NUCLEARISM AND NARRATIVITY

INTERRUPTING POLICE LOGIC

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During the decade following World War II, the United States authorized that a series of sixty-six nuclear tests be conducted in the Marshall Islands (Simon and Robison 1997, 258). These tests ostensibly aimed to shore up American weapons capabilities and ensure that credible nuclear threats could be levied against the Soviets as the Cold War began. The consequences of these tests, however, were substantial. Not only did the American military activity entail forced relocation, starvation, and myriad consequences for the islanders’ health, this imposition also deprived the Marshallese of their agency. This devaluation was justified as a sacrifice made for the “greater good” of humanity.

Because the islands were “part of the U.N. constructed Trust Territory of the Pacific (TTP), a group of small island countries entrusted to the U.S. following the end of WWII” (Simon and Robison 1997, 258) while the testing was in progress, the United States was able to legally justify its actions. As the Marshall Islands were not sovereign, they lacked the autonomy necessary to resist the bombings. The existence of the TTP was itself a testament to the battles that were staged on the islands during World War II due to their strategic location between Hawaii and Japan, and it echoed with colonial undertones. Even when the United States made legal claims about the islands’ status, justifying the testing ethically would prove more challenging.

One of the most reasonable bases upon which the testing could be justified is the logic of utilitarianism. If the testing of nuclear weapons could potentially reveal more scientific information about the impact of detonating the bombs, some argued that the long-term benefits that would be afforded the world population would more than make up for the lives that were lost or disrupted due to the explosions. Since the Marshall Islands were already very
underpopulated and remote, the atolls must have seemed like one of the least damaging potential targets.

Although this reasoning sounds like an unfortunate but relatively innocuous usage of cost-benefit analysis, it is actually considerably more insidious. This is because the explicit weighing of certain interests at the expense of others reveals a troubling characteristic of politics because of the nature of those whose lives can be sacrificed. For geographical or legal reasons, there are populations like the Marshall Islanders who are always already expendable before the gaze of transnational interests. In a significant sense, these populations “can be ‘disappeared’ without the showing of any loss to the whole,” and even if some real damage is caused, this “is no loss but a wash” (Levinson 2004, 73).

While recognizing this flaw in politics is crucial, the story of the Marshallese is even more interesting than this. Rather than accepting their fate as victims of foreign domination, the islanders have deployed narratives that lace together the external American influence with their traditional mythology. Although these discursive tactics cannot subvert the power that has been exercised and cannot undo the nuclear testing, these narratives are useful tools that allow the islanders to regain agency. I argue that the use of these narratives amounts to a rupture in the very kind of process that consistently relegates certain populations to the margins, or what Jacques Rancière calls “police logic.” Embracing the use of counternarratives that can reimagine history is beneficial for two reasons. First, this kind of tactic creates the conditions necessary for the Marshallese to regain agency. It also opens space for a more effective, widespread resistance to the counting logic that allows these systemic abuses to continue.

To understand the significance of the position of the Marshallese in this particular discussion, a closer examination of the process they mobilized will prove useful. Phillip McArthur (2008) recounts the reality of the nuclear testing that occurred between 1946 and 1958:

The violent blasts not only severely contaminated the northern atolls and in many cases incinerated entire islets, but the measures taken to exploit the Marshall Islanders also represent a story of deception, lies, and abuse. These weapons experiments required the forced relocation of the Bikini and Enewetak
Islanders, who were told by the American military governor that it would be “for the good of mankind and to end all world wars.” (264)

While it is clear that the testing could not have been viewed as desirable for the islanders, the specific details of their cultural practices contextualize why these actions were specifically abhorrent, because “myth, history, genealogy, and identity are inscribed into the landscape” (McArthur 2008, 264). Because the atolls would always remain uninhabitable after the tests, the annihilation of the islands was a loss that entailed the deprivation of homelands, generations of history, and burial places.

If the infringement on the value the islanders ascribe to the land were not enough to warrant our concern, the legacy of “severe problems from the fallout on their atolls, including thyroid cancer, stillbirths, deformations, and mental retardation” (McArthur 2008, 264) could be added to the list of externalities caused by the testing. Worse still was the “apparent ‘human experiment’ (despite denials by the U.S. government) that the islanders of Rongelap and other northern atolls experienced with the Bravo blast” (ibid.) that allowed a test to be conducted under inclement weather conditions. This resulted in the depositing of a white ash on these atolls that was radioactive. Even if the Americans did not conduct this test with human experimentation as an explicit goal, the carelessness with which the Marshallese were treated was inexcusable. All of this information about the testing should doubtless persuade us that the nuclear testing did amount to some kind of experiment that considered sacrificing the islanders and their homes justifiable.

