

other than a vote for incorporation into the republic; and a shameful disinterest on the part of international actors, who (apart from a small group of former French African nations) ultimately saw more to be gained from appeasing a noncommunist government in Indonesia than from supporting the claims of the West Papuan people to self-determination, and who were prepared to ignore the clear evidence that West Papuans had been denied a real choice in 1969.

Others have written about Dutch decolonization in Indonesia and about the West New Guinea question, but Penders' account is the most detailed study available, making extensive use of Dutch archival material. It makes an important contribution to the literature on decolonization and will be an invaluable source for students of Indonesian, and West Papuan, history.

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Melal: A Novel of the Pacific, by Robert Barclay. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8248-2591-8; viii + 300 pages, map, text art. Paper, US\$14.95.

Barclay is a first-time novelist who simply got it right. *Melal* is an archaic Marshallese word: playground of demons; not habitable by people. As a member of the editorial board of the University of Hawai'i Press, I first learned of Barclay's work when his manuscript was evaluated for publication. In her review of the manuscript, Teresia Teaiwa, Pacific Islands Studies, Victoria University at Wellington,

wrote that *Melal* is a "rare and precious gift to all humanity." Byron Bender, a University of Hawai'i linguist who has devoted much of his career to the study of Marshallese language and culture, described *Melal* as "an extraordinary work that defies categorization . . . a political and social treatise disguised as a novel."

Teaiwa and Bender are not alone in their assessments. Barclay has been named as the recipient of the Harriet Goldsberry Award in Hawai'i and was a finalist for the prestigious 2002 Kiriama Prize for fiction. (Two of Barclay's competitors for the award were Booker Prize finalists.) Barnes and Nobel selected *Melal* for its Discover Great New Writers program and has promoted the book in its stores throughout the United States. *Melal* has received critical acclaim in Honolulu's leading daily and weekly newspapers. Author Patricia Grace's enthusiastic endorsement on the novel's back cover concludes with the note that *Melal* is "an important book."

Barclay is now a doctoral student and lecturer in the English department of the University of Hawai'i, and *Melal* served as the thesis for his MA degree in that department's creative-writing program. Barclay first became acquainted with the Marshall Islands as a nine-year-old boy when his father took a job at the US missile range facility on Kwajalein Atoll in the early 1970s. Kwajalein is one of the twenty-nine coral atolls and five single islands that make up the Marshalls. Many of the islands, including Kwajalein, were devastated when American forces invaded and defeated the Japanese during World War II. After

the war, Bikini and Enewetak Atolls in the northern Marshalls were used as sites for over sixty nuclear tests between 1946 and 1954. While the people of the two atolls were removed from their ancestral homelands, radiation from the nuclear tests contaminated other inhabited northern atolls, and their peoples continue to suffer the consequences. Kwajalein was a support base for the nuclear program, and when that program came to an end, the atoll became an essential component in America's "Star Wars" strategic defense initiative. Long-range missiles originating from California are routinely intercepted and destroyed over Kwajalein by defensive missiles launched from the atoll.

The American community numbers well over 4,000 and is located on the atoll's largest island, Kwajalein Island. It has all the amenities—and more—of an affluent southern California suburb, complete with a well-watered golf course, movie theaters, swimming pools, lagoon-side marina, and well-stocked post exchanges. Barclay enjoyed a rather carefree boyhood of fishing and other water sports and diversions that accompanied never-ending summers. He left Kwajalein after high school and has returned numerous times for visits and a couple of yearlong stints of employment. Barclay began writing short stories based on his experiences on Kwajalein, and they eventually evolved into the novel at hand.

Melal covers the events of a single action-packed day, Good Friday of 1981. The main Marshallese characters are the widower Rujen Keju and his two sons, teenage Jebro (named after the king of the stars and Mar-

shallese folk hero) and twelve-year-old Nuke (shorthand for the American nuclear tests in the Marshalls). An apparent victim of radiological fallout, Rujen's deceased wife is buried near the family's house on Ebeye Island in Kwajalein Atoll.

Rujen is the highest-ranking Marshallese employee at the sewage plant on Kwajalein Island. Jebro has lived for a couple of years with relatives on an outer island with a more traditional lifestyle, but on the following Monday, he is scheduled to join his father's work crew at the sewage plant. The story line focuses on the interaction among three sets of players: the Americans on Kwajalein; the Keju family and other Marshallese; and a multitude of demons, spirits, and other beings who make up the supernatural realm of Marshallese culture. Within that realm, the forces of good and evil are in perpetual conflict, and while they are largely unseen, they are ever present and integrally involved in the daily lives of the people. Jebro has been touched by the supernatural, and only he appears to suspect the active presence of the other world. Etao, the trickster, is the key player in the Marshallese pantheon. Because of the light and speed of his own descent from the heavens, he is sometimes mistaken for an incoming missile. On other occasions, he is not above hitching a ride on one of the American projectiles.

Ebeye Island has one of the highest population densities in the world. Thousands of Marshallese live on its seventy-some acres. A small percentage work for the Americans on Kwajalein, while the vast majority are either relatives attached to the wage-

earners or Marshallese relocated from islands that are endangered by debris from exploding missiles. In Ebeye is the American version of apartheid in the Pacific. Access to Kwajalein Island by Marshallese is restricted to the workers who commute by ferry each day, and violations are punished by heavy fines and other penalties. Workers are denied access to the post exchanges and the low-priced goods available to Americans there.

