

wealth of Honolulu along the way but also drunks and homeless men collecting garbage. The job involves teaching the ha'a to a group of young Hawaiian men, and, as he puts it, to "help people get strong." During one rehearsal, he encourages them to hold their heads high and represent the culture "with mana."

As his parole comes to an end, David's life begins to deteriorate. He owes legal fees. Child support is subtracted from his paycheck. Unable to pay rent at his daughter's house, he moves in with a cousin. His hours at work are cut in half and then funding for his position is eliminated altogether. He gets into a fight with one of the men in his dance group. He tries drugs but the shame he will feel at having to explain what happened to "the guys back in prison" should he end up back there stops him from losing control completely. As he stands in the shallows at the beach, he concedes to being in "a battle that . . . [he is] slowly losing." A year passes and we find him living in a tent by a rocky shore.

After waking up and dressing, he makes his way to a public shower to wash and do laundry. As he walks, he declares that "Being in the house, paying rent. It's called life. What I want people to know is that this is life too. Right here." In the last image of the movie, we see him standing in the ocean, chanting in Hawaiian.

*Out of State* opens with scenes of David walking by the shore and we glimpse a tent whose significance now becomes clear. The documentary, in other words, has allowed us to appreciate something of the damage that state-based capitalism can and

does inflict on Hawaiian men, who live on its margins. It also allows us a glimpse of what indigeneity, as an ideology, can and cannot do for them. Its rich, bittersweet quality illustrates the predicament of men and masculinity not only in Hawai'i and the Pacific but also in settler-states throughout the world, together with the great efforts they make to accommodate it (as explored in Ty P Kāwaika Tengan's 2008 ethnography, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai'i*). It will make a welcome addition to undergraduate curricula on globalization and gender, indigeneity, and sovereignty movements.

DAVID LIPSET

*University of Minnesota*

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*Island Soldier*. Documentary film, 85 minutes, color, 2017. Directed by Nathan Fitch; written by Nathan Fitch and Bryan Chang; produced by Nathan Fitch, Bryan Chang, and Fivel Rothberg; distributed by Passion River Films. In English and Kosraean, with English subtitles. Further information can be found at <http://www.islandsoldiermovie.com/>

*Island Soldier*, directed by Nathan Fitch, opens in the air with a shot of endless ocean and white clouds floating by. Romantic South Seas islands ukulele music begins to play as the island of Kosrae, known to her people as the Sleeping Lady, emerges in all of her lush green splendor. Island scenes of a single, winding road, a boy bailing water from a canoe, and the sound of the morning roosters' crows

are almost jarring alongside images of Kosraean soldiers in uniform, waiting. A plane is landing, a plane that carries a lifeless, twenty-five-year-old brown body; a young son of Kosrae in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is being returned home to rest. As reported by Manny Cruz (*Pacific Daily News*, 25 May 2018), Sergeant Sapuro “Sapp” Nena is one of the more than forty soldiers from Micronesia who have died while serving in the US Armed Forces since 2003.

The military planes flying to islands such as Kosrae, Palau, and Saipan to return sons and daughters of Oceania home are quite frequent considering their small populations. Most of us from this region have family members and friends who serve or who have served in the US Armed Forces. Our relationship to our most recent colonizer, the United States of America, is complicated yet intimate, binding yet unjust, heroic yet toxic, and ultimately, loving yet lethal. To be frank, it is an abusive relationship, where the stakes are always high and there is only one victor. *Island Soldier* is a familiar narrative; it is a story that belongs to all of us who call Micronesia home and, as Jacki Leota-Mua reminds us, to our fellow “Nesians” in American Sāmoa as well.

Several years ago, my father, Simion, told me that he came to Guam, where we live, to join the army with five of his friends. I was surprised, as I had never heard this story, and had always assumed he came to Guam to attend the University of Guam (UOG). The year was 1974, and they had all just graduated from Pohnpei Island Central School (PICS). With the support of the Pohnpei

government, which at that time was under the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), Pahpa and his friends were the first Pohnpeians to leave the island solely to come to Guam to enlist and become sounpei, literally, “people who fight.” As the first, they would bring prestige to their families in Pohnpei. However, unlike the soldiers in the film whose journeys took them as far as Fort Carson, Colorado, Fort Benning, Georgia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, their journey would end on Guam.

