

A Defence Democracy ‘in’ the United States: Gender and Politics in the Unincorporated Territory of Guam

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Abstract: In 2018, the island of Guåhan (Guam), an unincorporated territory of the United States (US), elected the island’s first “Maga’håga” or first woman Governor of Guam, Lourdes Leon Guerrero. Guåhan became the first state or territory “in” the US to secure a legislative supermajority with all three branches of government headed by a woman. While political progress should be celebrated, local power is constrained by contemporary US colonial structures that enable expanding militarisation. This paper offers an island-centric and gendered analysis of the politics on Guåhan, revealing contesting Indigenous and colonial control over *i tåno’* (the land) of a sacred site, Litekyan (Ritidian Point). Defence democracy is demonstrated as the US military flouts locally passed Legislative Resolutions to construct a US\$78 million Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range. This is possible due to “imperial feminisms” frameworks, which celebrates elite female leaders within colonial systems. In response, the Indigenous *famalåo’an* Guåhan (women of Guam) have organised through the community group, Prutehi Litekyan: Protect Ritidian.

Keywords: colonisation, gender, Guam, militarisation, Pacific, politics

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Introduction

To have our first Maga’håga or female governor, 10 out of 15 legislators are female, and a Democratic supermajority is such an empowering change. Many of those who won have been openly critical of military expansion in our region, and many have also expressed support of self-determination votes for our island. Now, more than ever, decolonization is possible. The Indigenous culture of the Marianas is strongly matrilineal, so to return to that tradition after centuries of patriarchy and colonization is just amazing (Guåhan resident, Moñeka De Oro, as reported by Letman, 2018).

Contemporary colonialism and expanding militarisation continue to be a gendered process on the island (land area: 550 km²) of Guåhan (Guam) in the Western Pacific. Foreign occupation and patriarchal colonisation have spanned nearly 500 years, first implemented by the Spanish and further entrenched by the United States (US) Naval Command. In relation to the US, Guåhan residents elect a non-voting delegate to the US Congress but lack a vote in the House of Representatives and cannot vote for the US President and Commander-in-Chief (*The Guam Daily Post*, 2017). Despite this, 4,000-year-old matriarchal kinship systems continue as the source of power and inspiration for Indigenous CHamoru *famalåo’an* (women).

For this paper, I examine the island of Guåhan with a gendered theoretical framework, supported by the academic work of Indigenous Pacific scholars. This island-centric analysis of the politics on Guåhan highlights how the superficial celebration of elite women leaders as “imperial feminisms” (Eisenstein, 2016) distracts from contestations over Indigenous and military control over *i tåno’* (the land). After providing further context on Guåhan’s continuing

colonisation and expanding militarisation, I focus on the 2018 election when the island elected the first Maga'håga (woman Governor of Guam): Lourdes Leon Guerrero. The win secured a legislative supermajority, with all three branches of government headed by a woman. However, I argue that 'defence democracy' is when expanding militarisation occurs, regardless of increased women's representation in the 35th Liheslaturan Guåhan (Guam Legislature) as local political power over island is restricted by US federal colonial frameworks.

Through newspaper articles and correspondence between the local government and the US Department of Defense (DoD), I examine the locally passed Legislative Resolution 164-35 as a case study to demonstrate how defence democracy operates. I analyse the specific construction site of a US\$78 million Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range currently underway at the northern end of the island where the Pacific Ocean meets the Philippine Sea. The DoD considers it "Ritidian Point" at Northwest Field, located on the 22,000-acre Andersen Air Force Base (Carson, 2017). In contrast, the site is referred to as "Litekyan" in CHamoru, meaning "stirring place" with *i tåno* (the land) and *i tasi* (the sea) serving as a "sacred space where the stories of Guåhan's oldest ancestors can be experienced" (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 12). I conclude with information and updates provided by the women-led community group Prutehi Litekyan: Protect Ritidian, which demonstrates the simultaneous denial of local democracy and self-determination in the name of US defence.

Figure 1. Standing on Litekyan beach, which includes hundreds of CHamoru archaeological sites, looking at the reef located within the planned Live-Fire Training Range Complex's Surface Danger Zone. Photograph by author, 2015.



From Guåhan: Weaving an island-centric and gendered analysis

This work is founded upon the academic and intellectual mat that famalå'an (women) scholars have woven as they have worked over generations toward Oceanic decolonisation and demilitarisation (Dé Ishtar, 1994; Teaiwa & Slatter, 2013; Na'puti & Rohrer, 2017). Teresia Teaiwa's decolonial and poetic approach to gender and (de)militarisation offers island-centric and Oceanic understandings of women's multifaceted forms of power (1992, 2008, 2011). Through scholarship and via Skype, she educated me on how to reflect on my white identity as

an outside researcher and made clear the obligation I have to write with accountability (Frain, forthcoming). My “settler responsibility” to Indigenous peoples is to constantly listen, learn, and support Oceanic women’s work and incorporate their perspectives into my writing (Garrison, 2019).

