
Tourists visiting the Marshall Islands today, particularly the coral-studded ring of Bikini Atoll, encounter an eerie juxtaposition. Against the atoll’s cerulean shorelines and white sands linger the ghostly traces of US atomic operations: abandoned concrete bunkers, fading signage, and submerged military boats stand as the gaunt relics of American militarism in the Pacific. The year 1958 signaled the end of the US’s nuclear bomb experimentation on the Marshall Islands; 67 tests contaminated the environment, displaced thousands of Marshall Islanders, and established an entrenched ‘legacy of distrust’ between former inhabitants and US politicians.¹ The cynosure of the atomic operations was the 15-megaton Bravo hydrogen bomb, detonated above Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954, during the US-Soviet nuclear arms race. Seven thousand times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the explosion exposed thousands to radioactive fallout. US-funded cleanup programs proved largely feckless, causing those who returned to flee again in 1985 due to residual radiation. Subsequent exposure and contaminated soil dispersed Bikini Atoll’s community. Islanders and their descendants refuse to return to their homes, and their demands for further US compensation remain ignored.

That the Pacific Ocean and its communities continue to serve as a tabula rasa for foreign military operations numbers among the topical cultural and geopolitical issues broached in HuiHui: Navigating Art and Literature in the Pacific. In part, this volume of essays, poetry and fiction is a broader, more inclusive extension of the University of Hawai‘i Press’s Varua Tupu: New Writing and Art from French Polynesia (2006), which examines the literary relationship between Hawai‘i and French Polynesia. HuiHui, however, gathers a larger collection of literary voices from the Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Tahiti, Guam, and others, offering a larger window into the contemporary literary ethos of the Pacific.

The eponymous term, huihui, translates from Hawaiian as ‘mixed, mingled, united, joined’ or, ‘anything mixed. … Cluster, collection, bunch’ (1). Indeed, the volume’s title aptly encapsulates the cultural variety and interconnectedness of Oceania. Huihui may remind readers of callaloo, a Caribbean leaf vegetable stew of West African origins that has come to vividly symbolize the African diaspora; the dish’s gallimaufry of ingredients has inspired literary parallels with displacement and racial-cultural hybridity.² The huihui metaphor animates this collection of writings, emphasizing that cultural variety aside, the Pacific is a united homeland with a deeply shared (post)colonial history. Huihui presents new writing that engages erasure and revision. As the introduction says, the collection takes a rousing cue from Papua New Guinean writer-scholar Steven Winduo’s politico-literary urging that Pacific history must be ‘unwritten’. Stated differently, Pacific intellectuals and writers are called to write to unwrite the colonial discourses that have inscribed and subordinated cultures of Oceania, forging instead new rhetorics and aesthetics that will fill Oceania ‘with the cultural content that is of value to the Pacific people’ (4). This, in turn, will ‘allow the value of knowledge to transform the negative consciousness of the Pacific people to a positive one’ (4). Responding to Winduo’s call to unwrite this history, Huihui’s contributors ‘interrogate and dismantle

disparaging colonial literary standards’, turning to rhetoric and aesthetic modalities of Pacific cultures to deconstruct the legacies of colonial hegemony (4).

_HuiHui_ gathers fresh writing practicing this tumultuous literary process of unwriting Pacific history. Contributors contest, challenge and rewrite these colonial standards differently: some vandalize and subvert them through poetic verse; others take up academic scrutiny. Divided into four sections – Identity, Institutions, Community, and Word – this volume features topic ranging from Pacific feminism and the tourism industry, to Western militarism. Particularly poignant is Dan Taulapapa McMullin’s poem, ‘Tiki Manifesto’, a commentary on the global proliferation of tiki kitsch commodities. Ubiquitous examples of quotidian tiki kitsch abound: ‘Tiki mugs, tiki ashtrays, tiki trashcans […] / Tiki bars in Los Angeles, a tiki porn theatre, tiki stores / Tiki conventions’ (89). Tiki-inspired knickknacks distort the ancient spiritual significance of Polynesian sculpture and sustain pernicious stereotypes of Pacific aesthetics: ‘The difference is this, our sculpture is beautiful, tiki kitsch / sculpture is ugly / not because they look so very different but because their shit / is supposed to be ugly / because we are supposed to be ugly’ (90). The poem draws stark parallels, too, between the crass cultural misappropriation of tiki sculpture and the realities of Hawaiian poverty: ‘And American police drink mai tais in Honolulu bars from tiki mugs while / native Hawaiian people live homeless on the beaches’ (91). Simply put, tiki schlock symbolizes tourist insouciance for the islands’ social ills. For McMullin, these tourist gewgaws trivialize and obscure tiki sculpture’s spiritual importance, rendering Pacific peoples and their postcolonial realities invisible. McMullin’s final stanza poignantly confronts the rampant tourist materialism perpetuating this cultural effacement, asking: ‘Where? Where are we? / In the wallpaper, on the mugs?’ (92).

