

grounded in a notion of capital, then, made analytical connections between phenomena that were not apparent prior to analysis. This is what we meant by critique. . . . In this respect, the transition to a ‘mode of information’ is indeed disorienting: the academic response to information is not class analysis, not even network analysis, but networking. . . . Academic analysis has become an instantiation, a making evident of academic networks” (113).

There are some exceedingly tautological moments in this work, but it is engaging nevertheless in its demonstration of fluency with a range of European and American philosophical, political, analytical, and cultural canons and concepts, and in its unnerving representation of intimacy with key figures in Pacific academic, activist, NGO, and family networks. What is curious in light of the last quote above is that in her preface the author pointedly disarticulates her own scholarship from the “network” of Pacific Studies, stating that her book’s “contribution to the ethnography of the Pacific region lies in fragmentary resonances rather than overarching models or positions in debates” (xvi). Is this humility? Or disdain? Or, like Baudrillard’s double hologram (which Riles cites [27]), is the answer that, in seeing the form of each in turn, both become real?

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*Bravo for the Marshallese: Regaining Control in a Post-Nuclear, Post-Colonial World*, by Holly M Barker. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, 2004. ISBN 0-534-61326-8; xv + 172 pages, tables, figures, maps, photographs, appendix, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. US\$25.95.

In Barbara Myerhoff’s book *Number Our Days* (1978), Shmuel the tailor/philosopher warns her not to put pins in people, deflate them, flatten them out, and sacrifice their multidimensionality. Shmuel counsels her to “leave them be. Don’t try to make them stand still for your convenience. You don’t *ever* know them. Let people surprise you” (Myerhoff 1978, 41). In turning lived existence into text or film, anthropologists can never leave people be. Moreover, entextualization inevitably involves transformation (Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, *Natural Histories of Discourse*, 1996), but in transforming performances into text it is important not to deflate and flatten people out.

Reading Holly M Barker’s *Bravo for the Marshallese*, I sense the voices of Marshall Islanders—who are themselves lively and multifaceted—being flattened out by a theory that presents them unilaterally as victims of colonialism. Of course, there is no question that Marshall Islands residents, particularly those who reside in the northern atolls, have suffered severely from US nuclear testing after World War II. There is also no doubt that the consequences of those tests continue to affect Marshall Islanders today and will have substantial effects well into the future. Barker makes this point

well. She demonstrates how Marshallese social organization, particularly that of Rongelap people, has been radically disrupted by nuclear testing. She shows some alterations in Marshallese identities that were interwoven with a past etched into the landscape, and how people's daily activities have changed as a result of nuclear testing. Not only have residents of the northern atolls been displaced from their primordial homes, but Barker also points out how people's bodies have been infused with radionuclides, forcing them to change their images of themselves. Equally importantly, she demonstrates how the United States has tried to limit its liabilities by enforcing an artificial four-atoll boundary that excludes residents of Likiep, Ailuk, and adjacent atolls from consideration for nuclear damages. These images are important parts of a counter-history of the nuclear-testing era for Marshall Islanders.

Barker's work is a critical counter-hegemonic account pointing to serious contradictions in the smoothly polished image of the United States as heroic world savior that fills many secondary school texts. She couches her work as anthropological advocacy rather than standard ethnography, and perhaps readers, especially the undergraduate audience for whom this book is written, should not expect her to delve much deeper. In the Marshall Islands, the perpetual sequence of US blunders is the only thing more earth-shattering than the nuclear detonations themselves.

It is laudable for Barker to actively support the Marshallese pleas for fair compensation in the face of ongoing

US resistance to paying for damages that have been established, in accord with US demands, in an internationally constituted Nuclear Claims Tribunal. Nonetheless, in her attempt to construct a history of nuclear testing as reflected in the accounts of Marshallese, Barker oversimplifies or obliterates both Marshallese and US histories of the cold-war era. For example, she assesses US activities from a presentist perspective, as if US scientists knew as much about radiation risks in 1954 as they do today; as if animals that were sacrificed to learn about the effects of radiation in 1946 should be viewed with the empathy of animal-rights advocates who began to gain salience in the 1980s; as if the idea that *no* humans might survive the nuclear holocaust that many thought was inevitable was not a real fear embedded in the US psyche of the 1950s.