CHamoru famalão’an are the guardians of their islands and communities; they trace their matriarchal kinship systems alongside genealogies of resistance. Several CHamoru academics produced early scholarship on their connections to place and this continues to influence contemporary famalão’an scholars. Souder was the first to write in academic spaces about famalão’an’s lived-experiences under imperial frameworks imposed by the US (1985; 1991). She specifically addressed CHamoru women’s reservations about white settler forms of “feminism” (1992). CHamoru famalão’an continue to challenge how women are encouraged to establish themselves as equal to men in elite positions of power, and instead find their strength through island, Indigenous, and matrifocal forms of power (Cruz et al., 2016; Naholowa’a, 2018).

My island-centric analysis of Guåhan is grounded in early small state literature that address the smallness of island jurisdictions (Thorhallsson, 2018, p. 18) and moves Guåhan from the periphery to “the *centre* of research and critical inquiry” (Baldacchino, 2018, p. 4, italics in original). This shift expands the understanding of islands – regardless of their size – and their lands, seas and skies as significant places of inquiry. In contrast, Guåhan is conceptualised by the US DoD as a vulnerable, small and “remote island” that lacks the capacity to defend itself, while simultaneously framing it as absolutely necessary for (continental) US security (Frain, 2017, p. 107). The continued colonial control is perpetrated through a gendered narrative that the island is as a feminine locale in need of US strategic hypermasculine militaristic protection (Frain, 2018b). This form of defence democracy is one way the US justifies the US military’s occupation of Pacific islands, seas, and skies in the name of the US security, while denying self-determination to the Indigenous US citizens.

Famalão’an power is substantiated as taotao tãno’ (people of the land) and their historical resistance is best understood through the academic framework of “placenta politics” (DeLisle, 2020). As a form of resistance to pre-World War II US Naval “health and hygiene” orders, CHamoru pattera (midwives) refused to discard the pãres (placenta). Instead, pattera continued burying the pãres as a “political, social, and cultural act... [that] can be regarded as a specific form of Indigenous and gendered resistance against US naval colonialism” (DeLisle, 2015, pp. 2, 33). Resistance is based upon not only (sexual) control over their female bodies within health policies, but also upon rejecting foreign control over their communities and families (military recruiters), lands, seascapes, and skies (military projects and exercises) (DeLisle, 2016).

CHamoru famalão’an relationships with i tãno’ (the land) and i tasi (the sea) grounds and anchors their continuing resistance to contemporary colonialism and expanding militarisation and informs all aspects of Indigenous identity (Cruz et al., 2016; Na’puti & Frain, 2017). Oceanic perspectives consider land *in relation to* water, and “place is archipelagic, fluid, dynamic, and moving” (Na’puti & Frain, forthcoming, p. 1; Diaz, 2015). Therefore, while my gendered analysis specifically focuses on one site of i tãno’ (the land), CHamoru famalão’an’s defence and protection also includes the taotao mo’na (people of before) ancestors and means “ancestors as living entities that are present in the now” as well as future generations (Arriola, 2020). The transgenerational connections encompass the seas and skies.

Genealogies of famalão’an resistance are interwoven with the connection to the land, as former Guåhan Senator, Hope Cristobal and CHamoru language educator and community activist shares, “We don’t speak about i tãno’ as a separate thing, we are truly a people of the land” and guardians of i tãno’ (Lujan, 2017). CHamoru scholar, Tiara Na’puti, continues this work on the responsibilities of i tãno’ guardianship in response to expanding militarisation

across the Marianas. She explores how a “Chamoru sense of place” and connection to *i tãno’* challenges the “cartographic violence of the military” (Na’puti, 2019, p. 5),

A Chamoru sense of place also weaves together history and memory. Understanding the Chamoru people as *taotao tãno’* (people of the land) and their ancestral spirits as *taotao mo’na* (people of before) that inhabit the earth along with the living, conveys the mutually constitutive dynamics of people as land and people belonging to place, thus orienting Indigenous identity to collective concepts of land and ancestry (Na’puti, 2019, p. 9).

Contemporary *famalão’an* resistance is currently directed at one of 94 military expansion projects underway on the island of Guåhan. Specifically, *famalão’an* are calling for the return of their *tãno’* and protection of the sacred site, Litekyan (Ritidian Point) from the construction of the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range, one of the five ranges collectively referred to as Live-Fire Training Range Complex (LFTRC). As of August 2020, the construction of the Marine Base, Camp Blaz, is 65% complete, and the LFTRC is 50% complete, with 13 projects complete, 11 under construction, and more than 70 are pending (Kaur, 2020c). Currently, the LFTRC project is pending, “due to the reallocation of military spending for President Donald Trump’s border wall” (Kaur, 2020d). The efforts to protect Litekyan serves as a case-study to expose how US defence democracy actually functions to limit local political power within Guåhan. Instead, the US federal government and DoD celebrates feminism as elite women leaders in imperial positions of power which deny Indigenous self-determination.

