

Militarism and Micronesian Women's Activism

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Micronesia

“Microwomen: US Colonialism and Micronesian Women Activists” by Teresia Teaiwa

- Ferdinand Magellan 1521 in Guam
- US enters Micronesia early 20thc. as whalers, traders, missionaries, colonizers
- male colonizers identify Micronesian men as powerbrokers
 - men = POTUS, military chief of staff, nuclear scientists, Trust Territory admin
- introduce firearms, firewater, venereal diseases, nuclear & economic weapons
- 1945 World War II brings naval forces
- 1 March 1946 atom bomb on Bikini Island
- 1954 hydrogen bomb, Bravo, on Enewetak Atoll
 - between 1946-1958, US detonated 93 bombs
- (p 88-89)

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- 1976, 1977 women of Chuuk. 1st islander imposed alcohol prohibition - Indigenous sovereignty assertions vs. intro substance
- 1988 Belau women delegation to US Senate Hearing Committee and UN Trusteeship Council
 - Belau Compact of Free Association
- (p 90) women must fight against colonialism + chauvenism

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- “Culture has been one of women’s greatest oppressors” (p 90).
- matrilineal societies (except for Kiribati and Yap) - descent, lands
- Marshalls women command respect but may not show it publicly
 - functions: nurturing, peacemaking, benefactors, encouraging
- “Ailin kein an kora (Marshall Islands belong to women)”
 - (mis)perception of public power
- 1952 Congressional record shows Dorothy Kabua in House of Iroij (chiefs)
 - 1956 had 6 women (of 28) House of Iroij, dealing with land, law, public health (p 92)

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- Chuuk saying: “Men have wings, women have have feet” (p 92)
- colonial forces forced men to cease traditional warrior culture of intervillage battles, and adapt warrior culture to adopt alcohol
- substance leads to temporary insanity, irresponsibility, violence

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- Belau women assert matrilineal power: own land, control clan \$
 - traditionally select their chiefs, can remove them
 - having raised them, know who's worthy/talented to represent
 - Westerners arrived and took men's rights and powers
 - but matrilineal, so women kept language and culture alive
- statements reveal gendered and colonial views

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- masculine, aggressive, rational (colonists describe self)
- feminine, submissive, irrational (describe colony as)
- gender-sexed language, idioms, messages: I want you. Hug. Wedding/marriage to US. Getting into bed.
- “Contemporary Micronesian men have been willing to acknowledge the traditional importance of women as long as male dominance remains visible” (p 97)

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- Nuclear fallout: radiation, cancer, thyroid, reproductive health, stillbirths, children born with deformities, fertility issues
 - doubly oppressed (colonialism + chauvinism) : if deformities, then traditional aspersions of infidelity - so women inhibited from seeking compensation (further limited to only 4 islands)
- women’s access to education and economy
 - programs geared to domestic

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- “The women are decolonizers in that they assert the sovereignty of Belau: they refuse to accept changes in their constitution for a compact that could compromise their environmental well-being. They assert a type of feminism by pursuing a cause that most of their male leaders oppose or have abandoned” (102).
- trying to right the colonial wrongs of nuclear arms shipment and testing, land alienation, economic dependency
 - profound distortion of gender roles

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- Belau: “domestic and public spheres are not separable”; for example, “seemingly domestic/familial decisions about what food will be brought to a feast have much wider economic and social repercussions” (Margold and Bellorado quoted on 106).
- definition of activism needs to be broadened to include these assertions of power in the “private sphere”
- woman-centered view of history and politics
 - persistent problems of finding women’s voices in the official records

CHamorro

***Colonial Dis-Ease* by Anne Perez Hattori**

“Feminine Hygiene: The US Navy, Chamorro Maternity, and Gender Relations in Colonial Guam” (ch. 4, pp. 91-123)

- common story that most men died in Spanish-American war
- “Chamorro women have been privileged over Chamorro men, not only as the survivors and thus agents of Marianas history, but also as the very agents of life and death” (92).
- problem: historical erasure of Chamorro male agency leaves room for stories of colonial and military “saviors” of the emasculated islands and beleaguered females

CHamorro

Colonial Dis-Ease by Anne Perez Hattori

- *pattera* - midwives prenatal care & massage, birth practices, up to 8th-day checkup
- *suruhana* - broader gynecological, sometimes supernatural concerns (115)
 - described as “incompetent, dirty old women whose primitive forms of knowledge and methods of practice impeded the progress of modern medicine” (94)
- required *pattera* to obtain licenses through naval hospital
- both subject to surveillance (*suruhana* under sever scrutiny), primitivist discourse (women + superstition)
- specific policies: 1) mandated midwives refer all complicated cases to Naval Hospital; 2) monopolize production and distribution of medicines on island
- “By focusing on maternity as a critical area of health-care reform, navy administrators and doctors introduced concepts of domesticity that concentrated on mothers as the individuals responsible for the maintenance of health in the family” (94-95)

CHamorro

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- moves to medical professionalization
- Chamorro tradition/Western medical, community/individual, male caregiving/mother solo
 - moves to nuclear family, domestication, private home sphere, subject to male authority
 - *Guarm Recorder* columns with instructions on mothering: don't touch child, limit breastfeeding, impersonal & isolating

“perhaps pattered can best be understood as women who resisted confinement to a newly emerging domestic sphere, particularly as embodied in the workings of the patriarchal American military” (115)

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“A Guam Girl. Who is She?” article in *Guam Recorder*: “A girl of wondrous fascination and remarkable attractiveness, . . . she will make the home of her husband a paradise of enchantment, so that the heaven-touch harp of marriage, with its chord of love and devotion and fond endearments, will send forth a sweet strain of felicity as ever thrilled the senses with rhythmic pulsing of ecstatic rapture’ (GR, Nov 1934, 208). Such descriptions romantically endorse notions of patriarchal power and female domesticity” (121).

Thought Prompts

- Role of military in Micronesia, and similarities to rest of Pacific Islands
- colonialism + chauvinism
- gender-based roles - precolonial, contemporary
 - mis/use of cosmogonic feminine roles/power (women as birthers)
 - matrilineal societies - control of land, lineage, clan \$, choosing chiefs
- feminist activism
 - Why is it still so hard to find women's voices in the archives?
- perceptions of male power: consequent privileges, colonial collaboration
 - What similarities do you notice with HKT critiques of male leadership?