

Bomb Archive

The Marshall Islands as Cold War Film Set

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Abstract

This essay offers a decolonial analysis of the inaugural moment of the United States' Cold War project—the nuclear weapon “testing” in oceanic environments. As an alternative to the usual framing of Bikini Atoll as a site of the Cold War arms race that tends to invisibilize Marshallese experiences through a Cold War binary logic, this article invites the reader to focus on the Bikini Atoll as a film set. It offers such an approach with the hope of reframing questions of justice and recognizing the worlds lost due to the production of US nuclear modernity.

Keywords: bomb archive, audiovisual deterritorialization, audiovisual Cold War epistemologies, nuclear colony, nuclear weapons' “testing”, extraction through image

By analyzing the founding moment of the US nuclear “testing” in the Marshall Islands, as it is narrated in newsreels produced in 1946, I focus on how audiovisual technology takes part in the production of injustices in the Marshall Islands. The perpetuation of these impacts derives from the US Cold War production. With the US nuclear weapon project, a distinct audiovisual archive gets instigated. Its creation and preservation result in a unique type of injustice that I attribute to a nuclear colonial condition due to inextricable functionality of recordings of this extraterritorial nuclear project. I apply a media-analytic lens to expose a particular type of colonial violence and to offer possible venues for justice claims.

In the context of nuclear weapon production, I ask, what does taking a film camera out to sea mean in relation to the notions of territorial (un)making and production of evidence? In other words, what are the implications of the extraterritorial bomb archive? Military presence in the ocean space relentlessly shapes the notion of territory: it percolates practices of extraction and contributes to shaping knowledge-production, especially when it comes to science and area studies in humanities. I emphasize the importance of recognizing the role of media in historical and contemporary sea-bound conflicts such as legislation of national and international waters, territory-making, border crossing, and military weaponry “testing” at sea. My research is driven by a hope that interrogating the past and present from an oceanic perspective, in combination with an analytic film industry lens, can help bring a necessary shift from a Cold War binary framing of the global order (as defined by tensions between the two superpowers) to a nonpolarized demand for accountability.

While I take into account the context of struggle for self-determination and acknowledge the ongoing spatiotemporal complexities defining a non-homogeneous Marshallese community, my research is not meant to directly comment on these complexities. For this purpose, I draw on the latest and most pertinent ethnographic research of Sasha Davis, Barbara Rose Johnston, Jessica A. Schwartz, and others.¹ This important work informs my

1. Sasha Davis, *The Empires' Edge: Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Interviews with Bikinian Elders, Bikiniatoll.com, accessed May 18, 2001, <http://www.bikiniatoll.com/interviews.html>, in Ruth Levy Guyer, “Radioactivity and Rights,” *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no. 9 (September 2001): 1375; Jeffrey Sasha Davis, “Scales of Eden: Conservation and Pristine Devastation on Bikini Atoll,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 2 (April 2007): 213–35; Steve Brown, “Poetics and Politics: Bikini Atoll and World Heritage Listing,” in *Transcending the Culture-Nature Divide in Cultural Heritage*, vol. 36: *Views from the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Sally Brockwell, Sue O’Connor, and Denis Byrne (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2013), 35–52; Barbara Rose Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster: The Marshall Islands Experience and Lessons for a Post-Fukushima World,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities Postcolonial Approaches*, ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 140–61; Barbara Rose Johnston and Holly M. Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report* (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2017);

research and allows me to develop my argument on how the production and circulation of the bomb archive is at the core of nuclear colonial injustices.

Complex intertwining of military-scientific as well as visual production took place in unprecedented oceanic nuclear “tests,” which in the Pacific started with Operation Crossroads in 1946. The scale and range of the US military-scientific productions in the Pacific were well beyond ordinary. From the very start, while unprecedented international agreements permitted the United States to detonate never-before fission yields, concurrently another important world record was being set. More than half the world’s supplies of film stock and around eighteen tons of cinematography equipment were brought to Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands.² Operation Crossroads rendered what until then had been audiovisually a nearly undocumented place into one of the world’s most photographed at the time. The US cinema-military complex deployed over five hundred cameras to document Operation Crossroads.³ An immense archive of moving images has been harvested from these highly radioactive, destructive explosions.

The goal of this essay is to contribute to decolonial perspectives by exposing how the US cinema-military complex, after taking shape in World War II,⁴ continued its unscrupulous role not only in inventing the Cold War through its oceanic cinematic operations but also in becoming an important tool used to expand oceanic spheres of direct US influence and produce pervasive material

Jessica A. Schwartz, “Marshallese Cultural Diplomacy in Arkansas,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (September 2015): 781–812; Jessica A. Schwartz, *Radiation Sounds: Marshallese Music and Nuclear Silences* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2021); Robert Stone, dir., *Radio Bikini* (New York: Robert Stone Productions, 1988).

2. I use the Marshallese (also known as Ebon) transliteration Bikini in order to distinguish the name of the place from militarized and gendered connotations of the German, French, and American transliteration of Bikini.
3. Kevin Hamilton and Ned O’Gorman, *Lookout America! The Secret Hollywood Studio at the Heart of the Cold War* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2019), 74.
4. For more on the functionality of the military’s cinema complex inside the US military and US military’s contributions toward development of portable film-exhibition technology, see Haidee Wasson, “Experimental Viewing Protocols: Film Projection and American Military,” in *Cinema’s Military Industrial Complex*, ed. Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 24–43.

and symbolic legacies. I argue that the cinematic apparatus played an important part in the production of the US Cold War and continues its extensive role in the dynamics of Cold War legacies. The production of the Cold War to this day takes a toll on communities in the Pacific Islands in several ways now recognized and in others not yet widely acknowledged. In pursuit of shifting the usual framing of Bikini Atoll through Cold War categories that are productive of US nuclear modernity and its fetishizing tendencies, I propose a decolonial analysis of how image production, circulation, and its archiving practices are at the heart of ongoing violence. My focus is on this archive's production and its long-term cultural, political, and epistemological effects.