Imperial Feminisms on Guåhan

Historically, feminism as a scholarly discipline has largely failed to take into account the varying cultural and colonial contexts, socio-historical and lived-experiences of women beyond continental and white settler societies (Frain, 2017, p.106; Frain, 2020; Mohanty, 1991, 2011). Even white settler concepts of feminism, although well intended, incorporate imperial ideologies and ignore Indigenous issues. This contemporary type of feminism encourages women to serve in patriarchal styles of leadership positions, without examining the very power structures they are praising, who they benefit and how they are maintained. It is not enough to “just add women [to positions of power] and stir” but rather the “masculinities and femininities in security situations” should be examined (Sjoberg, 2013, p. 62). These elite women who achieve their positions of power – as Governor or Rear Admiral – operate within the imperial-militarised structure of the US through appointment or election into prominent positions. While this may be framed as a democratic process, they defer to the existing dominant power structures which, on Guåhan, enable expanding militarisation. This is a form of “imperial feminism” described as,

feminism that operates on behalf of American empire building. It has a history of using the Western canon of “women’s rights” to justify American wars... Imperial feminism imposes rather than negotiates, it dominates rather than liberates, it declares itself the exceptional arbiter of women’s needs. It operates on behalf of the hierarchies of class across the globe, leaving most women out of the mix. Imperial feminism privileges empire building through war (Eisenstein, 2016, p. 52).

The current protection and defence efforts over *i tãno'* (the land) and lack of political power on Guåhan is upheld through this framework. As a white settler concept of “feminism,” political progress in Guåhan is celebrated on a superficial level which does not acknowledge nor challenge imperially imposed electoral systems which reinforce and maintain military and federal control over land (Frain, 2020).

A gendered analysis through the imperial feminism framework, reveals the contradictions of the DoD and Rear Admirals as elite women in powerful positions, but within patriarchal masculine systems. Rear Admirals are chosen by the secretary of the US Department of the Navy, and which used the appointment of Rear Admiral, Shoshana Chatfield, Commander of Joint Region Marianas / US Pacific Command, and Senior Military Official of Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau, as a photo opportunity to celebrate female leadership in the DoD. Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield’s predecessor, Rear Admiral Babette ‘Bette’ Bolivar, a Filipina born and raised in Hawai‘i, was the first female Commander of Joint Region Marianas / US Pacific Command in 2017 (Bolivar, 2016). The DoD celebrated the handover of the most powerful military position on the island, as the first time a female commander passed the responsibilities over to another female commander in the region (Pang, 2016).

Guåhan residents continue to be sceptical of Rear Admiral commitments to the local people, in contrast to their career objectives. While Rear Admiral Chatfield earned this incredible high-ranking status after beginning her career as a helicopter pilot, she left the role in 2019 to become the first woman president of the US Naval War College (Allyn, 2019). Rear Admirals operate within the imperial feminism framework by privileging US “empire building and war making,” which highlights that representations of women in elite positions do not automatically translate into best outcomes for the local community (Eisenstein, 2016, p. 52). Beginning with an imperial feminism framework, contemporary colonisation and expanding militarisation on Guåhan is demonstrated through my analysis of the politics surrounding Resolution 164-35.

Context: Colonisation and Militarisation of Guam

Guåhan is in political limbo. It remains as a non-self-governing territory, meaning it is considered US sovereign “soil” and politically *belonging* to the US, as its people are constrained by a lack of representation and voting rights in US federal systems. Local political power is constrained within US Congressional bureaucracy and the enduring domination is justified as essential for continental US national security. This relationship is consistently justified and reinforced through imperial ideologies by both the US federal government and the Department of Defense (DoD). Enduring colonisation and territorial political status enables an escalating militarisation, as confirmed by the first woman Governor of Guåhan, Lourdes “Lou” A. Leon Guerrero,

The reality is Guam is a colony, a U.S. territory, and is in a geographic position that the military sees as a prime position for defense in the Pacific. To work around this reality, Guam needs to get its political status in order so it can have more control over its destiny and be at the table when these issues are being negotiated (Kaur, 2019b).

The process of militarisation has been released over the last decade by the US federal government and facilitated by the DoD, in thousands of pages of highly technical (and often contradictory) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents (Na’puti & Bevacqua, 2015, p. 838). These EIS documents outline how all fifteen islands in the Marianas Archipelago are conceptualised as a potential Live-Fire Training Range Complex (LFTRC), including the

current 268,000km² training area that surrounds the archipelago (Frain, 2016, pp. 306-307). The DoD has begun the construction of additional LFTRCs on the islands of Guåhan, Tinian and Pãgan in the Marianas Archipelago (Frain, 2018c). Despite community concerns and comments, the DoD rarely changes its plans based on local input (Kaur, 2020b).