After passing the entrance exam, they received a phone call from an army captain who told them that their papers were “invalid” and they “were no longer needed” because the Vietnam War was ending. Pahpa laughs when he tells this story, remembering the huge send-off at the old Pohnpei airport, reminiscent of the wailing ritual practiced by women in the outer islands of Yap, as poignantly described by Clement Yow Mulalap in his review, which follows. In light of this incredibly moving film, what sticks with me about Pahpa’s story is that their paperwork became “invalid” once they were no longer needed. These young Pohnpeian men and their families paid their way to Guam to enlist, and now they had to figure out what they were going to do next, given that they were no longer of use to the US military.

Luckily, my father had applied to UOG and been accepted, so he went and stayed with an aunt and uncle who lived on Guam. Two of the others became sailors for a commercial vessel, and the other three had to return home, dreams unfulfilled and in shame. The first to return later

told Pahpa that, as he walked from the plane to the old arrivals area, people saw him and saluted while laughing hysterically. But he returned home alive. They all did, eventually. If they had successfully enlisted, they would have been sent straight to Vietnam and may well have returned home in caskets like Sergeant Nena. Despite this blessing in disguise, their brown, Pacific bodies were dispensable because they no longer served the purpose intended by the army. Now, it is much easier for Micronesians to enlist, given FSM, Palau, and the Marshall Islands' Compacts of Free Association with the United States, but our bodies are still just as expendable, as *Island Soldier* reveals. In Vicente "Vince" M Diaz's passionate "call to arms" to collectively refuse and discourage young Micronesians from joining the US Armed Forces, we are reminded yet again of America's blatant disregard for the lives of brown bodies, even those who sacrifice their precious lives for a country that is not their own.

*Island Soldier* made its world premiere at the Full Frame International Film Festival in April 2017 in Durham, North Carolina, and has since screened at numerous festivals in the United States, Canada, the Pacific Islands, and Europe. The film also screened at the US State Department and the Department of the Interior in Washington DC. In April 2018, the film premiered in the FSM at Pohnpei Center Cinemas to an overflowing and enthusiastic audience. Fitch, who is based in Brooklyn, New York, is a graduate of Hunter College's MFA in documentary storytelling and currently works

in the video department at *The New Yorker*.

Fitch served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2004–2006 in Kosrae, where he worked with a young man who enlisted in the US Army. According to Fitch, the man "came back to the island for some R&R a year later after a deployment to Iraq, and I almost didn't recognize him. I think that raised questions in my mind that became the seed that led to making the film" (e-mail correspondence, 23 May 2018). It is obvious from the film that his time in Kosrae left a significant impact on his worldview, as he elaborated, "I loved the sense of community, and getting to know many of the people on the island. I think it was an important moment in my life to see that the value of work and career, very important in American society, are not the only values by which to judge people" (e-mail correspondence, 23 May 2018). His film captures the beauty, huge hearts, gut-wrenching sadness, hope, and resilience of the Kosraean people featured.

The reviewers featured in this forum come from diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds, each offering their own unique perspectives and insightful analyses of *Island Soldier*. They are also writing from various locations—Clement in New York City, Jacki in Lae, Papua New Guinea, and Vince in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Clement of Yap (FSM) provides his legal expertise and knowledge as the Adviser (Legal) for the Permanent Mission of the FSM to the United Nations and as an international law consultant for Blue Ocean Law. Jacki brings her experience as a Pacific curator, librettist,

former lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, and now self-described “Samoan Haus Meri”/ blogger from Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Vince, who is of Filipino and Pohnpeian descent and was born and raised on Guam, imparts his knowledge as a filmmaker, Native Pacific Cultural Studies Scholar, and associate professor of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities.

As the corresponding author for this review forum, I initially envisioned the forum as all Micronesian, which would be a first for *The Contemporary Pacific*. However, after discussing my early ideas with Alexander Mawyer and Mārata Tamaira, who encouraged me to include multiple voices and not just Micronesian ones, I thought of Jacki, knowing that there needed to be a powerful Pasifika woman’s perspective included. I deliberately placed her poetic review, cut like a film montage, between Clement’s and Vince’s more “traditional” reviews. As a film, *Island Soldier* is essentially a work of art, and Jacki’s words attune the reader to the sensual in the film while simultaneously asking necessary questions, such as “what of our island/s sisters and daughters?” This is a loaded question given that the only “island soldiers” in Fitch’s film are male.