Nuclear Audiovisual Operation

I delineate two major categories of audiovisual documents that were produced in relation to the Marshall Islands nuclear “tests” with a plan to distinguish parts of it for wide distribution: (1) newsreel films from the Marshall Islands and (2) raw footage as documentation of the explosions. Both broad categories contain several but not definitive subcategories:

1. Newsreel films from the Marshall Islands:
 - 1.1. US military preparations for weapon “tests”
 - 1.2. Postexplosion assessment
 - 1.3. Scientists revisiting the Marshall Islands to measure radiation impacts on human and nonhuman bodies
2. Raw footage/documentation of explosions, which has been absorbed into other audiovisual productions, such as:
 - 2.1. Fiction films
 - 2.2. Documentary films
 - 2.3. News coverage
 - 2.4. Artistic films
 - 2.5. Music videos

These are general categories summing up a plethora of audiovisual works dating from 1946 onward. I list these broad categories following my goal to analyze the modalities of an epistemic regime that is directly manufactured from (audio)visual⁵ documentations of the extraterritorial US nuclear project. I name the variety of images of the US nuclear “test”⁶ explosions a *bomb archive*, which I place in relation to other succinct notions that pertain mainly to scientific language, such as *bomb carbon* and *bomb effect*.⁷

An important distinction between the two main categories of the bomb archive is their function. While newsreels were deployed in internal, national, and international communication, raw footage/documentation of explosions were primarily meant for military-scientific assessment of the effects of the bomb.⁸ Both these categories and their multifunctional application were invented during Operation Crossroads, and both have a differently violent reach. Earlier documentations of nuclear explosions (July 16, 1945,

5. I mark “audio” in brackets in “(audio)visual” every time I refer to the US military’s produced moving images of Operation Crossroads because of the alleged equipment failure causing the iconic images of aquatic mushroom clouds recording without an audio track. Ostensibly, the intention to record audio was there, but the blast power interfered with the quality of the material. In the majority of moving-image works representing Operation Crossroads nuclear explosions, the audio part is added in postproduction. In other cases, the image is projected with no soundtrack.

6. In an effort to avoid the normalizing of Cold War language, I propose the use of quotation marks around the word “test” when referring to nuclear weapons explosions. I want to avoid the misleading connotation that these took place in a scientific laboratory environment instead of in outdoor environments that suffer ongoing effects. I do this in line with Kathryn Yusoff’s geotemporal critique of conceptualizing the Anthropocene as something that has consequences for human population while extractive practices have long created adverse conditions for racialized individuals and communities. See Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

7. For more on bomb carbon and bomb effect, see Rose Eveleth, “Nuclear Bombs Made It Possible to Carbon Date Human Tissue,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/nuclear-bombs-made-it-possible-to-carbon-date-human-tissue-20074710/>.

8. For more on the history of the application of cinematic apparatuses in the Marshall Islands, see William A. Shurcliff and US Joint Task Force One, *Bombs at Bikini: The Official Report of Operation Crossroads* (New York: W. H. Wise, 1947); Jack De Ment, “Instruments of Operation Crossroads,” *Military Engineer* 39, no. 264 (1947): 414–19.

Trinity; August 6, 1945, Hiroshima; August 7, 1945, Nagasaki) were comparable neither by scale (visual documentation of Operation Crossroads was the biggest of all) nor function (visual documentation of Operation Crossroads was used for a wide array of purposes: from image as science data to image used for internal and international media campaigns).

Through the highly controlled efforts of the US military,⁹ the images of Operation Crossroads became part of the shared imaginary and the iconic representation of the nuclear explosions. Kevin Hamilton and Ned O’Gorman explain that this operation was intended to both test the fortitude of naval vessels in an atomic blast and “provide ample images to the U.S. and global publics of America’s newly invented weapons (something . . . that both Hiroshima and Nagasaki failed to do). As such, photography was as critical to Crossroads as ballistics and in certain respects more critical, as the U.S. had never set up a photographic operation quite like this, whereas the bomb designs had already been ‘proven’ in Japan.”¹⁰ Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites claim that the initial visual representation of atomic warfare applied in Japan was “artistically modest, morally ambivalent, tilted toward abstraction and ethical justification, and not yet anchored in one medium or image.”¹¹ In that sense, Operation Crossroads was altogether different—fully fleshed out and anchored in the cinema-military complex.

Other than being central to highly controlled US public campaigns that were foundational for the international Cold War regime, images of the Bikini Atoll nuclear weapon explosions enter the public sphere under a guise of neutrality as representations of scientific “tests.” As such, they are

9. For more information on US communications about nuclear projects, see Beverly Deepe Keever, *News Zero: The New York Times and the Bomb* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2004).

10. Hamilton and O’Gorman, *Lookout America!*, 75.

11. Robert Donald Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, “The Iconic Image of the Mushroom Cloud and the Cold War Nuclear Optic,” in *Picturing Atrocity*, ed. Geoffrey Batchen et al. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 135–46.

separated from their sociomaterial Marshall Islands' context and perform as raw data. Representations of nuclear weapon explosions fluctuate between a scientific register as raw data and a film industry approach as raw material. They both are means for different and yet interconnected ends: scientific meaning and aesthetic meaning.

The aspects of scale of the nuclear visual operation were “tested,” assessed, and advanced during Operation Crossroads. This first oceanic extraterritorial nuclear “test” forecasted the need for a separate branch of institutional coordination inside the internal organization of the US military. As Hamilton and O’Gorman put it, “The U.S. government had to manage not only a technological system and its biochemical artifacts, but also the collection of images, stories, and data that inherently threatened to upset America’s place within a precarious post-war international order.”¹² They observe that, back in the 1940s, the excessively broadcasted images of Operation Crossroads lacked a compelling narrative—it had only a palette of images showing the awful might of atomic explosions.¹³ “The story of Crossroads threatened to become the story of American military recklessness. The Navy tried to avert this public relations fiasco by making the images, and indeed the cameras themselves, the story.”¹⁴ Today, we can recognize that success was attained in the effort to perpetually fetishize technological image-production aspects, which, throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, are most often framed as “American nuclear modernity.” Nuclear technological achievement and demonstrations of power to the USSR were crafted as the main narratives of the US Cold War. Furthermore, information about the oceanic nuclear weapon “tests” by US Cold War strategists and communicators has reached the level of cliché—the representation of an atomic mushroom cloud started signifying the Cold War itself. Iconography of the oceanic mushroom cloud together with the bikini bathing suit became

12. Hamilton and O’Gorman, *Lookout America!*, 74.

13. Hamilton and O’Gorman, 78.

14. Hamilton and O’Gorman, 76.

major tools through which the Marshall Islands was represented. Teresia K. Teaiwa's feminist decolonial critique of the bikini bathing suit as a gendered obscuring device¹⁵ of Indigenous subjectivity is my inspiration for looking for methodological frameworks that would permit recognition of the extensiveness of obscuring agendas. I recognize such a perseverant, obscuring framework in the audiovisual bomb archive.

