

REMAPPING HOME:
TOURING THE BETWEENNESS OF KWAJALEIN

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By
Gregory E. Dvorak

Thesis Committee:

Terence Wesley-Smith, Chairperson
Katerina M. Teaiwa
Jon Goss

REMAPPING HOME: TOURING THE BETWEENNESS OF KWAJALEIN

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Dedicated to my father

WALTER L. DVORAK
1945-1999

Acknowledgements

This project is a work in progress, one that has been going on ever since I was a small child running on the sands of Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. Thus, although I will not spare words in acknowledging the people who have made this possible, it would be nearly impossible to list everyone who has helped to make it a reality over the years.

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Abstract

“Remapping Home: Touring the Betweenness of Kwajalein” is a project that interrogates ambivalent notions of home and place within the multidimensional contexts of military colonialism, small-town suburbia, childhood memory, and indigenous epistemology on the island of Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. Articulating Marshallese oral traditions and coral reef structures with the “rhizome” described by Deleuze and Guattari in *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, the author explores multiple, contradictory “maps” of the island in an effort to remap his own sense of home.

Emphasizing the synchronicity between tourism and tours of duty, the thesis is constructed as a multimedia “tour” of Kwajalein recorded in printed form and visually on an accompanying DVD that traverses between critical discourse analysis, reflective poetic narrative, visual imagery, and three short film pieces. These different sections are threaded together as “stops,” “detours,” and “intermezzos” along the tour itinerary, which is mapped around the contours of the island.

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i. Preface

1. THE LARGEST ATOLL ON EARTH

Flowers on the Water

Kuwajleen in the Marshall Islands, commonly known in English as Kwajalein, is part of a coral atoll, an island that formed thousands upon thousands of years ago. Kwajalein is itself an amalgam of all the coral travelers who came before and built layer upon layer on the plateau rim¹ of an equatorial sunken volcano and eventually broke the surface of the Pacific Ocean, rising up to form a lei of white islets tossed gently like flowers against the shimmering turquoise water. One of the Marshallese origins of the name Kuwajleen is “beautiful flower lei upon the water.”²

These white flowers form the largest coral atoll on earth, encompassing a calm lagoon that spans a surface area of 1,100 square miles, with an average width of 15 nautical miles, its greatest dimension being 75 nautical miles from one end to the other. The lagoon reaches a maximum depth of approximately 200 feet, while the ocean immediately outside the atoll chain drops down to more than 7,000 feet (Harding 30-31.) At its southern end sits a crescent-shaped islet, one of the three largest islands in the atoll chain. This is the main island of the atoll, and its name is also Kwajalein (See Figure 1).

¹ Here I am gesturing towards Deleuze and Guattari's *A thousand plateaus*, which I deal with in more depth beginning in Stop 2 (page 12).

² From a private conversation with former RMI liaison to Kwajalein, Lawrence Edwards, who described the roots of Kwajalein to me in January 2001.

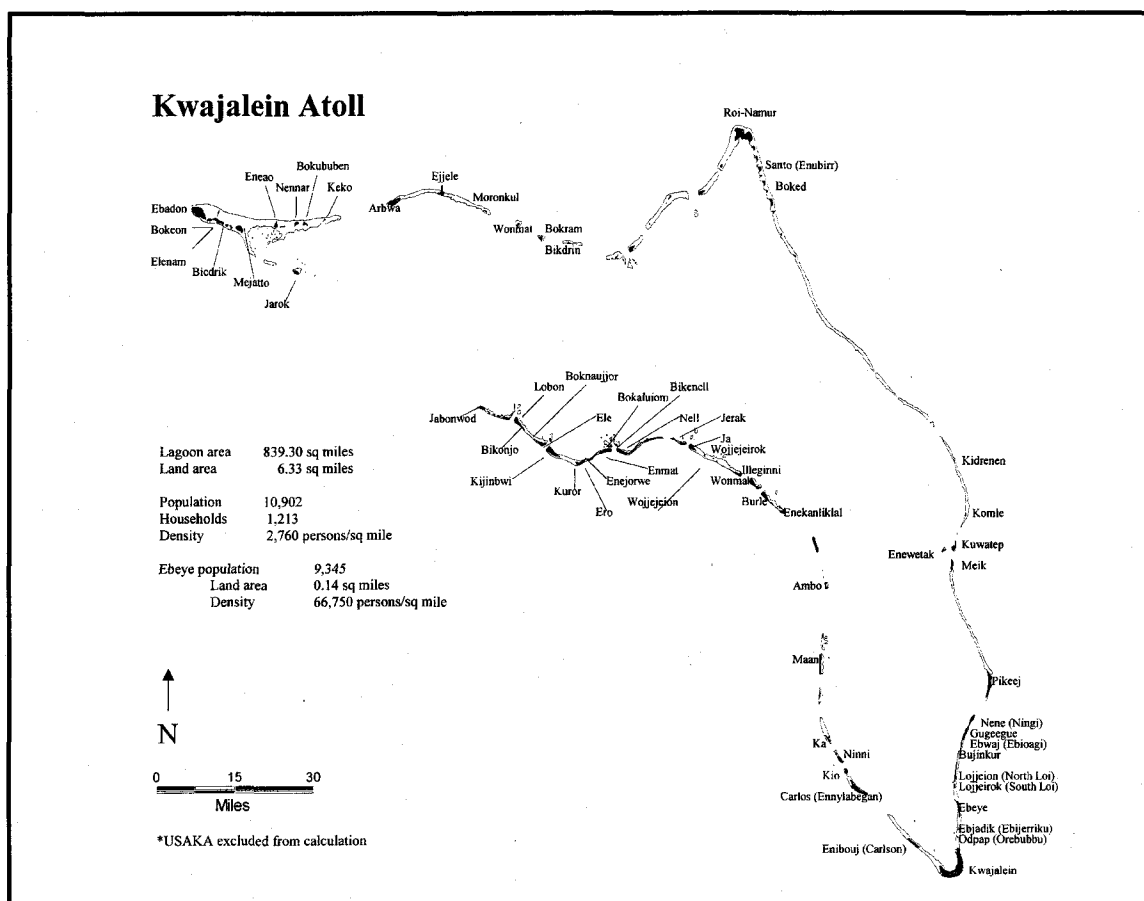


Figure 1. Current Map of Kwajalein Atoll (Kwajalein Island is at Southern Tip)³

As with most atoll islands in the Marshalls, Kwajalein possesses a sheltered lagoon side on its inner shore and a rough coral reef on its exposed ocean side, onto which the violent breakers of the open Pacific pound relentlessly. The island is three miles long, and the distance from ocean-side to lagoon-side Kwajalein is on average only 1/2 mile across; thus it is possible to see from coast to coast in areas where there are few visual obstructions, and from one tip of the island across the lagoon to the other.

³ Map courtesy of Marshall Islands Visitors Authority (2000)

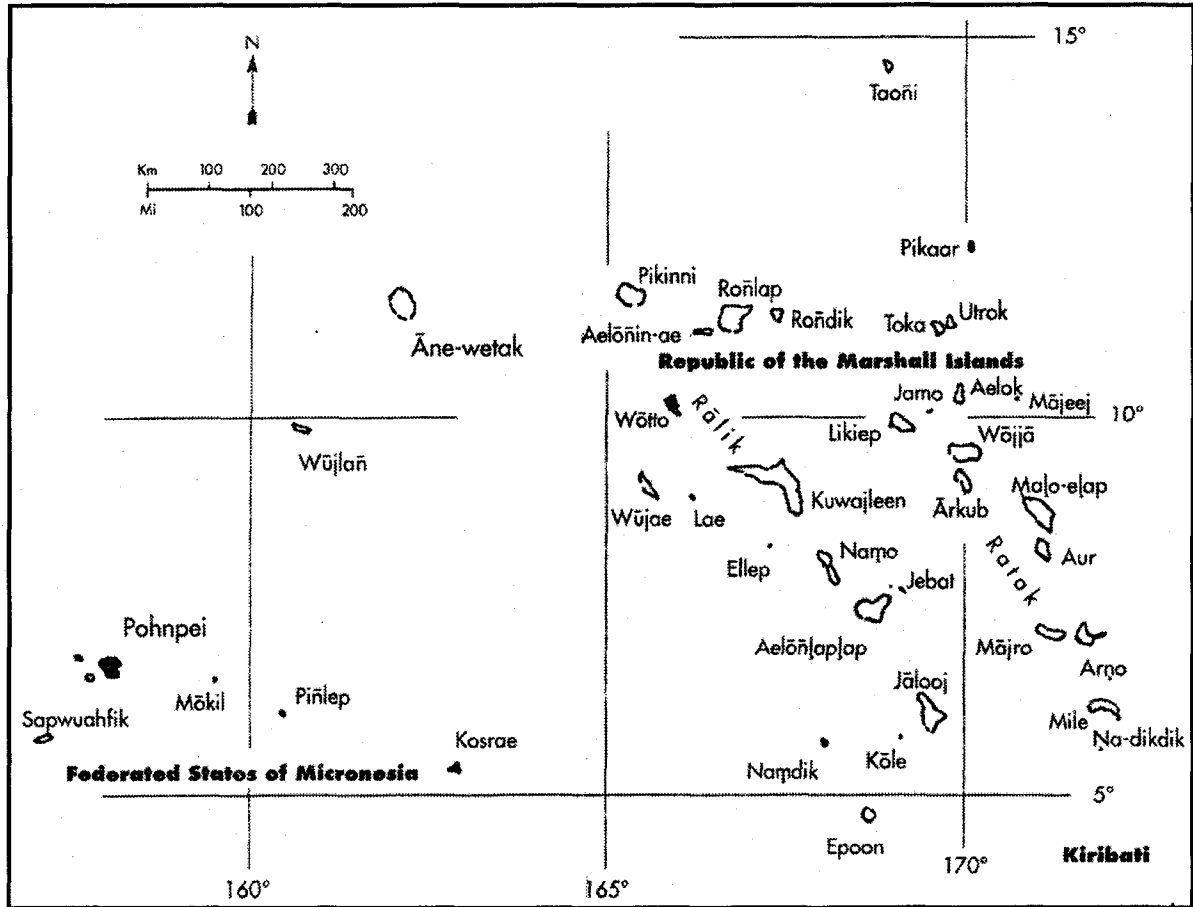


Figure 2. Republic of Marshall Islands (adapted from Carucci, 1999)

Like the coral that formed it, Kwajalein is imbued with the traces of the many colonists who came before. Each with their own unique perspective, bias, agenda, countless human travelers have left their mark upon Kwajalein's surface. The predominant theory of migration, based largely on linguistic patterns and the presence of certain artifacts, argues that successive waves of settlers traveled across the Pacific from West to East from Southeast Asia (perhaps Southern China) beginning roughly 5,000 years ago (Kirsch, 1984, Kiste, 1994.) Archaeological research suggests the existence of human settlement since 500 BC in many atolls of the Marshall Islands, with some sites, like Bikini Atoll, dating back to 1500 BC (Spennemann, 1998). Land was traditionally inherited in parcels, or *weto*, and was passed from one generation to another through a matrilineal system (Barker 10). Beginning

with the voyagers who navigated to these islands over two thousand years ago in their outrigger canoes, followed by myriad other travelers and settlers from different islands, the inheritors of these islands nowadays call themselves the Ri-Majol,⁴ the Marshallese people—or, in the specific case of Kwajalein, the Ri-Kuwajleen (Carucci, 1999).

The Shaping of Kwajalein

After Marshallese had been living there for thousands of years, however, European voyagers “discovered” these islands and decided to claim them as their own. British Captain Gilbert (after whom the Gilbert Islands, or Kiribati, were named) had no qualms in 1788 about naming the islands after his colleague Captain William Marshall, despite the fact that the two captains were merely sailing through the area en route to China (Spennemann, 2000). As in the case of many Oceanic places, the name stuck, surviving until contemporary times.

Subsequent groups of people proceeded to colonize these islands, subjugating the Marshallese people in their own home, moving them off their land, and otherwise trying to manipulate their lifestyles to suit their colonial agendas. The Spanish, Germans, Japanese, and eventually Americans would eventually call Kwajalein home in one way or another, clearing and literally reshaping the land. When the U.S. Navy began administering Kwajalein as a base after World War II, and later when the Army took over to transform the island into a ballistic missile testing range for the United States, land was bulldozed, dredged, moved, and constructed. The island was fattened and shaped into a tidy boomerang, beaches were refined for the pleasure of American residents, roads were reinforced, and an airstrip (which covers nearly half the island) was completed (see Figure 3 and Figure 4.)

⁴ Throughout this project, I have attempted to follow the spellings for Marshallese words as standardized by Abo, Bender, et al (1976); however, in this draft I have omitted diacritic markings, as I do not have the typefaces required to render these markings accurately. I intend to update this in future drafts and in my PhD dissertation work.



Figure 3. Aerial of Kwajalein in 1944 (from Berver, “Wartime History”)



Figure 4. Aerial of Kwajalein in 2003 (*Kwajalein Calendar 2003*)

The island is approximately 1.5 square miles in area, half of which has been crafted into a well-groomed residential zone, and half of which has been designed as a missile-testing range. The residential area is appointed with nearly all the amenities of an American small town—a wide range of housing, from bachelor apartments to two-story homes; a fully-staffed hospital with an emergency room; two public schools that support an outstanding K-12 education; a university-accredited adult education program; a supermarket, convenience

store, hardware store, department store; a library; a boat marina, beaches, two swimming pools, playgrounds, parks; dining facilities, a bakery designed to look like Starbucks Coffee; tennis courts, playing fields; a cultural center; and myriad other “quality-of-life” facilities. The operations half of the island is more sparse—dotted with an air terminal, control centers, advanced sensory equipment, rocket launching silos, antennas, and other paraphernalia; as well as a power plant, water and waste treatment facilities, storage, fuel tanks, etc.

In its present manifestation, Kwajalein would no doubt be unrecognizable to those who knew it before it became an American missile range. Colonization, however, is an ongoing, perpetual process; different travelers know different layers of Kwajalein—not only from era to era but simultaneously in present-day as well. Many Marshallese landowners, prohibited from living on their own land, see the home of their ancestors alternately as a significant site of profound meaning and as a temporary rental property in use by American forces (Carucci, 1997, Horowitz, 1991). Marshallese workers from all over the Marshall Islands see Kwajalein as a place to earn money, and some who live there today consider it their own home island. Military strategists see a critical “installation” that requires constant protection and maintenance. Temporary duty systems engineers see a comfortable tropical place to stay while conducting space-age tests in climate-controlled control rooms. Many American parents who work as contractors for the missile range see the island as a cozy and safe place to raise kids, a friendly neighborhood. And those kids, much like I once did, simply see “Kwaj” as their home and their playground.