*Island Soldier* provides us with a springboard from which to begin a much-needed discussion and protest of the unjust and inhumane treatment of Pacific Islanders currently serving in the US Armed Forces, as well as veterans. In a political climate where illegal immigrants from Mexico and Central America and legal migrants from the freely associated states (FAS) are being

discriminated against and deported for excessive and prejudicial reasons, it is our hope that readers of this review will have empathy for and a greater understanding of the plight of Micronesian soldiers and their families.

EMELIHTER KIHLENG  
Yona, Guam

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Nathan Fitch’s documentary film *Island Soldier* is, among other things, a lament for the dying of a people. The film tracks three stories, all of which feature individuals from the island of Kosrae, a state in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). One story is about Madison Nena, a pastor and community elder, and his son Arthur, a new recruit into the US military. A second story is about Kilfrank Sigraha, a sergeant in the US military getting ready for another deployment to the Middle East—this time to Afghanistan after two tours in Iraq—and being away from his young, growing family. A third story is about Maryann Nena and her son “Sapp” (short for Sapuro), who was killed in action in Afghanistan while serving as a sergeant in the US military. Though many threads connect their stories, one resonates with particular force: the young men serving in the US military are grist for the geopolitical mill, victims of a colonial long game that continues to ensnare the hearts, minds, and futures of the youth of Micronesia and cleave them from their ancestral homes. Their decision to enlist in the military of a foreign power reveals, in many ways, the lamentation of a nation facing an existential crisis.

Citizens of the FSM can enlist in the

US military because of the Compact of Free Association, a treaty between the FSM and the United States in which, among other things, the United States provides significant grant and programmatic assistance every year in return for exclusive military control of the FSM. The draw of the US military for FSM youth is a strong one, promising income, camaraderie, and globe-trotting. Enlistment becomes a vehicle to escape dire socioeconomic conditions in the FSM, particularly for the youth. It also hollows out the FSM, depriving the nation of the talents and energy of its youth as the nation struggles to achieve economic self-sufficiency—a central goal of the compact, in a twist of irony.

The story of Madison and his son Arthur captures this dilemma with skill. Madison insists that his children pursue higher education to the fullest extent possible, recognizing education's role in unlocking prosperous futures. At the same time, though, Madison acknowledges that he is unable to afford the cost of higher education for his children. As a consequence, his son Arthur has decided to enlist in the US military, where he is entitled to obtain financial support for higher education. The film portrays Madison as a proud champion of his island's traditional lifestyles. However, Arthur appears eager to leave Kosrae. A scene in which a Skype video chat between Madison and Arthur (while the latter is abroad in basic training) disconnects before they manage to move beyond pleasantries underscores the growing gap between father and son, literal and metaphorical. It is also a quiet moment of lament for a parent and child sepa-

rated—for a native son unmoored from his home.

Kilfrank Sigráh's story is a pointed reminder that such an unmooring does more harm than good. Kilfrank wanted to leave Kosrae and join the military in part because of the significant salary bump he would enjoy compared to the "chump money" he earned as an elementary schoolteacher in Kosrae. By the time the film picks up Kilfrank's story, though, he has already served two tours in Iraq and is living in Fort Carson, Colorado, with his wife and children. Unlike Arthur, whose nervous excitement about entering basic training is evident, Kilfrank is more cynical and weary about his own upcoming deployment. His preparations are somewhat haphazard and half-hearted and, perhaps for that reason, the film strains to get a hook into his story and find a through line of interest for the viewer, especially compared to the eagerness of Arthur and his father's complex anxieties. One sequence, however, reveals Kilfrank's ambivalence about his lot in life with some dexterity. During a cookout in Fort Carson prior to his deployment, Kilfrank, enjoying taro and fish while surrounded by his loved ones, yearns to return to Kosrae one day, savoring a taste of home in a literal sense as well as in his heart. His is a subtle, soft lament, a realization that the distance he has placed between himself and his island home might not be the best for himself and his family.