Operation Crossroads served as an initial merger between the military-scientific and cinema-military complex. It produced a logistical prototype to the Lookout Mountain Laboratory, which was established right after Operation Crossroads and provided growing infrastructure around the bomb archive's production, preservation, management of access, and circulation. According to Hamilton and O'Gorman, Lookout Mountain Laboratory, also known as Lookout Mountain Air Force Station, served as the headquarters of the 1652nd Motion Picture Squadron of the US Air Force from 1947 to 1969.¹⁶ After implementing some variably successful documentation of Operation Crossroads, based on an acknowledgment of the importance of visual accounts and an understanding of the logistical challenges of the scale of such a cinematographic operation, Lookout Mountain Laboratory became, arguably, "the Cold War's most prolific and influential film studio."¹⁷ While balancing between imagery production and imagery archiving, between utter secrecy and receiving a nomination for an Oscar from the Academy for Motion Arts and Sciences, Lookout Mountain Laboratory was also registering patents and publishing papers in technical journals dedicated to sound recording and scientific photography.¹⁸ As much as being remarkably prolific in image production, Lookout Mountain was

15. Teresia K. Teaiwa, "Bikinis and Other S/Pacific N/Oceans," in *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 15–32.

16. Lookout Mountain Laboratory, "Lookout America," Archives of the 1352nd Motion Picture Squadron, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.lookoutamerica.org/>.

17. Lookout Mountain Laboratory.

18. Lookout Mountain Laboratory.

not the only studio engaged in bomb archive production.¹⁹ When thinking about this moment, it is important to acknowledge not only the scale but also the role of the extractive operation in the Marshall Islands in areas of knowledge-production: inventions in audio and visual recordings, science photography, bomb-carbon facilitated forensics, and outer space research, as well as the fact that among a plethora of unprecedented scientific productions, an entire discipline of ecosystem ecology derives from the Pacific nuclear weapon “tests.”²⁰ These types of knowledge together with an abundant iconization of the mushroom cloud²¹ were produced through an overarching system of data classification that functions not only by closing access to data but by applying differential logic to providing access to selected data. There is no doubt that the nuclear weapons industry together with its derivative research play a substantial role in the world’s economy.

Ocean and Occupation without Possessing

As evidenced by Lookout Mountain Laboratory’s operations, the paradox of invisibilizing through hypervisibility is produced in the conjuncture of the military-scientific and cinema-military industrial complexes. To bypass the US Cold War–produced fetishizing that is usually applied in analysis of US nuclear representations, I propose a critical oceanic and film-industry lens to embrace questions of justice in the critique of hypermilitarization and recognition of worlds lost due to the production of US nuclear modernity.

19. For more information on the early stages of production of nuclear weapons representations, especially in settler-colonial contexts, see Susan Courtney, “Framing the Bomb in the West: The View from Lookout Mountain,” in *Cinema’s Military Industrial Complex*, ed. Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 210–26.

20. Joel Bartholemew Hagen, *An Entangled Bank: The Origins of Ecosystem Ecology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Laura J. Martin, *Wild by Design: The Rise of Ecological Restoration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

21. For more on the history of iconization of the mushroom cloud, see John O’Brian and Art Gallery of Ontario, *Camera Atomica* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015).

Historical examples of neocolonial Cold War employments of the ocean space are plentiful. As early as August 1946, the United States began efforts toward including floating ice masses in its national security discourse, which led to attempts to occupy frozen water masses as land.²² The physical feature of water taking solid shape in low temperatures led to juridical confusion. However, the fact that the US military focused on it meant that efforts were put in place to reconcile juridical contradictions and use this to allow an exemption of ocean space from selective aspects of national and international law.²³ Bruun and Steinberg's research shows how, between 1952 and 1978, the floating ice mass became part of what they call the "wider U.S. techno-political network of knowledge production that spanned across the Arctic and beyond."²⁴ According to Bruun and Steinberg, both scientists and the military were struggling with the same set of questions: "How could an environment of shifting mobile solid water that could be 'occupied' but not 'possessed' be assimilated into a system of spatial organization that assumes divisions between solid and liquid, between land and water, and between 'inside' (territory) and 'outside' (non-territory)?"²⁵ The physical features of water freezing into large shelves, contamination patterns, oceanic ecosystems growing reefs, and islands forming and disappearing challenge terrestrial-based juridical systems. These challenges demonstrate how the familiar (and usually undisputed) notions of what constitutes political, economic, juridical, and symbolic power over territories do not seem adequate when this power shifts from land mass to water. And yet, as both history and present-day political events demonstrate, many of the most intense and consequential of these struggles take place precisely over—not to mention on and under—water. The stakes in these queries

22. Johanne Bruun and Philip E. Steinberg, "Placing Territory on Ice: Militarisation, Measurement and Murder in the High Arctic," in *Territory Beyond Terra*, ed. Kimberley Peters, Philip Steinberg, and Elaine Stratford (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 147–65.

23. Bruun and Steinberg, "Placing Territory on Ice."

24. Bruun and Steinberg, 147.

25. Bruun and Steinberg, 149.

tend to appear abstract when territorialization by superpowers does not expose human inhabitants, thus appearing free of political implication.

Such occupation without possession in the ocean space seems to be prevalent in the postwar US context. Technology historian Ruth Oldenziel calls this phenomenon the “deterritorialization of power”²⁶—expansionism without juridically registrable and materially visible evidence. Oldenziel identifies the technoscientific *modus operandi* as leaching onto juridically “thin” places by introducing technological volume, or technological “thickness,” as she puts it—to these places. In Oldenziel’s analysis, such juridically “thin” and technologically “thick” places are islands scattered around the globe. I find this impulse for instituting extractivist practices on ice, corals, and atolls comparable and eye-opening. While the 1946 discovery of the T-1 iceberg was classified as a military secret,²⁷ the first oceanic nuclear weapon “test” (Operation Crossroads) was in the same year constructed as a public event. Both instances were driven by a similar impulse for occupying without possessing. The image-production complex was deployed in the case of Operation Crossroads in unprecedented ways, and this allows a glimpse into technological layering in juridically thin places from a perspective of visual culture analysis.