Barker does a commendable job of presenting materials derived from interviews focused on nuclear testing. Often, these stories are heart-rending and, generally, the translations are excellent. Nevertheless, the content of these interviews is heavily influenced by the contexts of their elicitation. They represent Marshallese framing themselves as victims, in opposition to a heartless US government, which is cast as the cause of their suffering. Like Gananath Obeyesekere's claim that the apotheosis of Cook had European origins (1992), if this story is recast in a Marshallese mold, the account of Marshallese as victims looks different: This story was brought to the islands by US Peace Corps Volunteers, reformulated in consultations between Marshallese

litigants and their US attorneys, and re-presented to the United States as the local account of US oppression. My complaint is not that the account is untrue, but rather that it represents a relatively recent by-product of a historical, legal process established by the US government to deal with the aftereffects of nuclear testing. Another entire set of local histories that emerge from local people's recollections of World War II precede this 1990s view. In these histories the United States is depicted as the local people's savior from oppression and almost certain death under the Japanese military during the war (Lin Poyer, Suzanne Falgout, and Laurence Carucci, *The Typhoon of War*, 2001). Even at the time Dennis O'Rourke filmed *Half-Life* (1986), with its parallel agenda to expose the abuses of US nuclear testing, this view of the United States as force of chiefly caliber, beyond local control but deserving of high regard, remained salient. For example, one Rongelap nuclear survivor says to O'Rourke: "OK, when I went to America and they 'cut me' [operated on me], it was extremely good. I was not afraid, nor was I frightened, but [it was because] I had already finished giving my life to them, so it was then their decision; and everything was very good and there was nothing I was worried about; everything was in a state of accord still . . . and very great was my real happiness on account of this time that they gave life to me again and took [away] the illness of mine" (retranslated from Marshallese by Carucci).

The ahistoric nature of Barker's account obliterates the complexities of

these shifting and contested histories, alternative perspectives that underlie continuing rifts in the Rongelap community to the present day. Yet, the complex historical view that delineates how a large group of Marshall Islanders altered their depiction of the United States from one deserving of honor and praise to a portrait of disdain is a story critical for US readers in the current day.

The core of Barker's work is grounded in an analysis of linguistic materials. She argues that Marshallese have borrowed the nuclear-testing idiom from English and revalued it, creating a language of resistance to the history of nuclear testing as fashioned by the US government. Such processes of reformulation are hardly restricted to the lexicon of nuclear testing or to the Marshall Islands. Instead, they are at the core of a bricoleur's toolkit and central to all cultural innovations. Nevertheless, from a linguist's perspective, the "language of resistance" Barker describes seems far more like a linguistic register than a language. Indeed, Barker gives numerous quotations in Marshallese, along with English glosses that demonstrate quite nicely that the nuclear testing "language" she describes lacks the completeness required of a fully elaborated language. Moreover, the messages fashioned from this lexicon are far more enriched and multifaceted than Barker suggests. The linguistic elements themselves are highly polysemic, eg, they are used in daily circumstances for diverse purposes, not just to convey messages of oppression, abuse, and disdain for the United States. Barker provides contextually viable interpre-

tations in many places, but for her main consultant, Ertlang, she simply lists glosses of her “expressions of blame” (100). In this list, it is unclear that expressions like “they examined us,” “they checked us,” or “they said we should take medicine” constitute statements of blame. It is erroneous to presume that Marshallese would not make similar statements about local curers of many common illnesses. Even Barker’s contention that the “they” in these statements refers to “the United States government,” the “clear agent of the Rongelapese people’s suffering” (99) is far from clear. The US government *might* be one of the entities signified by “they,” but the immediate indexical referent of this term is almost certainly the US medical personnel conducting the examinations. Other unspecified agents (like “di palle,” glossed as “clothed people, Americans”) may be indexed by these terms at the moment of their utterance and subsequently lost in processes of entextualization—but the US government is hardly the “clear agent.”