The most profound and heartbreaking lamentation in the film, though, is that of Maryann Nena. The film's treatment of her story—tender and respectful but also unblinking—is

the film's emotional and artistic high point. The arrival of her son Sapp in Kosrae in a casket, accompanied by his fellow servicemen and honored by a military funeral, opens the film, and it is the tear-filled meeting between Maryann and Sapp's best friend, a gruff-looking yet gentle Californian named Mario Robles, who calls Maryann "mom" and tells her he loves her in Kosraean, that closes the film. In Maryann and Sapp's story, one sees the full scope of the modern-day tragedy of the FSM under the sway of the United States. When Sapp's father and Maryann try to secure financial assistance from the US Department of Veterans Affairs after Sapp's passing, they receive grim news: They are not entitled to such assistance. The compact, although allowing FSM citizens to serve in the US military, does not also extend a wide range of veterans' benefits to FSM servicemen, let alone their surviving relatives. This brutal slap in the face is shown in stark contrast to a video message from President Reagan, speaking on the occasion of the entry into force of the compact between the FSM and the United States in 1986. In the message, President Reagan hails the "special relationship" between the FSM and the United States and insists that the United States has come to know the FSM as "members of our American family." The paternalism oozes from the screen, a guardian smothering a ward with faux magnanimity. Rather than becoming independent of the United States, the FSM would remain a part of the "American family," under the careful stewardship and protection of the United States—but more like a foster child rather than

blood, given the bare essentials to survive and no more.

I have been a lawyer specializing in international law—with an emphasis on international environmental law (eg, climate change law, law of the sea) and international human rights law—for nearly a decade now. Most of my practice has centered on the United Nations system as headquartered in the United States. In my career, I have witnessed the tremendous sway of major developed states when it comes to the making and enforcement of international norms, with the same small roster of players influencing major decision-making processes to a disproportionate extent on a regular basis. International law is supposed to level the playing field, allowing developed and developing states alike to contribute to lawmaking on an equal footing, each state having as much sovereignty and authority as any other state. The reality is different, however. The likes of the United States use the power of the purse and the specter of political ostracization—not to mention subtle (and less subtle) threats of force—to get other states to fall in line with their international legal objectives and geopolitical goals, including with respect to climate change (where the current international legal regime does not impose binding emissions-reduction targets on major polluter states) and the punishment of gross human rights violations (where powerful states refuse to bow to international condemnation of the abuses they perpetuate on their citizens). This was how the United States convinced the United Nations to establish the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (the forerunner of the

FSM) and select the United States as its administering authority after World War II, and it was how the United States “convinced” the FSM to enter into and maintain the compact indefinitely after the trusteeship ended, dangling economic incentives, immigration privileges, and other baubles in return for exclusive military control of the FSM’s territory and intrusive (some might say sovereignty-defying) demands on economic decision making in the FSM—demands that perpetuate a colonial mindset.

The trusteeship and the compact are tools of international law, forged between actors that are supposed to be equal in sovereignty but are, in reality, susceptible to long-standing disparities in power and influence. It is my career ambition to curb this misuse of international law and help the FSM and other small developing states embrace the full power that they have under international law to pursue their sovereign interests on equal footing with the likes of the United States, preventing such states from subverting the cultural and socio-historical norms and practices that make the FSM and its fellow developing states unique. Otherwise, stories like Arthur’s and Kilfrank’s and Sapp’s—captured with skill and subtlety by the film under review—will continue to bedevil the people of the FSM.

Ironically, if the film under review is able to expose the exploitative and subversive nature of the dynamic between the United States and the FSM with some impact and effectiveness, then it will be due in part to the broad acceptance in the FSM of film as a mode of storytelling. In the decades since the United States first

assumed administrative and military control over the FSM, the United States has plied the people of the FSM with all forms of consumable media from the West—eg, not just films but also music, radio shows, novels, and the like—primarily in an effort to instill certain Western values into the people of the FSM, water down the vibrancy of traditional lifestyles and cultures in the FSM, and draw the people of the FSM closer to the United States and its preferred mode of life. Film is a powerful medium in the FSM. This has come at the cost of ancient oral storytelling traditions in the FSM, but the film under review could be the beginning of a corrective to that steady denigration, especially if it inspires Micronesian filmmakers to get behind the lens and tell Micronesian stories with as much depth, poignancy, and clarity as *Island Soldier*.