Oldenziel emphasizes that the United States rules over extensive—but invisible to its citizens—*island possessions*: the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Johnston Atoll, Navassa Island, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Palau, and the US Virgin Islands of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Oldenziel notes that these US territories are the largest colonial holdings in the (post) colonial era,²⁸ exceeding the combined population of the overseas territories

26. Ruth Oldenziel, “Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire,” in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 13–41.

27. Bruun and Steinberg, “Placing Territory on Ice,” 147.

28. By bracketing (post) in (post)colonial, I make reference to Ann Laura Stoler’s emphasis on durabilities of colonial presence. See Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), x.

of Britain and France.²⁹ I argue that what sets the Bikini Atoll apart from all of these other instances of United States' holdings is that it is (1) the place of invention of what is termed a *nuclear colony*, (2) it is part of an important moment in the production of US island-networked power, and (3) it is the birthplace of the most public bomb archive—an archive central to Cold War securitization discourse and practice. And as such it continues to be interpreted through Cold War epistemic categories that are incapable of grasping the current conditions of deterritorialized colonial extraction that the United States exercises across the islands while the islanders are perpetually striving for decolonization.

It is important to note that the first oceanic nuclear weapons “test” was the first to be conducted by the United States outside of its own territory. The second, and best visually documented, oceanic explosion was immediately dubbed the world’s first nuclear disaster.³⁰ The questions of disaster and environmental crisis³¹ are inseparable from all stages of nuclear energy production—such as the nuclear disasters at Chernobyl, Fukushima, and more—given that nuclear pollution remains toxic for tens of thousands of years.³²

The time of inception of the Cold War is replete with events that at that time were unprecedented. Paradoxically, the solidifying of the Cold War was achieved through material and juridical maneuvers in the vast and fluid space of the ocean. The UN Trusteeship Agreement³³ with the United States

29. Oldenziel, “Islands,” 13–41.

30. Jonathan M. Weisgall, *Operation Crossroads: The Atomic Tests at Bikini Atoll* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), ix.

31. Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster.”

32. For more on varieties and the longevity of nuclear pollutants, see Eric Semler, James Benjamin, and Adam Gross, *The Language of Nuclear War: An Intelligent Citizen's Dictionary*, 1st ed. (New York: Perennial Library, 1987); Keever, *News Zero*; Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster”; Barbara Rose Johnston and Holly M. Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War*; Schwartz, *Radiation Sounds*.

33. Susan Kurtas, “U.N. Documentation: Trusteeship Council: Strategic Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,” research guide, United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, New York, accessed August 12, 2021.

in 1947 put the Marshall Islands, the Caroline Islands, and the Mariana Islands under a unique type of US control. This extraordinary juridical formation legitimized military-scientific and media operations.

Other than the fact that the Trusteeship Agreement vastly expanded the oceanic presence of the United States, it also allowed it the right to close any areas of this “strategic” territory at any time “for security reasons.” In 1954, legal scholar Emanuel Margolis summed it up as follows: “Upon United States insistence, the entire territory—comprising ninety-eight distinct islands and island units with a combined land area of 846 square miles, spread over some three million square miles of ocean—was set up as ‘strategic’ under Article 82 of the U.N. Charter.”³⁴ The Trusteeship Agreement allowed the United States to expand its control over lands and waters three times the size of US territory. At that time, well-known³⁵ detrimental effects on human and nonhuman lives led Margolis to conclude as early as 1954³⁶ that “the laws of humanity suggest and the law of nations requires immediate cessation of the thermonuclear experiments in the Pacific Proving Grounds.”³⁷ The solution he offered, however, should the “testing” not stop entirely, was to move it to the remote Arctic region. Sadly, this is the same argument that led the United States to the Marshall Islands in the first place. Today, with the knowledge we have about the glaciers melting, we can understand how the perception of oceanic remoteness (as separate, non-connective, isolated, and empty) was at the heart of false convictions that propelled twentieth-century nuclear weapons production. Despite warnings from experts and scholars, the United States proceeded with active “testing” in the Marshall Islands till 1958.

34. Emanuel Margolis, “The Hydrogen Bomb Experiments and International Law,” *Yale Law Journal* 64, no. 5 (1955–1954): 630.

35. The harmful effects of radiation exposure were already known as early as the 1920s and 1930s. For more on this topic, see Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

36. Margolis’s reaction could have been motivated by another well-documented audiovisually nuclear process, the Castle Bravo thermonuclear “test,” which took place March 1, 1954.

37. Margolis, “The Hydrogen Bomb Experiments and International Law,” 647.

Extraction through Image

Extraction through image takes place in scientific laboratories and in public communication. Such extraction begins at the point of image production and extends through its circulation. The image and its analysis are crucial in the process of refining nuclear weapons. Representation of nuclear technology is both scientific (as a means of analysis in order to measure the effects of explosions³⁸ and the effects of radiation on human³⁹ and nonhuman⁴⁰ bodies) and symbolic (as a means of shifting world power balance). I call this nonconsensual scientific and symbolic production *extraction through image*.

To understand the ways in which violence operates through the sphere of the (audio)visual, it is important to analyze the production of the bomb archive. Image production is a defining factor in the constellation of encounters between parties of the Trusteeship Agreement. When tracing how nuclear weapons explosions in the Marshall Islands started, the timeline itself appears very rushed for an operation of such magnitude. The scale and speed with which half of the world's film stock, eighteen tons of cameras, and at least 412 cameramen⁴¹ were sent to this remote and seemingly difficult-to-reach island speak for themselves. Looking back at the sequence of events, it is important to notice the large degree to which the US military focused on (audio)visual documentation of this moment. In such context, the Atolls, the Marshall Islands, and the entire territory of the Trusteeship Agreement⁴² (among other formations) were turned into a film production set. The logic of film production dominated throughout the duration of this military operation. Aspects of footage production, its meaning, and

38. Shurcliff and US Joint Task Force One, *Bombs at Bikini*.

39. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, 46.

