"MAN/MAKING" HOME: BREAKING THROUGH THE CONCRETE OF KWAJALEIN ATOLL

Greg Dvorak
Gender Relations Centre, RSPAS & Centre for Cross-Cultural Research
The Australian National University

Working Paper No. 13

ISSN: 1320–4025 (pbk); 1447–5952 (online)

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

This doctoral research was funded by the Australian National University and by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project Grant 'Oceanic Encounters: Colonial and Contemporary Transformations of Gender and Sexuality in the Pacific' DP0451620. This project is also supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), with assistance for the pre-doctoral phase of this research from the East–West Center.

Coral

It is "Liberation Day" in Kwajalein Atoll—the anniversary of the day American forces swept through and "Liberated" it from the Japanese—granting the Marshallese people "Freedom" as they bulldozed over these small coral islands with their tanks and guns during the Second World War. We used to celebrate it when I was a kid on Kwajalein Missile Range with the Kwaj Karnival, a festival open to everyone—with rides, games, and junk food—that lasted for several days. Nowadays the invasion is marked by two parades: one on the main island of Kwajalein, for the sake of the Americans who support the missile testing operations; and one on Ebeye, for the displaced Marshallese who inhabit this neighboring ghetto island.

On the U.S. Army ferryboat that takes me across the short thirty minutes to Ebeye, I look over at the Kwajalein Junior–Senior High School Marching band—they could have come from any high school in the continental United States. Some of the boys and girls are clearly military brats, with athletic builds and sunburnt faces. They shout out over the drone of the diesel engines, pushing a smaller boy around—perhaps he is the child of a missile engineer, like I was.[1] One of the teenagers waves at the other Americans windsurfing as we pass the north point of Kwajalein. I lean over the

[1] I write this paper in memory and appreciation of my father, Walter L. Dvorak (1945–1999), who worked devotedly in the interest of peace as a civilian engineer for a defense contractor on Kwajalein in the 1970s and 1980s.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

side of the boat, as I did when I was a little boy, and look deep down into the fathoms of blueness below me. The water is clear enough to see down to the coral reef—to massive coral heads swirling and flashing with silvery fish, to rainbow colored jungles of various formations. And these are interspersed with darker, longer forms, the shapes of ships and airplanes from the Second World War, most of them Japanese seafaring vessels where the souls of the sailors still sleep.

I begin my story here, in the coral of Kwajalein, on this day called Liberation Day, on my way across the lagoon. It is here, in the coral reef, where I hope to meditate, for here the multiple histories of Kwajalein converge and sediment, and it is obvious that everything connects.

The coral reef builds out in all directions, with no clear beginning or ending—only a perpetual sense of in-betweenness and a constant process of connecting and reconnecting. Its structure is unlike that of a tree, where a seed bursts upward toward the sky and branches forth from a central core; it is, rather, a network without any single center. Coral is itself a colonizer—a reef forms as millions of tiny polyps travel the ocean currents, migrating miles and miles to settle eventually and join others. These polyps come from all over, themselves voyagers of great distances, from different places and myriad directions. They gather together, forming solid communities and colonies—virtual cities along the ocean floor, along the sides of submerged volcanoes, gathering in their variety the multi-colors of algae and other microorganisms, taking on unique shapes and hues both breathtakingly beautiful and horrifically ugly. They build upon the sturdy structures of their ancestors to produce new lives, always expanding in new directions.

Coral is thus genealogical: it grows in all directions in vast reef networks, but it does so by picking up where others left off, changing direction, growing onward. This genealogy is not an oppressive hierarchy but, instead, a process that transcends the boundaries of living and dead, a continuum. It is a version, in essence, of the "rhizome" proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), a veritable "work-in-progress" structure that is always, already, "intermezzo." Curiously, these two theorists suggested that a model for their rhizome might even exist in Oceania, though their reasons for this comment are unclear (1987:18).

Deleuze and Guattari describe this rhizomatic structure as antidote to rigid hierarchical, binary ways of organizing the way we think about the world, and thus they imagine it being a structure that lacks memory or history. The rhizome gets us out of thinking in terms of likes and opposites, of making maps with predictable outcomes, or histories where clear winners defeat obvious losers. I bring forth coral as a useful paradigm to imagine a similarly "in-between" generative rhizomatic way of understanding history that still retains memory through *sedimentation* and building upon ancestral, genealogical pathways. Coral is thus a rhizome with memory, generational but epochal, regenerative within time spans inconceivable to the impatience of modernity and so-called development. In the Pacific Islands, where genealogy between people and islands is of utmost importance, but where people have also migrated and navigated tremendous distances—creatively and innovatively to find new lives, histories written like coral make a lot of sense.

