motivation to change orthodox definitions and approaches to development. She observes that governments in the region are far more likely to criticize damage or threats to people and the environment when caused by forces outside the control of regional governments (such as driftnet fishing, nuclear testing, or global warming), than when caused by forces sanctioned by these governments (such as idle pillage of forestry and mineral resources). As Griffin sees it, the primary element of sustainable development is a people-centered and participatory decision-making political process. Within such a democratic framework the voices of advocacy groups for women, the poor, communities, the environment, social justice, employees, and critical thinkers are given a central or at least an equal place. At present such voices are ignored or even suppressed by governments in many countries of the region, including those with independent political status.

Although it raises more issues than it offers answers, the book is highly recommended to development agencies; for teaching economics, social sciences, Pacific studies, and development studies; as well as for general readers with an interest in the Pacific Islands region. It provides a critical guide to the key development issues in the Pacific region, and to a wide range of scholarly, activist, and literary perspectives on Pacific Islands women.


Lynn Wilson is currently director of a US government program for health services among low-income families in Hawai‘i. Prior to the fieldwork in Belau that resulted in **Speaking to Power: Gender and Politics in the Western Pacific**, Wilson had conducted ethnographic research at the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp in England. **Speaking to Power** is the revision for publication of Wilson’s University of Massachusetts PhD dissertation on women, culture, and politics in Belau. (For readers who are more familiar with a British Commonwealth geography of the Pacific, which located the heart of the “Western Pacific” in colonial Fiji, the title of this publication is somewhat misleading as it refers to gender and politics only in Belau.) It is an interdisciplinary work engaged with issues of power and authority that have been raised in anthropology, politics, and women’s studies.

Wilson clearly sees her work as a necessary critique and development beyond the work done on gender in Belau by anthropologists like Augustine Kramer in the early twentieth century, Homer Barnett and Arthur Vidich in the early post–World War Two period, and more contemporary anthropologists like DeVerne Smith, Richard Parmentier, and Karen Nero. Wilson’s main contention with the
enthnographic literature before her is that it disclosed “very little about women’s political participation or about the relationship of local, ‘traditional’ politics and processes of international militarism” (8). With the assistance of invaluable native information, she attempts to fill in and fill up these scholarly gaps.

In relation to the field of political science, Wilson combines an interest in postmodern or poststructuralist analysis with concerns in security or military studies. She is influenced profoundly by the work of Michel Foucault and has adopted some of his “analytics”: power is exercised not possessed; “resistance, like power, can be exercised only through unsettled and shifting local relations within a field of power” (46); and the use of ‘genealogies’ (local, minute details that emphasize dispersion, accidents, faults, fissures, contingency, and fragility) over ‘history’ (“seamless metanarratives, unbroken continuities, and overarching coherent explanations implying an assumption of ‘truth’ ”) (47). Since security and military studies have tended to focus on “‘macro’ concerns such as international economic and legal policy, military strategy, and nuclear weapons systems” (37), her use of Foucault also makes a unique contribution to that literature.

Wilson has tried to directly confront issues of voice and authority in her text. Her bibliography contains an impressive list of references to groundbreaking works by Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, Chandra Mohanty, Chela Sandoval, and Gayatri Spivak among others. By calling into question a universalizing feminist theory, these women of color have led the way in theorizing voice and authority. As a white woman, Wilson claims that one of the goals of her project was to call into question her own authorial voice. In my opinion, she succeeded. This, however, raises some interesting problems, which I discuss shortly.

As a self-proclaimed experiment in postmodern scholarship, Wilson’s text is surprisingly coherent, though not completely accessible. Speaking to Power is a very thorough investigation into the intricacies of Belauan concepts of political authority and participation, and much of the philosophizing on Belauan traditions is quite dense. Many of the belabored details caused me to wonder what all this would mean to the “average” reader? (Are there “average” readers for a book like this?) In an academic age that has been confounded by the neologisms of postmodern and poststructuralist theory, perhaps one of the more subtle, albeit unintentional, messages of Speaking to Power is a reminder that esoteric knowledge is also always being produced (by natives) outside the eurocenters.