In the outer islands of Yap, there is a tradition of women and girls engaging in an extended wailing ritual on the shore prior to the launching of a traditional canoe for a long voyage on the open ocean. It is an acknowledgment that when the bravest souls in the community venture abroad on a perilous journey, they may never come back. I thought often of this lamentation ritual as I watched *Island Soldier*. I imagined the tempest of emotions that must roil the hearts and souls of the families of FSM youth who leave the FSM in service of a foreign military. Theirs must be a mix of fear, pride, and resignation—an acknowledgment that they might be losing their loved ones for good (in spirit if not also in body) to the vast unknown and that they have little power to offer

them viable alternatives. This is the loudest, most piercing lamentation in the film, bemoaning the tragedy of a proud people facing dire existential challenges.

CLEMENT YOW MULALAP  
*International Law Consultant*

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this review are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the FSM National Government or Blue Ocean Law.*

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Sergeant Sapuro “Sapp” Brightly Nena (1987–2012), a US Army, Second Battalion, Third Infantry Regiment, Third Stryker Brigade Combat Team, Second Infantry Division soldier, did not pass through the fire of war. Killed in combat, military honors cascade across a casket embellished in blood red. The camera’s visions offer the contrast: white tarmac and blue tear droplets falling into the Pacific Ocean surrounding Kosrae, “The Island of the Sleeping Lady.” The eye casts over mangrove estuaries, steaming and languid, green and idyllic, a woman mourning, weeping for a son, returned home from a compacted, contracted, and relentless war of terror.

Nena was the first Kosraean to die in combat while serving in the US military. This is his story, captured on film by Nathan Fitch, an ex-US Peace Corps volunteer who lived on Kosrae and speaks Kosraean. In order to complete this film, Nathan interviewed between forty and fifty Kosraeans and helped crowdfund the project with the support of Kosraeans and others, including other Microne-

sian and Pacific Islander communities, who shared in the belief that this story needed to be told. In fact, Nena is not the first, and he certainly won’t be the last.

There are too many Islanders dying in the service of the beast.

Fitch’s deeply meditative film and Sergeant Nena’s (dis)quieting journey is imaged on sea, rain, pools of asphalt, rearview, fender, wing, and LCD screens, mirrored sunglass rotating on turrets, gunning on every and any reflective surface imaginable, affirming for Islander communities—living on islands or abroad, in federal or united, “states,” living on the edge of an ocean, on the edge of American consciousness but on the frontlines of US military deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait, or wherever—that the human cost of war is too high.

Mother Maryann knows. Throughout the film, she is a steady and strong presence for her beloved son “Sapp” and her husband, Brightly, who served in the Persian Gulf, returning alive but continuing to face enormous challenges in accessing health care and other benefits owed to US military veterans. Consoled only with a Bronze Star, in failed operations, in “Enduring Freedom,” we are witness to other “fish” in a big sea. Tuna caught by bloodied “tails,” bashed aboard convoy upon convoy of military recruiters selling the American dream.

Arthur Nena and his father, Madison, contemplate the promised dream; we follow their enlistment story. Profoundly moving, Madison’s story ends with a pilgrimage to Washington DC, to a conference on community health centers, only to have his microphone turned off while trying to speak. It



was at that point, I cried. One hundred ten minutes into the film, I am given space to weep.

This silencing, again contrasted with the finely tuned and resoundingly aural, rich, and diverse soundscapes represented in the film, the minimalism and music of Bing & Ruth, sampling amniotic melodies, gives voice, and contributes presence and realism. Microphones up until that point had always been tuned in to the lyrical language of Kosrae, her sung and spoken word and accompanying strings. Subtitles aid context, acknowledging the complexity of Islander-American identity, interspersed with historical footage, or family footage as adage, were neatly edited, making transitions a joy to behold.

Cut in and out, the belly of the beast, in the heart of Kandahar, regulators in armored all-terrain vehicles, we are also witness to US Army Sergeant Kilfrank Sigrah, who has served no less than three military campaigns. But they still can't say his name. Except for his family and his children, of course. Always there are children. Because we do it for the children, don't we? And children are everywhere in this film; observing, listening, learning, mourning—their Island Soldiers.

This documentary film is called *Island Soldier*. The Island is Kosrae, located in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), along with Yap, Pohnpei, and Chuuk.

