

something deeply rooted that continues to dwell in the bodies and land of the Marshall Islanders.

A summary of damages, needs, and compensation is presented in Part IV, which includes creative recommendations made by Marshall Islanders. For example, they would like to honor various individuals—master navigators, builders, dancers, singers, fishers, weavers, healers, and so on—with a title and lifetime salary. These people would then be able to pass on their knowledge to the younger generation in schools and community centers (192–193). The last section, Part V, lays out various conclusions and recommendations.

Consequential Damages of Nuclear War is a meticulously researched and sympathetically presented report about a deplorable historical reality. Yet it offers much more than the facts; it is also an account about the value of truth and how history is made. Likewise, it is a model for how to document human rights abuse in a collaborative, participatory process, and then use this as cultural testimony in a legal case. Most significantly, it is also a celebration of the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands as quintessential survivors and constructive advocates for human justice.

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Morning Comes So Soon. 2 DVDs (NTSC), 85 minutes, color, 2008. Written and directed by Aaron Condon and Mike Cruz; produced by Small Island Films and Youth to Youth in Health. Languages: Marshallese, Mandarin, and English, with English subtitles (also behind-the-scenes footage and special features). Available for purchase from www.bikiniatoll.com, Majuro. United States and Canada: US\$14.99; international: US\$22.99.

“Bwebwenato” storytelling and acting out dramatic tales is hardly a new phenomenon in the Marshall Islands, where communities often gather for church events or special celebrations to sing, dance, perform skits, and tell tales. In recent years, even Shakespearean plays combining Marshallese and Edwardian lore, in English and Marshallese, have become popular annual events. So it is no surprise that with the increasing accessibility and affordability of video technology, marrying bwebwenato with quality filmmaking was the next logical step.

Morning Comes So Soon was a joint project funded by UNESCO and conceived by Majuro’s “Youth to Youth in Health” program and directors Aaron Condon and Mike Cruz. This first feature-length film to come from the Republic of the Marshall Islands was a runaway hit when it premiered there in May 2008. The film eclipsed box office sales of Hollywood films and sold out to packed audiences night after night. In October 2008 it was shown at the Hawai‘i International Film Festival, where it also drew crowds and impressed audiences with not only its artistic filmmaking style

but also the fine performances of the amateur actors, most of whom were Marshall Islander and Chinese high school students at the time the film was made.

Described as a Marshallese version of *Romeo and Juliet*, the film features a story of “star-crossed” love between a Marshallese teenage boy named Leban (played by James Bing III) and his girlfriend, an immigrant named Mei-Lin (Ting Yu Lin), the daughter of a Chinese general store owner. The film does not romanticize the islandscape for us; rather it depicts everyday life on Majuro as it would be seen from the eyes of a Marshallese teenager. Leban and Mei-Lin’s romance is played out subtly against the backdrop of present-day Majuro, with its hodgepodge of shops on land and purse-seine fishing trawlers in the lagoon, little kids playing in its narrow main road, and the classrooms of the island’s Assumption High School.

Leban courts Mei-Lin despite ridicule from his Marshallese classmates, who express their disbelief and even disgust that Leban would even consider dating a “Chinese girl.” As their teasing escalates into resentment and pressure for him to break up with Mei-Lin, Leban holds his ground, boldly inviting Mei-Lin to the school dance. Despite the concerns of her mother and brother who remain cloistered in their shop, Mei-Lin excitedly accompanies him to the dance, only to find herself the brunt of rude jokes and ostracism. She urges Leban to abandon his hopes of their being a true couple, but has difficulty suppressing her love for him. Yet when Leban’s friends ransack her family’s

store in retaliation, Mei-Lin concludes that her only option is to return to China.

Distraught over Mei-Lin’s decision and unable to reconcile his true love with the pressures of his parents and peers, Leban decides to take matters into his own hands. In a gut-wrenching scene, he gets drunk and then hangs himself from the oceanside tree where he and Mei-Lin used to meet. When his body is found the next morning, Mei-Lin also tries to end her life with an overdose of pills, only to awaken later in a hospital room, where she discovers that although Leban is gone, her family and Leban’s family have begun to kindle a friendship with one another.

The power of *Morning Comes So Soon* comes from the rawness of its acting and the immediacy of the themes of both teen suicide and racial hatred. In the accompanying DVD extras, Bob Balos, a film crewmember and coordinator in *Youth to Youth in Health*, stresses that it was in fact the epidemic of teen suicide that first inspired the idea for the film. Balos approached Small Island Films after being impressed with Aaron Condon’s filmmaking style in a local television show. *Youth to Youth* was initially most interested in creating a suicide-prevention film, but as they worked together with the filmmakers to write the screenplay, they decided to address anti-Chinese sentiment as well. Less a simple issue of “racism” than a collision of global capitalism with close to a century of colonialism and dependency on US aid, this latter theme was readily embraced by the young actors—who, according to Condon,

came up with some of their harshest lines themselves, drawing on their own life experiences. The clash between Marshallese and Chinese ways of doing business, for instance, is what provokes Bing's character to blurt out rebelliously to his parents, "The Chinese succeed because they don't just sit on their asses and watch TV!"

Despite being a low-budget film produced entirely on-site with amateur actors, *Morning Comes So Soon* shines with poetic cinematography and provocative honesty. In its ambitious crisscross between Taiwanese Mandarin, Marshallese youth slang, and English, the film almost converses with the genre of transcultural filmmaking of Alejandro González Iñárritu in his award-winning film *Babel* (2006). The soundtrack, too—although lacking the local flavor of Marshallese hip-hop or ukulele youth bands—is original and well matched to the story.

Without watching the accompanying "Behind the Scenes" DVD extra, however, it is unclear that the film was conceived cooperatively by Marshallese youth themselves, with their own passions and ambitions. Missing are elements that likely complicate anti-Chinese feelings: the constant struggle of Taiwanese versus Chinese Mainlanders for recognition in Oceania, the intricacies of Taiwan's development aid, or any consciousness of Marshall Islanders' own mixed heritage and prewar Japanese legacy.

More problematically, Leban's tragic suicide is somewhat lost in the larger drama of racism in Majuro, and as an audience we are left to wonder why "the Marshallese" could be filled with such rage toward "innocent Chinese," despite some very real problems

and hardships this rapid migration has caused the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Meanwhile, suicide, a national epidemic that affects Ebeye and other atolls as much as it affects the capital, is presented as the only option left for self-expression when all else fails in small island life. It is, after all, only through Leban's sacrifice that true reconciliation and change begins. Though these sorts of events are unfortunately Marshallese contemporary realities, the problem of suicide demands deeper reflection.

Morning Comes So Soon is nonetheless an outstanding start to what could be the beginning of Majuro's role as a major Pacific film hub. Already increasing numbers of Marshallese filmmakers are emerging, inspired by *Morning's* example. No doubt we can look forward to many more Marshallese stories told and preserved in moving images—as well as a new generation empowered to tackle global issues in innovative ways.

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Penina Uliuli: Contemporary Challenges in Mental Health for Pacific Peoples, edited by Philip Culbertson, Margaret Nelson Agee, and Cabrini 'Ofa Makasiale. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. ISBN cloth, 978-0-8248-3194-3; paper, 978-0-8248-3224-7; xv + 284 pages, illustrations, references, index. Cloth, US\$57.00; paper, US\$28.00.

As I picked up this book and began browsing through it, my initial reaction was anything but positive. "The