In the tense post–World War II atmosphere, it is clear why security would be viewed as a concern of paramount importance. With the recent memory of the horrific consequences of the use of atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the impending Soviet conflict framing policy decisions, the need to ensure the protection of the United States from external threats must have seemed critical. The targeting of the Marshallese was also seen as a relatively uncontroversial choice, since the recent acquisition of the TTP meant the islands were under American jurisdiction even though the Marshallese were not actually seen as “Americans.”

The problem with “the ‘globalization’ of” this kind of “extreme violence” is that it produces “a growing division of the ‘globalized’

world into life zones and death zones” (Balibar 2004, 127). For the Marshallese, who had already endured colonization by several nations, the horrors of World War II, and now the atomic testing, the nation’s marginality increasingly paralleled this kind of death zone. In such a space, “populations that are not likely to be productively used or exploited...are always already superfluous, and therefore can be...eliminated either through ‘political’ or ‘natural’ means” (ibid., 128). It tends to be the same populations that get targeted: those that are ethnically, racially, or religiously different.

As sensitive as the security situation was, then, the attitude taken by the United States government toward the islanders could hardly be rationalized by fear. Although “agencies of modern power presume to act ‘on the behalf of the existence of everyone,’” this emphasis on security should not be considered carte blanche to locate “whatsoever might be construed as a threat to life and survival” and “authorize any expression of force, no matter how invasive or, indeed, potentially annihilating” (Coviello 2000, 40). Perhaps the clearest indication of the cavalier stance the Americans seemed to take toward the situation was “Henry Kissinger’s purported claim when he was Secretary of State, ‘When there are only 90,000 people out there, who gives a damn?’” (McArthur 2008, 264). Even if this is an apocryphal anecdote, it does not appear too far removed from the mentality of those who authorized the nuclear tests.

That the legitimation of nuclear testing specifically on the basis of security is biopolitical cannot be understated. Michel Foucault describes a passage within sovereignty wherein the state acts as manager “of life and survival, of bodies and the race” and maintains the “power that exerts a positive influence on life that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 1978, 136). The need to sacrifice some in order to preserve the rest of humanity “has become the principle that defines the strategies of states” (ibid., 136). The uniqueness of nuclear testing within this context lies in its relationship to the possibility of the destruction of entire populations with the atomic bomb. Because “power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (ibid., 137), the threat of extinction is “a civic initiative that can scarcely be done without” (Coviello 2000, 41) because it allows quests for security to take eminence over all other concerns.
This kind of valuation relies on a form of utilitarianism that does not conceal its calculative bias. While there are ways to use utilitarianism to achieve a genuinely egalitarian ethic, the kind of cost-benefit analysis that the United States relied on was not such an ethical framework. The kinds of justifications made by the American government ignore the fact that just as “an individual is expected to refrain from immoral acts even when they advance his self-interest, so in international relations governments must refrain from immoral acts even when they serve the national interest” (Tesón 1998, 98). Michael Dillon (1999) aptly characterizes the logic that gives power to regimes of this kind when he explains that

\[\text{economies of value necessarily require calculability. Once rendered calculable, however, units of account are necessarily submissible not only to valuation but also, of course, to devaluation. Devaluation, logically, can extend to the point of counting as nothing…. There is nothing abstract about this: the declension of economies of value leads to the zero point of holocaust. However liberating and emancipating systems of value…may claim to be…they run the risk of counting out the invaluable. Counted out, the invaluable may lose its purchase on life. (165)}\]

This devaluation is a result of the insistence on calculations made in the name of some greater good that makes sacrificing a portion of the population justifiable and, in fact, necessary. To justify the testing on the basis of the possibility of reducing risks in the long run does not mean the decisions are “actually less violent than the violence they oppose. On the contrary, even the most horrendous acts are justified in view of what is judged to be the lesser violence” (Hagglund 2008, 48). It is not exaggeration to say that this is precisely the kind of calculability that makes genocide possible. By this logic, if “the extinction of the group in question is claimed to be less violent than the dangers it poses to another group” (ibid.), then the extermination of that group might be deemed justifiable in such a strict system of utilitarianism. It is clearly ethically unacceptable for a government to endorse a set of strategies that would be complicit in genocidal practices.