The soldiers represented in the film serve the US military, but it should be noted that there are other “serving” Islanders: from the territories of American Sāmoa, Guam, the US Virgin

Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; Compact of Free Association (COFA) Republic of the Marshall Islands and Palau; beyond bloodlines and borderlines, Nesian-ties to Aotearoa and Hawai'i are briefly referenced in the film, with Sapp's “New Zealand haka” and Kilfrank's “Brothers” captured on film in Afghanistan; other “island” soldiers affected by military posturing in (un)/incorporated, (un)/organized territories in trust in the United States; “brothers” in arms—but what of our island/s sisters and daughters?

A soldier is defined as a serviceman or servicewoman—a fighting man or fighting woman—but, unfortunately, there are very few servicewomen or fighting women represented in this film. Women wail. They mourn. Women cook and clean and look after the children. They shop. They dance. But do they not serve the US military? We do get a glimpse of Kosraean women at the US Army Career Center, contemplating the “150 specialties” in which the military guarantees training. We know women are deployed because there is one woman soldier joining the ranks alongside Kilfrank and his squad on a tour of duty to Afghanistan.

Leilani Mongkeya, a medical retiree, listed as support staff from El Paso, Texas, is recorded on the US Office of Insular Affairs website as Kosraean. While she did not die in combat, she did receive a US flag, draped and folded, at her funeral.

We remember Army Specialist Cwislyn K Walter too, listed among the fallen on the Military Times website. The first Micronesian woman soldier to die in Kuwait. She was not

from Kosrae, but Chuuk. She was only nineteen.

Neither is Sergeant Nina the only man to die in service. Kimo Bolden Abraham is another. In the film, his mother stands by his grave.

Too many are dying in the belly of the beast.

In an article for the *Christian Science Monitor* (5 May 2010), Terry Azios writes, “while some Micronesians see the US military as their ticket out, many . . . are poorly informed of the risks. The FSM has suffered more casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan per capita than any US state, and has lost soldiers at a rate five times the US average. Some recruits sign on unaware the US is fighting two wars.”

Micronesians, Polynesians, Melanesian . . . Nesian . . . it doesn't matter how the beast classifies and separates and validates our deaths and casualties on the frontlines. We are being killed.

Nathan Fitch's telling is long overdue, and I'm glad it's finally being told.

JACKI LEOTA-MUA  
*Lae, Papua New Guinea*

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In its powerful and poignant portrayal of Kosraean enlistment and service in the US Armed Forces, Nathan Fitch's *Island Soldier* evokes in the viewer emotions that range from anguish and grief to rage. Tellingly, in also conveying the real outcome of the supposed economic, social, and even political “bargain” contained in Micronesia's relationship of “free” association with the United States, the film gives no sense of satisfaction, much less happiness, in the relationship, particu-

larly as it is played out in the terms of military service. This is because any benefits and opportunities to be had from service in the US military at this particular historical conjuncture of American colonization and imperialism through military adventurism and strategic arrangement are not forthcoming. Rather, they are woefully fleeting or are structurally contained in the most domesticating and regimenting of institutions that preempt any real exercise of freedom or economic benefit that might have been imagined at an earlier time in such a political relationship with the United States. Through the lens of this film's emotive truths, that political relationship may now be better understood as a military “campaign” or “theater” of conflict itself, to invoke other appropriate metaphors of militarism in order to better characterize the troubled relationship that Micronesia currently has with the United States, and the resultant casualties. In this light, free association through the terms of military service with the United States means war. Or to put it in another way: Today, free association with the United States is hell. No wonder the predominance of Christian religiosity and hope in this film.

Seen through the wider and deeper historical aperture that frames the immediate story told here, instances of Micronesian success in military service are rare exceptions. These are forged against all odds and realized only after service *in another era*, prior to 9/11 and prior to America's present duplicitous and immoral “war on terror,” which has in the past two decades been spitting out record numbers of physically and emotionally