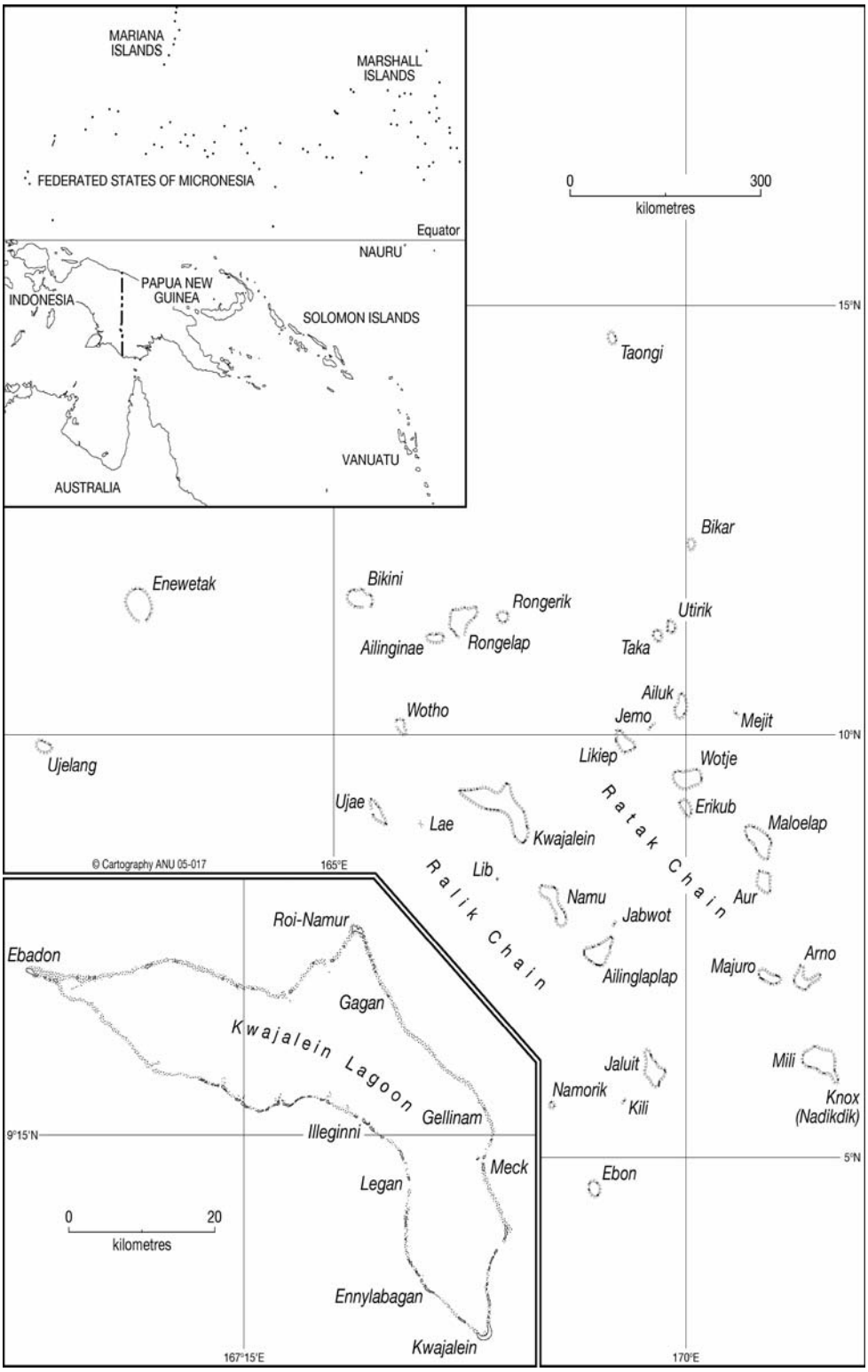
So here I play with the competition between coral as creative, expansive, deep-time storyteller, and concrete—the quick-drying narrative of colonialism. Both literally and figuratively, these two substances have created most contemporary islands of Oceania, and they are worth imagining in detail. The effects of colonial encounter have layered concrete upon the reef, constructing an artificial sense of permanency and progress, even bleached it white, transforming its dynamism and variety into homogeneity and fixity. But in the bigger scheme of things, while coral may be briefly threatened by these encounters and transformations, it is likewise threatening in the way it grows back, co-opts, rebuilds, invades, blocking the passage of ships across barren shallow reefs, or cutting into exposed human flesh upon contact. Though pulverized by settlers to make cement roads, runways and docks in the service of distant Empire, in time, coral even breaks through the concrete and covers it over again with new hope, direction, and vitality.[2]

It was coral that built Kuwajleen in the Marshall Islands, the largest atoll on earth, commonly known in English as Kwajalein. It is by evoking the metaphor of the coral reef that I begin my journey through memory, colonialism, and oceanic encounters; for this is also how Kwajalein began its journey, and because this journey is an ongoing one with a promising future. As a student of Pacific Islands Studies, I prefer to begin in the ocean, in the microscopic, and work my way outward to the macroscopic, and not the other way around. Like Epeli Hau‘ofa (1993), I envision a sea of islands that are deeply interconnected—not detached, remote, insignificant dots. Only through understanding Kwajalein as an important, real, solid place firmly rooted to the ocean floor, can I begin my inquiry from within, in the middle of somewhere, rather than “in the middle of nowhere,” as many outside discourses about Pacific islands begin (see Dirlik and Wilson 1995 for further discussion of this problematic).[3]

That “somewhere” is geographically located at the center of the Pacific Ocean, in the Ralik, or “sunset” chain of the Marshall Islands, roughly eight degrees north of the equator and almost exactly 4,500 kilometers on either side between Tokyo, Japan, to the west and Honolulu, Hawai‘i, to the east. Kwajalein is almost exactly 5,000 kilometers northeast of Canberra. The atoll encompasses a calm lagoon that spans a surface area of 2,040 square kilometers, its greatest dimension being 139 kilometers from one end to the other—forming the largest coral atoll in the world (USAKA 2001). At its southern end is the main island of the atoll, and its name is also Kwajalein. As one resident explains, “it’s shaped like a boomerang, and that’s why people who leave Kwajalein just keep coming back” (Dvorak 2004:137).

[2] According to Tamura Ryōichi, during the Japanese military occupation of Kwajalein Atoll cement was shipped directly from Japan and mixed with pulverized coral to cover the island (pers. comm., 25 January 2005).

[3] While the academy persistently locates Pacific Islands studies in “area studies” or anthropology, much of the last decade of scholarship from Oceania has pointed out the importance and inter-connectedness of small islands communities, and how these relate crucially to the global political economy.



I have come back to Kwajalein for the first time in almost twenty years. Standing here on the deck of the ferry, pummeled by the warm breeze that smells of diesel fuel, I can see almost the entire atoll spread out before me.

I actually didn't realize today was "Liberation Day"; my reason today for crossing over the coral reef from Kwajalein Island to Ebeye is to visit Neitari, my Bubu, my Marshallese grandmother.

I walk from the dock toward a massive crowd of people of all ages, wearing colorful green school uniforms and purple choir gowns. The irooj—high-ranking chiefs—of Kwajalein Atoll, and the Marshallese minister of foreign affairs are clapping as the U.S. ambassador plays musical chairs with a bunch of schoolchildren. The hot, gritty air of the Ebeye streets sticks to my lips and makes my eyes itch.

I have been told to look for Bubu's house back behind a small general store and down a narrow cinderblock alley. Along the way, I ask a teenage girl, who nods her eyebrows affirmatively and guides me back, under low-hanging clotheslines and telephone wires, to a small house made of plywood with two sawed-out holes for windows. Neatly-cut lace curtains dangle motionless in the breezeless heat. The roof is fashioned out of a massive road sign that reads *SPEED LIMIT: 60*.

My heart races with anticipation, as I have not seen Bubu since my childhood on Kwajalein, and I know that she is quite old now. Will she recognize me? Does she even remember my family? With the unreliable postal service, did my letters ever reach her?

In my mind, Neitari has always been my Bubu—one of my grandmothers—although in fact Neitari was my family's housekeeper from 1977 to 1980. I would sit on her lap as she told me stories of other islands and other times—and I would fall into a trance as she lulled me off to sleep with her singing. When I was six years old, I proudly announced that I wanted to marry her.