I do not introduce this anecdote merely to generate sympathy for the Marshallese or to malign the American military. There are
many similar stories that detail egregious abuses of power that have real consequences for marginalized populations. Although the Marshallese were at a distinct disadvantage because of their remote geographic location and the lucrative aid that the Americans were willing to offer, they are not unique in their plight. What is unusual about this particular story, however, is the reaction the Marshallese people have had to the testing.

Although it is tempting to rally around the story of the Marshallese as yet another instantiation of a global imbalance of power that allows the tyranny of the majority to continue unfettered, to merely view the story this way is evidence of “academic myopia [that] not only ignores how local people may view themselves, but also resembles what nation-states and imperial forces do to local communities” (McArthur 2008, 266). This is because such analyses necessarily abstract away how the Marshallese view themselves. They conceive of their role by integrating their trickster god, Letao, with the story of American nuclear testing. This positions the Marshallese and their heritage as central to the larger historical metanarrative that they were unwillingly drawn into by opening space to question the processes that underwrite global interactions.

According to the Marshallese narrative, the trickster god Letao decided to travel to America to become the source of the Americans’ “‘smarts,’ and their bombs.” In the narrative, “he is the source of their intelligence and thus the source of their military power” (McArthur 2008, 284). This not only “casts into relief the powerful ‘others,’ the Americans” but also allows “the Marshallese [to] explore American power and dramatize their history with the Americans in their own terms. In this way, they imagine themselves connected to the great figurative ‘world chief,’ not just by history (war and occupation), but also by cosmology” (ibid., 285).

Michel de Certeau (1984) describes the use of narratives that “frequently reverse the relationships of power and, like the stories of miracles, ensure the victory of the unfortunate in a fabulous, utopian space” (23) as a tactic that can be employed by populations that have been marginalized as a means of regaining agency. Although in “actuality” the Marshallese may have merely been targeted by the Americans and seen as profoundly insignificant, the narrative “space protects the weapons of the weak against the reality of the established order” (ibid.). This is not to say that the narrative should be discounted as a mere fiction, however.
As a means of disrupting the received metanarrative in which the Marshallese had to be sacrificed for the sake of the rest of humanity, the narrative also has a crucial function. Because the Letao story affirms local tradition and mythos, it “also hides” the Marshallese “from the social categories which ‘make history’ because they dominate it” (de Certeau 1984, 23). Unlike a traditional history, which would merely recount “in the past tense the strategies of instituted powers, these ‘fabulous’ stories offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use” (ibid.). The distinction that de Certeau draws between strategies and tactics is useful in analyzing the significance of the narrative deployed by the Marshallese. For de Certeau, strategies are associated with the emergence of metanarratives and are under the purview of states, militaries, and producers, while tactics are developed by consumers as a means of repurposing or reacting to what has been created.

If the counternarrative about Letao is an effective tactic, it is able to provide the Marshallese with the sense of agency they need to understand this historical encounter and ensures that “large-scale issues, including global modernity and power relations, are incorporated into the indigenous system of meanings about power at the local level” (McArthur 2008, 285). It also means that the Marshallese have the narrative at their disposal and as part of their historical memory as a playful story that still functions as a warning against the influence of outside forces because it remains grounded in the primacy of local practice.

An objection to this approach and a generic complaint that is frequently voiced when narratives are invoked concerns the validity of such stories. Some feel that embracing narratives is misleading since it suggests delusion or wishful thinking on the part of those whose stories do not mesh with the larger metanarrative. It is important here to note that the “Marshallese recognize their geographic, economic, and political marginality on the international scene,” but it is through the “potential of the narrative” that “they envisage themselves, not as peripheral, but as profoundly central to...globalization and world events” (McArthur 2008, 287). As de Certeau describes, this kind of counternarrative is rooted in fantasy, though it functions as something much more serious politically. Instead of seeing such speech as separate or naive, recognizing that “narrativity has a necessary function” in history and politics means that “a theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices”
(de Certeau 1984, 78). This is crucial because the power of narrative lies in its ability to allow the Marshallese to view themselves not merely as victims, but as participants in the story of American nuclear testing and other, broader transnational stories.