40. Susan Schuppli, "Radical Contact Prints," in *Camera Atomica*, ed. John O'Brian (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2015), 278–91.

41. Hamilton and O'Gorman, *Lookout America!*

42. The Marshall, the Mariana, and the Caroline Islands.

circulation demonstrate how film production in the Marshall Islands is part of nuclear violence.

Historical records suggest that from the moment the United States took over the territory of the Marshall Islands it claimed ownership. Even if the Trusteeship Agreement did not grant ownership itself, it granted governing freedoms that are often associated with ownership. Representatives of the United States did not shy away from testing the limits of this exceptional trust(eeship). The US government insisted that the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) be designated a “strategic trust”⁴³—one in which the administering power had a national security interest. The status of strategic trust meant that the United States would be accountable only to the UN Security Council, where the United States held veto power, rather than to the UN General Assembly, which administered all other trust territories.

The chronology of US actions after its military entered the waters of the Marshall Islands in 1944 demonstrates how quickly infrastructure for explosions and for setting up the media operation developed. It is apparent that the nuclear weapons “test” site intersected with that of a film-set. Explosions had to be visible: frameable, well-lit, with sufficient openings for camera angles. Cameras and microphones had to be sheltered from winds and blast power. The concrete structures were built specifically for (audio)visual documentation. A choreography of aerial shots was planned in coordination with cameras. This is especially true of the second Baker “test,” representations of which were massively reproduced.

One of the major signs of asymmetrical colonial relations is the right to land. US officials removed inhabitants from the lands and waters. While Steinberg described Micronesian Islanders’ regard for water as a “land-like space of distinct places,”⁴⁴ and the survivors of nuclear violence assert

43. Schwartz, “Marshallese Cultural Diplomacy in Arkansas.”

44. Philip Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 43.

their exceptional relation to the place,⁴⁵ the US military treated the ocean as colonially “asocial”⁴⁶—an empty space. Sasha Davis describes how the “emptiness” of the Marshall Islands was initially identified but also further emphasized as a major resource that legitimized nuclear operations.⁴⁷ Deceiving the islanders about the scale and longevity of the operation is comparable to theft of waters and the islands.⁴⁸

The islanders’ desire to stick to the initial agreement and return to their islands in the 1970s posed another opportunity for extraction—knowledge about the effects of radiation was produced without initial consent and by withholding information about it from the islanders themselves. Imaging technology played a crucial role in this process. After several attempts by islanders to return to their ancestral lands, it was generally agreed that the nuclear explosions eliminated the possibility of permanent, sustainable return. Davis calls such colonial settlements, which are being significantly changed by the US military, *baseworld*.⁴⁹ The Marshall Islands epitomize this, along with several other colonial modalities. These modalities are unique to the Marshall Islands in their intense combination but at the same time they are exemplary of broader tendencies of the United States’ “deterritorialization of power” through island-driven, neocolonial expansion. Still today, according to the United Nations’ plan for ongoing decolonization and 2020 statistics, the majority of nonself-governed communities inhabiting islands around the globe amounts to around two million individuals.⁵⁰

45. Interviews with Bikinian Elders, Bikiniatoll.com, accessed May 18, 2001, <http://www.bikiniatoll.com/interviews.html>, in Ruth Levy Guyer, “Radioactivity and Rights,” *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no. 9 (September 2001): 1375.

46. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*.

47. Davis, *The Empires’ Edge*.

48. For theft and property relations in settler-colonial contexts, see Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

49. Davis, *The Empires’ Edge*.

50. “The United Nations and Decolonization: Past to Present,” United Nations, accessed August 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en>.

Audiovisual Deterritorialization of Power

Elimination of Indigenous societies is at the center of Patrick Wolfe's definition of a settler colony.⁵¹ Although Pikinni Atoll shares this characteristic of a settler colony, when compared with studies of other settler colonies, the core constitutive elements of the Marshall Islands follows a different causal sequence. In the Marshall Islands, elimination of the Indigenous population from the lands was not a means of extraction but an immediate condition. Removal of the population was facilitated by post-World War II international legislation regarding the island states. Unlike other settler-colonial contexts, the supposed return of stolen lands, or lack of relocation of populations from the danger zone, such as in the case of Roñlap Atoll, was used as another occasion for extraction: the US military-scientific complex studied the post-“test” environment, including the islanders' physical bodies, to observe the long-term impact of nuclear radiation.⁵² As DeLoughrey claims, “Despite the excessive surveillance and documentation of their radiogenic illnesses, to this day the majority of affected islanders have been refused access to their medical records and have inadequate medical treatment.”⁵³ The quest for the withheld records is ongoing⁵⁴ and once in a while takes the shape of demands by the public that all classified documents pertaining to “testing” be released to the Marshallese.⁵⁵ The effects not only of the radiation itself but also of the withheld knowledge⁵⁶ are felt to this day and

51. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409.

52. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*; Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster”; Jonathan M. Weisgall, “Statement of Jonathan M. Weisgall Legal Counsel to the People of Bikini Before the House Natural Resources Committee,” US Department of Energy, Office of Scientific and Technical Information, February 24, 1994.

53. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific,” *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 2 (2013): 178.

54. Seiji Yamada and Matthew Akiyama, “‘For the Good of Mankind’: The Legacy of Nuclear Testing in Micronesia,” *Social Medicine* 8, no. 2 (January 2013): 83–92.

55. Schwartz, “Marshallese Cultural Diplomacy in Arkansas,” 793.

56. For more on the impact on health and cultural practices of the Marshallese communities

should be understood as nonconsensual extraction, which is part and parcel of the same data classification system as the bomb archive.

To most observers, the oceanic nuclear colony is primarily a mediated experience. Audiovisual reproducibility of the invention of the nuclear colony points to a processual definition of it as a structure of a settler colony (drawing on Wolfe's emphasis on a settler colony as an ongoing structure rather than a temporally circumscribed event). I call this mediated structure of a settler colony an *audiovisual deterritorialization of power*, and a source of injustice.

Like many island nations, the Marshall Islands' case shows characteristics of both early-day colonialism and twentieth-century modes of extraction. A major distinctive feature of the Marshall Islands is the fact that image production is at the core of the invention of its particular nuclear colonial modality. The Marshall Islands case is exceptional in that it witnessed the capacity of camera and broadcast attention⁵⁷ and served as a building block for technopolitical power, as well as a key to understanding how these new modes of power operate.