When we arrive, however, a familiar face peers out from the front door, smiling a toothless grin. She has white hair now, and her face is wizened but radiant. As soon as I explain who I am, her eyes open wide, she giggles, and gets up to embrace me, immediately remembering me. She pats me on the back again and again with arthritic fingers, "My grandson, come inside!"

Bubu offers me her only chair, even though she and three of her small grandchildren are sitting on the floor. I politely decline and sit beside her, where she has been weaving an elaborate necklace out of cowries and palm sennit. The necklace looks a bit like Kwajalein Atoll itself, for it is a long strand of finely-woven fibers and shells—in fact, the Marshallese name Kuwajleen is said to mean "beautiful necklace upon the water" (Edwards cited in Dvorak 2004:xiii).

As if she has been expecting me, planning to give it to me all along, Bubu ties the final loop in the necklace, leans toward me, and places it around my neck. It smells of sweet coconuts perspiring in the sun and reminds me of the many gifts she would give my brother and me when we were children—little pandanus balls, baskets, boxes, hats, and fans, and I am instantly reconnected with a different time, before I went to that place my parents called "backtothestates."

Completely unable to repay her generosity as usual, I open my bag to reveal the small stash of canned corned beef, instant noodles, lollipops, and Tylenol that I have smuggled out through Harbor Control on Kwajalein. I feel embarrassed that my gifts are all cheap global commodity items. "Ohhh," she says, slapping my shoulder and disapproving of my giving her any gift at all, "you don't need to do this. Thank you."

We step out into the sunshine to watch the parade. Father Hacker's Assumption Band comes marching by, just as it did in the 1970s—followed by the American high school band I saw on the boat trip across. They proudly play "The Star Spangled Banner" as they march through the dusty streets.

The parade reminds me that Kwajalein has been—and is—"home" to many different people, for very different reasons, and it has had many different names as well. For instance, although the Marshall Islands were colonized by Spain and more recently Germany from 1886 to 1914, and Kvadje-linn was used as a copra plantation for contemporary Marshallese people living in Kwajalein Atoll, however, the present and the past are clearly demarcated respectively as the Japanese period and the American period and replayed in the Liberation Day Parade (Hezel 1995).

A large truck rolls by carrying a float entitled "Kwajalein Atoll, Before." It is filled with Marshallese boys dressed like Japanese soldiers in trenches, holding toy guns and swords, wearing *hachimaki* headbands with the Japanese imperial flag emblazoned upon them. They peer out from between a grove of cut palm fronds that surround the float to make it look like the pre–war jungles of the atoll, in the days before concrete choked out many of the trees. The characters for "The Great Japanese Empire" are painted in black on a long white piece of fabric, raised high on bamboo poles.

Beginning in the late 1800s, even before the League of Nations ceded the Marshall Islands to Japan under a Class C Mandate, the atoll appeared in Japanese

exploration literature—like that of Suzuki Keikun, who wrote of his expedition to Kwajalein and several other atolls in his reports to the Japanese government (Suzuki 1980 [1889]). Through 1944, the atoll would be known as Kuezerin, a small outpost of the larger Japanese South Seas Nanyō Guntō colonies based in Palau. Kuezerin would eventually be militarized as a major Imperial Navy submarine base and used to launch the assault on Pearl Harbor (Peattie 1988:257).

The parade continues. Another float approaches, and Bubu giggles as she recognizes one of her grandchildren. This float is entitled "Kwajalein Atoll, Today." It carries an enormous papier-mâché missile, emblazoned in block letters, "U.S. Army." Several Marshallese boys and girls, dressed like engineers in white lab coats, holding clipboards and wearing fake black-rimmed glasses, stand seriously behind the aluminum-foil-wrapped missile in the "Kwajalein Missile Range Control Room," tapping at computers and pretending to scrutinize data.

The site of bloody fighting between Americans and Japanese, the atoll became a U.S. naval base as the rest of Japan's territories in Micronesia became the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. By the 1950s Kwajalein was being used as a site from which the United States Department of Energy deployed its atomic bomb testing program of over sixty detonations at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls—a scientific experiment and global show of bravado that irradiated and sickened generations of Islanders (Barker 2004; Walsh 2003). It also irradiated Japanese tuna fishermen who happened to be in the area, and U.S. military personnel involved in the tests. Those who survived still suffer today.

By the 1960s, the United States had relocated all Kwajalein Atoll's Marshallese inhabitants, including Bubu, to Ebeye, a tiny island which just happened to be convenient commuting distance for cheap local labor that might eventually support its military Cold War mission.[4] In 1964, Amata Kabua, who would eventually become the first president when the Marshall Islands gained independence over a decade later, negotiated the first formal lease agreement with the U.S. government on behalf of his father Lejolan, paramount chief and principal landowner of Kwajalein (Walsh 2003:221).

Kwajalein soon became a top-secret and cutting-edge test site for the Nike X and Zeus missile testing projects. Thousands of American civilians were brought there by a series of defense contracting companies. These Americans, most of whom were young and promising engineers and scientists, brought their families, occupying the tidy little grid of tree-lined streets and transplanted American suburbia that the military had built on Marshallese land. My father was one of these engineers, and I spent nearly the first ten years of my life on Kwajalein (see Dvorak 2004).

[4] My research is revealing that Japanese military forces had already relocated the indigenous population of Kwajalein Atoll from the main islands of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur to many of the smaller islets in the atoll around the late 1930s and early 1940s. At the start of its weapons testing program, the United States once again removed Marshallese from these main islands, as well as from several of the small "Mid-Atoll Corridor" islands with the rationale that it was in the interests of safety (from missile tests) and national security. Islanders were thus systematically displaced from their lands and crammed into a tiny island that soon became a popular place to live for Marshallese eager to secure jobs at the new missile range.

In this fashion, the present and past of Kwajalein Atoll are paraded through the streets by the Ebeye community, much to the amusement of the massive crowd that has gathered from various islands. To witness the action, people of all ages line the road, sit on the rooftops, lean out from windows, stand on top of old rusted trucks and buses, and ride each other's shoulders.

"You know, I saw plenty of that," Bubu describes, pointing at the Japanese float. She nods wistfully for a moment and repeats the word, "pu-len-ty."

"I don't remember any Japanese words except what I learned in school back on my home island Mejit, you know—*sakura*! *Sakura*!" She laughs and covers her mouth. "I bet the cherry blossoms in Japan this time of year are very beautiful!" she grins.