Positing narratives as true or fantastical relies on the perceived “the tension between two kinds of linguistic acts: ‘poetic’ languages that open the world up and the closed-world forms of arguing and validating” (Rancière 1999, 55–56). This distinction proves to be false, however, because the use of counternarratives reveals something about the tactics of everyday life of a given culture and contains political force. Such a narrative “is always both argument and opening up the world” (ibid., 56), since it is used as an argument and as an aesthetic device. This is why a narrative such as the Letao story is so useful; such a way of framing the world allows the Marshallese to “address the ambiguities of globalization much better than do scholars with their polar perspectives” since they are able to “explore the possibilities within the interstices of the local and the global” (McArthur 2008, 287), as well as within the interstices of the argumentative and the poetic. Thus, the very act of trying to separate these two kinds of discourse is illusory since there is really “no division between a rational order of argument from a poetic, if not irrational, order of commentary and metaphor. It is produced by linguistic acts that are at the same time rational arguments and ‘poetic’ metaphors” (Rancière 1999, 56).

In this case, the Marshallese are able to assert their agency in a concrete way with the stories they tell. When the question of validity arises, then, it is significant to recognize the extent to which dominant historical metanarratives such as the American belief in global privilege also derive their power from this kind of strategy. Insofar as historical memory relies on narrative, there is no immediately apparent reason to prefer the dominant metanarrative that accounts for the history of nuclear policy in a way that almost always omits the Marshallese. If it is not so easy to disentangle argumentative speech from merely poetic speech, the entire question of rationality too becomes increasingly difficult to settle.

Those who defend the way this history has been framed tend to explain that the broader historical process is characterized by certain relevant relationships. Since the story of early American nuclear policy is, to these individuals, most affected by seemingly larger-scale events such as the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the arms
race and balancing with the Soviets, the Marshallese do not seem integrable into the web of relationships and causalities that “matter.” Hayden White indicts this way of viewing narratives by arguing that “the shape of relationships which will appear to be inherent in the objects inhabiting the field will in reality have been imposed...in the very act of identifying and describing the objects” (1985, 232). Choosing which elements to include in a history and how to describe their relationships, then, is a profoundly normative act.

What those who dispute the relevance or truth of narratives like the one deployed by the Marshallese really seem to be contending is that there are certain stories that do not count. This represents a transition from the merely historical processes that undergird our discussions of nuclear policy to a more contemporary and pressing issue that impinges directly on politics. Merely demanding that the Marshallese be included in this dominant story of early American nuclear policy is insufficient because this only comprises a cosmetic change in the way politics is understood. This is because of the “limits of counting models” and the fact that “the math of interest-group pluralism...can never truly add up” (Chambers 2005). Even if the Marshallese are suddenly recognized and counted, there will be others who remain outside the realm of consideration in this kind of politics. This is precisely because the kind of metanarrative that excludes the Marshallese works “under the operative assumption that all groups are already counted” and relies on a “counting equation [that] is predicated upon certain exclusions, but ones that can never be named” (ibid.). If genuine politics are the goal, then simply adding more groups to the whole is not an effective strategy.

To explore the possibilities for this encounter, I want to discuss how Rancière employs a historical example of how failure to recognize the accounts of marginalized entities precludes the possibility of politics. He does this by engaging the Roman historian Livy’s account of the secession of the plebeians on Aventine Hill. The patricians who had dominated them could not make sense of their grievances because they were not believed to be rational, and for the “intransigent patricians...there is no place for discussion with the plebs for the simple reason that plebs do not speak. They do not speak because they are beings without a name, deprived of logos” (Rancière 1999, 23). Yet the plebs were insistent and made themselves equal because “through transgression, they find that they too, just like speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does
not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence” (ibid., 24–25). While there may have originally been poor people that were recognized, the emergence of a class of plebeians was not possible until this act. Their demands rendered “visible the gap between… identity within the police order (within the distribution of roles, places, and status) and a certain claim of subjectivity through the action of politics” (Chambers 2005).

This strategy is just as relevant today as it was during the secession of the plebs. The logic that motivated the patricians in this instance exists now, but it takes place in a different form. Theirs is the logic that simply counts the lots of the parties, that distributes bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility and aligns ways of being…appropriate to each. And there is the other logic, the logic that disrupts this harmony through the mere fact of achieving the contingency of the equality…of any speaking beings whatsoever. (Rancière 1999, 28)

For Rancière, this first logic of silencing mirrors the politics of the police. He defines the police as “the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution” (1999, 28). The second type of logic Rancière names is the one utilized by the Marshallese to combat police logic—it is called the logic of tort, since it exposes the wrong in politics. For the purposes of my argument, I am interested in three main articulations of the police. The first is at the level of geopolitics. The second resides within the historical metanarratives of global privilege that continuously sacrifice the margin. The third is at the level of individual consideration—our willingness to close our ears to the Letao story or our haste in labeling the Marshallese as “irrational” too reflects this police logic.