Wilson’s primary informants in Speaking to Power were a mother and daughter, Gabriela Ngirmang and Cita Morei. Along with other women of Belau, like Isabella Sumang, Katharine Kesolei, and Bernie Keldermans, Ngirmang and Morei have acquired something close to heroic status in the eyes of Oceania’s feminist, peace, and indigenous rights activists and scholars. The nature of Ngirmang and Morei’s engagements with Wilson, however, were quite different from the
testimonies they have become famous for giving against US nuclear interests and the Compact of Free Association. Certainly, Ngirmang and Morei’s exchanges with Wilson were rather more technical, almost semantic, alternately pedantic and dogmatic, and many times contradictory—especially when they celebrated the “fluidity” of Belauan tradition at the same time as they insisted that it be written down for future generations (73, 94, 139, 141). But what kinds of burdens does an audience’s demand for a particular type of speech or representation (a representation that “testifies,” a speech that must always be about struggle in the face of adversity, “heroic” speech) place on women like Ngirmang or Morei? There is not much demand for mundane or semantic speech on the market of women’s feminist multicultural representations. What intrigues me here then are the disjunctures between Belauan women’s (apparent) self-representations and (apparently) ethnographic representations of them. This discussion necessarily entails references to other texts in which Belauan and other indigenous women have been represented.

In 1994 a group of Fiji’s vanguard feminists launched the publication of the first anthology of scholarship/testimony/poetry by Pacific women edited by a Pacific woman—’Atu Emberson-Bain. The anthology, Sustainable Development or Malignant Growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island Women (Suva 1994), included contributions from Isabella Sumang and Cita Morei. Sumang’s contribution was the text of a submission she made to the United Nations Trusteeship Council in New York, May 1994, on behalf of Women’s Organizations of Palau to Keep Palau Nuclear-Free. In her submission, Sumang clearly and compellingly held the US government accountable to its own freedom of information and environmental laws, as well as international law. In her contribution to Sustainable Development, Cita Morei described the struggle for a nuclear-free Belau in relation to a history of women’s leadership in the community, and the memory and trauma of World War Two in the islands. While Sumang and Morei have become well-known as spokeswomen for the anti-Compact movement on Belau, the widely acknowledged grand dame of the movement is Gabriela Ngirmang. Both Sumang and Morei have served as English-language interpreters for Ngirmang. In 1989, two of the Belauan organizations in which Ngirmang, Sumang, and Morei were critical figures, were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although Kltal Rengl and Otil a Beluad did not eventually win the prize, the nomination was a momentous recognition of the legitimacy of Belau’s struggle for sovereignty. The nomination acknowledged that their voices, their own representations of themselves, had been heard far beyond their shores.

In 1992 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Rigoberta Menchu, a champion of Guatemalan indigenous peasant rights. While Menchu’s autobiography (London 1984) has been a bestseller, the reconstruction of Menchu’s voice and narrative by an editor and a translator of the autobiography have drawn criticism from some circles (see Salazar in Gluck and Patai,
Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, 1991. The issues of voice and authority, which have been raised in discussions of Menchu’s autobiography, were more graphically illustrated for me by being in an audience on her lecture circuit. In the year she was nominated for the Nobel, I was in a northern California town hall seeing her at center stage with an Anglo-American translator at stage right, hearing her speaking Spanish and her Anglo-American translator speaking English in alternating five-minute intervals. What might have been a powerful and moving testimony to indigenous peoples’ struggles in Guatemala became distracting and tedious. Reading Speaking to Power reminded me very much of sitting in the audience for Rigoberta Menchu and her translator.