In enormous contrast to the American facility, the squalor of Ebeye makes it one of the worst slums and shantytowns in the entire Pacific. It is largely treeless, and fresh water is always in short supply. Recreational facilities, sewage and garbage disposal, education, and health care systems are woefully inadequate. Electrical outages are commonplace. The surrounding lagoon and ocean waters are polluted, making marine life inedible. American television programs provide some distraction, but idleness, delinquency, other social problems, and alcohol, tobacco, and other substance abuse are all commonplace. The rate of suicide among male teenagers is high.

Rujen and his sons share a dwelling with about twenty clansmen and other relatives. The novel opens with Rujen rising before daybreak to cope with the beginning of another workday. He is a conflicted man who has turned away from Marshallese culture, suffered humiliation, and kowtowed to Americans to protect his job and please his superiors. He has a particularly bad day, including victimization by other Marshallese. At the end of his ordeal, he is emotionally and physically wounded, distraught, angry,

and in doubt about the wisdom of the course he has taken. Rujen's relationship with Jebro is also uneasy. The younger man finds refuge and value in Marshallese culture, and he is inspired by memories of his paternal grandfather, who was a traditionalist. On the other hand, young Nuke is only attracted to things American. Jebro encourages Nuke to explore his Marshallese heritage. He borrows his father's boat, and against all the American regulations, takes Nuke on a fishing expedition to a now abandoned island elsewhere in the atoll where his grandfather had land and is buried. On their return to Ebeye, their boat is sunk by careless, alcohol-infused young Americans, and only Etau saves them from drowning. The novel ends as Rujen and Jebro find some reconciliation, and Etau and benign others of the supernatural realm struggle to save the souls of Marshallese harmed by the American presence in the islands.

Barclay captures the essence of the Kwajalein Atoll of today and recent decades. The integration of the complex interaction of the diverse characters and events of Barclay's story into a coherent tapestry is masterful, reflecting a lively imagination. Barclay's skillful use of language allows him to paint vivid portraits of the scenes he describes. His forays into Marshallese culture are well informed, and his acquaintance with the ethnographic literature on the Marshalls extends back to the era of German colonial rule. His empathy for Marshallese is evident, and it comes as no surprise that, at least initially, Barnes and Noble assumed that Barclay was a Pacific Islander. *Melal* is a powerful

and at times heart-wrenching novel that should appeal to a wide range of readers interested in the region today. It is always a delight to discover a new talent, and we can only hope to see more of Barclay's work in the future.

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Sista Tongue, by Lisa Linn Kanae. Designed by Kristin Kaleinani Gonzales. Honolulu: Tinfish, 2002. ISBN 0-9712198-2-6; 64 pages, unnumbered; photographs, bibliography. US\$10.00.

Writing in Hawai'i Creole English or Pidgin has at least thirty years of tradition behind it. What is generally considered to be the first book in Pidgin, *Chalookyu Eensai* by "Bradajo" (aka Jozuf Hadley), was published in 1972. In the years that have followed, there has been a sort of renaissance of literature written in Pidgin in Hawai'i.

Lisa Linn Kanae's *Sista Tongue* is one of the more recent books to both participate in and analyze this scene (another interesting book is Lee Tonouchi's *Living Pidgin: Contemplations on Pidgin Culture*, also published by Tinfish in 2002). Kanae is a Hawai'i writer with firsthand knowledge of this renaissance and also one of the editorial assistants of *Ōiwi*, a groundbreaking journal of Native Hawaiian literature and art.

Sista Tongue is a "chapbook" of about sixty pages. Kanae begins with a story about childhood, a story about her brother Harold-Boy, who was, she explains, a late talker "who couldn't

articulate certain words or speak in complete sentences until long after the 'normal' expected age." Because Harold-Boy is a late talker, people make fun of him; he has to go to a special school; and he grows up to be kind, but shy. This story of Harold-Boy is mainly, but not exclusively, written in Pidgin. Next to it, Kanae tells her own language story, mainly in standard English but with occasional interjections in Pidgin, such as "Badda you?" She writes, "My genealogy can be traced back to Japanese pig farmers in Happy Valley, Maui; Chinese and Filipino immigrant plantation workers; and Native Hawaiians from the island of Hawai'i; however, I am not fluent in any of my ancestors' native tongues. Instead I speak both Standard English and Hawai'i Creole English, or 'Pidgin.'" As Kanae tells her own story, she also tells a brief, scholarly history of Pidgin, a language created out of the intersection between the various immigrant languages that plantation workers brought to Hawai'i and the already present Hawaiian language. Mixed in with this, in what I cannot help but read as homage to Korean-American writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, are a series of quotes from various linguists describing things like how the tongue works.

Kanae's take on Pidgin is unapologetically supportive and counters years of linguistic belittlement by what Kanae calls "cultural elites." Near the end of her essay Kanae states, "Resistance is an intrinsic element of Pidgin." And after listing a number of Hawai'i writers such as Darrell H Y Lum, Tonouchi, Joe Balaz, and Lois-Ann Yamanaka (her