"But … too much fighting. Ja-pan, Amerikan. Too many people died. A girl in my school when I was in third grade, the Japanese man came and Americans chase him, and they shot everywhere and they shot her and she died, too. Mmmmmm, I remember."

"But many Japanese, they were good to me, to my family, good people. Like Americans. Now America and Marshall Islands are friends."

"And you know the American army is so strong, so big," Bubu says, her eyes getting serious. "You know many Marshallese fight in the American army. In Iraq. Wow, I don't know how they caught Saddam Hussein. Amazing …"

Snorkeling

Bubu's words are troubling. Direct, contradictory, they fill me with questions I know I can't answer, with a strange mix of nostalgia, fear, and anger. But questions, nonetheless.

It is with these questions—about what happened here—that I embark on my PhD research, eager to understand this idea of "home" and the masculine missions of colonialism, military, and missile testing that have "domesticated" Kwajalein, for, as Bubu and the coral reef can attest, Kwajalein is much more complex than the U.S. Army wants us to believe.

My core objective, however, is not to argue about the politics of missile testing or military in the Pacific, nor is it to binarize Americans or Japanese as "bad" and Marshallese as "good." Rather, I intend to narrate and visualize through writing and film Kwajalein's colonization in the bigger scheme of history as an ongoing competition between concrete and coral, where relationships between people and place transgress official boundaries and discourses, and where the island itself endures as a powerful site of mediation.

This project will be one of searching more than researching. In some ways the latter suggests to me that I am looking for something that I think I have already found. Rather, I intend to look for new clues, seeking deeper articulations and

synchronicities, asking the questions that the signs disallow. In a sense, this is a process of snorkeling the reef, criss-crossing the layers of time that all coexist in the same space. Much like diving through the wrecks of Japanese ships that sleep on the bottom of the lagoon right outside my childhood home, my journey will take me to the unfamiliar depths of those backyard seascapes I once took for granted.

My research over the past two years has been looking at the ways in which the United States military has created a sense of "home" at Kwajalein as a product of its ongoing patriarchal project of missile defense. My master's thesis work looked at my own childhood subjectivity in the 1970s poised within a concrete suburbia, a safe little piece of America that had been carved out of Marshallese coral in the interests of U.S. National Security (Dvorak 2004). I began to experiment with multiple narrative strategies and cinematic approaches as a way of trying to explore the multiple voices of Kwajalein and essentially "re-map" home.

Now I expand upon this project by delving into the embodiment of these colonial missions at Kwajalein. Since both American and Japanese colonialism in Kwajalein unfolded in the context of an all-male military campaign, I would imagine it is also possible to understand the concrete of Kwajalein as a "manmade" layer, in the most literal sense. Flipping this paradigm and interrogating not only the "man-made" but also the unstable constructions of masculinity these projects deployed at Kwajalein, essentially the "made-man," I hope to explore how these masculine projects imagined, represented, transformed, and were transformed by their encounters with Islanders.

Concrete

Unlike earlier colonial encounters, the twentieth-century encounters between Japanese and Marshall Islanders, or Americans and Marshall Islanders, did not take place in a context of claiming hitherto "undiscovered" or so-called "virgin" land (Peattie 1988; Higuchi 1987; Tarte 1995). On the contrary, by the time the Japanese arrived in Micronesia there were very few islands that had not been visited numerous times by missionaries, beachcombers, and various traders. And, when the United States pushed its military campaign through Micronesia en route to battle in Japan, the islands were invaded in a context of "liberation," a rhetoric that emphasized the negative aspects of Japanese rule as a distraction from the realities of American occupation.

The Marshall Islands were truly the farthest eastern reaches of the Japanese Empire, and, being coral atolls, they were likely not as easy to settle as some of the more mountainous parts of Micronesia. The Japanese migrants who went to the Marshall Islands were almost all men, unlike their counterparts in the other parts of the Nanyō District—in the regional capital of Koror, Palau, which at one point was a thriving town where whole families of Japanese outnumbered the Islanders (Peattie 1988:186–87). In the Marshall Islands, fishermen from southern Japan and Okinawa, traders, civil servants, and teachers comprised the entire Japanese population, which was centered around the former German administrative center of Jaluit Atoll, pronounced "Yarūto" in Japanese.

Though I have only just embarked on an exploration of the ways in which Japanese masculinities were performed in the Marshall Islands and, specifically, at Kwajalein, it is extremely productive to explore the representations of "Islanders" (*tōmin*) or "Natives" (*dojin*) that came out of Jaluit, and even those that emerged in Japanese popular culture out of the larger project of colonization at the Nanyō level. When Japan began to administer the islands of Micronesia, it lumped them all into one category, Nanyō Guntō—the South Seas Islands. This grouping, which reproduced the earlier European boundaries of Micronesia, flattened any of the idiosyncrasies between islands, collapsing the Marshall Islands and Eastern Micronesia into Guam, Yap, and the Western Pacific.

However, one of the most popular songs of the 1930s, Ishida Hitomatsu's "Shūchō no Musume," or "The Chieftain's Daughter," was a comical song that specifically referenced the Marshall Islands and, as will become apparent, its young women. It begins:

> My lover is the village chief's daughter
> She's black, but down in the South Seas, she's a beauty
> Below the equator, in the Marshall Islands[5]
> She dances lazily in the shade of the palm trees…[6]

This song bespeaks a racially-charged cliché of the lackadaisical Pacific island virgin, familiar from European fantasies typical of many early European settlements in Oceania. However, "The Chieftain's Daughter" typifies a certain kind of heterosexual male gaze that was probably quite dominant in the Japanese colony of Jaluit, where a vast majority of the settlers were single men or men who were living away from their wives and families.

As the far-flung frontier of the Japanese Empire, Jaluit was also the most redolent in exotic fantasy. I suspect that, as the Japanese presence in Jaluit was considerably smaller, briefer and less saturated than it was in other Nanyō metropoles, the earlier encounters between Japanese men and Marshallese inhabitants were less intimately practical and more "otherworldly" than amidst the very domesticated "real-world" hustle-bustle of Koror, Palau, or Garapan, Saipan.

[5] Note that the Marshall Is. are actually *above* the equator.

[6] This is my own translation from the original Japanese. As I will describe in my later writing, there were multiple versions of this song, but an important keyword here in the original lyrics (that none of the available English translations, such as Peattie 1988:216, include) is *teku-teku*, a comical term that literally means "trudgingly" or lazily. Since later versions of the song I have located in archives are even titled "*Teku-teku Odori*" ("The Lazy Dance"), this is clearly a word that should not be overlooked.