Gabriela Ngirmang is the (almost Menchuesque) principal “native informant” of Speaking to Power. Cita Morei, Ngirmang’s daughter, an anthropology graduate, poet, activist, and teacher, is also a “native informant” and interlocutor for Wilson. In the book, Wilson strives “to avoid a single analytical voice and to resist concentrating authority in my own words, interpretations, and perspectives” (191) and asks “What would anthropology look like if it were to resist patterns of colonialism, both in research and representation, that have permeated academic endeavors?” (41). The best example I have seen so far of what such anthropology might look like is “The Way We Are (Working in Flux)” by Nancy Daiyi, Linda Ford, and Debra Rose (in Greenwood, Neumann, and Sartori, Work in Flux, 1995). In this article, an Aboriginal mother and daughter and “their” American anthropologist describe and reflect on the relationships they have negotiated with each other in the context of land struggles in the Northern Territory of Australia. The trio mirrors almost exactly the configuration in Speaking to Power of Ngirmang, Morei, and Wilson in that Daiyi is a respected clan elder, Ford is her university graduate daughter, and Rose the anthropologist.

The most disturbing aspect of Speaking to Power is that although Wilson reflects critically on her own interactions with Ngirmang and Morei, the “native informants” are still not afforded the discursive space to become “authors.” Ngirmang and Morei’s transcribed words (significantly printed in a smaller font than “Wilson’s” words) constitute a third of the complete text; in spite of the fact that Wilson clearly recognized the high stakes involved for Ngirmang and Morei in shaping the ethnography (97, 100, 103, 131), ultimately she failed to see that “if it were to resist patterns of colonialism both in research and representation” anthropology would admit that “native informants” should finally be given authorial status.

The most positive aspects of Speaking to Power seem to lie in Wilson’s attempts at redressing inadequate analyses of gender in Belau. For example, in response to Homer Barnett’s assertion that “women in Palauan society hold a subordinate position to that of men,” Wilson marshals evidence from conversations with her native informants. A woman elder was interpreted as saying that “women are the source
of money in Palau. *Uchul a kerrul*, the source of money. If I get married, then I would prepare food for my husband’s side of the family. And then they, in turn, provide money. Men don’t do much in terms of bringing in money—except maybe if they were to build a canoe and get paid for their work. But it’s women who bring the money” (99). A male elder recalled this Belauan adage: “[W]omen are assets and men the liabilities” (100). And Wilson’s principle informant, Gabriela Ngirmang was translated as saying:

she has to pay. . . . That’s really the heart of the women’s role. She’s saying that the female role is very complicated and that there’s a lot of weight, a lot of weight. And there’s a big difference between responsibilities for men and women. *Kmal kakarose*, very different. Because women would be *uarm*. That means they sweat. You can look it up in the dictionary if you want. It means that the women have to work very hard, that they work hard for their uncles and brothers. Men would be responsible, and work—for their wives. And so they are also working. But it’s the women that are working very hard. (128)

I am a little disturbed, however, by the way the role of “women” in Belau is being used as a rhetorical device, almost anthropological dogma. How is this Belauan gender narrative enabling to modern Belauan society as a whole? While it is understandable how such constructions of gender would appeal to and titillate western feminists, they ring as rather codependent—could they possibly be doing more to legitimize irresponsible behavior in Belauan men, while placing unreasonable burdens on Belauan women? (see Nero 1990, *Pacific Studies* 13[3]). (Not to mention the unexamined problematic of transferring and translating traditional economic roles into a late capitalist model.) I fearfully suspect and suggest that explicitly named studies of “gender” predetermine or overdetermine the researchers’ findings. However, most studies that proclaim to be about “gender” are not. Gender studies should by now be more rigorously about gender, not just about “women,” and certainly not just about “men.” If gender is to continue to be a useful social and intellectual category, then obviously research on gender will need to be conducted by mixed-gender teams, inasmuch as “natives” must claim their rightful place as authors if anthropology must persist as a discipline.

*Speaking to Power* is not an easy read, especially if one has the misfortune of not “being a Palauan” (pun on Barnett intended), not being an anthropologist, and not being a whole-hearted feminist. This review is offered with respect to the author(s) as a frank “reader response” that struggles to achieve some academic objectivity, while asking some hard questions about academic practices—questions directed as much to myself as to the author(s).

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