Perhaps most difficult to conceive is this third level of analysis. To address this, I offer Rancière’s elaboration of how the logic of the police is deployed:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the
visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (1999, 29)

I want to focus in particular on the last portion of this description. Rendering certain kinds of speech or narrative mere noise is objectionable. If the Letao narrative is considered at all, it is simply as poetry or fiction. Again, however, this delineation may not prove useful, as the separation of argument from poetry is not distinct. Realizing that “tales, stories, poems, and treatises are already practices” is crucial to realizing that counternarratives should be seen as they are since “they say exactly what they do. They constitute an act which they intend to mean. There is no need to add a gloss that knows what they express without knowing it, nor to wonder what they are the metaphor of” (de Certeau 1984, 80). I locate the importance of the Letao narrative for the Marshallese here, since it comprises genuine political activity because it “shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” (Rancière 1999, 30). It is just the kind of tactic that de Certeau describes that holds the potential for the Marshallese to act as agents. Another significant consequence when we do not allow the Marshallese to be represented or strive to devalue their narrative is that this devaluation translates into political and ethical practice (as the argument previously cited by Dillon indicates).

This feature of the police amounts to a counting logic in which certain entities who do “not count…can potentially be made to disappear without any party or representative being harmed, without any ‘real’ wrong. In such a scenario, political subjects ‘are disappeared’; but nothing noteworthy takes place, nothing of society that counts is lost” (Levinson 2004, 72). This is especially true in the context of the death zones Balibar describes. If the Marshallese are not deemed politically useful, they are not actually seen as equal, even in a utilitarian context. Their elimination is not significant for the United States. Much like the poor who became plebeians, those living in the Marshall Islands were not recognized as Marshall Islanders at that time.

The development of identity as such is not the goal of politics for Rancière, however. Rather, fostering political subjectivity is seen as
a significant accomplishment. The focus on agency is crucial here, since although “by refusing the given identity of the police order, political subjects lay claim to the fundamental equality that means they too, those who do not count, must be counted” (Chambers 2005), these demands are not always successful. The ability to fight for recognition and to maintain one’s traditions and heritage in the form of narrative is still consolation when it becomes the kind of tactic that allows future gambits to be more successful. After all, the Marshallese did eventually secure independence from the United States during the 1980s. Yet the level of analysis concerning geopolitics that I have introduced will explain why even this constitutes a pyrrhic victory.

This also explains the interaction between this third level of analysis and the actual geopolitical arrangement that such narratives describe. The solution to the dilemma opened up by the Marshallese within the political does not culminate in merely adding them to the broader transnational political consensus or simply recognizing that their voices are more than mere noise. This is because “not even the inclusion of all…would tackle wrong. Full inclusion...is the signal of” a society in which “the whole of community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over” (Levinson 2004, 76). This is a false consensus that mirrors Hegel’s notion of “bad infinity, which names an accumulation without limits, one that adds on indefinitely to itself, but whose additions never alter the whole” (ibid., 77). Such a consensus allows the wrong in politics to thrive and perpetually displaces it before it can ever appear. Even if we find a way to represent the Marshallese in a transnational metanarrative about nuclearism, then again, there will be others who are still omitted, always already expendable. A more radical intervention is required to call into question the entire equation that Rancière indicts for not counting and naming certain groups from the very beginning.

This is, again, precisely where I situate the Letao story and the deployment of counternarratives in general. Since the Letao story resists easy incorporation into the dominant metanarratives, it cannot simply be used as part of the “bad infinity” of police logic. This is how it can be used to short-circuit the processes that empower police logic. Because it represents the kind of speech Rancière believes can lead to political subjectivization when it fuses the argumentative and the poetic, I contend that exposing this wrong amounts to what he calls the logic of tort. This logic “destabilizes and shortcuts
the whole power structure of the social order” whenever it allows the marginalized to “make themselves visible as speaking subjects where previously the dominating classes only perceived the noise of the alienating or rebelling individuals, and they make the objects of their recrimination visible as worthy objects of dialogue” (Deranty 2003). In this scenario, “bodies and voices that were neither seen nor heard can be included in the communicative context” (ibid.).