Guåhan is “one of the most militarized places on Earth by the measure of military equipment and toxic residue, historical levels of investment, and personnel per acre” (Lutz, 2019, p. 210). Currently, 29 per cent of Guåhan is a restricted military area, and the DoD considers the entire Marianas Archipelago as the “preferred destination” for the relocation of 5,000 Marines from Okinawa, Japan (U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, 2015). Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield, claims the “relocation of Marines to Guåhan from Okinawa increases our defense posture and security for our island, our nation and for all Americans” (Ridgell, 2017). This relocation is promoted as necessary for US national security by Rear Admiral Chatfield, claiming the US Marines “need a place to train” (Partido, 2019). Specifically, the construction of the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range on Guåhan is “vital” to the combat effectiveness of the Marines who will be relocating to Guåhan (Ridgell, 2017).

In 2015, the US Department of the Navy released a Record of Decision to construct a US Marines Corps LFTRC located at Northwest Field on Andersen Air Force Base. The LFTRC is comprised of a Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range, hand-grenade range, shoot house and breacher facility, as well as range-support and telecommunications facilities *above* the Guam National Wildlife Refuge, at Ritidian Unit (Hofschneider, 2016). The Surface Danger Zone (SDZ) includes significant portions of Litekyan, extends over the surrounding ocean and over the last hãyun lågu tree (Souli, 2020), about which more below. Community access to Litekyan will be restricted for 39 weeks per year with night operations; meaning that the space will be closed 75 per cent of the year (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 126). According to Na’puti (2019, p. 13), “Litekyan has deep ancestral connections and is a protected critical habitat area for endangered species; yet the US military engages in doublespeak by making the place seem at once useless/insignificant and simultaneously necessary for security and military training”. This site has a layered history of the US federal government’s control over *i tãno’*, either as a military installation or as a conservation area, ultimately restricting Indigenous residents from accessing their ancestral resources (Perez, 2014).

In 1944, Post-World War II, the US established naval rule over the island, with the northwest corner of Guåhan becoming a vital location for the US federal government. By the 1950s, the area was recognised as ideal for monitoring the surrounding ocean and air during the Cold War: the US Navy argued that “a national security threat from the Soviet Union necessitated the application of eminent domain for its long-distance Sonar Underwater Surveillance (SOSUS) program” (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 90). By the late 1950s,

a US federal Condemnation Case was filed for eleven parcels of land that were owned by local families, as well as an unsurveyed lot owned by the Government of Guam. The discovery that other parcels were landlocked by the proposed perimeters led to an amendment to expand the declared area of condemned land. However, that proposed amendment was never filed. On 3 December 1968, the US Naval Facility (NAVFAC) at Ritidian Point was commissioned (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 90).

The imperial legacy continues through the US Congressional exemption provided by the House of Representatives: a political body within which the residents of Guåhan lack a representative. H.R. 4435, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, authorised US\$ 521.3 billion for the DoD and includes an “amended version” of H.R.4402: the Guam Military Training and Readiness Act of 2014. H.R.4402 permits the US Department of the Navy to use Ritidian Unit, located within the Guam National Wildlife Refuge, as the Surface Danger Zone (SDZ) for the Live-Fire Training Range Complex (H.R.4402 - Guam Military Training and Readiness Act of 2014). Both H.R. 4435 and H.R. 4402 passed without local representation. Both are examples of how the US maintains imperial control over the island through bureaucratic and Congressional channels. US federal agencies pass the same *tåno*’ from one US agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, to another agency, the US DoD.

The Agüero, Flores, Castro, and Pangelinan families of Litekyan whose ancestral *tåno*’ were condemned in the 1960s under the “principle of eminent domain,” were told that the lands would be returned when the federal government no longer needed them for “national security purposes” (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 90). Instead, the lands were reassigned to the US General Services Administration, the federal agency authorised to transfer the title of the land to another federal agency (Perez, 2014; Flores, 2015). In the early 1980s, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, a different US federal agency, declared a need to “create a critical wildlife habitat” at Litekyan while at the same time the Navy planned to “install a new radio receiver system” (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 90). Litekyan was placed under the federal jurisdiction of the US Fish and Wildlife Service as Guam National Wildlife Refuge, Ritidian Unit.

This US federal government asserts its need to seize control over *i tåno*’ for a variety of reasons. Whether in the name of national security or the name of conservation, control over *i tåno*’ is supported by women in elite positions and enables expanding militarisation. Regardless of the reason, the US federal government does not require the consent of the local population and *i tåno*’ may be acquired through the US federal legal principle of “eminent domain,” justified as for the greater good of the nation (Frain, 2017, p. 210). These are examples of federal governance over the physical land, but the political system is an imposed form of US defence democracy.

Women’s representation in the 35th Liheslaturan Guåhan (Guam Legislature)

The contemporary colony of Guåhan holds local general elections that mirror the continental US system and campaigns. Residents select local leaders, mayors of their village, as well as senators for Liheslaturan Guåhan (Guam Legislature) with the governor serving in the highest position on the island. Due to the island’s position west of the international dateline, Guåhan holds elections hours before the continental US. In January 2017, famalåo’an Guåhan held the first Women’s March in response to Donald Trump’s inauguration and adapted US-centric language to reaffirm, “The Rise of the Woman = The Rise of the Nation” (A Mighty Island, 2017). While this was the largest single protest day in continental US history and framed as a historic day for US women, famalåo’an Guåhan were also resisting the imposed US electoral system from the 1960s (Frain, 2018a).

