, and the earlier clamoring before the passage of the Organic Act in 1950, bore strong resemblance

to each other. Despite widespread hesitation to rock the political boat, these episodes of political flare-up expressed and reflected deep dissatisfactions with social and economic conditions that began to be traced to the island’s status underneath the military and the federal regimes respectively.

In closing, the resonances between the distant and recent pasts of the colonizer and colonized also tell us that a history of colonialism and anticolonialism is alive and well in places like Guam at the dawn of a new millennium. In the ongoing story of colonialism among subjugated peoples like the Chamorro, I also believe – having been taught well by that (slightly older) generation of teachers in Bordallo-Hofschneider and Underwood—that the quest for political fulfillment, including the absolute need to distinguish the colonized from the colonizer, must also endure. To be sure, Bordallo-Hofschneider’s work, extended in historical and analytical scope by the inclusion of Underwood’s commentary, embodies that ongoing history and historiography.

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