Issues of Pacific feminism figure prominently in Selina Tusitala Marsh’s essay, ‘Un/Civilized Girls, Unruly Poems: Jully Makini’, which critically examines the writings of Jully Makini, a Solomon Islands poet whose work explores the intersections of gender, feminism, globalization, and the atrophy of cultural traditions. The essay focuses on two poems, ‘Civilized Girl’ and ‘Roviana Girl’, which, read in parallel, starkly juxtapose the perspectives of an anonymous Westernized and traditional first-person woman narrator. The speaker in ‘Civilized Girl’ is styled in ‘Cheap perfume / six inch heels / skin-tight pants […] steel-wool hair / fuzzy and stiff / now soft as coconut husk / held by a dozen clips.’ While she replicates superficial Western beauty standards, the speaker of ‘Roviana Girl’ reflects, ‘Black and poor as I am / Don’t look down on me / My roots are bedded deep / on Roviana soil.’ She is economically disadvantaged, socially and racially conscious, and profoundly aware of her inextricable ancestral-cultural link with her homeland. The perplexed speaker of ‘Civilized Girl’ reflects internally on the vexed questions of liminal identity: ‘Who am I? / Melanesian Caucasian or / Half-caste? Make up your mind.’ She grapples, too, with Western forms of address. The Western aesthetic she labors to emulate baffles but leads to self-reflection. According to Marsh, ‘Makini problematizes the trope of the much-maligned civilized girl and offers an alternative lens through which to view the realization of Solomon Islands independence’ (48). For Makini, Marsh suggests, the civilized girl cannot be summarily characterized as a cultural misfit who has repudiated her ties with tradition and culture; rather, bombarded with competing cultural influences, she struggles to form a cohesive identity within the grey zones of liminality. Communication, Marsh rather vaguely concludes, is vital for bringing together women to maintain a collective Solomon Island identity: ‘These unruly civilized and traditional girls, urban and rural based, must talk to each other in order to realize meaningful personable and political independence’ (60). While Marsh’s conclusion fails to fully clarify what such ‘talk’ entails, by critically rethinking the civilized girl Marsh confronts postcolonial tropes that oversimplify the lived experiences of Solomon Islanders.
In addition to poetry, the collection includes several trenchant essays. Craig Santos Perez’s essay, “‘I Lina’la Tataotao Ta’lo’: The Rhetoric and Aesthetics of Militarism, Religiosity, and Commemoration”, memorably scrutinizes the political and historical legacies of US militarism in Guåhan (Guam) to illustrate how discourses of foreign patriotism perpetuate cycles of Guam’s entanglement in US military campaigns. Blending memoir and political commentary, Perez’s essay examines the role the US’s powerful military recruiting machine plays in shaping Guamanian life: ‘Despite the status of Guåhan as a colonial possession of the U.S., Chamorros [Guåhan natives] enlist in the U.S. armed forces at some of the highest rates in the nation’ (183). Perez carefully eschews anti-American censure, choosing rather to memorialize Chamorros killed abroad in US Afghanistan- and Iraq-based military operations, while drawing provocative connections between Guamanian cultural memory and military service. Interspersed throughout the essay are lists commemorating Chamorros soldiers killed overseas, detailing his or her name, circumstances of death, and age. Perez’s lists produce mid-text eruptions that effectively remind readers of the always abrupt and sudden loss of human life. For Perez, Guåhan is enveloped by foreign military presence, and he rightly laments the pending ‘mega-buildup’ of auxiliary US military infrastructure, which threatens to raze jungle, ancient burial grounds, and sacred ancestral sites. The chief achievement will be a deep-draft wharf — constructed at the incalculable loss of Guåhan’s treasured coral reefs — to station American nuclear aircrafts vessels. Importantly, Perez’s essay reads contemporary military bases as powerful postcolonial forces, and invites other writers to respond to the encroachment of foreign military influence.

Students and scholars of postcolonial literature (and history) will find this volume an indispensable resource for studying contemporary Pacific writing. The volume succeeds in representing the many voices of Oceania without being disproportionately attentive to one specific culture or topic. *HuiHui*’s strongpoint is that its chapters, while grappling with serious postcolonial issues, never devolve into outright polemics. Rather, each chapter offers a balanced, thought-provoking response to contemporary Pacific matters.

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