The two-party US political system of Democrats and Republicans is “still relevant and significant on Guam,” according to the Republican Party of Guam State Chairman, Jerry Crisostomo (Eugenio, 2018). But instead of committing to a political party, local voters unite according to family alliances and vote for individual candidates, not according to parties. “On a small island, community members are so close, either by blood or some other bond, so they get along much more easily with each other,” former Republican Party of Guam Chairman,

Philip Flores stated (Eugenio, 2018). Generally, Guåhan as a community takes its elections seriously and votes in large numbers.

In Guåhan's 2018 historic local election, women won the majority. This made headlines in the continental US, celebrating the first woman Governor of Guåhan and the first women-led supermajority of the 35th Liheslaturan Guåhan. On 6 November 2018, local voters elected the island's 9th governor, Lourdes Leon Guerrero. For the first time in Guam's modern political history, Ufisinan I Maga'Håga (the Office of the Governor) had a woman leader. Governor Leon Guerrero stated, "I think it will be a great honor for women ... because I have paved the way for more equality in government" (Eugenio, 2019). Not only did Leon Guerrero win, but she secured nearly *twice* the number of votes secured by her Republican rival and former Lieutenant Governor, Ray Tenorio.

Tenorio had been charged with official misconduct – a misdemeanour – in September before the election concerning a July gun-grabbing incident at the Annual Pleasure Island BBQ Block Party. Court documents state that Tenorio "reeked of alcohol during the incident and grabbed... the officer's gun six times" (Weiss, 2018). In addition, a communication director for the former Governor has also filed a related complaint against Tenorio. While these scandals could have impacted Tenorio's gubernatorial campaign, perhaps his role in the previous administration and political history did not appeal to voters. Governor Leon Guerrero was previously the President of the Bank of Guam, seen as an accomplished businesswoman, and emerged early as the winner in a four-way 2018 Democratic primary election (Eugenio, 2018).

Immediately after the results and framed as advancement for gender equality in politics, the Democratic Party issued this statement,

We hope that while female leaders open doors for the women who will undoubtedly follow, their work will open minds to the possibilities that any young person can achieve in politics and beyond. This rise of female politicians has a ripple effect as it is likely to increase women's access to other elective offices. First, it may make voters more willing to cast ballots for women. Second, it may make women more likely to pursue political ambitions. That's because female politicians serve as role models for other women interested in politics. They may get women politically engaged and inspire them to seek office. Here on Guam, our community has a long history of women in government leadership positions. Guam has had a female attorney general, congressional delegate and public auditor, as well as judges and senators (*The Guam Daily Post*, 2018).

News outlets reported that Guåhan became the first state or territory 'in' the US to secure a legislative veto-proof supermajority with ten of the 15 positions headed by a woman, and with all three branches of government to be headed by a woman. This approach reaffirms the imperial narrative of equality in politics and that the island is part of the US political family – sometimes. In his congratulatory announcement, GOP Chairman Jerry Crisostomo echoed the US-centric discourse of 2018 being "the year of the woman, so Guam is setting that trend" (Kerrigan, 2018). Other media outlets framed the results as historic, but with a US-centric and patriarchal tone,

These ladies are making history! The incoming women of the 35th Guam Legislature will literally run the show! And they will dominate the first legislature in the United States to be populated by a majority of popularly elected women... some are now calling Guam's new 'Ladies-slature.' Move over manhood, the ladies run this house! Island voters have just elected ten women to the island of Guam's 35th Legislature. That's a big feat for such a far-flung member of the republic, occupying a mere 212-

square miles of earth on a resort tropical island paradise hosting Army, Navy, and Air Force bases. That may sound like a whole lot of macho for such a tiny place... (Marchesseault, 2018).

Unfortunately, the feminist celebration of the first locally elected Maga'håga and female legislative supermajority was undermined by the imperial limitations of true political power due to continuing colonial US Congressional control. While this feminist political progress should be celebrated, US citizens from Guåhan are still denied the vote for US President and lack Congressional voting power and Senate representation. Moreover, although famalåo'an are well represented within the Liheslaturan Guåhan (Guam Legislature), they are unable to act in the interests of their constituents to protect important Indigenous sites from the DoD. Despite the advancement of electing the first Maga'håga and "Ladies-slature," political power over the island remains with the DoD *over* the locally democratically elected governor and legislature (Marchesseault, 2018). Famalåo'an continue to navigate the imposed US electoral systems and use the local political system strategically to elect famalåo'an. As first members of the community and organised through women-led groups, famalåo'an intentionally incorporated themselves into the imperial feminism framework to use their senatorial positions for environmental advocacy.