2. TALE OF TWO ISLANDS

Country Club/Slum

To outside observers, these myriad experiences and readings of place are often and easily obscured by the louder memories and meanings prescribed by larger, dominant discourses. As the narrator of the film *Sans Soleil* (1982)⁵ wistfully recites, “History throws its empty bottles out the window.” Too frequently history—and anthropology—forgets the intricacies, the resistances, the shadows, the voices, remembering only the general, not the specific. It is quite simple to view *The Marshallese* in opposition to *The Americans*, or *The Americans* in contrast to *The Japanese* and any other group. Such simplifications carry political weight and baggage as well—“us” versus “them” makes it easier to determine whose interests to protect, and whose to ignore, manipulate, or destroy. It is also quite convenient to deflect attention and inquiry onto “them” and not “us.” It is tempting to avoid the contradictions, blurred lines, and exceptions and to imagine binaries instead.

Despite there being nearly one-hundred islets within Kwajalein Atoll, many of which are inhabited, most writing in English about Kwajalein or the atoll in general fixates almost exclusively on only two of those islands by making case-study comparisons and generalizations between Kwajalein Island and nearby Ebeye Island without taking a more focused and critical look at any island on its own terms. The Ebeye/Kwajalein dialectic serves as a meaningful symbol, no doubt, of how the United States has exploited the Marshall Islands since World War II, but it also has a way of simplifying the problems, the

⁵ *Sans Soleil* is an unusual film that strings together seemingly unrelated, oftentimes “kitsch” imagery from different parts of the world—Japan and the African subcontinent—through the use of montage and a stream-of-consciousness voiceover. This style of filmmaking was part of the inspiration for the short films included in this project, as it is successful in threading together contradictory elements in thoroughly meaningful ways, by being conscious of the synchronicities of everyday life.

deep complexities of Kwajalein, and the military presence there while obscuring the stories of other Marshall Islands and Islanders in the atoll.

It is not hard to see how, to many observers, the island of Kwajalein—where a handful of military officers and 2,500 or so civilian contract workers who support the missile testing operation live quite comfortably with their families—appears to be an exclusive American country club in the middle of the Marshall Islands. Ebeye—where a relatively small proportion of the 10,000 residents work jobs on Kwajalein to support their extended families—appears rather more like a border town,⁶ with makeshift housing, traffic jams, relatively poor sanitation, and very few trees. The compellingly different images of these two islands are a study in contrasts, almost too-perfect symbols of “haves” versus “have-nots.”



Figure 5. Plywood Bungalows on Ebeye Figure 6. Quadriplex Housing on Kwajalein

Ebeye is, nevertheless, the product of Kwajalein to some extent—the site chosen by Americans to displace Marshallese residents of the atoll in the 1950s. As such, David Hanlon (1998) plays upon the metaphor of “dumping” (187). A dive team from *Outside Magazine* accentuated this point in its 1997 article:

⁶ Robert Barclay (e-mail correspondence, 18 March 2004) described Ebeye as “the bar in Star Wars,” like a border town for the “Star Wars” missile testing project on Kwajalein.

Bellu stopped the car near the island's dump. Children were here, too, playing king of the hill in the mound of trash. He stared at me, perhaps trying to gauge how closely I identified with my country. Then he decided to be frank. "On the bad side," Bellu said, "the U.S. did drop all those bombs here, exposing us to the radiation. It's theirs, not ours. How would you like it if I came with a pickup and dropped a load of rubbish into your yard?" (Friend, "Lost at Sea")

Giff Johnson's 1976 article, "Ebeye: Apartheid, U.S. Style" is one of several of the period that describes the Ebeye/Kwajalein situation as "apartheid." JoAnn Wypijewski's 2001 article in *Harper's Magazine* elaborates in much more detail and sensitivity (but not compassion) for both sides of the story; however, her assessment again fixates on the sheer contradictions between Ebeye and Kwajalein, clearly as fodder for her larger protest against America's "Star Wars" missile defense program (7). And while her article is highly perceptive and conscious of contradictions, Wypijewski oversimplifies the situation on Kwajalein by stylizing it into a stereotypical (a)pathetic American community lost in the "Twilight Zone":

Except for the absence or near-absence of rent, taxes, advertising, and residents who aren't white, this is probably the most American place in the Pacific, the picture of 1950s suburbia re-created on the un-submerged rim of a sunken volcano. (3)

The term "Slum of the Pacific" is another characterization for Ebeye, echoed in the writing of Oliver Sacks (1997), who—without even setting foot there or spending more than a few hours in Kwajalein's air terminal, writes it off as a "shantied hell." Robert Barclay's sophisticated novel *Melal* (2002), while it draws heavily from Marshallese oral traditions and engages deeply with a Marshallese subjectivity, manages also to reinforce the view of Ebeye (if not the Marshall Islands in general) as a tragic site of post-apocalyptic suffering and horror. According to Barclay, *melal*, the term he uses to describe Ebeye, means "playground for demons, not habitable by people" (vi).

Beyond the Binaries

There is much more to the story, however: As Lyotard (1984) warns, *metanarratives are dangerous things*. In its myopic scope, the developmentalist worldview afforded by contrasting the luxury of Kwajalein and the squalor of Ebeye is one that imagines Ebeye (and by extension, the Marshall Islands) as “backward” and inferior to Kwajalein (and the United States).⁷ While such a view highlights the legacies of colonialism that have wreaked havoc on the Marshall Islands, literally scarring the land and the bodies of the Marshallese people, it also inscribes Marshallese either as helpless victims, desperate workers who have come to get a taste of the good life at Kwajalein, or money-hungry landlords trying to profit from lease payments from the U.S. Government. It deprives Marshall Islanders of agency, voice, and strength; elides the existence of clean, abundant nuclear-free Marshallese lagoons teeming with marine life (for they *do* exist, contrary to popular opinion); and ignores the incredible amount of global movement of people to and from the Marshall Islands (particularly from Ebeye outward to the rest of the world.) In short, colonialism moves in *all* directions: Kwajalein does not just produce Ebeye; Ebeye—and other islands—produce Kwajalein.⁸ Not only do Marshallese landowners have the final say whether the United States can continue to operate its testing project in the atoll, but the everyday interactions of the 1,000 plus Marshallese individuals who travel back and forth to work and study in the American community make an impact on the way in which American residents understand their world. This is of course not to mention that it would be nearly impossible to maintain Kwajalein’s

⁷ Kwajalein is a restricted military installation, systematically controlled and supported by the U.S. Army; Ebeye is the urban seat of Marshallese government at Kwajalein Atoll, Republic of the Marshall Islands. Thus, within the limited context of Kwajalein Atoll, Ebeye has come to symbolize the entire Marshall Islands as a whole, while Kwajalein has come to symbolize all of the United States.

⁸ Here I give credit to Julie Walsh-Kroeker, who helped me to appreciate how Kwajalein Americans are just as “Marshallized” as Marshallese are “Americanized.”

“luxurious” standard of living were it not for the dedicated labor of the Marshallese workers who keep everything running in the first place.⁹

Although the population of Ebeye, let alone the entire Kwajalein Atoll is comprised of an extremely eclectic and diverse group of people—Marshallese of varying classes—*iroij* (chiefs), *alap* (landowners), and *ri-jerbal* (workers) from Kwajalein Atoll and various other atolls—and numerous other Islanders, such as Kosraeans and Samoans, the whole Ebeye community has come to symbolize “The Marshallese,” in contrast to “The Americans” of Kwajalein. The latter, meanwhile, are equally obscured in this dialectic, for despite the fact that the population of residents on Kwajalein is also quite diverse and expatriate-like (several of whom are of different nationalities, not to mention the considerable number of Hawaiians and now Marshallese who live on island), they are often lumped together in much the same fashion.

Clearly, it is not so simple: Buried beneath this simplistic (and impossible) binary are vast differences and gaps between the individuals of these communities, tensions between different classes, and relationships that transcend boundaries and challenge these notions of separation and opposition. Importantly, this fixation also presumes that Ebeye is *the* place with problems, the necessary hell to complement Kwajalein’s paradise. But looks are deceiving: much like the family that disguises its dysfunctional secrets with perfectly-manicured lawns and picket fences, there is more to American Kwajalein than meets the eye, and it deserves attention.

⁹ In the bigger picture, it is also essential here to mention that Marshallese are influencing America far beyond the Marshall Islands, such as in the case of large communities of Marshallese from Ebeye and Majuro that have settled in (and influenced) places like Honolulu, Hawai’i; Costa Mesa, California; Eugene, Oregon; Springdale, Arkansas; or Enid, Oklahoma. See Linda A. Allen’s dissertation, “Enid ‘Atoll’: A Marshallese Migrant Community in the Midwestern United States (1997).

It is, therefore, essential to move beyond this Kwajalein/Ebeye dichotomy, and instead to engage directly with the discourses that have created it while focusing more on the people of the different communities in Kwajalein Atoll. It is not productive to reproduce binaries—to get stuck in who is right and who is wrong—or to avoid engaging with the actual people who actually live, or have lived, there. Indeed, as I will explore in the pages and moving images that follow, this project is devoted to paying more attention to Kwajalein.

3. REMAPPING

The Homeland

As I have hinted above, I am a “Kwaj Kid” myself, having spent close to seven years of my childhood on Kwajalein and leaving at the age of nine. With no memories of my life before my father relocated our family from New Jersey when I was less than two years old, it was as if I had been born there, as if Kwajalein were the foundation of my entire life. Though my father worked for a civilian contractor that tested missiles for the U.S. Army, the core purpose of Kwajalein as a major defense site was completely marginal to my young mind, and I only knew “my island” as a safe, idyllic, comfortable hometown where I imagined I could stay for the rest of my life. As a child, although I sat outside on occasion with lemonade and popcorn to watch unarmed missile re-entry vehicles as they streaked across the sky from the continental U.S. into the lagoon, the implications of missile testing or nuclear arms did not mean very much to me. When my family left to return to the U.S. mainland, however, I gradually learned that my home had indeed been on a restricted

military base, and that it would be close to impossible for me to ever return without proper credentials.

My intense nostalgia and longing for this home, and the nearly insurmountable difficulty involved in going back, reinforced its significance in my mind and shaped the way I understood the world wherever I went. Kwajalein would be reshaped and remapped in my mind repeatedly at different ages in different places in order to claim a sense of my own stability and contiguity. Likewise, as I grew older I wanted desperately to believe that the island was really my homeland, not just a temporary work assignment for my father. As Yi-Fu Tuan writes:

This profound attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon. It is not limited to any culture and economy...The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere. (1977: 154)

As Tuan argues, “space” is something that *becomes* place, that “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). Yet for me, despite whatever meaning I had personally invested in making Kwajalein into a real, valuable, “permanent” place, the idea of its being an off-limits, top-secret military base was very disconcerting. Though it had been a part of my experience all along, suddenly it was as if the military were actually undermining the reassuring comfort of this homeland. Thus I began on my own to try piecing together the mysteries of this childhood and make sense out of the contradictions I had once taken for granted, and I tried very hard to understand the bigger picture.

Maps are arbitrary tools, however objective they may pretend to be. As a part of my research, I looked closely at nearly two-hundred different maps of Kwajalein, each of which was entirely unique and drawn from a different politically, historically, or culturally subjective

vantage point. Therefore I am quite conscious in this project of my own evolving map of Kwajalein. I play with the notion of maps by remapping home and consciously, self-reflexively envisioning Kwajalein in a more complex way than I was once able to imagine. On one hand I am quite critical and on the other I am comforted by an overpowering sense of nostalgia and love for home. I have throughout my life idealized it, repainted the lagoon as brighter, the flowers more fragrant. I cannot, however, ignore that these issues are disturbing to me now, or that I am no longer satisfied with only one side of this story. Thus, I remap again and again, in all my ambivalence, making space for all aspects of the home/sickness that I feel.

I undertake this remapping process as a thirty-year old man living in Honolulu and studying at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; thus my maps are informed by the context in which I live now, enriched by the guidance of my teachers, my discoveries of other Kwaj Kids and their experiences, and combined with the experiences that have led up to my coming here—by nearly ten years of studying and later working in Japan for the Japanese government, by another nearly ten years before that of living with my family in New Jersey while I attended school. This remapping is inclusive of my successive returns to Kwajalein in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2004, and the new understanding I gleaned from those visitations. It draws also on the relationships I have developed with old and new Marshallese friends, the time I have spent over the past few years in other Marshallese atolls, and my beginning knowledge of the Marshallese language.

Defensive Dad

My current map accounts also for the untimely death of my father in 1999, embracing his memory and remembering his role in bringing my family to Kwajalein. It was only after he passed away that I returned for the first time since my childhood. My relationship with my father becomes central to this thesis project not only as an exploration of my own personal story, but symbolically as a metaphor for the tensions between Kwajalein's militaristic "mission"—upon which my father worked as a systems engineer—and the idea of "home," in which my father was simply "Daddy." It was in this very personal context, as it was with many other "Kwaj Kids," that I subtly learned to swallow these contradictions. My subsequent understanding of my father (and by extension, myself) as a part of the missile-testing project has transformed my understanding of Kwajalein and complicated my sheltered sense of home.

My father was so honest and law-abiding that even as an adult I would feel terribly guilty for driving one mile above the speed limit or lying to him about eating the last cookie in the jar. I appreciate his career as a systems engineer on Kwajalein to be sincere work that supported me throughout my life, and I know that he engaged it with a passion and curiosity for science and technology that many other engineers possess as well. Yet this tension between the two sides of my father is emblematic of something *much larger*; for it is resonant in the tensions between the United States and the Marshall Islands, or the tensions that exist with American military power throughout the world. It is a symbol of the paternalism of colonialism itself; for Kwajalein Missile Range is a condensed portrait of all the contradictions that patriarchal fatherhood and masculinity entail.

Enloe (1990) champions the perspective that the military's global project is a patriarchal endeavor with the aim of masculinizing the world, which in many respects

resonates with my metaphor of the father who lives a double life as both domestic provider for mother and family (constructing and fortifying “home”) and as defender to protect that home and way of life. His defensive pursuits, however, enforce his values onto the world and require it to submit to his pre-emptive advances. In the microcosm of Kwajalein Atoll, this patriarchal mission results simultaneously in the reinforcement of what Tuan calls the “reassuring homeland” (154), the perpetuation of American “national security,” and the subjugation/silencing of Marshallese subjectivities.

Enloe explains that the military justifies its existence by imagining the world as a very dangerous (or endangered) place in need of protection (12). Ferguson and Turnbull elaborate that the military codes Pacific Islands as feminine, exotic, and available, in line with the patriarchal narrative of virginity (72). Quoting McClintock’s definition, they explain that “to be virgin is to lack both desire and agency, to await passively ‘the thrusting male insemination of history, language, and reason’” (McClintock 30, quoted in Ferguson and Turnbull 72).

