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## The Rongelap Report: Consequential Damages of Nuclear War

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surveillance, and control practices are proposed for villagers to acquire resources and fulfill their goals, in self-designed, and self-regulated, projects, funded by the Bank. It is an attempt to study the mechanisms of local social capital, but it is also an attempt to insert people in the market economy, and make them behave in accordance to the capitalist standards of competition, accumulation and progress. Even though Kekamatan Development Program was considered (and replicated) as successful by the World Bank, it also failed to address the real issues in people's lives—although it did succeed in modifying their conduct towards market and accumulation activities.

In conclusion, it is evident in Li's account that historical attempts to improve people's lives in Sulawesi while reconciling conservation, capitalism and social justice is impossible for two reasons: the lack of attention to political economic structures, and the absence of villagers' participation in decision-making. At the same time, in many cases populations resist and eventually reclaim what has been extracted from them. The will of some to improve the lives of others does not cease, however. Li poses an important question: If there is evidence of populations' abilities to resist and claim spaces of justice on their own—especially since partnership, participation and collaboration are today recognized as crucial in development—why are there still trustees interested in assisting them to improve? Trusteeship, and the "hierarchy that separates trustees from the people whose capacities need to be enhanced," (p. 278) are "embedded in the will to improve" (p. 281). In this sense, it would be worth the effort to further explore Li's thesis.

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## The Rongelap Report: Consequential Damages of Nuclear War

BARBARA ROSE JOHNSTON AND HOLLY BARKER  
LEFT COAST PRESS,  
WALNUT CREEK, CA, 2008  
321 PP. \$29.95 PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY LAUREN HARRIS

Through attempts to dig up truths about a society destroyed by nuclear fallout, this ethnography chronicles one of the most devastating chapters in American history. In 1954, 67 nuclear bombs were tested in the Marshall Islands by the United States military. Despite warnings about the possible effects of this testing on the local inhabitants, the bombing

schedule was carried out as planned, spreading radioactive waste across entire islands and their inhabited villages. For decades, the Rongelapese have been forced to serve as research subjects for U.S. military scientists and endure the severe environmental and health effects of a situation completely outside their control. Using the voices of the island's residents collected from decades of research, Johnston and Barker bring to life the details of Rongelapese residents' experiences.

The most significant contribution of the book is the detailed explanations that are provided of the effects of nuclear testing on the Rongelapese over the past 50 years. The analysis begins with their cultural practices, values and traditions before the nuclear bombings in 1954 and ends with testimonies of relocated Rongelapese attempting to get back to their homeland. These personal narratives all serve as evidence for the final "Rongelap Report," pieces of which are carefully placed at the end of each section of the book to synthesize authors' findings. The full version of this report was used by representatives of the Rongelapese in court hearings against the US government.

Before nuclear testing, the Rongelapese were intimately connected to their land. Food, toys, shelter, transportation and tools were all created from natural materials. Land and water territories were dispersed using local rules maintained by the traditional hierarchy of leaders within the community. Spiritual and social values were also tied to the island landscape. The authors suggest that not only was it the place that the Rongelapese buried their dead, but it brought meaning to peoples' lives. Before nuclear testing, the authors describe the Rongelapese's relationship with land as symbiotic, based on individual narratives and portrayals of life before nuclear destruction. Rongelapese who were interviewed explain that when hunting, they would kill only male crabs so that the females could reproduce, never take all the bird or turtle eggs, and only kill the young birds so that the older ones could reproduce. These and other resources were exchanged and used to maintain social relationships and to confirm basic values essential to Rongelapese culture.

The contamination from the nuclear bombings obliterated the social relationships that mediate use of natural resources on the island. Johnston and Barker spend the last third of the book discussing the specific ramifications of nuclear testing for the Rongelapese, which include involuntary displacement from their homes, loss of access to natural resources and natural habitats, loss of land rights, and loss of their everyday existence including customary laws and traditions. Because the nuclear fallout was so expansive, much of the landscape was permanently destroyed. Throughout this chapter, the Rongelapese talk about birds found with hard white pebbles in their throats, radioactive coconut crabs, and arrowroot that are completely hollow inside, capturing the severity of impacts on food resources.