Figure 2: Cliffs to the right indicate where the range will be located, with live-fire ammunition falling on the forest, beach, reef, and sea. The neighbouring island of Luta (Rota) visible to the north. Photograph by author, 2015.



Prutehi Litekyan - Protect Ritidian

The woman-led community organisation, Prutehi Litekyan – Protect Ritidian, was formed in March 2017 by descendants of Litekyan landowners, Catherine McCollum, Lou Hernandez and her daughter, Maria Hernandez. They are “dedicated to the protection of natural and cultural resources in all sites identified for DoD live-fire training,” and have been active in highlighting damaging effects of the impending military construction on wildlife and natural and cultural resources (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 128). They have gathered thousands of signatures for the online petition which in brief states, “We, the Guam-based

group Prutehi Litekyan oppose the establishment of any military firing range and align our efforts with other regional movements working to prevent environmental degradation and destruction on sacred and native lands. Our work promotes the continued pursuit for the return of ancestral lands” (Prutehi Litekyan: Protect Ritidian, 2017).

Fifth-generation Litekyan land-owner, Maria Hernandez, continues to resist the construction of the LFTRC and the destruction of cultural heritage sites on her family’s land (Hernandez, 2020). Litekyan is recognised as one of the oldest inhabited sites spanning over 3,500 years, with every “time period of Chamorro archaeology and history represented” (Carson, 2016; see [Figure 4](#)). The site encompasses the Northern Guam Lens Aquifer, which provides 90% of the island’s freshwater, and includes ancient limestone forests with the last seed-producing, endemic hâyun lâgu tree, *Serianthes nelsonii Merr.*, officially recognized as an endangered species since 1987 (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, p. 108) (see [Figure 5](#)). The hâyun lâgu is a symbol of the uniqueness of the CHamoru people, lands, seas, and skies, and found only in the Marianas Archipelago (Terral, 2020). CHamoru scholars describe “Litekyan [a]s so much more than a location for the US military to test weapons or build firing ranges: it is a historical place of great cultural significance” (Na’puti, 2019, p. 13). The community’s resistance against DoD militarisation over the last decade has successfully postponed the construction of the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range, one portion of the Live-Fire Training Range Complex (LFTRC), originally planned for Pâgat Village, a sacred site also listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Na’puti & Bevacqua, 2015).

In the 2018 election, Prutehi Litekyan’s tactics shifted from community organising and online petitions to supporting their own female politicians to run in the local legislative race as Democratic candidates. Members Kelly G. Marsh-Taitano and Sabina Perez were successfully elected as senators, finishing 11th and 13th in the Legislative race. Prutehi Litekyan also saw ten legislative candidates they had endorsed get elected (KUAM, 2018). Senators Marsh-Taitano and Perez ran not as seasoned politicians, but as members of the community, strategically utilising the imperial feminism framework to enter politics. Their approach is to specifically focus on the complex and uncertain federal process of military construction. In addition, the 2018 election of Maga’hâga Leon Guerrero represented a shift in political leadership, with Prutehi Litekyan seeking a more critical stance from the governor on the thirty-one military projects across the island. However, the political advancement of a legislative supermajority poses new challenges for the women leaders, as they continue to navigate the imposed US political system, federal frameworks and ongoing military expansion.

Case Study: Resolution 164-35

The 2019 Resolution 164-35, introduced by Vice Speaker, Senator Telena Nelson and endorsed by 13 of Guåhan’s 15 Senators, calls for a halt of *all* construction activities related to the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range (see [Figure 3](#)). The Senators also directly pressed Governor Leon Guerrero to use her Ufisinan I Maga’Hâga (Office of the Governor) to influence the military to respect the community’s requests (Nelson et al., 2019). The 35th Liheslaturan Guåhan (Guam Legislature) introduced Resolution 164-35 on 24 June 2019 and held a public hearing on 3 July 2019 which showed overwhelming public support for an indefinite pause on *all* military construction activities across Guåhan (Kerrigan, 2019a). Similar efforts had been tried in 2017, when Liheslaturan Guåhan passed Resolution 228-34, calling for a *pause* in the construction of the LFTRC, which the DoD disregarded (Carson, Leon Guerrero, & Storie, 2018, pp. 126-127).

On 26 June 2019, Governor Leon Guerrero wrote to Rear Admiral Chatfield, Commander of Joint Region Marianas / US Pacific Command. Governor Guerrero acknowledged the importance of US national security but stressed consideration of local cultural heritage sites and the environment. She stated, "...right now are decisions of utmost importance in strengthening our national defense and preserving Guam's culture and environment" (Leon Guerrero, 2019). While both elite women leaders are driven by their shared but competing interests over *i tãno'* (the land) at Litekyan, Governor Guerrero works within an imperial feminist framework despite successfully being elected to the highest political position on the island. She navigates the US federal government and the DoD, and strategically compromised with her request from halting *all* 31 projects as the Resolution 164-35 outlined; to requesting a six-month *pause* on only *one* of the construction projects: the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range at Litekyan (Kaur, 2019b; Kerrigan, 2019a).