maimed victim veterans. Though the outcome is not new, there is something particularly sinister, if not just different, about US military excursions in the post-9/11 era, and it is not just the amount of money and power at stake for a diminishing few. For example, the experiences of the veterans of more recent campaigns are conditioned by their status as non-US citizens from highly impoverished countries, countries ravaged as collateral damage for American security and economic well-being. In the case before us, Kosrae's average annual income is US\$2,000, and it relies on US economic assistance for 80 percent of its annual budget. In truth, Micronesia has experienced better times, even under other colonial regimes. The fact is that, after seventy-five years under American colonial governance or postindependence influence, Kosraeans are the poorest and the worst off that they have ever been under any other colonial regime. Of late, it seems clearer than ever that Kosraeans and other Micronesians fight and die for a country to which they do not belong and for rights and benefits that they will never see. Precisely for that reason and because of the structural reasons that require impoverishment of colonial "peripheries" as prerequisite for America's economic well-being (not that actual US citizen veterans themselves get adequate service and benefits for their sacrifice anyway, and not that American communities are necessarily flourishing). It is apparent now, more than ever before, that US militarism exists for the protection of the privileged few that continue to hoard wealth at the expense of everyone else.

To be sure, this particular politi-

cized view of post-9/11 American military adventure may not be one that Fitch or most Micronesians uphold and/or intend to convey. In any case, I argue that one cannot understand the plight of the contemporary island soldier and his/her family and community without recognizing the notoriety and immorality expressed in the linkage between massive capital accumulation and profitability and contemporary military adventurism (See Jean Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* [1995]). This is the main context and principle condition that frames the film's subject matter and focus on Kosrae. Furthermore, the degree of violence, inequality, and social upheaval that Kosraean and other Micronesian soldiers, families, and communities experience through service under the terms of their island's "free association" with the United States is only compounded by the particularly greedy, undemocratic, and immoral character of American military excursions around the world today. Hence, the ultimate takeaway of this film for me is a lesson of timing: It is high time for us to recognize the asymmetrical and immoral stakes of the more specific Micronesian-US bargain, particularly as it is played out in the terms of pursuing the American Dream in the twenty-first century through service in the US Armed Forces. The anguished story of Kosraean service in the US Armed Forces speaks directly to that larger truth and reality, and it is our job to recognize this reality and to work to transform hegemonic understandings of it. *Island Soldier* helps us open our eyes and do this work.

In brief, *Island Soldier* captures the

painful, emotive truth of the burden of such an asymmetrical bargain between Micronesians and the United States as it is played out in military service by Islander youth. Here, we follow four interwoven stories: First, there is the return of a fallen son, named Sergeant Sapuro “Sapp” Nena, in a flag-draped casket, along with the shreds of life left in the wake of his death that must be rebuilt by his “Goldstar Mother,” Maryann. Second, there are the heroic efforts of a father, Reverend Madison, who suffers through backbreaking toil and labor. To this burden, as we will see later, he experiences the sting of colonial indifference to his pleas to provide food, housing, and redress for families directly impacted by the exodus of their children, like Arthur, his youngest son, who in the film decides to enlist against his father’s wishes. Third, there is the ongoing story of Sergeant Kilfrank, a former elementary schoolteacher who, against his own desire, is forced into enlistment by need. We discover that Kilfrank abandons his first love of teaching elementary children for active service in the army and the accompanying promise of providing a better life for his family. We meet, and leave, Kilfrank in active duty, awaiting his next deployment. Fourth, we follow a non-Micronesian, a Latino veteran named Mario Robles, who must travel from his California home to Kosrae to pay proper respects and find closure from the death of the aforementioned Sergeant Sapp, who became his soul mate while in active duty. When he finally arrives and visits Sapp’s grave, Robles nods and declares, “that’s my dawg right there.”

In these stories, and in the inter-

persed glimpses into the lives and testimonies of other Kosraean veterans asking, “Why, Why, Why . . . will we lay on a grenade” for others when we will not even enjoy the full benefits and services of service and sacrifice of body and mind to the US military, the film bears witness to a deal that is just not working out in the best interests of Islanders.

The film also evokes other feelings—especially that of foreboding uncertainty—over what further violence and damage is to come. Most suspenseful is the outcome of Sergeant Kilfrank, whose facial twitches hint already of PTSD and whose marital estrangement is palpably present in the silence, physical distance, and lack of affection captured in fleeting moments pictured with his wife, who needs never utter one word for us to be worried. In one particularly painful moment—among many painful and even gut-wrenching moments—in the film, Kilfrank heads out the door of his home in Fort Carson, Colorado, to his next deployment, picking up his toddler daughter who is silently following him. He clutches her and asks, “you don’t want daddy to go, do you?” But she hasn’t actually said anything to that effect, or indicated anything like it in her body language, at least not on camera. There will be other awkward, even excruciatingly painful, moments in the film.