Following independence on May 1, 1979, the Marshall Islands became a sovereign republic. And the US civilian population has never actually settled on Marshall Islands territory. Nevertheless, the ultimate elimination of agency from representation in the context of ongoing land dispossession can be seen as a particular type of settler colony. This type of settler colony has not historically been attributed to its territorial ambitions due to the vastness of its surrounding waters, which are not entirely registrable through a geopolitical framework. To a large extent, this is due to spatially and temporally divergent legislation. A nuclear colony was, thus, invented and maintained through a combination of nuclear, oceanic, and imaging extractive practices.

caused by nuclear "testing" and subsequent withholding of medical data, see Johnston, "Nuclear Disaster"; Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War*; Schwartz, *Radiation Sounds*.

57. Schuppli, "Radical Contact Prints," 280.

I call the momentary and perpetual visibility of the nuclear bomb archive—the former as a “special effect” on a film set and the latter as a canonized immortality of recording—the *audiovisual deterritorialization of power*. This audiovisual deterritorialization of power signifies pretend visibility of action. Due to its extensive post–World War II visibility, the Marshall Islands are unique compared to other nuclear colonies, but at the same time, its invisibilizing visibility plays a part in overcasting imaginaries on broader nuclear-colonial modalities.

The Trusteeship Agreement between the United Nations and the United States was enacted as a political and a media/cinematic process. Before the Trusteeship Agreement was signed on April 2, 1947, the Pikinni Atoll in 1946 saw the simultaneous production of film sets for (1) an open-air science “laboratory” and (2) narrative film production. Both types of audiovisual productions took place in parallel, and both furthered political goals. Universal Studios, in collaboration with the US military, produced several newsreels prior to the “tests.” One of them, “Ready for Atom Tests at Bikini,”⁵⁸ depicts the moment of a supposed agreement between US military officials and the Pikinni Atoll population to resettle. The camera registers the apparent consent of the Pikinni community to leave the Atoll. There are no negotiations, no questions asked—only a docile, supposed agreement to leave the Atoll to the US military’s care. As the Marshallese people continue reentering their reparation claims in the courts, revisiting the moment of “agreement” is pertinent. As well, medical records are continuously being withheld while the Compact of Free Association between the United States and the Marshall Islands is coming to an end in 2023.⁵⁹

Peter Hales reveals that the newsreel “Ready for Atom Tests at Bikini” was produced not from documentary footage but of scripted⁶⁰ material for

58. “Ready for Atom Tests at Bikini,” in Peter B. Hales, *Outside the Gates of Eden: The Dream of America from Hiroshima to Now* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 27.

59. Office of Insular Affairs, “Compacts of Free Association,” US Department of the Interior, October 15, 2015, <https://www.doi.gov/oia/compacts-of-free-association>.

60. Hales, *Outside the Gates of Eden*, 27.

which a group of Pikinni Atoll inhabitants were asked to perform a meeting with a single US military representative. Hales follows the chronology of the Pikinni Atoll events from January 10, 1946, when US president Harry Truman officially licensed the bombing. The footage showing the supposed willingness of islanders to abandon their home environment was filmed a month after the agreement supposedly took place. Hales investigated the raw footage dating a week before evacuation and almost a month after the declared date—March 3—instead of the official date February 10, 1946. Hales reveals that the raw footage that did not make it to the final cut exposes fabrication beyond the pretend date. In left-out footage, the Atoll chief Juda gets upset about being forced to repeatedly perform consent for camera. He stands up and walks directly to the cameraman just to say into the camera, “All right; is that all?”⁶¹ Then he is seen storming off the set. I identify this as a moment that Nicholas Mirzoeff calls “countervisuality,” an insertion of “the right to look,” which he defines as “requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim rights and to determine what is right. It is the claim to a subjectivity that has the autonomy to arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable.”⁶² This Marshallese claim of the right to look is in the archive vaults, awaiting restoration and transfer to digital formats. The archival imperative and the protection of US military archives through classification practices have prevented the raw footage from being used as evidence in a counternarrative. Meanwhile, most of the online sources offer falsified narratives from military-produced versions.

The film production team delayed⁶³ the evacuation of the islands for one week in order to get the required quality of performance from their untrained “actors.” In the context of a very rushed time line, this further highlights the importance of film production in the framework of the nuclear operation. Pikinni Atoll became a film set with rehearsals, main

61. Hales.

62. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

63. Hales, *Outside the Gates of Eden*, 28.

protagonists, extras, repeated takes, and multiple angles. There was film direction and a clear vision of how this performance would steer the viewers' response. However, I believe this filmic instance should be approached not merely as a cinematic performance but rather as a binding document, especially knowing that the written treaty between Pikinni Atoll inhabitants and the US government does not exist—only the ubiquitous audiovisual edits of the islanders agreeing to leave.

The US military's attention to audiovisual production was rather exceptional, valued not as a documentary but as a document. This might be the first and the last document of its kind produced once film became widely embraced by the military following the speedy World War II deployment of cinematic combat functionality.⁶⁴

The edited footage used in "Ready for Atom Tests at Bikini" is not just a straightforward piece of propaganda but is also a source of one of the most quoted alleged facts about Pikinni Atoll, emphasizing how the islanders left their homeland willingly. This story comes from the newsreel itself, and it had been repeated in many written sources, tending to reappear as authentic documentation in multiple other audiovisual productions. However, when studying the subject more deeply, one is left with the impression that the Marshallese had not much of a choice. And yet, the insistence on this move as an informed and voluntary act haunts almost every source.