Figure 3: Committee Report on Resolution 164-35 from the Office of Vice Speaker, Telena Cruz Nelson, 2019. Retrieved from: [http://www.guamlegislature.com/Committee_Reports_35th/CR%20on%20Resolution%20No.%20164-35%20\(COR\).pdf](http://www.guamlegislature.com/Committee_Reports_35th/CR%20on%20Resolution%20No.%20164-35%20(COR).pdf)



**OFFICE OF VICE SPEAKER
TELENA CRUZ NELSON**

CHAIRPERSON OF THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, AIR TRANSPORTATION, AND STATISTICS, RESEARCH, AND
PLANNING

I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUAHAN | 35th GUAM LEGISLATURE

COMMITTEE REPORT

Resolution No. 164-35 (COR)

**Introduced by Telena C. Nelson, Therese M. Terlaje,
Sabina Flores, Perez, Telo Taitague, Jose "Pedo"
Terlaje, Kelly Marsh (Taitano), Clynton E. Ridgell,
Joe S. San Agustin, William M. Castro, Louise Borja
Muña, Amanda L. Shelton, Régine Biscoe Lee,
Tina Rose Muña Barnes**

"Relative to urging for the support of Governor Lourdes Leon Guerrero to call for a pause to clearing, pre-construction, data recovery and construction activities related to the U.S. Department of the Navy's proposed Live-Fire Training Range Complex at Northwest Field or Tailalo, adjacent to Litekyan in order to ensure the protection of the environment and historic and cultural resources of the northern coastline of Guam."

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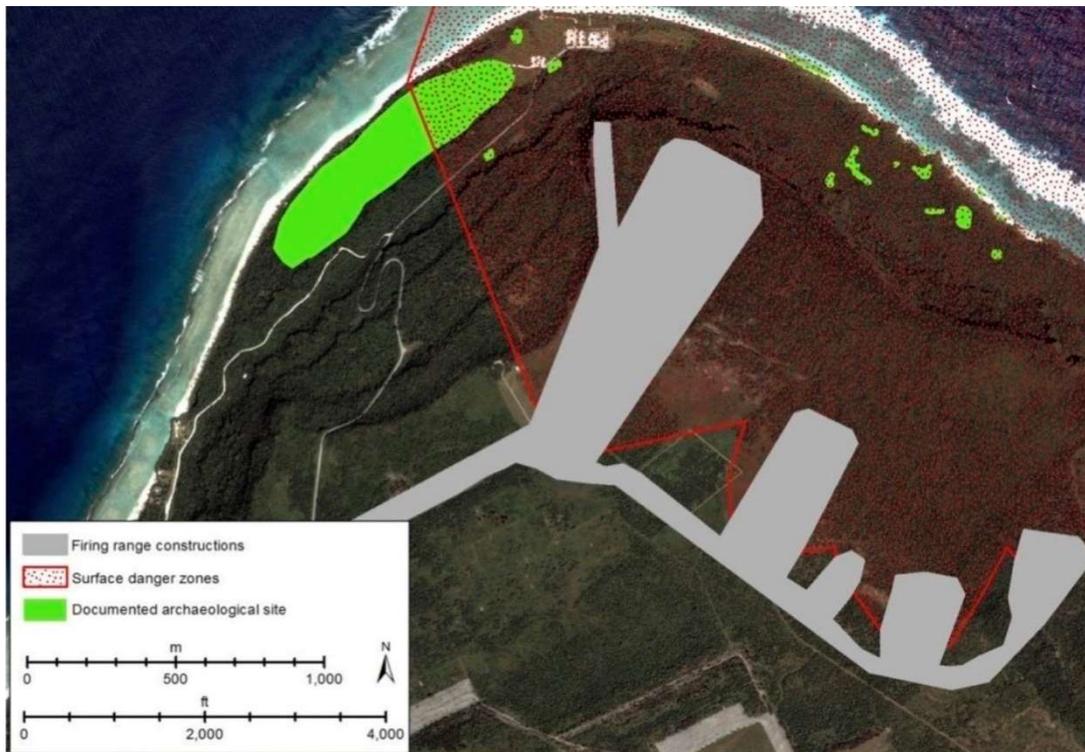
[M]y request is that work on the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range... be paused until [December 2019 when] all the facts are in concerning the health of Guam's sole, mature, endangered *Serianthes Nelsonii* tree. This action will signal to our community that you are working to ensure that the necessary protection and preservation processes are being utilized to safeguard our environment. ... "It is incumbent on us to be sure that all decisions to be made that provide greater national security have to be equal in the protection of the CHamoru culture (Leon Guerrero, 2019).