If there is any lightness or joy in the story, they are fleeting, because they are also securely contained in the machinations of the violent and asymmetrical relationship between America and Micronesia. There is also nervous humor: Considering China’s investment in Micronesia in the

context of a dire economic prognosis after the renewed compact terminates in 2023, Kilfrank speculates about political allegiance and even military service by Kosraeans in a future Chinese Army. “Maybe I might have to fight my own cousins,” he wonders aloud. In another instance involving Sergeant Sapp, we see a haunting video interview taken just before his final, ill-fated deployment to Afghanistan. In the interview, Sapp assures his mother that he “is gonna make it,” but then intimates that because of his dark complexion, the locals “think I’m one of them.” But he also fears for their safety because “the bad guys will kill them because they (the locals) are helping us (the Americans).” The ironic and nervous humor turns out to be tragic: Sapp was in fact the casualty of what US military discourse labels an “insider attack,” or in his case, an attack by a local Afghan policeman, a presumably “friendly” one whose training in peacekeeping the United States uses to legitimate its presence in the region. In this set up, being a nonwhite American friendly can easily get you killed by other brown American friendlies. This system is deadly, not life giving.

For all of this doom and gloom, there is also steadfast dignity and resolve among Micronesians and their relations, relative to the story here. Micronesian humanity is presented in how the families and communities of the island soldiers are left to carry the burden and the scars: dignity survives and controls the inconsolable grief of Maryann, the Goldstar Mother. At the end, we are buoyed by Maryann’s voice as she intones, with ukulele and characteristic Kosraean

accent, her vernacular rendition of a 1915 Hawaiian hymn, “Iesu Me Ke Kanaka Waiwai/Jesus and the Rich Man,” which is based on the parable in Matthew 19: 16–24. That parable is about the power of humble faith and love in God, as seen through Jesus’s own love, to guide the way to eternal happiness, as well as the need for forbearance in regard to how God tests us in life. Steadfast and resilient too is Reverend Madison’s faith in God and Micronesian tradition. Seeing that Kosraean veterans are not given health benefits and support, and that appeals to local officials don’t seem to get anywhere, the Kosraean minister of meager means raises funds from the community to travel stateside to a national convention of health-care providers who specialize in veteran care and support. At the convention, top-level officials from the US Department of Veterans Affairs are scheduled to speak. At one such address, we watch as Reverend Madison patiently awaits his turn at the mic at the floor during the Q&A, even putting up with a self-congratulatory spiel from one official about the high-quality care given US veterans and an over-the-top-bottom-of-the-heart gush delivered from the floor by a patriotic mom. But when Reverend Madison’s turn comes up and he begins to speak, he quickly realizes that he is inaudible and begins to tap test his mic, which has in fact just been shut off. The Q&A session is declared over, and the officials scurry away from the podium and go off-stage. For a few moments, however, Madison continues to talk, though no one, not even the film’s audience, can hear his message—a message that by now the film’s audience wishes would

be heard loud and clear by the federal officials in particular. For this muting, we too feel the sting of the rejection, the slap of indifferent inconsideration. I felt rage seeing Reverend Madison left standing there, silently mouthing words where I might have unleashed fury of a kind commensurable to the salt that the system just poured on the festering wounds of injustice.

I want to close on a call to action. Contrary to popular belief, in military law, a rank-and-file soldier may in fact disobey a command or direct order given by a higher-ranking military officer, if the command is understood to be illegal or immoral. According to Pauline Shanks Kaurin, in an article published by RealClearDefense, an online military and defense news digest (8 Aug 2017), such an act of “decisive disobedience” by military underlings is even touted as a professional if not moral obligation, one that

accompanies a soldier’s sworn oath of loyalty and service to the country. I call, then, for analogous acts of collective refusal, for all of us to actively discourage Micronesian youth (all youth) from enlisting in the US Armed Services because of the immorality of contemporary American militarism, the false promises, and because island cultural values of service and sacrifice—which consistently get confused and conflated with service to American ideals and campaigns—should trump short-term benefits that have such high costs. The power of *Island Soldier* lies in how it makes us feel and potentially act in the face of the evident outcomes of the so-called political bargain with America.

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