Quite literally, the U.S. Army’s project at Kwajalein is a masculine one of “thrusting male insemination,” symbolized most poignantly by firing missiles into the center of the “passively awaiting” lagoon. As I explore in further detail later in this project (see page 79), this “missionization” of the atoll genders space and asserts a particular style of black-and-white rhetoric for understanding Kwajalein.¹⁰ This discourse naturalizes the mission while creating binary oppositions between work and pleasure, America and the Marshall Islands (or Kwajalein and Ebeye, as I have already discussed), security and danger, developed and undeveloped, and so forth.

¹⁰ Enloe (1990) also champions the perspective that the military’s global project is generally a patriarchal endeavor with the aim of masculinizing the world, resonates with the tensions I explore here about missile testing fathers and the

Teresia Teaiwa's theory of "militourism" (1999: 251) expands upon this notion of feminizing/eroticizing military pursuits, thereby naturalizing them into a larger masculine narrative. She explores the Marshallese example of Bikini Atoll as a site in which the heterosexual male gaze rationalized and "domesticate[d] the horror" of U.S. nuclear testing in the 1950s by fetishizing the bikini swimsuit, thus drawing attention away from the holocaust (1996: 154). By the same token, Teaiwa's theory can be used to analyze how the touristic gaze of Kwajalein's residential community operates as a foil for military operations¹¹ and helps to naturalize the mission of ballistic missile testing. As I will explain throughout this project, the pleasures of Club-Med-style island life sugarcoat and decorate the mission, oftentimes completely obscuring it. As a recent online recruitment advertisement for employment with the main civilian contractor on Kwajalein attests, the touristic exoticization prefaces the actual purpose of the job assignment:

...Opportunity at the Reagan Test Site (RTS) located in the exotic and tropical island of Kwajalein in the Republic of Marshall Islands. Reagan Test Site (RTS) complex includes a variety of radar, telemetry, and other instrumentation and communication systems. This location is a beautiful, tropical setting in the central Pacific that offers year-round water sports and many other recreational activities... (Monster.com website, 28 April 2004)

No mention of missile testing or military activity is mentioned anywhere in this advertisement, but "year-round water sports" and the tropical location are emphasized as overtly as possible. There is no mention of Marshallese land disputes, let alone the irreconcilable damages created by the United States' weapons testing programs in the Marshall Islands. The military elides these details from the postcard-perfect "exotic" fantasy, creating what Ferguson and Turnbull call, in the case of Hawai'i, a "paradox of visibility and invisibility" that allows the military to be "hidden in plain sight" (xiii).

¹¹ As I write elsewhere in this thesis, Kwajalein was the primary support base for the Bikini tests, which makes Teaiwa's example all the more relevant.

4. BETWEENNESS

Theorizing Betweenness

My aim in this project, then, is to question these otherwise unquestioned binaries, these contradictory tropes of “home” and “mission,” positioning myself in the middle, in a space of betweenness. I trace a journey through my memories of Kwajalein, from a quiet picnic lunch with my father, through the official discourse of the “mission,” through the lens of my father’s movie camera in the 1970s that witnessed my family’s leisurely play in our tropical paradise, through my father’s battle with cancer and its relationship to radiation in the Marshall Islands, and back to the island twenty years later. By doing so, I hope to destabilize and “un-naturalize” the discourses that have sedimented in places like Kwajalein. I write a history of Kwajalein that attempts to be much more personal and human than the military narratives of the island that split the world into black-and-white rhetoric and obscure its complexities.

Though Kwajalein’s military mission creates an imaginary split and dislocation from its Marshallese surroundings, it is in fact an intersection of multiple subjectivities that interact, what Pratt (1992) would call a “contact zone.” She defines this as:

...the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict... A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees,’ not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (6-7)

It is from this “contact perspective” that I meditate on and ground my thesis in Kwajalein’s betweenness and interconnectedness. This project functions as a “tour” of that betweenness, with an itinerary that criss-crosses multiple narratives—some very personal, and others very banal and official. My aim is to open up different ways of viewing Kwajalein and the power structure that has come to be taken for granted. I hope to show that Kwajalein, and myriad places throughout Oceania with similar histories—such as Guam, Moruroa, Banaba, Hawai’i, Okinawa, and countless others—are important, meaningful, and legitimate places, however exploited they may have been. These sites of betweenness are charged with transformative possibility and much potential, and deconstructing the binaries can in turn empower multiple, marginalized subjectivities and restore agency.

“Writing” Betweenness

Presenting betweenness and restoring agency to Kwajalein is not something that can be achieved by replicating linear or conventional modes of research, narrative or inquiry. My work is deeply influenced and inspired by an expansive genealogy of Pacific Islands studies thinkers, all of whom have had to (re)invent as creatively as possible to transcend the heavily colonized body of knowledge produced by Western academics about the Pacific Islands.

Teresia Teaiwa explains the tendency of Pacific Islands studies scholars to push disciplinary limits in an effort to humanize (and for some, to “decolonize”) the academy:

Pacific academics have had a long three-way love affair with “art” and “activism”. Invoking the university’s ideal role as a critic and conscience of society, prominent Pacific academics have often spoken out on controversial issues and have usually made convincing cases for taking one particular side over another. The choice to make a creative endeavor such as literary production a sort of necessary outrigger to the academic canoe of one’s intellectual persona (or is it an academic outrigger to the literary canoe?) is regularly attributed to indigenous heritages of storytelling, of documenting, and philosophizing. So it seems that for Pacific academics, art and activism allow them to inhabit at least two worlds and inherit at least two traditions—the indigenous and the (post)colonial. Art and/or activism is what Pacific academics

seem to think will keep them human: will save them from the awful dehumanizing, spirit-draining vacuum cleaners that universities are... (T. Teaiwa, 2003)

“Inhabit[ing] at least two worlds” is the essence of betweenness, and it is from this place of multiplicity and creativity that I chose to structure this project as an expression in multiple voices—critical, visual, aural, and poetic. This tour through multiple modalities of representation reproduces in many respects my own research process, one of “touring” between archival and library research, childhood memories, interviews and conversations, filming, editing, journaling, and observation.

I did not adhere to an anthropological methodology that dictated I maintain any distance with my subject matter; for I autobiographically placed myself directly into the frame of my inquiry. For that matter, I have consciously chosen not to privilege a process concerned with statistical data or obtaining large or random “data sample sets;” for this to me would be entirely counterproductive to my approach of multiple subjectivities and multiple contexts. I align my work in this sense with that of Greg Dening,¹² whose interdisciplinary approach to history and anthropology exemplifies the importance of contextualizing and embodying knowledge poetically, based on the serendipity of specific, real lives and the circumstances in which they unfold.

My research involved a series of roughly thirty interviews or conversations with individuals on Kwajalein, Ebeye, Likiep Atoll, Kosrae, Hawai'i, and the U.S. mainland over the course of the past two years, including conversations with members of my own family. In some cases I videotaped these interviews, but some were conducted over e-mail and most were conducted in a “talking-story” style, which allowed for much more spontaneity and

¹² Dening's *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (1995) is a beautiful study of the significance of one man's death in Hawai'i from multiple perspectives—a life and death that would otherwise be glossed over by conventional histories that favor the elite and explain things in sweeping generalizations.

interactivity. I would take notes during or immediately after the conversations, and then type these into summary transcripts with my own observations later.¹³

I am inspired by the example of Katerina Teaiwa, a student of Dening's whose research methodology about phosphate mining and identity in Banaba and Rabi employs montaged film segments, self-reflexive narrative, archival research, and "home" work rather than fieldwork in achieving its goals. Teaiwa's PhD dissertation *Dancing Te Kainga, Visualizing Te Kainga* (2003) manages artfully to employ various and appropriate modes of enunciation that succeed in capturing very human, specific, and compelling stories and images while articulating them with archival and theoretical knowledge. The result is a fascinating study that can be read and appreciated from multiple vantage points: ethnography, art, cinematography, dance, choreography, history, ethnomusicology, gender studies, and so forth. It has the power to reach audiences in island communities just as much as it can interface with academic audiences worldwide.

Indeed, visual language and multimedia interactivity is extremely powerful, and especially in Oceania, where there is such a precedent in interactive "talking-story" (or *bwebwenato* in the Marshall Islands) and visual, performative art. It is also appropriate in an era where more households, even in Oceania, are more likely to have access to video and television—or to a computer—than to a library. Advanced information technology makes it possible to transmit in digital form not only words but also multimedia elements instantaneously over the internet.¹⁴ Having worked for two years in a Tokyo advertising

¹³ Except where relevant to the context, I kept the identities of my interviewees confidential. All interviews were done with full consent of the interviewee; I also obtained permission to identify those whose names I have included. As this project expands into the PhD level, my emphasis will shift more into the stories of others, at which point I plan to include much more extensive documentation of my ongoing interview work, either on film or in written transcript form.

¹⁴ Currently, relatively few Pacific islands, however, actually have internet access, let alone broadband connectivity; and this is particularly true in the case of the Marshall Islands, where most "outer atolls" do not have telephone service or electricity. Nevertheless, even on many "remote" islands, residents even use power

agency, where I realized the power of simple, symbolic images as a persuasive mode of expression, I have been eager to use the skills I gained toward a more productive cause—namely, for the sake of Pacific Island communities whose voices are usually muted by the hegemonic discourse of larger, industrialized countries. I agree with Ramona Fernandez (2001) that it is possible to master the same seductive skills that multinational corporations use for moneymaking or pushing their right-wing agendas, and to use those techniques to educate and empower. As Fernandez writes of Disneyworld:

We all enter the world with desire. We are all manipulated by that desire. We would do well to learn some of Uncle Walt's skills, dubbed "The Magic of Disney" by the advertising executives of his empire, for they represent the power to reach our imaginations. It is still my hope that this faculty can be turned in many directions, not just to the ideological right. (129)

I am likewise fascinated by the power of visual language and the sort of multimedia methodology that Marsha Kinder (2003) proposes for the future of the field of Pacific Islands studies. Kinder, who actually initiated her academic multimedia style by working with graduate students on the "Reframing Roger Rabbit" Project (1991), which involved the deconstruction of a Disney film, describes her collaborative processes as "dreamlike" efforts of creating "database narrative" repositories within the academy that challenge linear "master narratives" in their interactivity (113-114). Based upon her Labyrinth Project, a research initiative she currently directs at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California, Kinder recommends five principles that could serve as guidelines:

...honoring past art forms, emphasizing conceptualization over technical mastery, taking a collaborative approach to interface design, searching for compelling metaphors that are culturally specific, and leveraging the transformative potential of database narratives. (115)

generators to watch videos on television together, gathering in large groups. At the very least, the internet makes it much easier to distribute media quickly and in large volumes. A possible scenario for publishing or archiving a multimedia project like this one in the Pacific would be to provide material in electronic format (either online or on disc) to local cultural or academic centers in the Pacific, where it could then be transferred to DVD, videotape, and printed-out formats, reproduced, and distributed.

Taking cues from the Pacific academics that came before me, I am beginning to experiment with film, creative and critical writing, and interactive media. In this project, some text sections, such as the analysis of the 2001 *Kwajalein Atoll Telephone Directory*, resonate more with a cultural studies modality, adopting a style that has been used in Pacific Islands studies quite readily by Vicente Diaz, Teresia Teaiwa, Margaret Jolly, or Geoffrey White, among others.¹⁵ Other sections are more narrative or poetic, again inspired very much by the work of Pacific academics/writers such as Vilsoni Hereniko, Epeli Hau'ofa, Larry Thomas, Sia Figiel, and Robert Barclay. As I mention above, my approach to my film work has a precedent in the work of Katerina Teaiwa, but it also takes cues from Alexandra Stewart and Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982), Dennis O'Rourke's *Half-Life* (1985) and *Cannibal Tours* (1998), and Adam Horowitz's *Home on the Range* (1991).

Using a mixture of styles to (re)conceptualize Oceania, my experimentation aims to employ the sort of "culturally specific, compelling metaphors" Kinder recommends, while striving to create accessible narratives that can appeal to audiences outside the academy. In this project, for instance, I work not only with the metaphors of coral reefs, particular Marshallese spirits, and specific oral traditions, but also with the metaphors of missiles, suburbia, and battlefields. In doing so, I am suggesting that Kwajalein—and all sites of colonialism—are not as simple as they may seem, that reality is multiply situated and often quite contradictory. Hopefully, through this consciousness, it will be possible to open up space for change, in dialogue with everyone who lives throughout Kwajalein Atoll and other sites throughout Oceania.

¹⁵ See *The Contemporary Pacific* Special Issue "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," 13, 2, 2003 for examples of work by these authors.

ii. Pre-Tour Briefing

We are all at once citizens, travelers, and spies on an infinite rhizome of interlocking situated knowledges.

—Ramona Fernandez (69)

As this project represents a process of traveling through and between multiple layers of meaning and subjectivity, I have chosen to map the very structure of the narrative to the landscape of Kwajalein. This is why I have designed this project as a self-guided tour, playing with the tropes of tours of duty and tourism. As Epeli Hau'ofa writes, engaging with the actual landscape is in part a very Oceanic way of (hi)storytelling:

Our landscapes and seascapes are...cultural as well as physical. We cannot read our histories without knowing how to read our landscapes (and seascapes). When we realize this, we should be able to understand why our languages locate the past as ahead or in front of us. It is right there on our landscapes in front of our very eyes.” (Hau'ofa, 2000: 466)

I invite you, the reader, on this journey, as we tour some of the possible betweennesses of this home called Kwajalein. This is not a conventional tour—it is not meant to be linear but rhizomatic, in the sense that it traverses multiple dimensions. It is possible to take the tour from whatever direction you find most appropriate. Needless to say, though, as this is my remapping process, I have recommended an itinerary that will, if followed, tell a particular story, much like oral traditions that map a landscape mnemonically in the order a chant is recited.