In mid-July, Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield responded in a letter addressed to the governor and legislature, "declining" both the request for a pause on the Multi-Purpose Machine Gun Range as well as a halt on all projects (Partido, 2019). This response, via a letter, from the highest-ranking (appointed) military leader to the highest serving (elected) political leader, demonstrates how actual power on the island is held by the DoD and enacted through bureaucratic measures (Kaur, 2020b). The superficial imperial feminist approach publicly celebrates women in elite positions but does not acknowledge nor challenge how their power is limited within colonial systems. Rear Admiral Chatfield's disregard for the Governor's request and Legislative Resolution through her response that the military 'build-up' (locally referring to *all* military construction) will continue (Partido, 2019), clearly represents how imperial feminism is beholden to the larger imperial project which is enforced through war and war preparation.

Despite the Rear Admiral's reply, Speaker of the House, Democratic Senator Therese Terlaje has continued to reiterate her request for a pause in construction on the firing range complex as previously expressed in Resolution 164-35 (Terlaje, 2020). "Historic sites slated to be cleared are bigger than previously understood and potentially more historically significant... on the cliff line adjacent to what some have described as the oldest known village in the Marianas, at Litekyan" (Kerrigan, 2019b). As of July 2020, 43 historical sites – or "inadvertent discoveries" in bureaucratic terms – have been disturbed or "discovered" since this military buildup construction began in December 2018, including 15 sites with human remains and 28 sites with historic artefacts (Kaur, 2020c).

Three cultural sites eligible for the US National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places have been destroyed due to Project J-107 and the "remnants of the ancient village" cleared without the community's knowledge in June 2020. Mitigation by the DoD is offered through "data recovery – an archaeological process conducted "to record, remove, and preserve what is deemed valuable material" by the DoD and without local consultation (Kaur, 2020a). Residents do not have access to knowledge of what or where these artefacts are stored. The Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Preservation Office (Guåhan) has rejected [this] military's "mitigation plan" as to what the military purposes to do when ancestral artefacts are unearthed (Kerrigan, 2019b). This disregard for US federal procedures displays how defence democracy operates for the benefit of US defence only and democratic representation is sacrificed for expanding militarisation. In response, Prutehi Litekyan posted on their Facebook page, "despite the significance of this site to our history, [the land] was cleared to construct their marine base" (Prutehi Litekyan, 2020).

Figure 4: Historical properties within the Surface Danger Zone. Map prepared by Dr Mike Carson, January 2017. Used with permission.



Despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of the Navy and the Department of the Interior through the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Geological Survey signed a Memorandum of Agreement (via video conference) on May 14, 2020, to establish the Live-Fire Training Range Complex (Pacific News Center, 2020). These federal agencies operate by simultaneously ignoring local democratic systems and denying Indigenous self-determination in the name of US defence.

Conclusion

Through a gendered theoretical framework, I provided context on Guåhan's contemporary colonisation and expanding militarisation. An island-centric and gendered analysis of the politics on Guåhan, reveals contesting Indigenous and colonial control over land, the distractive celebration of elite women leaders, and the simultaneous denial of democracy and self-determination (Frain, 2019). I focused specifically on the sacred tåno' (land) and tasi (sea) of Litekyan, which is conceptualised by the DoD as a place to test weapons. The DoD continuously requires military expansion and resource extraction and maintains more political power over Guåhan, the Governor's office and the Liheslaturan Guåhan (Kaur, 2020b). Famalåo'an Guåhan (women of Guam) are now well represented within the Guam legislature; but they are unable to fully act, negotiate or govern in the best interests of their constituents to protect important Indigenous sites from the US Department of Defense. Instead, Rear Admirals as women in elite positions of power, reproduce imperial feminist frameworks to support colonial structures and expanding militarisation.

This is a contemporary example of how enduring US colonial structures constrain local political power on the island of Guåhan, despite the historic 2018 election of the island's first woman governor with a legislative supermajority with all three branches of government to be headed by women. A gendered analysis illustrates how "imperial feminism" celebrates the appointment of prominent women leaders but does not question the colonial frameworks which deny political representation (Eisenstein, 2016). The appointment of Rear Admiral Chatfield (as the second female Commander of Joint Region Marianas) and the election of Lourdes Leon Guerrero (as Governor of Guam), superficially celebrate elite women. While the US federal government congratulated Guam as the first state or territory "in" the US to elect a woman Governor, denial of Indigenous self-determination and federal domination enables continuing militarisation as defence democracy.

Famalão'an Guåhan resist within imposed political systems and imperial feminist frameworks and through women-led environmental advocacy, such as via the community organisation Prutehi Litekyan. Famalão'an remain grounded through matriarchal lineages and identities as taotao tâno' (people of the land). They serve as guardians and defenders of their freshwater source and the endangered hâyun lågu tree, demand the return of their ancestral tâno' y tasi and protect cultural heritage sites. While this article focuses on the specific CHamoru connection to i tâno' at Litekyan, the situation today is part of a long, matriarchal legacy of famalão'an Guåhan resisting various empires.

Figure 5: A seedling at the foot of the last seed-producing endemic hâyun lågu (*Serianthes nelsonii* Merr) represents the next generation. This tree is locally referred to as the "mother tree" on Guåhan. Photograph by Curt Fiedler. Used with permission.



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