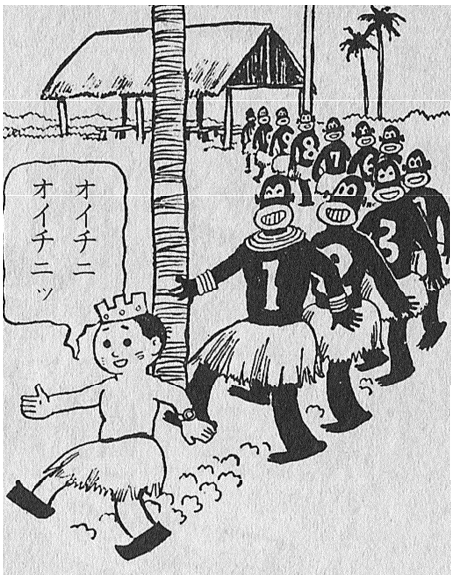
Perusing some pictorial material that came out of the beginnings of the Nanyō District, such as the images of Jaluit life in the Nanyō Kyōkai's 1916 publication, *Nanyō Fūdō* (*Customs of the South Seas*), we can see that the eroticized figure of the Marshallese "chieftain's daughter" was always already a common trope available in Taishō-Era Japan. Images of bare-breasted women often appeared in depictions of other Nanyō locales, such as Yap or Palau, but this image from *Nanyō Fūdō* is unique in that "Jaluit Woman" is a solo cameo photograph, evocatively posed and used to introduce the chapter of the book about the Marshall Islands. It stands out in contrast to the photographs of Marshallese women who appear in later publications fully covered head to toe in loose-fitting gowns, such as in the images of fifteen years later in Kiyoshi Yoshida's 1931 edition of *Nanyō Guntō Kaisetsu Shashinchō (Photographic Survey of the South Sea Islands*). The Jaluit Woman stands exposed, staring directly into the camera, almost defiant, arms clasped behind her, neither smiling nor frowning. She stands idly beneath the fronds of a palm tree, not unlike her counterpart in Ishida's playful lyrics.

Here, in this postage cancellation stamp from Jaluit, probably used in the 1930s, we see again the nostalgic icon of the bare-breasted virgin, clearly referencing the image of the Chieftain's Daughter (Kōsuge 1978). No other postage cancellation stamps from other municipalities in the Nanyō District depict a human being. In the Japanese colonial imaginary, the Marshall Islands is symbolized not by cultural artifact but by the female body, by a roughly-drawn portrait of a nameless slender woman, bare-breasted and clad in a "grass" skirt, one hand on her hip, possibly with a flower over her ear—the other arm hanging limply, waiting, ripe coconuts at her feet—suggestive not only of copra production but of fertility.

Many have critiqued European or American romanticizations of Islander women played out in the context of Polynesia, such as Paul Gauguin's depictions of his teenage muse Tehe-hamana, his second of several wives, in Tahiti (Teaiwa 1997). Few such representations appear in Micronesia, although it is interesting to note the Franco-Japanese case of Paris-born, Tokyo-raised Japanese woodblock print artist Paul Jacoulet, who depicted his travels through the Japanese South Seas in vivid colors.

Representations of Marshallese men, in contrast, are much more simplistic. Typically they are imagined as strong boys capable of doing productive work, like fishing or gathering copra, or possessing power ready to be harnessed and disciplined into army-style regimentation. In the broader context, Shimada Keizō's comic *Bōken Dankichi*, "Dankichi the Adventurous," which appeared between 1931 and 1939 in the very popular boy's magazine *Shōnen Kurabu*, was a narrative of a young white-

looking Japanese boy who washes up on the shore of a "South Sea" island when he falls asleep while fishing (Shimada 1976; Kawamura 1994).



Castaway on an island populated by black-skinned, male natives who are drawn "primitively" with both adornments of African tribesmen and "grass-skirted" Islanders, Dankichi, who is always set apart from the "savages" with his wristwatch and shoes—*accoutrements* that link him with the modern world—proceeds to supplant the chief as king of the island and leads the Islanders in a project of development that lasts through the entire comic series. Unable to pronounce their names, Dankichi paints numbers on the chests of each of the Islanders, and proceeds to teach them to march in a single file. This march of progress leads to various "improvements," such as a school in which Dankichi is the teacher, a hospital in which Dankichi administers medical care, and an army in which Dankichi is commander.

Bōken Dankichi is the cartoonist's ignorant rendition of a fantasy world, loosely based on the limited information available to the Japanese public about the South Seas colonies. Dankichi's Micronesian island is also populated by wild animals, such as lions, elephants, and camels, after all—and so it is anything but an accurate depiction. This said, Kawamura Minato has recently drawn attention to the way in which Dankichi actually invades and possesses "time" for Islanders who are perceived to be timeless "savages," lazy, undisciplined, and locked in the past (1994:24–25). Introducing time with his wristwatch, Dankichi has an enormous degree of power, which he wields over his followers, receiving nothing but love and appreciation in return. This orientalist rhetoric of progress versus timelessness is, of course, not a representation unique to Japan.

In some ways Dankichi is like Belgian comic artist Hergé's Tintin, the boy traveler who explores the world in colonial style. Yet an important distinction is that Dankichi quickly strips off his Japanese clothing and "goes native," so to speak. Unable to return to Japan until the very end of the comic strip, Dankichi—outside of his watch and shoes—is clad in nothing but a grass skirt. He embodies a youthful, boyish sense of bravery, freedom, and limitless adventure—

indeed, liberation—in his exploits and, despite the blatant racism and hierarchy his presence evokes, he shares in a sense of camaraderie and friendship with the Islanders whose world he colonizes.

Dankichi's island, of course, is not only a realm of "timeless savages"; rather, like Never-Neverland in Barry's Peter Pan, it is an Empire of Native boy-men.[7] Once again, this is a masculine-coded narrative by men, enacted by men. Women scarcely appear anywhere throughout all seven years of the comic strip's publication.

Thus, cross-reading Bōken Dankichi's adventures with the representations of the Chief's Daughter, it is clear that Islander men were imagined as a malleable resource—a labor force of boys that made possible imperial aspirations; while, on the other hand, women—particularly chiefly women—were desirable, there to be married. Given the fact that the Marshall Islands is a matrilineal society, and that marrying women was a key to securing land and political power, it is no surprise that so many of the chiefly irooj leaders of the Marshall Islands today, such as the Kabua family, are part Japanese. Though this history is debated by some scholars, this has been the case in some of the most prominent of political families throughout Micronesia.