As this tour is rhizomatic in structure, there are no real beginnings or ends, only returns and revisitations; thus, the tour “starts” and “finishes” in the same site, coming around full-circle. It begins, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's (1982) terminology, “intermezzo.” Circumnavigating the island, the thesis flows in and out between poetry and

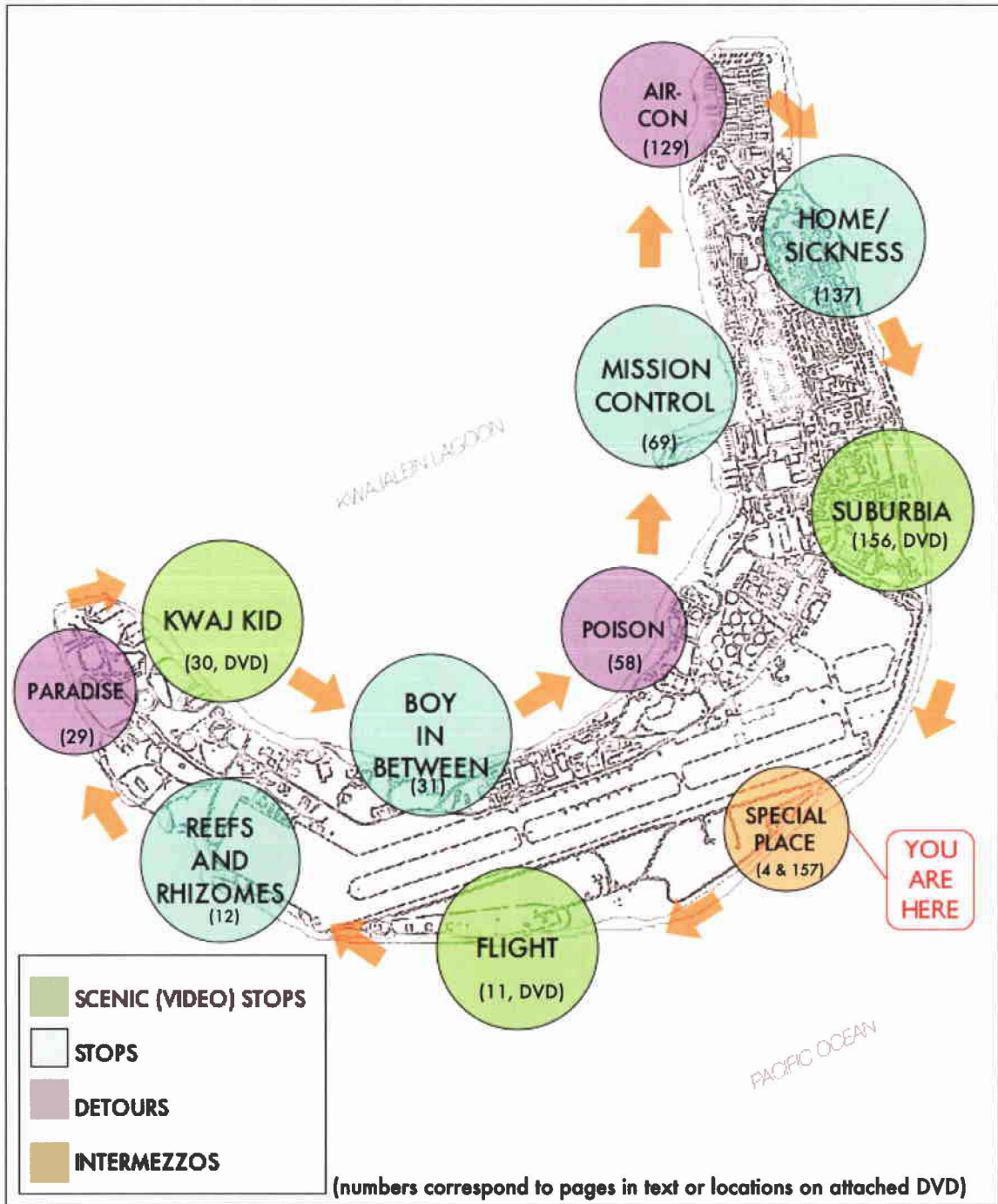
memory narratives, short film pieces, and cultural critique that all comprise different “stops” and “detours” along the way. Our tour stops and meanders through different locations (or “plateaus”) in space and time, employing written text, imagery, and ambient film visualization.

Though this project could easily lend itself to being rendered completely in digital multimedia format, in which the reader could click and navigate through the tour, I am rather limited by the restrictions this university currently places on M.A. thesis submissions. I have therefore opted for a format in which the reader (or “tourist”) is invited to travel through written passages on paper and to view films concurrently when cued on the attached DVD. This implies, however, that readers will physically need to move their bodies and participate in the tour by inserting the DVD and navigating through different “scenic stops,” which is in fact a way of making this project more interactive and in some respects “choreographic” in nature.¹⁶

In addition to the traditional “Table of Contents” (on page x) instead I offer on the following page an Itinerary Map, which should help in visualizing the actual structure of this project and the process through which it was realized. As you take this tour, please do not hesitate to deviate from the path, to make your own observations and ask your own questions; for as you are now also a traveler to Kwajalein, you will inevitably add your own layers of meaning to the island as you participate in the making of the largest coral atoll in the world.

¹⁶ I have included written commentaries to accompany each film segment, which can be found in the appendices at the back of the thesis and can serve as companion pieces to the films. Note, however, that the video segments of this project are an *integral* component of the overall thesis, not supplementary by any means; nor are they meant to be viewed out of context with the rest of the tour, which would likely dilute the significance and symbolism of the sounds and images encountered. These segments were produced over the same two-year period as the writing and research of this thesis and are to be viewed in conjunction with the text. The images are actual footage from different visitations (and “mappings”) in my personal history of Kwajalein—some from childhood films taken by my father, others as recent as an on-site filming project I conducted in January of 2004.

iii. Itinerary



INTERMEZZO: The Special Place

1. THE PICNIC

It is toward the far end of the island, away from all human inhabitation, at the edge of the reef, where the Pacific pounds the barnacle-laden boulders and coconut palm fronds swish and flap violently in the tradewinds. He leads me there, pedaling far ahead on a sapphire blue bike against the strong breezes that sweep off the sea, across the runway, and over to the lagoon side. My bike can barely stay balanced against the wind, nor can I manage to pedal fast enough to keep up. I honk the shiny new horn on my candyapple red bicycle now and then to get him to slow down, but my father keeps riding happily along, as if he were the exhilarated son and I his exhausted dad.

We stop on the road to watch as a gargantuan C-141 cargo plane, a MAC¹⁷ flight loaded with residents, groceries and mail, roars onto the runway beside us, touching down and making screeches as it skids onward toward the airport. When it passes off into the distance, we push our bikes off to the side of the road and into a grove beside the golf course, toward the ocean. I have never seen this place before, even if I have passed it once or twice on more ambitious rides around the island with other second-graders. An old, forgotten Japanese bunker left over from the war sits nearby, made of concrete, overgrown with purple flowers and lush foliage and caked with bird droppings.

We park our bikes in a mess of vines and march into the sanctuary of green. The entrance is demarcated by an opening in a dilapidated stone wall, an aberration which looks

¹⁷ MAC stands for "Military Airlift Command." These large cargo planes were used on Kwajalein not only to transport regular shipments of perishable food and other supplies; their windowless interiors were fashioned with rows of seats (which faced backwards, for some reason) and were used to transport Kwajalein residents back and forth to Honolulu. Nowadays most residents fly on one of the commercial carriers that service the island.

as if it were transplanted from another, not-so-Micronesian place. Entering, we are surrounded by giant palm trees and shrubs—and we stand on a soft carpet of freshly-cut grass, an oasis of lush greenery unlike the dried-out khaki stubble that covers the rest of the island. Facing the ocean is a decrepit aluminum picnic table, its screws oozing rusty orange blood onto the sad, cracked cement below.

Instead of sitting on the bench we spread out our blue and green madras blanket on the grass and flick away the stinging red ants before sitting down. My father puts down the little red Coleman chest filled with peanut butter and grape-jelly sandwiches, a tartan plaid thermos of orange juice, and some chocolate-chip cookies. He looks out at the crashing surf, sniffs salty air deeply into his nostrils, and announces triumphantly, “Son, I think we’ve found our Special Place. Whaddya think?”

After spending the afternoon picnicking, taking pictures, and riding around the island, my father and I arrive home just as the six-o-clock siren goes off. The siren is an air-raid siren, a super-loud blast that reverberates throughout the entire island; yet it is a soothing sound that comes predictably every night at the same time. Supposedly, the siren goes off each evening as a test of the emergency warning system, an alarm to be employed in the event of an enemy attack, an errant missile, a tidal wave, or other disaster. But like most other Kwaj Kids and their families, to us the siren just means the day is over, time to stop playing and get home for dinner, and the reassurance that everything’s OK.

Strange how such a cry of danger is the comforting sound of home...

2. DIGGING THROUGH THE LAYERS

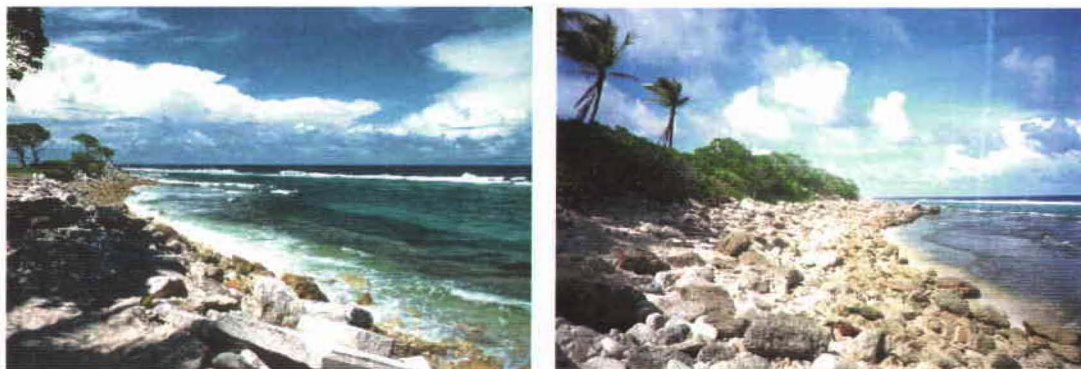


Figure 7. The Special Place, taken by my father in 1977 (left)

Figure 8. The Special Place, taken by me in 2001 (right)¹⁸

It is in the Special Place, this specific place that I begin all memories of Kwajalein, my childhood home. The exact details have changed, but it is generally the same snapshot—my father in his orange mesh “Kwajalein Missile Range” baseball hat, the stink of barnacles and sunburnt plastic fishing floats on the breeze, me with my first camera, a Kodak Instamatic, in my pocket, hurrying home.

Being a “Kwaj-Kid,” as people like me are called, I grew up perpetually elaborating on this story, shaping it, re-imagining it, and adding bits and pieces, like a carefully-threaded necklace of meticulously-chosen seashells. That day picnicking with my father I never knew that I would ever live anywhere else but Kwajalein, that I would in only a few years’ time be experiencing my first brutal winter in New Jersey, or that someday I would long to return to that place that I so innocently took for granted. In the many years since my family moved “back” to the United States, Kwaj would be the fabric of my own wistful narrative, one that

¹⁸ In juxtaposing these two images, I am overlaying my own gaze with that of my father’s, a technique I use elsewhere in this project (in the overlay of slide photographs in the first film, “Flight” and particularly in the second film, “Kwaj Kid”) as a way of dialoguing with my father and exploring the differences in the way we understood our island home.

became more and more nostalgic, at times tragic and melancholy, and more often than not a story of longing for my own promised “paradise” homeland. Through my own romantic homesickness and the twisted awkwardness of adolescence, I created my own myth of an eventual homecoming, an escape from the greyness of suburban New Jersey to pristine azure waters. This story helped me to survive and endure, and I even evoked it in my own defense—when, for instance, I needed an excuse for why I was so different from my peers. After all, I was a Kwaj Kid, and there weren’t too many around like me.

I would learn eventually, however, that mine was not the only story of Kwajalein, and it was not quite “my” island after all. For some a site of refuge and solace, for others a locus of violence and despair, even the grassy spot where my father and I once shared a picnic lunch has been the site of myriad stories—each told by people who possessed the power to make sense out of that place in their own way. Long before my own imagination began to flourish, other narratives had been in place, explaining and justifying the harvest, conquest, battle, inhabitation, exploitation, sanitation, militarization, and isolation of that little horseshoe-shaped stretch of land in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. There were many other stories, like those told by my Marshallese grandmother, my *Bubu*, and others told for countless generations by the Marshallese people of Kwajalein Atoll—which told of the mixed blessings and delicate balance of island life. There were also the stories my own parents told me, and the stories the United States Army told them before that. And there were others told still by various colonists before the Americans ever set foot in Micronesia, like those of the Japanese, who built villages for copra production and military fortification. Most surprising of all, though, I would discover that there were many stories of Kwajalein produced by other Kwaj Kids—many which sounded nothing like my own.

RECEIVED

AS

FOLLOWS

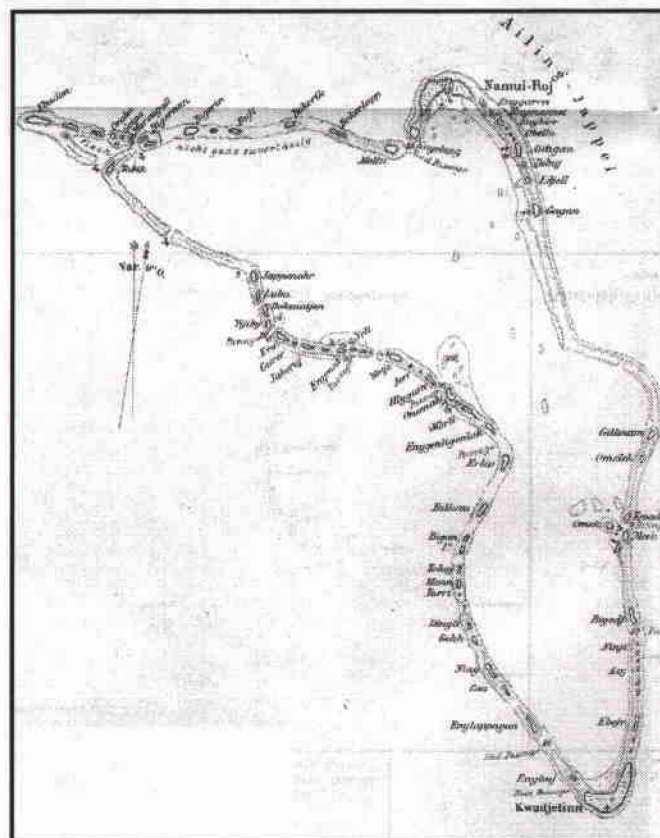


Figure 9. German-Era Map of Kwajalein Atoll (Witt, 1881)

I learned as I grew up that the island I called Kwaj had many other names. Even Marshallese have named the island differently through the ages. Spelled phonetically in Marshallese “Kuwajleen,” the atoll’s indigenous inhabitants, the Ri-Kuwajleen, argue that even this name is derived from a European mispronunciation of *ru-ruk-jan-leen*, which refers to “the place where people gather or harvest plentiful flowers and fruits.”¹⁹ Marshallese elders say that it was also known once as Tarlan, named after the symbolic coral head that sits in the center of the lagoon (Carucci, 1997:49). To various 19th century European explorers, it was logged alternatively as Catherine Island, Dove Island, Kwadelen Island, Lydia Island, Menchikov Island, Michaleff Island, and Ocean Island (Spennemann, 1998).