Information about the islanders' decision to leave Pikinni Atoll needs closer analysis. The moment of agreement is often read as a separate instance. Johnathan M. Weisgall writes that the islanders' decision to leave their environment was not based solely on a desire to see mankind benefit from nuclear "testing." Since the defeat of Japan, US ships were bringing food, other supplies, and medical officers who provided free services: "By the end of 1945 the Americans had built a store, an elementary school, and a medical dispensary on the atoll."⁶⁵ Weisgall acknowledges that saying "no" to US officials did not

64. Wasson and Grieveson, *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex*.

65. Jonathan M. Weisgall, "The Nuclear Nomads of Bikini," *Foreign Policy*, no. 39 (1980): 78.

seem like a choice. As people were preparing to leave for an evacuation site (temporarily, they thought, for two weeks), the first of two hundred and fifty vessels, one hundred and fifty aircraft, and forty-two thousand military and scientific personnel began to arrive. This is yet more proof of how quickly this operation was pursued. Weisgall testifies, “The islanders were overwhelmed by all the fanfare, geologists, botanists, biologists, and oceanographers categorized the flora and fauna of the atoll, and engineers blasted a deep-water channel through the reef to the beach on the main island of Bikini. Meanwhile, the Bikinians, who had never before seen motion pictures, were entertained with Mickey Mouse cartoons, Roy Rogers westerns and Hollywood bedroom farces.”⁶⁶ This was an old-style colonial tactic: gain the trust of the host by paying a largely symbolic fee for the possibility of extracting something much more valuable. It is not accidental that in post–World War II military-scientific sites, the portable cinema apparatus⁶⁷ found yet another mission. In the Marshall Islands it participated in opening up ways for even more filmic production and the creation of the bomb archive.

Initially invented for the leisure of soldiers to keep up their spirits between battles, portable film projection was used to impress the islanders who were getting acquainted with both ends of “film culture”—viewership and acting—and the entire spectrum of exploitative tendencies in-between. It is obvious that performances took place without release forms and without parties involved fully understanding the script. Interpreting this material that reverberates through several iterations of productions necessitates a very broad analysis of the context. In this case, categories of fiction, documentary, and documentation are also blurred. I reiterate that the parameters shaping the conditions of film production and falsified circumstances of agreement to abandon the islands allow us to draw parallels with settler-colonial treaties.

The human subjects, with no access to authentic and personal (as opposed to scripted) verbal expression on screen, had to be inserted into a

66. Weisgall, “The Nuclear Nomads of Bikini.”

67. Wasson, “Experimental Viewing Protocols.”

fully scripted audiovisual narrative that was meant to hold evidence, act as a contract. Historically, an academic discipline of visual anthropology primed US military-artistic crews for such colonial audiovisual productions. If fabrication at the moment of dispossession from the Indigenous populations or fabrication for the sake of dispossession was not a new practice, its filmic nature was.

For US citizens, apart from the dominant “savage” tropes, newsreels provided what Priya Jaikumar calls “accurate imagination”⁶⁸—a strategy applied by British educators in audiovisual travelogs teaching subjects located in Great Britain about remote colonies. Such emphasis on colonial visual education was proposed by a British imperial geographer, Halford Mackinder, author of the notion of geopolitics,⁶⁹ in order to foster a unified vision of the empire, the grounds for which were laid many years ago. The audiovisual tools were meant to strengthen ties between subjects of the colonial center and colony at a time when decolonial movements were picking up in the twentieth century. While narrating the “Cold War inevitable” and inventing post–World War II securitization discourse, the US newsreels from the Marshall Islands followed the logic of “accurate imagination.”

To dethrone the usual framing of Pikinni Atoll as a site of the Cold War arms race, I want to view the Pikinni Atoll primarily as a film production set. In this sense, what it takes to produce the image, the visuality of the “special effect,” is an inclusive part of image production. The Marshall Islands “tests” could be seen as a “runaway production.” The Trusteeship Agreement delineated the borders of the set. Production costs were much “cheaper” outside the United States, and the end product became an “international success,” which soon entered the cinema canon.

68. Priya Jaikumar, “An ‘Accurate Imagination’: Place, Map and Archive of Spatial Objects of Film History,” in *Empire and Film*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe (London: British Film Institute, 2011), 167–88.

69. Mackinder, “The Teaching of Geography from an Imperial Point of View, and the Use Which Could and Should Be Made of Visual Instruction,” in *Empire and Film*.

Decolonial analysis of the bomb archive gives insight into how ocean space, assumed to be a vacuum, in conjunction with nuclear technology produces a nuclear colony with its ongoing nuclear and image-anchored violence. As part of this broader process, the roots of the nuclear colony in the twentieth century's anti-imperial context led to the particular type of audiovisual archive of newsreels and images of bomb explosions that are as abundant and available as they are misleading. I want to link this archive to manifestations of power, which Oldenziel describes as "often and purposefully . . . hidden from view."⁷⁰ In the analysis of US power deterritorialization, Oldenziel claims that "the U.S. wields a strikingly different kind of power because it lacks overseas possessions. . . . the U.S. does not occupy vast tracts of land outside the American continent like the Roman, British, and Russian empires of yore. But the U.S. does rule over extensive—but to its citizens, invisible—*island possessions*,"⁷¹ which serve as technopolitical nodes. I emphasize that, in the case of the Marshall Islands, an oceanically deterritorialized technopolitical extraction is also enacted through the production and circulation of the image.

It is not the invention of nuclear technology per se, but the international legislation, backed by ethical and aesthetic paradigms, in combination with a persistence of the settler-colonial logic, that allowed direct and metaphorical atomization of the twentieth century's US colonial project. Nuclear weapons explosions for cameras are moments of violent alteration of the human relationship with the ocean in the vast areas in the Pacific, whose effects, despite all the hypervisibility they offered, have failed to translate into moral and political accountability. Following Oldenziel's description of the deterritorialization of power⁷² as expansionism without juridically registrable and materially visible evidence, I claim that the bomb archive serves the function of audiovisual deterritorialization. Under such circumstances,

70. Oldenziel, "Islands," 13.

71. Oldenziel, 14.

72. Oldenziel.

a film-industry analytical framework is most capable of recognizing and exposing such injustices.

Habitually, following the US Cold War logic, the Marshall Islands nuclear weapons explosions are framed as a demonstration of US power to the USSR and the creation of a “balance of power” in the world. However, representations of these explosions signify and perpetuate an invisibilizing of Indigenous experiences. I extend the notion of the bomb archive to the combination of representations of the nuclear weapons “tests” and their archiving practices. The processual nature of long-lasting nuclear weapons effects is embedded not only in the elemental violence of radioactive contamination but also in image production, distribution, and its archiving. In this sense, the image has been both a goal and an instrument in what is called “testing” of nuclear weapons. These images, produced at the time of nuclear weapons production, form a toxic archive that should be addressed through epistemic categories other than those relevant to the Cold War, which produced differential treatment of islanders.