This is a relentlessly heterosexual narrative of how gender and sexuality were performed by Japanese men in the pre-war period. There was, after all, the possibility of intense homosocial bonds within such a male-dominated world, and particularly within the Japanese military.

Returning now to Kwajalein, my current understanding is that very few Japanese lived at Kwajalein until the militarization efforts from the late 1930s into the 1940s. Into this once very small community of Japanese and rather large community of several thousand Marshallese came an overwhelmingly large influx of young Japanese men—soldiers, sailors, and airmen. According to military records, roughly 90 percent of these men were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, and most of them had been deployed directly from military exercises in Manchuria.[8] Having no knowledge whatsoever of life in the South Seas, these young men must have had nothing but the stories of local Japanese and popular representations like the "Chief's Daughter" and *Bōken Dankichi* to help orient themselves to their new surroundings.

Unlike Dankichi, however, few of them would have known how to survive on a coral atoll—how to eat breadfruit, what fish were safe to eat, and so forth. Few would even have known how to make a fire with dried coconut husks. But they came as sons of the Emperor (Low 2003), together with Japanese prisoners and Korean laborers they had brought with them from conquests in Asia (Peattie 1988:251–55). Together with Marshallese laborers, they would work to expand the massive airstrip on Kwajalein and to build concrete bunkers. It was with their hands that Kwajalein was quite literally covered with concrete.

---

[7] I generously acknowledge Geremie Barmé and Margaret Jolly for their insights about these comparisons.

[8] Wakako Higuchi's (1987) research has been highly informative about the logistics of Japanese military deployment to Micronesia.

And then, as American history tells us, Kwajalein was "liberated." What went on during the years of Kwajalein's Japanese occupation is a question I will be tackling throughout my research, but now I shift to the ways in which the masculinities of American concrete have been poured over Kwajalein's surface.

Kwajalein Atoll, currently known as "Ronald Reagan Test Site at the United States Army Kwajalein Atoll/Kwajalein Missile Range," is a condensed portrait of all the contradictions that patriarchal fatherhood and masculinity entail. With a population of only 10–15 military officers and nearly 3,500 civilian contractors and their families, the missile test site is an anomaly among U.S. military bases (USAKA 2001; Wilkes 1991). It is quiet, sheltered, and looks in some ways like any small American town. But achieving this domesticity requires constant effort on the part of the U.S. Army (Dvorak 2004).

Cynthia Enloe (1990) writes that the military's global project is a patriarchal endeavor with the aim of masculinizing the world, explaining that the military justifies its existence by imagining the world as a very dangerous (or endangered) place in need of protection. In essence, the missile-testing project becomes both domestic provider for family life by constructing and fortifying "home" and defender to protect that home and way of life. Its defensive pursuits, however, enforce its values onto the world and require it to submit to its pre-emptive advances. In the microcosm of Kwajalein Atoll, this patriarchal mission results simultaneously in the reinforcement of "reassuring homeland," the perpetuation of American "national security," and the subjugation and silencing of Marshallese subjectivities.

Since the 1960s the missile-testing establishment at Kwajalein has evoked an entire pantheon of Greco–Roman gods to commune with the heavens (Wilkes 1991). Missiles have been named Nike, Zeus, and Spartan; and even though nowadays missiles bear more sterile names, the concrete-enforced missile silo complex at the southern tip of Kwajalein is still known as "Mt. Olympus."

Missile tests take various forms, but the most common have been "target practice" experiments in which missiles fired from California would travel into space, re-enter the atmosphere, and penetrate the center of Kwajalein's deep lagoon, in an off-limits region of the atoll called the mid-atoll corridor. Thus, quite literally, America's Zeus has inseminated the Marshallese lagoon time and time again. In their study of Hawai‘i, Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull (1999) suggest that the military codes Pacific Islands as feminine, exotic, and available, even virginal. Quoting Anne McClintock, they explain that "to be virgin is to lack both desire and agency, to await passively 'the

thrusting male insemination of history, language, and reason'" (Ferguson and Turnbull, 1999:72).

Yet this characterization evacuates any semblance of Marshallese agency or power. In fact, McClintock's (1995) argument about masculine imperialism is that, in their feminization of colonial landscapes, explorers typically also imbued these so-called "virgin" places with danger, with fear of the primordial female that threatened to envelop and devour.

Neither Kwajalein lagoon nor the coral reef wait passively. Nor are they virgin to American advances. Julianne Walsh (2003) argues, rather, that the Marshallese attempt the "Marshallization" of America, that in fact the thousand or so Marshallese workers from Ebeye—most of whom are women who work as housekeepers like my Bubu once did—are the true "ambassadors" of the Marshall Islands, making connections with Americans and forming alliances.

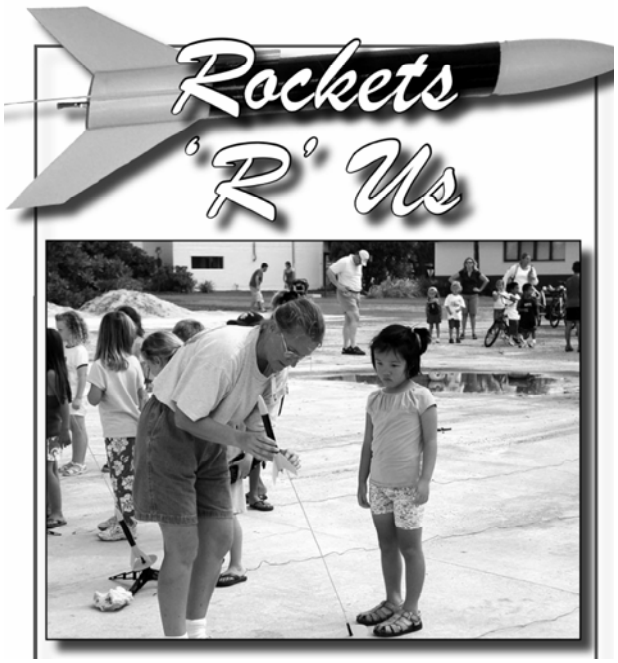
In fact, the original holders of power in Kwajalein Atoll, and the entire Marshall Islands, were female chiefs who held matrilineal claims to the land. In contrast to all other atolls of the Marshall Islands, however, Kwajalein has effectively shifted to a patrilineal system, in order to interface more easily with colonial powers (Walsh 2003). The Leroij, or female matriarch of Kwajalein, rules the atoll by proxy via her male relatives, who have taken on chiefly titles.[9]