¹⁹ Conversation with Lawrence Edwards, Majuro, RMI on January 28, 2001, corroborated by Carucci, 1997: 49.

To the German colonists, it was called Kwadjelinn; the Japanese called the atoll Kuezerin, Kuwajarin, Kwozerin, and other variants. The U.S. Navy codenamed the island Porcelain, Carillon, and Rowlock during their invasion in February, 1944 (Bell Laboratories, 1978), later calling it Kwajalein Missile Range—or KMR, and another slew of acronyms which followed. Known in 2004 alternately as RTS (Reagan Test Site), USAKA (U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll), and just “Kwaj,” it is a place with many names—reflecting and revealing in their enunciation the particular time-space location and bias of the person who utters them.²⁰

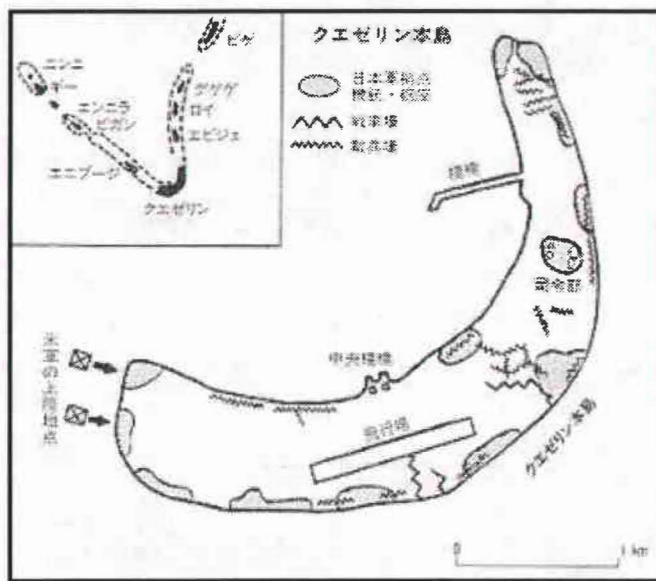


Figure 10. Japanese Military Map of Kwajalein at Time of Attack in 1941²¹

At the very least, Kwajalein and Kuwajleen are quite different places altogether, and this is in fact one of the contradictions that interest me in my remapping process. Its various names coincide with its multiple narratives; for it is a contested island-landscape (and sometimes an island-*escape*) that has meant many things to many people. Even the exact location of the

²⁰ In this project, for the most part I consciously employ the name and spelling “Kwajalein,” or “Kwaj,” because these names reflect the world and background I personally experienced and have known from early childhood. Employing this spelling, and not the “indigenous” spelling “Kuwajleen,” I am aware that in some ways I am privileging a colonial lexicon. However, by using this American spelling I do not intend to de-emphasize the legitimacy of a Marshallese-centered positionality and representation.

²¹ Map: “Ma-sharu Shoto no Sakusen/Kuezerin-to, Ruotto-Namuru-to”

“special place” I chose with my father to be our own sanctuary had also been chosen by Japanese military to be a hiding place during the battle of Kwajalein, and later, the site of bloody fighting. Later, American occupying forces in the 1940s would designate the area to be a labor camp to house the Marshallese workers who were rebuilding the island (Carucci, 1997: 249-250). When the labor camp was relocated to Ebeye, it would become a Boy Scout camp adjacent to what soon was developed as the country club and the golf course.

The Special Place was also not far from the site of the legendary flowering tree spoken of by Marshallese elders that symbolized the abundance of the islet (Carucci, 1997: 50)—and it was a part of Lo-pat, the place where heavenly bodies land, the explanation in Ri-Kuwajleen cosmology for its having become the landing point for planes along the present-day runway (195).

That runway, visible from the air as the island’s most outstanding landmark, was built before the Pacific War by Japanese soldiers, together with the Marshallese and Korean laborers under their direction. Later, under American administration, it would be the site where planes would take off and land as they shuttled hydrogen bombs to Bikini Atoll for their experimental detonation. Two decades later, it would be the place where a jet plane landed in the summer of 1975, carrying an adventurous young American couple—my parents—and their baby son.

STOP 1: Flight

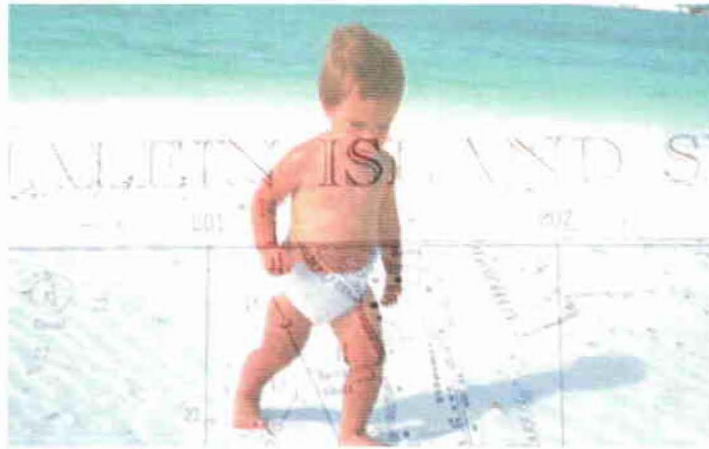


Figure 11. The Author Running on Coral Sands Beach, Kwajalein 1976

Please select the DVD movie file “Flight” and view. For a synopsis and commentary, see Appendix A, page 160.

STOP 2: Reefs and Rhizomes

1. 1,225 PLATEAUS

The rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*... What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious... It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification... (Deleuze and Guattari 12)

Coral, by its very nature, is an in-between substance that connects, bridges, crosses over, constructs, maps and re-maps. Coral is an architect—it assembles reefs and islands out of seemingly irrelevant elements, continuously expanding, metamorphosing its creation and linking to other structures—sunken ships, glass bottles, fallen trees. A coral reef is formed as millions of tiny polyps travel the ocean currents, migrating miles and miles through the ocean to settle eventually and join others. These polyps come from all over, themselves voyagers of great distances, from different places and myriad directions. They gather together, forming solid communities and colonies along the ocean floor, along the sides of submerged volcanoes, gathering in their variety the colors of algae and other microorganisms, taking on unusual and unique shapes, acquiring mass. They build upon the sturdy structures of their ancestors to produce new lives, perpetually expanding in all directions. Coral territorializes and de-territorializes, creating reefs built from the memories of previous colonizers but ultimately new and different, constantly changing, mediating between contradictory realities and possibilities.

The structure of coral reefs, endlessly interlocked with no clear beginning or end, is somewhat—but not entirely—like the rhizome so celebrated by French theorists Deleuze and Guattari in their 1980 work, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Western knowledge, they argue, is structured in such a way that “[t]he tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree,” (5) so that the world is imagined as binaries or subsets, hierarchically breaking down in linear branches from a single root. In reaction to this “overdeterministic” (6) way of conceptualizing reality, they write that the world is made up of multiplicities and heterogeneities, extremely diverse and dispersed but meanwhile entirely interconnected and related. To imagine this world, they envision the rhizome, a structure without beginning or end—only perpetual betweenness and points (or nodes) that “can be connected to any other, and must be” (7). This becomes an alternative means of imagining knowledge and experience that allows space for difference, variation, and relationship between seemingly disparate things. Deleuze and Guattari encapsulate the rhizome as follows:

... its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows... The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots... In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. (21)

It is not for the sake of convenience or novelty that I transport this rhizome to the context of Pacific Islands; for it has profound relevance to the in the way in which coral atolls like Kwajalein can be (re)understood. In fact, the two theorists suggest this possibility when they write, “Does not the East, Oceania in particular, offer something like a rhizomatic model opposed in every respect to the Western model of the tree?” (18)

There is, however, a difference between Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome and the one I am proposing out of coral, and this lies in the idea that "the rhizome is antigenealogy" (21.) Coral is rather genealogical, as I have hinted above: It grows in all directions in vast reef networks, but it does so by building upon the exoskeletons of its ancestors, picking up where others left off, changing direction, and growing onward. Yet this sort of genealogy is not necessarily an oppressive hierarchy but instead a perpetuation that transcends the boundaries of living and dead, a continuum of colonial life-forms. In this sense coral is like a rhizome that remembers, with multiple but incongruous histories, a constantly metamorphosing multiplicity with countless trajectories.²²

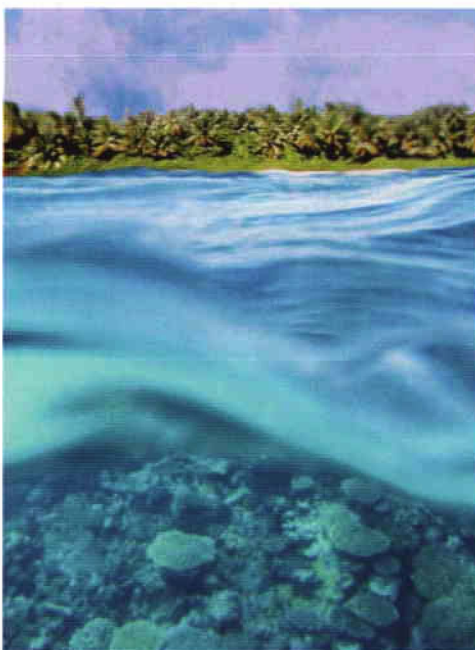


Figure 12. Kwajalein Atoll's Reef, at Bigej (Pikeej) in June 2002²³

In conversation with Deleuze and Guattari, who write that "A rhizome is made of plateaus," (21) I would suggest that atolls are in fact rhizomes comprised of smaller island

²² It is not my intention to state that coral is in fact a rhizome in the scientific sense, as I realize its composition is quite different; however, I make my observations in much the same spirit that Deleuze and Guattari imply that even rodents, wasps, or maps can be rhizomes.

²³ Photograph by the author

plateaus, interwoven along the coral-reef submarine rhizome that weaves them together with other places, other times, other dimensions. Literally the Marshall Islands alone comprises more than *a thousand plateaus*; it consists of exactly 1,225. They are not remote, disconnected stretches of irrelevant sand and plant-life but nodes on networks and nexuses that bring them into contact with absolutely *everything*, much like Epeli Hau'ofa's appraisal of Oceania as an interconnected "sea of islands" (1993).

Admittedly, I am localizing, even fetishizing this paradigm to some extent, but it is worth consideration that Kwajalein is on a coral rhizome—it is a plateau interconnected between and in relation to other plateaus of varying sizes and peculiarities, not only like Ebeye, Bikini, Likiep, Banaba, and the Maldives, but also like Hawai'i, America, Japan, or Australia. Yet plateaus are not only geographies—they are ideas, concepts, dimensions. Coral, the very substance out of which Kwajalein was created, is a rhizome of betweenness and perpetuity. It suggests that places like Kwajalein, with their rhizomatic, multidimensional layers and rhizomatic maps, are important and *real*—that they exist dynamically and meaningfully in relationship to other places, not isolated and dominated or conquered by whomever happens to think they are in power. No plateau or conceptualization is more important than another. Even the grandiose plateaus of missiles and military are but nodes in the network—they are part of Kwajalein's substance inasmuch as they are all in alliance with it; yet they are only destinations in a larger map and itinerary, where reality consists of multiple flows in every direction possible.

Multiple narratives flow through Kwajalein simultaneously, with the island-plateau in between it all—at the center; yet being in the middle does not mean being in the "middle of nowhere":

The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing

to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (Deleuze and Guattari 25)

...Or an ocean—rushing around, thrashing at the reef and the beach, traveling back and forth forever between open sea and inner lagoon and intensifying in violent white froth as it meets Kwajalein?

Then again, the elders of Kwajalein Atoll have their own narrative to explain this. This sort of rhizomatic understanding of Kwajalein's betweenness has been passed down in oral traditions for generation after generation, long before any Europeans explorers or theorists set foot on the islands. Ri-Kuwajleen²⁴ speak of the legends of Tarlan, the great coral head from which the atoll was formed. Located somewhere in the waters of the Mid-Atoll Corridor, a zone that is now highly restricted by the military, Tarlan is to Ri-Kuwajleen the stuff their islands are made of—what anthropologist Laurence Carucci calls “a primordial location of sacred significance.” (1997:62) The coral of Tarlan is symbolic of the coral of all of Kwajalein, a “metonym” (60) for the entire atoll. Carucci quotes Handel Dribo's description, translating from Marshallese:

According to legend, Kuwajleen was hewn out of a coral head named Tarlan...If you go to Tarlan, you will see that one side of the coral head is rich with fish, clams, and other things, while on the other side of the same coral head, it is lifeless, and since Kuwajleen is believed to have originated from the coral rock, Tarlan, people sometimes call Kuwajleen Tarlan. Not all the islands within Kuwajleen Atoll were always well supplied with food and other things. Parts of some islands commonly were low on foods and other supplies, just like the coral head... (60)

Other accounts of the Tarlan legends highlight the way in which each island in the atoll is an exact replica of a part of the central coral head, and how there is a direct correlation of wealth/poverty and other contradictory endowments to each location.

Carucci quotes Israel Lokkon:

²⁴ Literally, “The Kwajalein People”

Kuwajleen is the land of Tarlan. As a result, there is a coral head in about this location on the map, and all of the history of Kuwajleen can be found at the coral head. The shape, customs, behavior, and peculiarities of Kuwajleen and its people can be found there. Each islet can be identified with a particular location on the coral head. The islets that are poor in food resources also can be identified and linked to certain locations on the coral head. (62)

Is this not the coral rhizome in all its intricacy, ambivalence, and multiplicity? Not only does it reveal that all islands are birthed from and articulated via the same coral, but it acknowledges difference, opposition, and variety in exactly the same place, connected, inseparable—without reverting to simple binaries, hierarchies, or equations.