The nuclear weapon “tests” in ocean space allowed the United States to “bracket” open waters, first legally as a no-go zone available for “tests,” and later materially, as an excessively contaminated place. Of course, the effects of these operations—the contamination patterns—seem to have never perfectly aligned neither with juridical nor military-scientific “bracketing,” which points at the broadest scope of ecological concerns.⁷³

Conclusion

The US Trusteeship Agreement provided a framework for extraction without ownership that would entail not only having to shift the oceanic regime but also produce a different type of accountability for its citizens. The Indigenous population remained entirely “other,” both symbolically, documented

73. Johnston, “Nuclear Disaster.”

as “savages,”⁷⁴ and juridically, as non-US citizens. While acknowledging the ever-evolving complexities around changing modes of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and diasporic governing,⁷⁵ a focus on the juridical and material configuration in the broadest sense can help us understand why US military crews went to such lengths to produce a newsreel depicting an agreement with islanders in order to evacuate the Pikinni Atoll. This audiovisual document stands out for its function—treaty-like evidence at the moment of dispossession.

Through an elaborate production of the image of nuclear weapons “tests,” the United States and the United Nations instigated a shift in the oceanic regime toward what Oldenziel calls a deterritorialization of US power through island occupation. The production of the image is inextricable in this instance. The US-UN Trusteeship Agreement allowed for the United States to cast onto the Marshall Islands a Euro-American conceptualization of ocean space as a vacuum. This settler-colonial configuration is produced through an elaborate combination of material, symbolic, and juridical factors, as this essay has attempted to sketch. Understanding the Pikinni Atoll as definable through settler-colonial dynamics allows us to place analytic emphasis on the extensive, ongoing nature of extraction and grasp the mediated core of it. To understand the dynamics at hand, it is necessary to depart from event-based narration and focus instead on process-based conceptualization. Ultimately, the United States, while on a mission of temporary

74. Davis, *The Empires' Edge*.

75. For more on challenges related to the national and international legislation intersecting in complex ways in the Marshall Islands, see Anita Smith, “Colonialism and the Bomb in the Pacific,” in *A Fearsome Heritage: Diverse Legacies of the Cold War*, ed. Arthur John Schofield and Wayne Cocroft (London: Routledge, 2016), 51–71; Anita Smith and Cate Turk, “Customary Systems of Management and World Heritage in the Pacific Islands,” in *Transcending the Culture-Nature Divide in Cultural Heritage*, 23–34; Martha Smith-Norris, *Domination and Resistance: The United States and the Marshall Islands during the Cold War* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016); Schwartz, “Marshallese Cultural Diplomacy in Arkansas”; Schwartz, *Radiation Sounds*; Susanne Rust, “How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2019; Davis, *The Empires' Edge*.

trusteeship, has turned several islands into a zone of near-permanent damage. The inconceivable longevity of radioactive contamination means that for all intents and purposes we are talking about a theft of ocean waters and islands.⁷⁶ The Trusteeship Agreement in combination with nuclear damage entirely bypasses the discoverist terra nullius sequencing of the settler colonizer's gradual taking over of the land, which is often structured around divergent priority of rights to buy land versus Indigenous people's rights to retain or to sell it.⁷⁷

Due to US nuclear weapons production, the Pikinni Atoll became less of a place that one can inhabit or visit and more of a mediascape. When compared to other instances of the application of audiovisual technology, the US military's takeover of the Pikinni Atoll is remarkable in that the ocean waters and islands were being inscribed into a settler-juridical order at a time when cinema production and circulation technology was already invented and widely available. This means that islanders appear on-screen not just to give testimonies of colonial atrocities in a post-contamination landscape, as it appears in audiovisual representations of other (settler)colonial cases. The Marshallese community has a performed removal from ancestral waters and islands documented on film. In this case, the cinema technology amalgamates an intense collection of temporalities: an early settler-colonial method is being applied at the moment of birth of nuclear modernity, during the time of decolonization.

Meanwhile the initial archive of raw footage made up of snippets and entire newsreels continues to circulate as US archival property, and when it is incorporated in other productions, through creative or scientific engagements, it becomes either corporate or private property. Such gradual increase of private/corporate ownership rights is comparable to differential distribution of land ownership rights in settler-colonial contexts, the juridical and ethical genealogies of which have been analyzed by Robert Nichols.⁷⁸

76. Nichols, *Theft Is Property!*

77. Nichols.

78. Nichols.

I am suggesting here, therefore, that we understand settler coloniality and its violence not solely through national borderscapes but also through mediascapes.

There is neither information accompanying the sources correcting the facts presented in the newsreels nor information about atrocious production “costs” of the entire bomb archive. One could say that, legally, the government of the United States does not need consent to be able to use any type of bomb archive footage. However, exploring the possibilities for making this precedent at the very least deserves a discussion. Such a move would allow for the exploration of how intellectual property rights, and the audiovisual sphere in the broadest sense, could become a more literally and metaphorically visible and accessible site for articulating return and reparation demands. The bomb archive is part and parcel of the same data-classification paradigm as the health records of the Marshallese “test” subjects. Questioning the givenness of the right to screen nuclear colonial productions or creating a specialized fund collecting screening fees that would directly contribute to the impacted communities could help draw attention to the persistence of nuclear violence.

The issues caused by the classification, categorization, and canonization of audiovisual nuclear archives extend to the present and perpetuate *extraction through image*. In an effort to shift away from fetishizing both the bomb and the visual technology that in the Marshall Islands has been used as a strategy of deterritorialization, I propose incorporating an acknowledgment of worlds destroyed every time the bomb archive gets (audio)visually evoked. This could help distinguish between productions that are building on invisibilizing legacies of Cold War epistemologies and productions that are participating in the self-determination of communities that are enduring the deterritorializing violence of the mediascape-entrenched bomb archive. Such an approach each time would require making visible both the systemic violence of militarization and putting emphasis on different experiences implied in images that most often are articulated through notions of “American nuclear modernity.” The forms of acknowledgment and

definition of other engagements with nuclear archives should be produced by the impacted communities. My hope is that such a reclamation of agency in the area of representation could help include Marshallese experiences in established nuclear epistemologies, with space for dignity.

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