

terms of use, materials, technology, and symbolism?

Pointing to gaps such as these is, in large part, simply quibbling. Before *Home in the Islands*, relatively little was known about housing in the Pacific. Now that this fine volume and its contributions are available to stimulate question and thought, it is easy to see just how much more is needed, and how to fill the gaps.

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Nuclear Nativity: Rituals of Renewal and Empowerment in the Marshall Islands, by Laurence Marshall Carucci. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-87580-217-6, xvii + 217 pages, maps, photographs, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. US\$32.

Few ethnographies measure up to the charge set by Clifford Geertz to provide a truly “thick description.” Carucci’s discussion on Marshallese ritual, however, commendably achieves the kind of ethnographic thoroughness I believe Geertz advocated. Carucci does more than let us merely peer through a crack into the cultural world of the Marshall Islanders; he throws the door wide open so we may come in to gain a full view. He richly describes Marshallese culture and social practices, extensively connects ritual to social life and meaning, and interweaves descriptions with theory for consideration rather than fixing interpretive outcomes.

In this book Carucci, an anthropol-

ogist at the University of Montana who has worked in the Marshall Islands over a period of twenty years and published extensively on Marshallese culture, describes how the Islanders of Āne-wetak Atoll make sense of their history by drawing on the representational resources that have deep historical meaning. In recent history many global dramas have been played out on these Islanders’ atoll: World War Two battles, military occupation, relocation to Wūjlañ for atomic bomb testing. Carucci, however, does not attempt to detail this imperial history, nor does he wish to be overly occupied by the reality of the social and economic conditions of the Islanders. Instead, he concentrates on how the Islanders think through a “verified past for purposes of historical reference and current empowerment” by symbolically constructing “an indigenous history” and a “historically significant existence” derived from mythology, Christianity, and kinship. This meaningful existence is represented and reconstituted through ritual practice. He identifies the annual three-month celebration called *Kūrijmōj* (Christmas) as the inter-actational and performance context in which significant physical and symbolic capital (both “pagan” and Christian metaphors) is invested to draw on the life-giving forces of deities and thus perpetuate and ensure a meaningful existence for the Islanders. This unified cosmology is “lived in” daily and maintained through ritual enactments.

Through the course of the celebration competing songfest groups called *jepta* engage in several activities such as recruitment, song competitions, dis-

plays of food, ritual games that invert gender relations as well as authority, age and kinship relations, dances, buffoonery, costuming, and heightened cataclysmic events. Nothing goes beyond the purview of Carucci's description or lacks importance in the interpretation of the logic of this celebration and its meaning. He addresses language, land tenure, food preparation, gender, sexuality, authority, age, economics, international relations, spatial concepts, myths about the primal gods and the trickster figure with his connection to atomic bomb testing, and a discussion on the symbolic condensation of the life-giving deity *Jebro* with Christ.

Carucci argues that within the celebration, exchanges between the *jepta*, and between humans and deities, blur the boundaries of heaven and earth, the sacred and the profane, and so forth. Carucci proposes that a single *jepta* internally operates as a metonym of the *bwij* (which he describes as a bilateral extended family), because like the *bwij*, the *jepta* is governed by the principles of sharing, equality, kindness, and feelings of indebtedness. The logic of the *bwij* is expansive, inclusive, and flexible to incorporate a variety of identifiable kin into relationships of obligation. Alternatively, while *jepta* groups are formed around an ideology of cooperative kin for the purpose of recruitment, they also function as a metonym for competing groups like the *jowi*, or clans that follow female lines. Consequently, as a metonym of *jowi*, various *jepta* engage in transactions that enact historically salient metaphorical battles and marriage exchanges. The entire celebration

must ultimately be seen as an exchange between humans and deities; the ritual is offered not as a supplication, but to obligate the gods to reciprocate by renewing nature and regenerating humankind for the coming year. The logic of how the Islanders "expand the map of their own episteme" draws from and adds to their identities.

I believe Carucci correctly asserts that the logic of exchange within the *bwij* and between *jowi* informs and shapes the ritual and its *jepta*. Nonetheless, his concept of *bwij* reflects the particular history of Āne-wetak more than how the logic of *bwij* is realized in the rest of the Marshall Islands. He declines to call *bwij* a matrilineage because such a term reflects an African model he feels does not resonate with Pacific kinship. His disinclination to a comparative model is less problematic than how, in the broader Marshallese cultural context, the concept of *bwij* is clearly rooted in a female principle of linearity (with all its metaphors, such as *bwij* as the root term for navel). Whereas Carucci asserts that inclusiveness denies linearity in favor of a bilateral principle, I think Islander practice is more a matter of how the Islanders' concept of the female line and its metaphors of sharing, kindness, and equality reach out to incorporate others. Linearity and horizontal inclusion are not antithetical but work together. This alternative view of *bwij* would only strengthen Carucci's argument. Indeed, both the logic of exchange and the cosmological relations of humans to deity embodied in the guiding mythology (which he presents) draw from the "female as mother" concept and a lineal principle, and thus are

linked to the regenerative ideology of the ritual.

Generally I feel Carucci is ethnographically right, but at times he seems too right as he neatly fits together all the pieces of the ritual and cultural life of the Marshall Islanders. In an attempt to cast widely the ethnographic gaze, one wonders if this method does not obligate the ethnographer to fit all the pieces of culture and history into a tidy integrative system of meanings and social practices. Part of the vibrancy of culture lies in how, from one context to the next, social actors generate meanings that are multiple and flexible. Carucci does show how meanings shift and, as emergent products, are produced and reproduced through time. However, the slippage between the sense-making of the ethnographer and the “native’s” sense, no matter how informed by intersubjective understandings, cautions that disparate activities and symbols may not always refer back to a semiotic center. Nonetheless, to see the “order of things” from the Islanders’ perspective Carucci has been more than thorough and insightful. He has presented a reading that brings closer the experience and worldview of the Marshall Islanders.

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They Make Themselves: Work and Play among the Baining of Papua New Guinea, by Jane Fajans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. ISBN 0-226-23443-6 (cloth), xiv + 313 pages, map, figures, photographs, appendix, glossary, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, US\$50.00; paper, US\$19.95.

The gauntlet was thrown by Gregory Bateson, who termed the Baining “unstudiable,” a challenge confirmed forty years later by Jeremy Pool, who considered himself to have discovered no “area of central anthropological concern” that could be fruitfully explored among the Baining. Jane Fajans accepted this challenge. In the process of over two years of cumulative fieldwork in the late seventies and early nineties, she discovered first, that her method of study had to rely on observation and participation much more heavily than informants’ exegesis, and second, that anthropological analysis of Baining culture would have to emphasize process and interaction rather than form and structure. Fajans is scrupulous about informing readers of her own interpretative process and the bases for her analysis. Interestingly enough, she tells us that rather than having the main symbolic elements of Baining culture lavishly displayed in ritual sequences and later confirmed or enriched through the study of daily life, as many ethnographers seem to do, among the Baining it was necessary to fully understand the values and actions that informed daily life and most of all the socialization process before she could make any headway on understanding the fantastic and