Clearly, the Tarlan narratives work as a Marshallese epistemology that describes Kwajalein in all its multiplicity, forming what Carucci suggests is an atoll-wide sense of identity for the indigenous people of Kwajalein. While this interpretation may be rather essentialist or exaggerative (Carucci's sources appear to be comprised exclusively of elderly people, which raises questions about Tarlan's significance for younger generations), this understanding of the atoll is indeed quite elaborate and rhizomatic, and it serves as a way of explaining not only differences between islands, but also the multiple colonizations and settlements of Kwajalein—with all their curses and blessings. Kwajalein Atoll is thus alternately described as so abundant that countless schools of flying fish jump from the waters and at the same time so poor that it was “the land where you starve.” (164)

Tarlan exists within a complicated nexus of relations to other key physical locations in the atoll: the islets of Tar-woj²⁵, Pikeej (Bigej), and Pikeej-lan, setting up a mediatory balance between these key points (plateaus?) of abundance and scarcity that holds the whole fragile balance of the cosmos together. However, this is also a balance that holds Kwajalein poised in a liminal state of betweenness, a state of ambivalence. The important interrelationship between these four points, Carucci explains, is that “in alternating sequence,

²⁵ Tar-woj features prominently in Robert Barclay's 2002 novel, *Melal*.

they delineate the relationship between sky and earth that brings Kwajalein “to exist in a perpetual state of anxious anticipation” (163). He continues by explaining, “Tarlan is uncertainty...‘the rapid beating of the heart in a state of fear’. It is what it means to be a Kuwajleen person...” and that ultimately, Tarlan “...points to the position of the heavens and the mediation of foreign beings associated with the heavens, in order to mediate the space between divine grace and disaster.” (165)

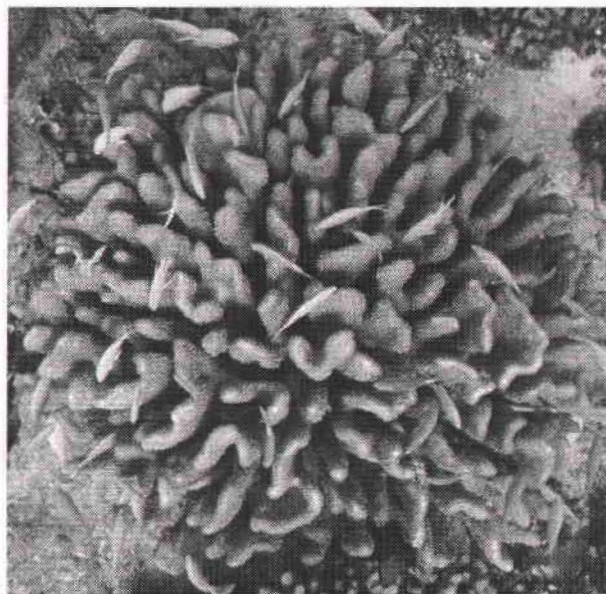


Figure 13. Kwajalein Atoll Coral²⁶

Kwajalein, in this world-view, thus becomes a conduit, an integral link between different contradictory elements. In an ironic twist of fate, present-day Marshallese elders describe the circumstances of Ri-Kuwajleen living throughout the atoll and their American tenants by invoking this paradigm, explaining that it was bound to happen that outsiders would come and reap the rich “fruits” of Kwajalein while others would have to deal simultaneously with profound scarcity. This is not, however, a defeated sense of resignation; for Ri-Kuwajleen elders are also quick to note that Americans are paying for the “fruit” they

²⁶ Photograph by Greg Dvorak, June 2002

pick (however unevenly those payments may be distributed.) While the money from the use of Kwajalein Missile Range is not sufficient in the view of Kwajalein landowners—and not everyone profits or benefits from this money—the lease payments, together with the benefits that come from the Compact of Free Association, are often imagined as “tribute” for the use of the land. Kwajalein thus becomes a literal conduit, the bargaining chip with which local Marshallese can engage directly with the United States Government. It becomes, in fact, one rhizomatic plateau that engages with others, connecting it directly with Washington and Majuro simultaneously.

Carucci’s anthropological survey showcases the Tarlan legends by pointing out how the uncertainty of life in present-day Kwajalein Atoll makes these legends all the more potent and central in the (Ri-)Kuwajleen identity:

All variants of the story of Tarlan point out the variations between rich and poor, plenty and impoverishment. At the same time, however, the stories of Tarlan represent local people’s attempt to order and control an unknowable future, and tilt the balance of earthly existence toward a fortuitous future. It is this that makes people ‘incline toward *lan*,’ ‘heaven.’²⁷ Even though heavenly interactions are dangerous, and make people reliant on the often stormy relationships with spirit beings from heaven and with heavenly sanctified human beings—beings like powerful chiefs and their analogues, the recent colonial rulers from Japan and the United States—the interactions are the only way ordinary humans can seek peace and future prosperity on earth. (163-164)

The problem with this sort of interpretation is that it reproduces a sort of hierarchy and a rhetoric of dependence between Marshallese and colonial powers. Nevertheless, it does suggest ways in which rhizomatic betweenness can situate itself within a hierarchical structure or genealogy, contrary to Deleuze and Guattari’s model. It is important to note here that there is a *direct connection* established with “powerful chiefs,” not a binary opposition or oppressive relationship. It is an empowering relationship that, when realized through the

²⁷ this is the literal meaning of Tar-lan—inclining towards (tar) heaven (lan)

“heavenly interactions” enabled via the Tarlan coral head to other plateaus, has the potential to secure a peaceful and abundant future.

By owning such narratives of betweenness, “ordinary humans” are able to claim their own subjectivity, thus owning the responsibility of creating world peace²⁸ and prosperity in the process. Perhaps the colonial presence or militarism of Kwajalein is a bittersweet reality with its own curses and blessings, but in the Tarlan narratives, it was already predicted and thus *contained* by Marshallese cosmology.²⁹

As a Kwaj Kid of the 1970s, I was also familiar with the word Tarlan, but not quite on the terms just described. Spelled *Tarlang* it was the name of the ferry (now out of service) that shuttled Marshallese workers back and forth between Ebeye and Kwajalein (see Figure 14). A booklet prepared by Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1974 explains that *Tarlang* means “storm proof” in Marshallese. According to one of Carucci’s informants, Kinoj Mawilon, Tarlan has the power to protect the entire atoll from typhoons and other natural dangers (60); thus it is likely that the name of the ship has the same origins.

It is ironic, if not deeply symbolic, that several times a day, the *Tarlang* mediated the space between the incongruous worlds of Ebeye and Kwajalein, and often other islands in the atoll. Rumbling as it did across the lagoon, floating hundreds of feet above missile-testing debris and the sunken fleet of Japanese battleships that littered the reef below, the *Tarlang* was a place where one could look in one direction toward the quiet streets of middle-class America on one island; toward the rows of coconut trees, cemeteries, and churches on another island; or back over toward the urban sprawl of a ghetto, with plywood shacks and

²⁸ Whether this peace would be one consistent with the objectives of Kwajalein’s missile testing project is a question for further study, but as Carucci has suggested elsewhere (1989), many Marshallese narratives accommodate a view of American military supremacy in the world.

²⁹ Further research will be needed to get a better feel for whether these oral traditions had any pre-colonial antecedents or if they have directly emerged from the colonial experience (or to what extent the colonial experience has accentuated earlier stories.)

burning trash, on yet another island. From the decks of the *Tarlang*, it was clear that each island, in all its uniqueness, was a part of the same atoll, the same coral chain, and all of it fit together perfectly.

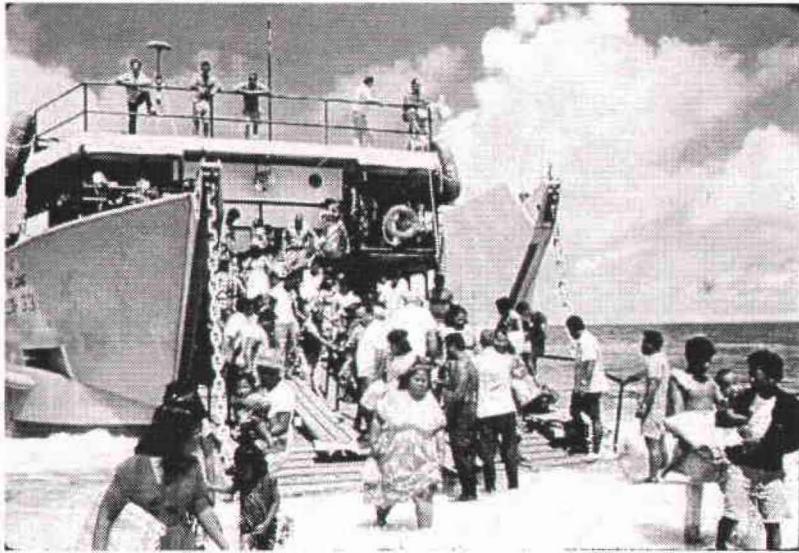


Figure 14. Workers Disembarking the *Tarlang*, 1970s (Trust Territory Archives)

2. LIVING ON THE EDGE

Tarlan mediates between all these mixed blessings, connecting them all together, as if with invisible lines. Many Pacific cultures are highly sensitive to “the spaces in between,” although little has actually been published about this. Samoans refer to the concept of the *va* to describe the important and often fragile, invisible strings that connect people together. According to novelist Sia Figiel, the importance of this in-between space becomes clear in small community relationships, where, in order to preserve social harmony, complete enemies keep their peace by respecting and nurturing the *va* that connects them and binds them to others.³⁰ Albert Wendt describes the term in this way:

Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of *Va* or *Wa* in Maori and Japanese. *Va* is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change. (We knew a little about semiotics before Saussure came along!) A well-known Samoan expression is “*Ia teu le va*”—cherish, nurse, care for the *va*, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of *va*, relationships. (402)

The *va* is perceived almost like an essential but invisible web that connects and interlinks everyone, the fiber that weaves all parts together into the whole. I would imagine that what Wendt describes is not just a “unity” in the conventional sense but more a rhizome of multiple, and very different, relations. It is nonetheless a dynamic of betweenness that unites, though; it is a sort of energy—a field that transcends, mediates and

³⁰ Private conversation with Sia Figiel, 26 April 2003, Honolulu, Hawai'i

equalizes, and it can be stoked and enhanced by the cooperation and goodwill of the community, however varied each of its individual actors may be.³¹

The same description could be made, perhaps, about other island societies throughout the Pacific, where people are conscious of a dynamic like the *va* or *wa* —an invisible connectedness that pulls all people together in a common cause, *regardless of their differences*. In the launching or building of a canoe, fishing, the harvesting of copra, the preparation of food, and the weaving of mats, it is not as important that something is actually being produced than it is that the web has been fortified³² and the community can thus survive. On small islands, the need to share smaller spaces of land and limited resources contributes to the importance of cooperation, community-building, and nurturing interpersonal relationships. This is not to say that small island communities do not also breed gossip and a wide range of complex human dramas, as Epeli Hau'ofa has attested in his satirical books *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983) and *Kisses in the Nederends* (1987), but even so, there is an emphasis on getting along with one another for the benefit of all.

Though the community that actually lives on Kwajalein today is mostly American, an element of the *va* also seems to be at play, although in a highly contradictory way. It would seem that the relative smallness of the island draws people together on a personal level, except that their common cause is that of supporting testing operations of the missile range. Though paradoxically this purpose is an impersonal military mission in defense of the United States, it helps to unite the small neighborhood, as many people participate in local volunteer activities or help each other out on a day-to-day basis.

³¹ As Wendt acknowledges, this manifests in Japan as *wa*, which possesses connotations of connectedness and harmony. The character is used in the word for peace, *heiva*, literally “calm and harmoniously interconnected,” but it is also commonly used to signify Japan itself, particularly in relation to “the West. For this reason, *wa* is problematized in Japan for on one hand producing group unity (or prescribing conformity) but also excluding outsiders. In a positive sense, however, it functions to balance out the complicated relationships of society and promote social peace.

³² Private conversation with Vilsoni Hereniko, March 19, 2003

Yet for the Marshallese elders of Kwajalein Atoll, the liminality symbolized by Tarlan suggests great uncertainty and “anxious anticipation.” Never knowing quite how things will come to pass, the Ri-Kuwajleen live on the fringe of prosperous luck or disastrous catastrophe. Naturally, the Tarlan narratives hint at the uncertainties of life in a place where some individual Kwajalein landowners (*alap*) and chiefs (*iroij*) receive literally millions of dollars in rent from the United States,³³ while other residents barely have clean water to drink from day to day. There is the uncertainty of whether or not U.S. funding will continue, whether or not there will be enough food to eat, and whether or not Kwajalein Missile Range will remain in the atoll. Added to this are other ambiguities—the danger of missiles, the legacy of nuclear testing, the rapidity of ocean level rise.

For the residents of the American community on Kwajalein, life is also full of profound uncertainty. No one but contract employees and their dependents can live on-island, their residency perpetually subject to renewal or cancellation. A change in contractor or base commander, let alone a decision in Washington or Huntsville, can easily result in one’s having to leave the island. It is also a highly regulated environment, with penalties enforced against everything from espionage to not attaching a flashlight on one’s bicycle at night (Figure 15). Serious offenders are evicted from the island by the army— immediately and forcefully, usually “without being able to pack their own bags,” as one resident put it.³⁴ In all respects, there is never any guarantee to how long one can stay. Though this sort of uncertainty pales in comparison to the severity experienced by many Marshallese residents of the atoll, it a way it does resonate as a sort of “shared identity” for Americans as well, who

³³ According to former Senator Ataji Balos (conversation, January 20, 2004), there are *imij* who receive upwards of 1.8 million dollars annually.

³⁴ National Air Traffic Controllers’ Kwajalein Website <<http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/kwa/>> accessed 27 April 2003.

usually include in nearly every conversation a comment about how much longer they think they can stay.

33. OPERATING A BICYCLE AT NIGHT WITHOUT A LIGHT. IT SHALL BE UNLAWFUL FOR ANY PERSON TO OPERATE ANY BICYCLE, TRICYCLE, OR SIMILAR VEHICLE POWERED BY HUMAN ACTIVITY WITHIN KWAJALEIN MISSILE RANGE DURING THE PERIOD FROM A HALF HOUR AFTER SUNSET TO A HALF HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE OR AT ANY OTHER TIME WHEN THERE IS NOT SUFFICIENT LIGHT TO RENDER CLEARLY DISCERNIBLE ANY PERSON OPERATING SUCH BICYCLE, TRICYCLE OR SIMILAR VEHICLE ON OR ADJACENT TO THE ROADWAY AT A DISTANCE OF TWO HUNDRED FEET WHICH IS NOT EQUIPPED WITH AN OPERATING LIGHTING DEVICE EMITTING A CONTINUOUS LIGHT TO THE FRONT OF SUCH VEHICLE. ANY PERSON VIOLATING THIS PROVISION SHALL BE FINED NOT MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$100.00) FOR EACH SUCH VIOLATION.

Figure 15. Bicycle Light Rules (*Kwajalein Telephone Directory 1981*)

Kwajalein is a mediatory place of uncertainty in this sense, like the *bardo* realms described in Tibetan Buddhism, wherein the possibility of liberation is imminent but where every moment is always spent somewhat suspended on the edge. *Bardos* are potentially terrifying spaces between dimensions (especially between life and death) where anything becomes possible. It is in many ways this rhizomatic “intermezzo” is like the moment between breaths or the midpoint of silence between when a wave recedes and when it pounds back onto the beach. Sogyal Rinpoche explains the term in this way:

The word “bardo” is commonly used to denote the intermediate state between death and rebirth, but in reality bardos *are occurring continuously throughout both life and death*, and are junctures when the possibility of liberation, or enlightenment, is heightened.