Yet a substantial question still remains unanswered: “What happens when the battle of discursive politics cannot be waged at such an individual level?” (Chambers 2005). There are certainly populations who are not able to retain or develop their own tactics, such as refugees, groups in diaspora, and nonhumans. For these groups, there is a possibility that others can stand up with them to make them recognized. A characteristic of Rancière’s vision of politics explains that this is “why the political subject claims an identity it does not have as an ontological subject. For instance, it can claim to be a proletarian without being a worker, or conversely to be a poet without being a bourgeois. Rancière gives political meaning to the 1968 catchphrase: ‘nous sommes tous des Juifs allemands (we are all German Jews)” (Deranty 2003). This kind of disruption further elides the influence of the biopolitical and distributive processes of the police. While there are always groups that cannot be recognized, “since the logics of radical equality and social inequality are always both incommensurable and interrelated, the treatment of the litigation is indefinite” (ibid.). This process of attaining political subjectivity is not merely a new kind of inclusion within the system of the police; it actually ruptures it. The recognition of groups that reject the identity given to them by the police but who can still become agents through their own discourses—such as the Marshallese—is a process that necessarily means that “there can be no end to the history of emancipation” (ibid.), since there is always a wrong to be corrected or a part that has not been counted.

Yet locating this narrative is still particularly important because such a juncture is a site of contestation that itself questions whether politics as such is possible. For Rancière, “politics only occurs when these mechanisms [e.g., police logic] are stopped in their tracks by the effect of a presupposition that is totally foreign to them yet without which none of them could ultimately function: the presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone, or the paradoxical effectiveness of the sheer contingency of any order” (1999, 17). This
kind of equality is achieved when the status of a political subject is separated from questions of equality or ontology, as in the case of the French students who claimed they were all German Jews. The Letao narrative achieves this kind of disruption because it problematizes the boundary between argument and poetry, global and local. In this interstitial zone, then, the kinds of tactics that constitute the everyday practices of the Marshallese and their possible political maneuvers begin to materialize.

The efficacy of such a strategy remains the most contentious issue, then. Many feel that the significance of a local narrative that is not communicated in a way that all parties can hear is diminished to the point of complete irrelevance. What is crucial, though, is the agency and equality that the Marshallese can establish for themselves when they employ such a narrative. Since we have concluded that the counting of the police is a fundamental wrong in politics, we understand too that it “cannot be settled—through the objectivity of the lawsuit as a compromise between the parties. But it can be processed—through the mechanisms of subjectification that give it substance as an alterable relationship between the parties, indeed as a shift in the playing field” (Rancière 1999, 39). Becoming subjects in their own right is enough of an achievement for us to consider the counternarrative espoused by the Marshallese as a key site of resistance to the domination that we have witnessed. Although the biopolitical influence of the United States remains very real in the form of military bases, aid programs, and a special Compact of Free Association even after the Republic of the Marshall Islands was created in 1986, the development of narratives that contain tactics to be deployed and remembered in the future is still useful. Trying to find the seam between the local and the global or looking for how the story told by the Marshallese impacts the Americans is futile; this is because “politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds” (Rancière 1999, 42). The possibility of politics, then, rests squarely on the existence of the narratives that shape and are shaped by these worlds that encounter one another in the political sphere. The other major objection to allowing counternarratives and counterfactuals to be considered in general, then, is also addressed. Since the possibility of politics is also located in the encounter between these two worlds that are in conflict, we do not have to be concerned that adopting this strategy will be regressive or will open up more sites of contestation. If both the metanarrative
and its counternarrative are reliant on this fusion of argumentation and poetry, there is no reason to privilege one over the other. When confronted with the story of American nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands, it is evident that the counternarrative operates as a hedge against the police logic that always seeks to exclude certain groups from consideration. Because the Marshallese are able to secure their own agency when they tell their story, they make themselves visible as speaking subjects who must be taken into account. However, they are not merely counted into a transnational consensus that remains exclusionary—their speech challenges the very mode of counting that allows certain entities to be viewed as unequal. Embracing counternarratives and accepting the equality of speaking individuals both helps us reframe the way we view history and opens up space for genuine politics to occur.

WORKS CITED