Nonetheless, as Michael Kabua, paramount chief for Kwajalein, explains, America tests missiles in the atoll to secure world peace, and it does so through *Marshallese* power (pers. comm., Koror, Palau, 24 July 2004). This is exemplified by the story of the trickster god Etao, the male hero of Marshallese cosmology, who often rides American warheads and turns the tables of power, changing form—sometimes even becoming a woman. Laurence Carucci (1989) recounts a tale in which, after Etao tricks a chief to his death in order to win his beautiful daughters, he travels to America, where he acts as consultant to the government before being captured in a bottle like a genie. The U.S. government coerces Etao into helping with all its experiments and military exploits if he wants to secure his release, and thus he becomes the "source of the force" wielded in America's perpetual war of global domination (Carucci 1989:96). In this fashion, though America is imagined as the most powerful country in the world, it is only through Marshallese power—only through insemination by Etao's virility—that Zeus missiles become possible in the first place.

But in American representations, Kwajalein is gendered as feminine and receptive (see Dvorak 2004). Teresia Teaiwa's (1997) theory of "militourism" expands upon this notion of feminizing/eroticizing military pursuits, thereby naturalizing them into a larger masculine narrative. She explores another Marshallese example—that of Bikini Atoll—as a site in which the heterosexual male gaze rationalized and "domesticate[d] the horror" of U.S. nuclear testing in the 1950s by fetishizing the bikini swimsuit, thus drawing attention away from the original Bikini

[9] This is most definitely an area which requires further research and clarification, and I intend to develop a detailed analysis of the power structure at Kwajalein during my fieldwork.

and the holocaust that destroyed generations of Marshallese bodies there (Teaiwa 1994:96).



Similarly, the enlistment of Kwajalein into the missile-testing "mission" asserts a particular rhetoric in which both hard work and hard play are both essential. The rigorous and athletic pursuit of tropical, touristic pleasure, like water sports, becomes essential to American national security.

The *Kwajalein Hourglass* newspaper suggests how this naturalizing project is achieved, by combining domestic recreation with national defense. Missile tests are celebrated as a spectacle on par with fireworks, not as potentially threatening weaponry. Schoolchildren, for instance, learn to associate missile technology not with the Post-Cold War, but with the thrill of rocket science, as this image from September 2004 reveals.

The *Kwajalein Atoll Telephone Directory* carries a similar message in the way it configures the domesticity of safety and danger for American residents. One safety message, for example, makes a fuss about the perils of the coral reef itself—warning residents to wear gloves and shoes and protect against sunburn. Ironically, however, it draws attention away from the telephone listings at the top of the page for the National Missile Defense Agency or defense contractors. Tellingly, nowhere in the entire directory is there any safety note that warns of errant missiles falling from the sky (see Dvorak 2004).

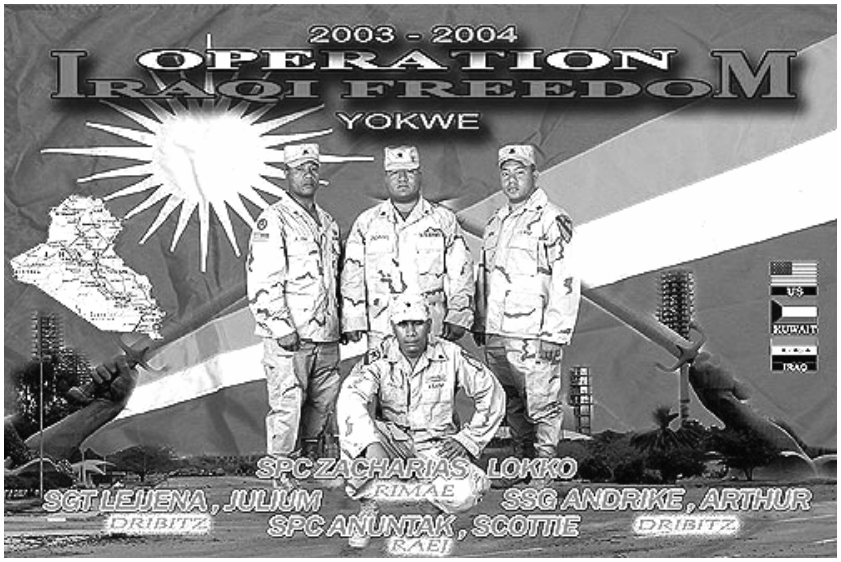
Meanwhile, Marshallese are inscribed, much as in the Japanese representations of *Bōken Dankichi*, as workers or as "cultural" curiosity, as in advertisements for "traditional" dance presentations. Usually in these ads, Marshallese male Jobwa dancers are featured, clothed in pre-modern attire, brandishing sticks. The Marshallese

man is exoticized, even eroticized, by this sort of portrayal; and yet, there are very few Marshallese people who are allowed to live on Kwajalein.

Only Marshallese workers with special permission to enter Kwajalein can disembark at Harbor Control, where they pass through a palm scanner and pick up their badges for a day of work. Moreover, post-9/11 security procedures require Marshallese workers to leave the island within one hour of finishing work or risk being punished for trespassing.

There is, of course, a way to transcend the boundaries imposed by the military—by joining it. In mid-2004 alone, twenty-one new Marshallese recruits were inducted into the United States Army, where they were to serve on the front lines of conflict in Iraq, ironically fighting with the purpose of "liberating" the Iraqi people. Though no Marshallese soldiers have been killed as of December 2004, according to an October 6th report from Radio New Zealand International, per capita Micronesian casualties in the Iraq War are four times higher than American troops from the mainland United States.

The concrete "man-making" continues in Kwajalein and the Marshall Islands—Japanese fishermen still ply Marshallese waters, and the U.S. Army has just renewed its lease of Kwajalein for another sixty years, amid protests that the payments are insufficient. [10]



Liberation

Filled with many questions for my journey ahead, I return from Liberation Day on Ebeye, riding the boat back to Kwajalein and looking down into the vast coral reef below me.

The elders of Kwajalein Atoll talk of the giant coral head, Tarļañ, that sits in the middle of the atoll, from which the atoll is said to have been formed (Carucci

[10] This image appeared on the "Yokwe Online" website in November 2004. It features four of the Marshallese soldiers enlisted in the United States Army in the Iraq War.