...I think of a bardo as being like a moment when you step toward the edge of a precipice; such a moment, for example, is when a master introduces a disciple to the essential, original, and innermost nature of his or her mind... (11)

The object of understanding *bardo* states, however, seems to be like that of identifying with Tarlan; for the point is to deal with and accept profound betweenness and

impermanence, without grasping at illusions of stability or bold black-and-whiteness.³⁵ It is also at the core of Deleuze and Guattari's model, as the rhizome becomes a way of handling multiplicity without losing sight of it, without reverting to false binaries or surrendering to schizophrenia. The unconscious, with all its disjunctures, seeks ways of connecting the dots.

Etao (a.k.a. Le-Etao or Letao), the Marshallese trickster, embodies the energy of this liminality and fickle unpredictability as he travels the coral rhizome between dimensions. He is in a sense a master *bardo* navigator, the hero in countless Marshallese oral traditions, the one who inverts power, turns the tables on chiefs, and transforms the destiny of the universe in his wake (see Tobin 21-25; Kelin xi; Carucci, 1989: 92). Tobin compares him to Olofat in Chuuk, Nareau in Kiribati, Maui in Polynesia, and other tricksters in other cultures worldwide (51).

Etao can use his magical powers to help or hinder, and he is notorious for lying, but as one oral tradition (*bwebwenato*) illustrates, he can be of benevolent assistance in times of fear and uncertainty. A story told by a Kwajalein elder³⁶ and relayed by Tobin (222-227) tells of a boy who paddles across the lagoon to find food and happens upon an island of great abundance. After he fills his canoe with breadfruit and ripe coconuts, he is chased by a demon and nearly eaten, his canoe destroyed and harvest devoured. Etao helps to hide the boy when the demon comes to find him, and proceeds to make the demon fall asleep before burning it to death. With Etao's blessing, the boy and his mother claim the demon's former island and live happily ever, surrounded by all the food they can eat.

³⁵ As Sogyal Rinpoche explains, a solid understanding of the impermanent, transitory state of reality (*samsara*) is essential to smoothly transitioning through life and death, avoiding over-attachment or identification with seductive or frightening realms; thus gaining a mastery of the *bardo* teachings is a key to liberation and an acceptance of the betweenness of existence itself (3-27).

³⁶ Jelibor Jam, 1975, "About a Woman Who Had a Boy Child"

This story is a positive example of how the mediation of tricksters and other spirits can help to navigate life's uncertainties and secure bountiful destinies. Barclay, in the tradition of Marshallese storytellers, imagines an Etao who drinks Coca-Cola and wears a Lakers basketball jersey. It is through Etao's intervention, along with a compassionate Noniep spirit on the island of Tar-woj, that *Mela's* protagonists Jebro and Nuke are empowered to gain the respect of their father, return to their ancestral land (in the off-limits Mid-Atoll Corridor) and ease the suffering of the lost souls of Kwajalein Atoll. Etao is able to travel masterfully between the rhizomatic multiplicities of Kwajalein, even riding its ballistic missiles and guiding them to kill the evil demons that haunt Ebeye:

...Etao catches one of the warheads and tucks the glowing oblong thing low by his waist. Its heat is like the sun, but it does not burn him, not Etao who once was buried in an oven. He pivots left, his right knee rising level with his waist, his right hand rising with the warhead as he uses his momentum for a strong one-footed leap, his body angled sideways toward the hole [in a cloud], hand high as he releases the warhead with a quick, downward snap of his wrist, sending it on a high arc toward its goal. He lands back down on the cloud, facing the hole as the red-hot warhead drops cleanly through. "Skyhook!" he shouts. He whoops and claps his hands to applaud his own superior skill. One of the other warheads strikes the island of Illegini, the third splashes into the lagoon after being missed by one of the two missiles launched from Meck.

Etao's warhead continues to fall at increasing speed, headed where he had all along intended it to go, straight on target to ruin the lives of two unsuspecting demons... (292-293)

Carucci (1989) recounts a tale in which, after Etao tricks a chief to his death in order to win his beautiful daughters, he travels to Kiribati, Fiji, and onward to America, where he acts as consultant to the government before getting tricked himself and placed in a bottle:

He is only allowed to secure his release if he agrees to help the government with its experiments on planes, rockets, bombs, and spacecraft. In this way, the sacred force that is involved in empowering the Marshallese universe is co-opted by the United States and becomes the source of the force wielded by the military in the ongoing war that makes the United States, in the worldview of Marshallese, "the strongest [country] on earth." At the same time, that empowerment maintains a Marshallese heritage. (92)

Americans thus become “figurative ancestors of the Marshallese,” themselves a part of the larger rhizome of Kwajalein that links everything together and maintains order in the world. Once again, though Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome is one of “antigenealogy” or “short-term memory,” this example is one which shows how the Tarlan rhizome is genealogical in its own way, but how simultaneously *flexible* it is as well. Memories are transformed in this structure as well—the people of Kwajalein tell evolving, continuing stories that make space for the perpetual change and metamorphosis of their atoll.

So while life is fraught with the *bardo* of “anxious anticipation,” to come from Kwajalein is to be connected with the multiplicities and ironies of the universe, to cross the lines of power like Etau with hopes of peace and abundance in the future. It is to be able to negotiate complexity and contradiction adeptly and skillfully, amidst the intense confluence of meanings—extreme richness and extreme poverty; survival and extinction; the exploits of empires; the scars of warfare; bulldozers and scientific testing; battering by myriad typhoons; clouds of radioactive fallout... The coral of Tarlan reminds us that although Kwajalein may seem like a small place, it is only one of many plateaus of intensity that rise up above the water from a vast nexus of betweenness and interconnectedness that reaches in all directions. Perpetually between, Kwajalein ties people together—it is an intersection, a place where realities coincide.

DETOUR 1: Paradise

&
it
was
just
like
any
other
Kwaj day
Going to
The beach
Playing in the
Sand and
Swimming in
the lagoon
together with
my family.
Another day
In paradise
Sunshine and
Cold drinks
And bicycles
And talking
with friends
and playing
hide-and-seek
on the rocks
before sunset
feeling safe
feeling happy
In Paradise
just another day
another cloudless sunny day
without even a care in the world
knowing everything's okay because
** what could possibly **
go wrong
in paradise?

STOP 3: Kwaj Kid

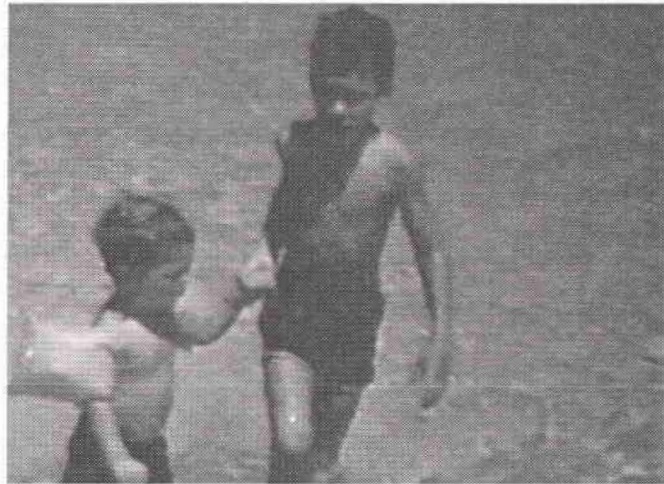


Figure 16. The author and his brother at Emon Beach, Kwajalein 1980

Please select the DVD movie file “Kwaj Kid” and view. For a synopsis and commentary, see Appendix B, page 165.

STOP 4: Boy in-Between

1. SIXTH GRADE³⁷

Kwajalein, A Place To Be

Sixth Grade

December 14, 1984

Not too many people know about Kwajalein, a small island in the Marshall Islands. Of course I do, or I wouldn't be writing this essay. The reason I know about it is because I lived there until I was nine years old. When we moved from our home in New Jersey, our predictions were to stay for a year... then it became another, then another, and finally almost seven years.

What many people think about Kwaj besides, "What's that?" usually sounds like this: "It's too small." Everyone says that. I think, no, it's not, because in my view it was a little paradise to me. Since it is a missile range, everyone imagines a barren battlefield with a runway and rocket smoke in the air. No way, it's a beautiful, one-square-mile island with palm trees and hibiscus flowers everywhere!

◀ ◀ Here I am at age eleven trying to make sense out of myself and my situation: a boy sitting at his desk in New Jersey shivering and wearing a sweater for the second winter ever in his life, up past his bedtime, doing homework at the last minute— dreaming of sunshine while writing his very first essay about the island he once took for granted. It has been nearly two years since he moved away from Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands with his family, and the initial chaos has past. In the rapid and turbulent transition from small island tropics to landlocked autumn, the boy has learned to put it all in perspective. He has learned three lessons: Kwaj is very far away, Kwaj is in the middle of nowhere, and Kwaj is virtually everything New Jersey isn't—sort of. With the exception of the rows and rows of tidy houses, the gated community-feel, the American faces, American food, and *Sesame Street*—Kwaj might as well be in a completely different universe altogether.

Though the eleven-year-old boy proclaims to know the legend of how "we" moved to Kwajalein and stayed for seven years, he actually has no recollection of ever living in New Jersey before. Nor does he relate to the nostalgia of cold autumn nights and spiced apple cider. But his parents do, and he has begun to cultivate these memories and this identity for his own survival and comfort. For the boy, there actually was never anything *but* Kwajalein, except for brief summertime sojourns with relatives backinthestates. Backinthestates: the word used to describe the world where Grandmom lived—an alternative reality reached only through a series of flights on trans-Pacific and trans-continental

³⁷ I adopt the two-column, two-typeface style I use here with gracious acknowledgment to Teresia Teaiwa, who first used this in her 2001 article "L(o)osing the Edge," which combined commentary with referenced narrative to express two voices simultaneously. Here I use it to dialogue with my eleven-year old self in 1984.

I really should start telling about Kwajalein itself. Homes were supplied by the Army and electricity, phone calls, and water were all free. Homes consisted of trailers and houses. Trailers were nice little homes that most people were used to living in. No, they weren't trailers like you see traveling on the highway, they weren't even like our school's trailers. These were big, well-built, silver trailers! One slight problem we had were cockroaches, big brown cockroaches.

The transportation of Kwaj is an interesting topic. Everyone rode on bikes! Everything was so close to our homes, all you had to do was hop on a bike and ride for two minutes at the most!

One of the most fascinating topics of Kwaj is the ocean. It was very beautiful. Our trailer was located right next to it, so the view out of our dining room window was remarkable. The activities we did were swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving and fishing. Let's not forget sailboating and other numerous activities.

Even though I didn't fish much, fishing was interesting to watch. Deep sea

airships. It was a reality in which cars and buses sped along highways and big buildings could be navigated by elevators and escalators and automatic doors—unimaginable devices that did not exist in the island world called Kwaj.

Physically living backinthe states, however, is another matter: In this other dimension, one must pretend to belong and know, and being as "grown-up" as he is, the boy has finally begun to learn the ropes. It is a process of putting things in context: After all, Kwaj is in the past. It was temporary. It was just a decade-long vacation in the tropics. It was never really home, he discovers—the biggest joke of his life, like Dorothy waking up from her crazy dreams of Oz—there's no place like home. And home isn't in the Marshall Islands. Is it? We're Americans, anyway.

All just a dream, just a paradise island, just a moment frozen in time, in between Reality and Reality. There are no palm trees in Reality. No baby coconuts to take to the Marshallese maintenance man at the pool for him to custom spraypaint in bright colors. Yes, just a dream, just a place to be. Sort of.

By sixth grade, my eleven-year-old self begins to edit and embellish the memories of life on Kwajalein to suit his own purposes. He never really fished—he just wants his stateside friends to think he did, because he has learned that this is what one is supposed to do on tropical islands. In fact, he only followed his father once out to sea, probably on the only occasion *he* ever fished.

And as much as he pretends to know them, the Marshallese people in the boy's life were amazingly few and far between. What really happened to them, he wonders. Why was Kwaj for Americans, and Ebeye for Marshallese? They were "sort of forced off the island" and "had radiation" and so on, but that's just what he

fishing was most popular. People would go out on boats and ride for hours. Of all the little sailboats that a few people rode on, there was one big grey fishing boat. Today I like to refer to this boat as the big diesel. First of all, it was very huge. Second of all, it was very nauseating and it rocked rapidly. Some fish we caught were mahi-mahi, a very rich and juicy fish, tuna, flounder, and sunfish.

The people that lived on Kwaj were mostly people from all over the world, usually from the United States. There were also the original inhabitants, the Marshallese. During World War II, they were sort of forced off the island. A few of them even had radiation. After that, they moved out of Kwaj and made their home on an island north of Kwaj called Ebeye.

So all together Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands was and still is a really nice place to live.

The End

was told. He didn't quite know what any of that meant, except that Ebeye, a few islands down the chain, was a hideous and fantastic place—it haunted and excited him all at once. It was the place his family went at Christmas to watch the dances, or where they went for the DeBrum kid's first birthday party, his *kemem*. But it was also the place where children ran freely and laughed, a place of wondrous freedom and camaraderie, where the music blasted and everyone played ballgames in the street.

If the island wasn't *really* home, what, then, was that cozy feeling he remembered of coming back to Kwaj after a long month of summer vacation on the mainland—that snuggly sensation on the way back from the air terminal? Soothed by the silent warmth of the island, by the tradewinds and the thick smell of reef barnacles baking at low tide, he remembered a sleepy calm as comforting as getting tucked into bed at night, and secretly wished that he could just go home.

Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands: Almost the first decade of my life. Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands: Missiles falling from the sky. Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands: Stolen Marshallese land? Rented Marshallese land? Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands: Possessed at different times by the Spanish, German, Japanese, and American Empires. Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands: A Really Nice Place to Live.

The island of Kwajalein was not only a “nice place to live,” it was where I began to learn about life itself. It was also where I first came to know the reef and the ocean, and where the ocean began to flow through me, connecting it all and carrying me through life. Between Kwajalein and Ebeye, between Kwajalein and “The States,” between the open sea and the inner lagoon, and between reality and fantasy, my identity as a Kwaj Kid was formed. This identity, like any identity, cannot be reduced to any singular deterministic value—but if anything, it is one of multiplicity, betweenness, and connectedness. I am a “connect-the-dot” kind of person, and though it took me a long time to realize, Kwajalein is for many reasons a “connect-the-dot” kind of place, a liminal place of uncertainty and possibility, and a place of contradiction.

