

Book and Media Reviews

ate its appended “Research Guide to Finding Family.” This lists helpful archives and online sites for seekers beginning a paternal family quest. The Mothers’ Darling project also has its own progeny: a website (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/usfathers/>) that offers research advice and invites submissions that might help track missing dads. These life histories remind us that Pacific War relics include both people’s bodies and stories.

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The Battle over Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American Memories of War, by Stephen C Murray. War, Memory, and Culture Series. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8173-1884-0, xii + 278 pages, maps, photographs, endnotes, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth, us\$59.95.

Stephen Murray has written a remarkably sensitive, insightful, and compassionate book about a war that continues. While Japanese forces surrendered the island of Peleliu in what is now the Republic of Palau to American invaders on 24 November 1944, the battle goes on around issues of memory, commemoration, and the meaning of history. The chad ra Beliliou (people of Peleliu) receive scant if any mention in the histories produced by the principal combatants. Their experiences, feelings, trauma, and the terrible devastation wrecked on their island go largely ignored

in national histories that endeavor to explain and justify an unnecessary slaughter. Murray’s book seeks to correct that neglect. While the author’s investigation of American and Japanese sources is impressive, his inclusion of Palauan elders’ voices is what makes this work so distinctive. *The Battle over Peleliu* thus represents a most valuable addition to earlier works by Geoff White, Lamont Lindstrom, Lin Poyer, Suzanne Falgout, Laurence Carucci, Keith Camacho, and Judy Bennett that deal with the Pacific War’s effects on Island populations.

Murray gives close historical and ethnographic attention to the multiple contexts, both indigenous and international, that prefaced the battle. His book is divided into three parts. In part 1, he writes of Peleliu in the early Japanese colonial period as a time when villages (beluu) were still the focus of life; people lived close to the land and sea and organized their lives around clans, lineages, and chiefly councils. Land was key; people derived their personal identity from family lineages and the land those lineages controlled. For the chad ra Beliliou, history and geography are inextricably linked. History is understood as the movement of people among islands and across landscapes. Natural landmarks or human-made stone markers called olangch cued memories of events deemed historically important and worthy of recalling. The destruction of the olangch, first by Japanese phosphate mining and later by war, severed the people’s ties to their past. As Murray notes, the “destruction of the villages, farms,

cemeteries holding the ancestors, and other landforms demolished not only productive assets but also the roots of identity and much of the means of memory and history" (4).

Part 2 details the prelude to conflict, the war itself, the exile and hardships experienced by the chad ra Beliliou, and their acclimation to a new US colonial overlord. While often overlooked in the history of World War II, the actual battle of Peleliu was nothing short of horrific. The naval bombardment, onshore shelling, high-altitude bombing, and use of flamethrowers devastated the landscape. The Japanese commander, Colonel Nakagawa Kunio, staged an extremely effective if doomed defense, placing his troops in Peleliu's caves as a way to slow the US invasion while inflicting maximum casualties. Eleven thousand Japanese soldiers would end up being entombed in those caves once US forces breached the shore defenses and secured the island; American casualties exceeded eight thousand dead and wounded. The cost of that victory proved all the more staggering given the conviction on the part of many US military planners that the invasion was unnecessary.

A morning air raid on 30 March 1944 heralded the arrival of war on Peleliu. While the Japanese military conscripted young men to labor on war-related projects, the majority of residents sought shelter in the island's caves. As the bombing intensified, most fled Peleliu for the nearby island of Ngercheu, where they remained until the Japanese command decided to evacuate them to the island of Babeldaob. There, the people of

Ngaraad took in the chad ra Beliliou. For the people of Peleliu, the most significant memory of the war is the shelter and salvation they found with the people of Ngaraad. Not too long after the war had ended, the people of both places erected an inscribed olangch named the Odesangel Bad to commemorate the wartime bonds that continue to bind them.

The chad ra Beliliou would eventually return to a cratered, burned out, and debris-strewn island that was unrecognizable. The island looked as if it had been bleached—the result of phosphate mining, airfield construction, and the residue from the white phosphorous used in hand grenades and heavy artillery rounds. Gone too were the olangch, those physical forms of history that linked the people to their pasts and their ancestors. US relief supplies created a dependency that left the chad ra Beliliou ill prepared to resume life on their terribly wounded island. Efforts to reclaim communal ownership of their lands proved complicated and painful under the trusteeship form of government authorized by the United Nations and administered by the United States. Attempts to restore the prewar system of village life and governance met resistance from US military planners and later civilian administrators. The establishment of the Republic of Palau in 1994 brought only modest and ultimately unsatisfactory gains in the quest for war reparations.

While regarded as a noble victory, American histories of the war are plagued by a host of painful and disturbing questions that focus on the necessity of the invasion, the failure

of intelligence regarding the terrain, and the ineptitude of the US military command. Japanese views of the war are also divided. For some, the story is about the unrelenting grief from the loss of loved ones; others impose political and ideological views about empire, provocation, and heroic sacrifice. The *chad ra Beliliou* regard the war in a brutally straightforward manner. According to Murray, “it brought them environmental and social catastrophe. It is the obliteration of everything that sustained them and everything they had built that primarily shapes their memories and judgments of the conflict” (97).