The single-minded interpretative bent of Barker’s linguistic analysis is particularly evident in her consideration of the song “LoRauut,” or “Mr. Urine” (93). She is right to suggest that this song “captures the obvious humor of the Marshallese people who take an absurd situation . . . and turn this strange and difficult situation into an experience to laugh about” (94). Her next statement reminds readers that the song’s surface content may merely serve to obscure the underlying theme of suffering: “It is important to note, however, that the humor evident in this song in no way conveys that

people’s experiences with these doctors were easy or lighthearted. Just the opposite; the Rongelapese created a humorous song as a way to release their pain” (94). But it is unlikely that Rongelap people were unable to have multidimensional relationships with these doctors just because they worked for the US oppressor-state. In my experience, Marshall Islanders may have genuinely lighthearted, humorous interactions and relationships with nuclear-testing medical practitioners, even as they may mistrust the overarching motives in the US nuclear compensation monitoring program as a whole. “LoRauut” is an absolutely typical Marshallese song with many layers of irony and humor that derive from the performative construction (in song and mime) of an entirely inverted universe, juxtaposing Euro-American medical practices with taken-for-granted norms of local demeanor and treatment of the human body.

Barker portrays a culture in the process of being destroyed. This view reifies an idyllic, primordial way of life, and then depicts how US nuclear testing contributed to its destruction. Yet the primordial era is really a portrait of Marshallese cultural reformulations in the face of earlier colonialism, when copra was king and chiefs and heads of landholding groups became more powerful as a result of pacification and missionization. Nuclear testing has altered these alignments, and many abuses of human and territorial rights have taken place as a result. But despite these horrendous events, Marshallese have adapted in creative ways. This message of cultural vitality is obscured in the story

of destruction and abuse that must be told in front of the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. As Barker recognizes, “Marshallese have become actively engaged . . . in redefining history to include their own experiences” (158). Nothing could be truer. Nevertheless, although they certainly include the counter-hegemonic story of abuse that Barker’s *Bravo for the Marshall-ese* inscribes for readers, histories are intricate and multifaceted.

The story Barker tells the world on behalf of the Marshallese is an incredibly important one for undergraduates who may need to begin to question the “Father Knows Best” image that the United States likes to project onto its international activities. But embedded in these Marshallese stories of the nuclear-testing era is a richer and more differentiated set of meanings. Viewers of O’Rourke’s *Half-Life* get some sense of this diversity by comparing the disgruntled stories of several Rongelap residents with the juxtaposed tales of American good will, such as the one quoted above. Indeed, a similarly diverse array of interpretative histories exists throughout the northern Marshall Islands today. While Barker presents one viable Marshallese rendering in order to demonstrate the considerable abuses Marshallese have suffered as a result of US nuclear testing, it is a view that flattens the multi-perspectival landscape.

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*The Marshall Islands: Living Atolls Amidst the Living Sea; The National Biodiversity Report of the Republic of the Marshall Islands*, by the Team of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Santa Clarita, CA: St Hildegard Publishing Company, 2000. ISBN 982-9045-02-1; 345 pages, figures, maps, tables, glossary, bibliography, index; written in English, Marshallese, and Latin. US\$45.00.

Includes *The Republic of the Marshall Islands’ Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan*, by the Republic of the Marshall Islands Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Team. Santa Clarita, CA: St Hildegard Publishing Company, 2000. ISBN 982-9045-01-3, 24 pages, tables.

Increased awareness of global warming trends and the impact of sea level rise on fragile coral reef ecosystems led the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to sign the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit held in Brazil in 1992. With funding from the Global Environmental Facility of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), based in Suva, Fiji, the RMI Ministry of Resources and Development, through the Environmental Protection Agency, created a National Biodiversity Team to compile data from both traditional and western sources and to formulate a plan for conserving national resources. The Republic of the Marshall Islands is the first Pacific nation to complete a project of this scope and produce a comprehensive biodiversity report (Preface, Romulo Garcia, UNDP Resident Representative).