1997). One side of the coral head is devoid of all life, the other side is teeming with enough to sustain generations and generations of people. That is why, say the elders, some times in history were good and others were bad, why some islands in the atoll are rich and luxurious, and others stink of raw sewage and there is nothing but canned food to eat, if you're lucky. That is why some landowners also own palatial mansions in Honolulu or Los Angeles, and why Bubu lives in a shack made out of road signs.

I think of how, like the coral reefs of Kwajalein, Bubu's stories are complex, but how she threads them together, like one of her necklaces, with hands that know and accept the contradictions.

In Bubu's necklaces, and throughout this interconnected reef, there is space for all these moments—

For the scent of decaying barnacles baking in the sunlight.
For the faces of ancestors
For the countless visits by strangers who act like they own everything
For gathering coconuts to make copra for the Japanese.
For a big and happy family
For soldiers and barbed wire fences
For American children, their names spray-painted on the land.
And for the possibility of another generation that breaks through the concrete to make new meanings,

Here in the coral
of the largest atoll in the world.

Image Credits

Figure 1 Map of Kwajalein Atoll and the Marshall Islands. Cartographic Services, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2005. (Page 4)

Figure 2 Aerial Photo of Kwajalein Island in 2002, from *Kwajalein Calendar 2003.* Kwajalein, 2002. (Page 5)

Figure 3 Image of "Jaluit Woman" (*Yarūto no Fujin*) from Wada Norihisa (ed.) *Nanyō Kyōkai Zōhan: Nanyō no Fūdō.* Tokyo: Shunyōdō, 1916. (Page 10)

Figure 4 Postage cancellation stamp from Jaluit, circa 1930 featuring bare-breasted woman from Kōsuge Teruo. *Nanyō Guntō Shashinchō: Photographs of Micronesia's Yesterday.* Tokyo: Guam Shinhō-sha, 1978. (Page 11)

Figure 5 Image from the "Bōken Dankichi" comic strip from Shimada Keizō. *Bōken Dankichi*. Reprint. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976 [1931–39]. (Page 12)

Figure 6 Image from the "Bōken Dankichi" comic strip from Shimada Keizō. *Bōken Dankichi.* Reprint. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976 [1931–39]. (Page 12)

Figure 7 1960s insignia of Pacific Missile Range from the United States Army. *Kwajalein Test Site Handbook*. Pacific Missile Range, 1964. (Page 14)

Figure 8 "Rockets R' Us," from *The Kwajalein Hourglass,* 3 September 2004. (Page 16)

Figure 9 "Safety Note, Reefing" from U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll. *2001 Telephone Directory.* Kwajalein: Document Control, 2001. (Page 16)

Figure 10 "2003–2004 Operation Iraqi Freedom Yokwe" from *Yokwe Online: Everything Marshall Islands.* Available at http://www.yokwe.net. Accessed 9 November 2004. (Page 17)

References

Barker, Holly. 2004. *Bravo for the Marshallese: Regaining Control in a Post-Nuclear, Post-Colonial World.* Contemporary Social Issues Series, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/ Thompson Learning.

Carucci, Laurence M. 1989. "The Source of the Force in Marshallese Cosmology." In Geoffrey White and Lamont Lindstrom (eds) *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 73–96.

_____. 1997. "In Anxious Anticipation of Kuwajleen's Uneven Fruits: A Cultural History of the Significant Locations and Important Resources of Kuwajleen Atoll." Marshallese translations by Alfred Capelle. Unpublished manuscript prepared for United States Army Space and Strategic Defense Command, Huntsville, Alabama.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Transl. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dirlik, Arif and Rob Wilson (eds). 1995. *Asia/Pacific as a Space of Cultural Production.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Dvorak, Greg. 2004. "Remapping Home: Touring the Betweenness of Kwajalein." MA thesis, University of Hawai'i.

Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ferguson, Kathy and Phyllis Turnbull. 1999. *Oh, Say, Can You See?: The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai'i.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hau'ofa, Epeli. 1993. "Our Sea of Islands." In E. Waddell, V. Naidu, and E. Hau'ofa (eds) *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*. Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2–16.

Hezel, Francis X. 1995. *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Higuchi, Wakako. 1987. "Micronesia Under the Japanese Administration: Interviews with Former South Sea Bureau and Military Officials." University of Guam Micronesian Area Research Center.

Kawamura, Minato. 1994. *Nanyō Karafuto no Nihon Bungaku.* Tokyo: Chikuwa Shobo.

Kiyoshi, Yoshida. 1931. *Nanyō Guntō Kaisetsu Shashinchō* (Album of the South Sea Islands Under Japanese Mandate). Garapan (Saipan): Kenbunsha.

Kōsuge, Teruo. 1978. *Nanyō Guntō Shashinchō: Photographs of Micronesia's Yesterday.* Tokyo: Guam Shinhō-sha.

Low, Morris. 2003. “The Emperor’s Sons Go to War: Competing Masculinities in Modern Japan.” In Kam Louie and Morris Low (eds) *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 81–99.

McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.* New York: Routledge.

Peattie, Mark. 1988. *Nanyō: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia 1885–1945.* Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Shimada, Keizō. 1976 [1931–39]. *Bōken Dankichi.* Vols 1–4. Reprint. Tokyo: Kodansha.

Suzuki, Tsunenori (Keikun). 1980 [1889]. *Nanyō Tanken Jikki.* Reprint. Tokyo: Heibonsha.

Tarte, Sandra. 1995. “Japan’s Aid Diplomacy and the South Pacific.” PhD thesis, Australian National University.

Teaiwa, Teresia. 1994. “bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans.” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6(1):87–109.

_____. 1997. “Reading Paul Gaugin’s *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau‘ofa’s *Kisses in the Nederends*: Militourism, Feminism, and the “Polynesian” Body. In V. Hereniko and R. Wilson (eds) *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific.* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 249–64.

U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA). 2001. *2001 Telephone Directory.* Kwajalein: Document Control.

Wada Norihisa (ed.). 1916. *Nanyō Kyōkai Zōhan: Nanyō no Fūdō* Tokyo: Shunyōdō

Walsh, Julianne M. 2003. “Imagining the Marshalls: Chiefs, Tradition, and the State on the Fringes of U.S. Empire.” PhD thesis, University of Hawai‘i.

Wilkes, Owen, Megan van Frank, and Peter Hayes. 1991. *Chasing Gravity’s Rainbow: Kwajalein and U.S. Ballistic Missile Testing.* Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.