Part 3 of this deeply moving study deals with the ways in which the war is remembered and commemorated differently by Americans, Japanese, and the people of Peleliu. The sheer weight of written histories, memoirs, works of fiction, military studies, and documentaries produced by the two principal combatants leave no room for the voices of the *chad ra Beliliou*. Murray’s careful examination of these many and varied sources makes that exclusion painfully clear. Official American commemoration of the battle has been modest. Privileged by the victor’s position, American memorials remain locked in a narrative that sees the battle over Peleliu as part of a mighty and just response to an unprovoked attack. This blinkered history thus avoids all of those unsettling questions around the battle, including the extremely racist character of the violence Americans delivered on their enemy.

Japan also regards Peleliu as sacred, hallowed ground. Given the intense

contemporary controversies that surround Japan’s conduct of the war in the region, the government has been restrained in its endorsement of memorials. This has created a vacuum filled by a host of domestic groups with varied and conflicting views about the Pacific War. There is the Ireidan or “Association for Consoling Souls” who, until recently, have visited Palau and Peleliu on a regular basis to mourn the dead and bring comfort to their families. They are a politically mixed group whose earliest efforts focused on the collection and burning of the bones of fallen Japanese soldiers. Among the Ireidan is the Nihon Izokukai, an association that speaks for war-bereaved families but with a strongly rightist agenda that sees those fallen Japanese soldiers on Peleliu as heroic defenders of the homeland. Groups like the Nihon Izokukai and the right-wing Shinto group Seiryusha are free to inscribe political messages on the memorials they erect without fear of criticism or censure from home. These messages are shaded by altered translations; Japanese texts, for example, might speak of heroism and imperial mission, but these words, and the nationalist sentiments behind them, are blurred or left out in their English-language translations.

Plans put forth by the US Park Service and the Japan International Cooperation Agency for the economic development of Peleliu focus on the commemoration of the battle. The *chad ra Beliliou* do not see the war as their history; they value their land and surrounding seas differently. Their memories of the war may parallel

and even intersect at times with those of the Americans and the Japanese; they seldom touch, however. For the people of Peleliu, the battle was “an unmitigated social, cultural, and environmental disaster” (215). It is their attachment to their island that separates their memories from those of the Americans and the Japanese. Until their voice finds a featured place among the contentious and disparate histories of the battle over Peleliu, the war over memory and commemoration will go on. To his great credit, Stephen Murray has done much to redress the imbalance and injustice.

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For a Song, by Rodney Morales.
Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press,
2016. ISBN 978-0-8248-5882-7, 505
pages. Paper, US\$19.00.

Rodney Morales’s new novel, *For a Song*, represents a significant development in his already varied oeuvre, which includes a collection of short stories (*The Speed of Darkness*, 1988); a memorialization of George Helm and Kimo Mitchell (*Ho‘i Ho‘i Hou*, 1984); and his first novel (*When the Shark Bites*, 2002). As an extension and elaboration of that earlier novel, Morales’s most recent foray into the noir genre is an effort to bring the genealogy of Chang Apana (the historical figure who was the basis for the fictional and Hollywood film character Charlie Chan) into a decolonizing, de-orientalizing, and thoroughly contemporary frame through the

protagonist Kawika Apana. According to recent historical work by David A Chang (“Borderlands in a World at Sea: Concow Indians, Native Hawaiians, and South Chinese in Indigenous, Global, and National Spaces” [*The Journal of American History* 898 (2): 384–403]), Chang Apana was hānai-ed (adopted) into the family of a Kanaka Maoli (native Hawaiian) woman, Kahaulelio, and a Chinese man from the Pearl River Delta, C Y Aiona. Both Chang Apana and C Y Aiona came from the same ancestral village, suggesting that similar genealogical logics of adoption were operating in southern China and in Hawai‘i.

However, Morales’s Kawika Apana is anything but his literary ancestor. Instead of rounding up Chinatown gamblers with a bullwhip like Chang Apana, Kawika is a down-and-out reporter-turned-private-investigator, recently divorced. We first meet him in the novel’s opening scene, set in the elite Honolulu neighborhood of Portlock, where Kawika has conned a group of white-collar gamblers into parting with thousands of dollars. Close to dawn, his lawyer-host pressures Kawika into accepting a high-speed boat in lieu of the cash—a boat that not only becomes his new place of residence but also serves as his entrance into a classic noir narrative of entrapment.

Apana’s first job in his new digs is to find Kay Johnson, the missing daughter of Minerva Alter and the late Lino Johnson (a Hawaiian musician somewhat reminiscent of George Helm), who in the novel was murdered in Chinatown some eighteen years earlier. Apana discovers