Health consequences from the initial nuclear explosion and from the toxic environment in the years that followed devastated the Rongelapese way of life. After the bombs went off, white radioactive powder fell directly on many people, leaving them with discoloration and blisters that covered their bodies. Johnston and Barker's key informant lost his 15-year-old child to leukemia. His story, unfortunately, is only one of many. Almost all Rongelapese were forced to have their thyroid glands removed due to concentrated levels of radioactive material, a surgery that has left them without a singing voice, and with a daily, chronic need for medication. The reproductive effects of the bombing were perhaps some of the most disturbing. Throughout the third chapter, men and women talk about having children without arms or legs, of stillbirths, babies with Down's Syndrome, even giving birth to "grapes." One woman talks about a child being born with the entire back side of his skull missing. She states, "You know, it was heart wrenching having to nurse my son, all the while taking care that his brain didn't fall into my lap" (p. 146). Although difficult to absorb for the reader, such stories need to be told, and the authors create a forum for Rongelapese to do so.

The final chapters of the book discuss the culpability of the United States, including the decision to drop nuclear bombs despite the perceived risk of fallout, and the governmental official's lack of attention to the needs of the Rongelapese in the years

following the disaster. While the U.S. did provide health care to residents after the bombing, it was much more focused around “scientific investigations” than it was on the actual health complaints of the people themselves. In a letter written to the U.S. government, a Rongelapese man states, “you have never really cared about us as people—only as a group of guinea pigs for your government’s bomb research effort. There is no question about your technical competence, but we wonder about your humanity...” (p. 139).

These events lead the authors to discuss the need for justice and reparations, citing specific historical circumstances in which the U.S. government was forced to repay local civilians for breeches of contract and/or losses of critical resources. Under what is termed “The Memorandum of Decision and Order” they call for restitution, indemnity and satisfaction under four general categories. These include: 1) the hardships, injuries and consequential damages of the loss of healthy, self-sufficient way of life; 2) the natural resource damage and related socio-economic stigmatization; 3) consequential damages to human exposure to fallout from the nuclear weapons testing program; and 4) negligence, negligent misrepresentation, battery and related consequential damages of involuntary participation in human subject research. While the Rongelapese were awarded some consequential damages by the RMI Nuclear Claims Tribunal, the authors continue to demand further compensation for each individual abuse that falls under these four main categories of concern.

To date, most of the literature on the effects of nuclear weaponry on human populations has been produced by medical personnel, focusing primarily on the physical consequences of radiation, which include reports of thyroid cancer and leukemia (National Research Council 2003; Institute of Medicine 1999). Other studies, produced outside of the medical fields, have focused on the social and cultural effects of nuclear fallout in the United States (Caldwell 2007; Johnson 1996; Fradkin 1989; Rosenberg 1980) and the Marshall Islands (Johnston 2007; Dibblin 1990), however they tend to be primarily subjective. While these reports provide emotionally

charged personal accounts of the victims, they contain little evidence to connect environmental and health problems to the actual bombings. This is one of the main contributions of Johnston and Barker’s ethnography—the way they link these impacts to the bombings with convincing evidence. The major reason for this gap in other reports is likely to be the highly confidential nature of the research subject. U.S. military personnel are in control of all activities surrounding nuclear weapons testing; therefore it is incredibly difficult to obtain any information without an official international criminal hearing.

By joining forces with local and government personnel, Johnston and Barker were able to weave together ethnographic accounts of nuclear testing victims with data collected from the U.S. military. This combination of qualitative and quantitative data gives much needed validity to their findings, leaving the reader with a more complete understanding of the experiences of the Marshallese people by capturing what this event means to their lives individually and collectively. Unlike previous books on this topic, one comes away from this ethnography with a better understanding of differing perspectives, a sense of responsibility for what happened, and a desire to provide the voices speaking out through the pages with the reparations that they deserve.

This ethnography is appropriate to use in undergraduate and graduate level anthropology courses to illustrate how meticulous ethnographic fieldwork can serve as essential evidence in cases concerning human rights violations. In addition to demonstrating what applying anthropology can accomplish, this book also suggests the importance of long-term ethnographic analysis and multiple methodologies for acquiring data, as well as what can be gained from engaging with professionals both in and outside of anthropology. The readability of this ethnography makes it highly accessible to the public, and more importantly, to policy makers and military personnel who can make a contribution in working to prevent these atrocities from occurring again.

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