Growing up as an American on Kwaj *seemed* like growing up in the States—except it wasn’t. It was and is a military base, an anti-hometown: Even today those grown-up children whose parents stay on Kwajalein cannot return to visit for longer than sixty days, with a security clearance, of course. Departing Kwaj at the age of nine with my family as I climbed the stairs of a Continental Micronesia DC-9 one evening in June, 1982—hibiscus lei around my neck; little blue backpack bulging at the sides; Mack, my little sock monkey and trusty travel companion under one arm—I had no idea it would be almost twenty years before I would return.

Ah, the nostalgia: I could write soap operas about this stuff. I pined for Kwajalein almost obsessively, wishing I could go back to the place where I felt most comfortable, not the icy unfamiliarity of New Jersey. I wrote letters pleading to family friends, Marshallese diplomats, retired missionaries, asking their advice for how I could return. Yet in my leaving everything that was familiar, I began to discover unfamiliar parts of myself—new

dimensions, other thoughts, frequencies I had felt before but were hitherto too cryptic to tune in to and comprehend. I discovered disjunctures, inconsistencies between myself and the world around me. Realizing I could not go home, suddenly I began to wonder what Kwaj was and how it had all come to be. Realizing I did not quite fit in my new surroundings in New Jersey, I began to ask whether I really *was* American. Realizing my parents were fine and I was the only one who seemed genuinely miserable, I began to wonder where home really was, anyway.

So I accepted, somewhere along the way, that I wasn't quite sure who I was or where I was from, or why, and I let it be that way, albeit somewhat uncomfortably. And though I somehow settled into a *backtothestates* version of myself, relating easily with my new surroundings, I tried in whatever way possible to go back to Kwaj, to restore it in my mind. With no chance of returning, I was left to wander, to become a nomad of sorts, a nomad without a history or a real home, for how could I explain what I felt—to justify my intense feeling of coming from Kwaj when everyone around me made it quite clear that I wasn't *really* from Kwaj, I was *really* born in Philadelphia, the great-grandson of immigrants who had made their great crossing to the New World from Czechoslovakia, Italy, Russia, England, Romania? What about *my* crossings, and did they matter?

Deleuze and Guattari knit their eyebrows, saying,

History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history. (23)

I know a little about nomadologies—I have tried writing them several times: “Kwajalein wasn't home; it was just a really nice place to live” was the theme. By presenting above an essay I actually wrote in sixth grade I am attempting to expose my own childhood confusion and struggle in reconciling the contradictions of living on Kwaj and then moving

to the United States, my own narrative of multiplicity and betweenness. Not that any of this ever needed reconciling in the first place, but in a world where history prevailed, I wanted to be able to tell my own, and the “State Apparatus” of American complicated things. For my parents, Kwaj had been a liminal dimension, simply because it was a time/space away from “real life” back on the continent. Yet whereas adults and older children who had lived on the island could rationalize their existence as a long and extended vacation, I could not remember having lived anywhere else. I had no choice but to be a nomad, I thought, or else surrender just to being a little New Jersey kid—which made even less sense.

There were other nomadologies—other moments and ways of writing myself in-between Kwaj and the States, and later Japan. It was as if I embodied the “short-term memory” (21) of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome and could belong to each place simultaneously while not belonging to any. Later on I imagined my nomadology from myriad perspectives—from the opposite side of the Pacific, looking across from Nango, Japan, where the largest Japanese fleets of tuna fishing boats head southeast every year to chase *maguro* in Marshallese waters. I told these same stories in Japanese, and in turn I told stories of cold New Jersey winters and Japanese food in broken Marshallese and English to friends in atolls throughout the Marshall Islands. In New Jersey I remember being the strange kid who came from a faraway island called “Kwaja-what?” In Japan I was the weird *gaijin* who looked white but spoke and acted “more Japanese than a Japanese person.” In the Marshall Islands, I was a *ri-belle*. Wherever I went, I was asked again and again, “No, I mean where are you really *from*?” “*WHAT* are you?”

“Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd,” write Deleuze and Guattari (3), and I have also been conscious of being “several,” at least ever since moving away from Kwaj. With only convenient labels to suffice, collecting them as I went along

became a hobby. I complicated my “American-white-maleness,” becoming a Jewish-Slavic-Italian-gay-American-male-etcetera-with-deep-attachments-to-Japan-and-the-Marshalls who spent the majority of his life outside the continental United States.

I was a nomad, a multiplicity perpetually traveling the world, with Kwaj being my long-lost anti-hometown, a place I rekindled as my playground in the waters of Micronesia. It was a place for me without history, a happy place to which I rightfully was meant someday to return. Yet in my mind I also had glimpses of contradictions, mysteries that lay themselves bare in the corners of my consciousness. Alongside my memories of carefree frolicking in the lagoon, I remembered watching missile tests at night and wondering about the Marshallese people who came and went, but never stayed. And what was this thing called radiation, anyway?

2. RELOCATION

Just a Tour, Only a Tour

Like the other American citizens who chose to live on Kwajalein in the 1970s, my parents were fully aware of the temporary nature of their civilian “tour” of duty. My father, who worked as an electric engineer for RCA’s defense division in Moorestown, New Jersey,³⁸ took the opportunity to move to the Marshall Islands and work directly with the radar technology used in the intercontinental ballistic missile tests conducted at Kwajalein Atoll. Two young and adventurous Americans in their twenties, my parents decided to move with their baby son from Southern New Jersey to an unknown frontier in the Pacific.

Like many other engineers on Kwajalein, my father wore collared shirts and shorts with white socks and sneakers everyday when he went to work. On weekday mornings he would ride his blue bicycle down to the air terminal and fly off on a U.S. Army “Caribou” aircraft to the island of Roi-Namur, at the opposite end of Kwajalein Atoll. The KREMS complex of radars at Roi-Namur, including the massive radars ALTAIR and TRADEX, was an essential component of the Kwajalein Missile Range, where different radars strategically positioned on different islands in the atoll aimed their beams skyward in attempts to track the re-entry trajectories of missiles as they rocketed from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California and plunged toward the center of the lagoon.

In the evenings I would sit outside on the yellow fire hydrant alongside Palm Street, waiting for the overwhelming sound of the six o’clock siren that signaled the return of my father as he came home from work, and then we’d both go back home to our trailer where

³⁸ This eventually was bought repeatedly by different companies; in 2004 it is now Lockheed-Martin Missile Corporation, which has taken over the contract for the management, together with Bechtel, of the entire Kwajalein Missile Range as Kwajalein Range Services (KRS.) The company’s motto is, “We never forget who we’re working for.” See <www.lockheedmartin.com>

my mother and baby brother were ready for dinner. It was a simple life, and as far as I remembered it had always been that way.

Yet while I was largely unconscious of Kwajalein as a temporary place, as a child I was part of a community of Americans who were all uncertain of how long they would stay, ambivalent about their surroundings, and somehow perpetually in between one place and another—between fact and fiction. In several respects this meant that life was fresh, new, unconventional, adventurous, and experimental, in much the same way that a traveler greets each new day of his or her sojourn abroad. I was inspired by the curiosity of my father and other engineers like him, who focused their eyes on the stratosphere before and after missile tests, and who contemplated our tropical environment with an insatiable scientific thirst for knowledge. There was also the compassionate and humanistic outgoingness of my mother, who made friends all over the island and on Ebeye, as she engaged in research on Marshallese childbirth techniques, practiced yoga, and sold cosmetics to Kwajalein housewives.

My family lived a full and active life on Kwajalein, involved in both the American community on Kwajalein and to some extent in the Marshallese community on Ebeye. However, like other residents, my parents were never quite sure how long they would stay. Much had to do with the current colonel and his particular style of base leadership; much also depended on their willingness to live far away from their own parents and families. I, however, like many Kwaj Kids who grew up alongside me, assumed that I would always live exactly where I was. Not that I was oblivious to the fact that my classmates would suddenly move away, back to the states, never to be seen again, but I had always felt a deep affinity with my surroundings, and it just seemed inconceivable that I could live anywhere else.

Having to negotiate “home” in such a tentative state must have been a challenge for those who were fully aware of these ramifications. For the more than 3,000 Americans on island, less than twenty of whom were active military personnel, Kwajalein was a home in which one could live with only a superficial pretense of being settled-down. The defense industry and other contractors that hired civilian personnel to work there provided relocation allowances to come on island, store one’s possessions, and eventually relocate back to one’s point of origin. Upon arrival, individuals or families were given “quarters” that ranged from moldy dormitory rooms to lagoon-side trailer homes and townhouses.

These assignments were based on one’s marital status and the number of dependents one was accompanied by, but they were also determined by professional status and “longevity” on island. Unlike bachelors or people on short duty, long-term residents with families ordinarily lived in relatively spacious homes with tacked-on additions, patios, gardens, and in some extreme cases, garden gnomes and plastic flamingoes. Yet these were always attempts to humanize and soften an otherwise impersonal landscape produced and regulated by the military. Living from contract renewal to contract renewal, some residents had lived decades on Kwaj, having made their own space as homelike as they would a private residence in the United States; yet the fact still remained that their only option was to live in assigned housing that was managed entirely by the range facilities office. The majority of residents, nevertheless, stayed only for a few years’ “tour” before they would “PCS”³⁹—describing their comings and goings in military terminology as if they were all enlisted officers with orders.

“Isolated” from the U.S. Mainland by roughly 4,000 miles from Los Angeles and from Hawai’i by 2,100 miles, contract employees and military personnel were poised

³⁹ PCS is a military acronym for “permanent change of station,” a word used on Kwajalein and other U.S. bases to mean “moving away for good (and going home to the U.S.)”

between the reassuring comfort of stateside convenience and the fear and excitement of survival on a deceptively tranquil “desert island.” Americans on Kwajalein lived on the doorstep of Marshallese society and could easily immerse themselves in it by taking a short boat trip or flight to a nearby island, and yet many seemed to prefer the air-conditioned stability of Kwaj, rarely ever venturing beyond its waters. It is important to note, however, that up through the 1980s, access for Americans to other islands in Kwajalein Atoll, including Ebeye, required permission from the commander (and in some, but not all, cases, express invitation from Marshallese hosts), and this likely discouraged many people from making regular visits.⁴⁰

I, however, never felt really isolated from anything. Nor did I feel like I lived on a small island. I have a vivid memory of riding my bicycle one night under the full moon, out to the end of the island, past the high school, out past North Point. I stood there on a beach that had formed in the low tide and let my feet sink down into the cool sand. In front of me the entire atoll stretched out as far as my eyes could see—the headlights of taxis on Ebeye straight ahead in the distance; blue and green buoy lights bobbing out on the lagoon to my left; opal black ocean roaring to my right. I cannot remember a time in my life when I ever felt more connected to the entire universe than at that moment, with the whole cosmos stretched out before me. There was always plenty to explore, places I had never been, and a burning curiosity about who lived on those other islands that I could see on the horizon.

⁴⁰ The policy toward inter-island visitation at the time of this writing is much more relaxed, although authorized entries and exits from Kwajalein are strictly enforced, and passengers who are not authorized to stay on Kwajalein transit onward to the Republic of the Marshall Islands after undergoing immigration procedures.

The “Other” Island

I did have a vague sense of who “those people” were, although my perspective was tainted by the way in which Marshallese were understood as workers on Kwajalein. Day after day, Marshallese laborers—some of whom were the legitimate owners of land on Kwajalein Island, would arrive at Echo Pier, where their I.D. badges would be checked and they would head to their places of work, earning less than minimum wage to do jobs like operating cash registers, housecleaning, delivering groceries, maintenance, working in waste disposal and so forth. To Marshallese workers, the domestic whine of the 6:00 siren that told me it was dinnertime was the blaring final warning for them to catch the boat before it was too late. Anyone who missed it was fined and charged with trespassing.⁴¹

Americans on Kwajalein would rationalize this unsettling reality as a natural byproduct of U.S. military base culture, perhaps with the genuine belief that it was all for the sake of national defense and the good of everyone concerned. Even as a small boy, however, it was quite obvious to me that Marshallese people were not being accorded the same dignity that I enjoyed, nor were they seen for who they really are. Thinly veiled, racist discourses about Micronesians undercut the ideology of our world. They were subtly and not so-subtly portrayed as helpless, dependent, dirty, poor. It was possible, for instance, in the 1970s to publish a description of “The Basic Micronesian Racial Stock” for use in orientation materials for American newcomers to Kwajalein:

At most it can be said that, along with other Micronesians, these people [i.e. the Marshallese] approximate to a broad common pattern of physique...those in the Marshalls to the east appear rather more Caucasoid in type, as are their Polynesian

⁴¹ Currently, LCM ferries shuttle passengers back and forth between Ebeye and Kwajalein free of charge, from early in the morning until close to midnight, seven days a week, improving access considerably. There are also “water taxis,” speedboats run by Ebeye residents that charge a nominal fee for one-way trips. However, authorization to enter Kwajalein is still very limited, and violators who do not have proper credentials to enter or who attempt to smuggle merchandise are punished.

neighbors, with longer narrower heads and faces, and narrower noses and lips...and some individuals look quite Negritoid...

Scientists still know all too little about the physical characteristics of the Micronesian peoples. Scientific measurements have been made by German, Japanese, and other earlier scholars, but usually on a relatively few living individuals and skeletal remains. Fresh studies have been started by American scientists working under the auspices of the Pacific Science Board, dealing with racial characteristics, nutrition, population trends, and other matters. (Bell Laboratories, 1972)

Marginalized and objectified by American discourses of science, development, politics, and racial difference, Marshallese were kept at a safe distance. On Ebeye, they were far enough away not to be threatening, but close enough to come and work for cheap pay. Strangers on their own land, the Marshallese I encountered as a child represented to me a gap in the green-lawn-picket-fence suburban vision the United States Army had painted onto the landscape of my childhood.

Whenever a crime took place on island, such as a burglary, Marshallese were often the first to get the blame. Patrick Lane (1996) and Robert Barclay (2002) have both written about the scapegoating of Marshallese youth in the 1970s and 1980s by Kwajalein teenagers, as in the autobiographical episode in Lane's work where the protagonist tries to avoid getting into trouble for drinking alcohol by fabricating a story about being beaten up by a gang of Marshallese boys (62-69). I remember the rumors my friends would pass around on the playground about how they saw Marshallese men breaking into their houses and stealing things from cabinets and refrigerators. These rumors would come and go, replaced by a generally understood complacency among the Kwaj community that Marshallese were simply not to be trusted—whether the incidents really happened or not.

My own experience, however, stood in sharp contrast to this sense of distrust. I would meet our housekeeper Neitari, who would lovingly hold me on her lap while she rocked my infant brother to sleep (Figure 17). She and her cousin Arina would take breaks

between their housekeeping jobs to eat, and they would sing church hymns and lullabies to us together, weave mats and baskets, and talk about all their grandchildren and nieces and nephews, counting us among all the others. Thus it always seemed strange to me that Neitari took care of our house but could not sleep over in my home (for my parents to have invited her to do so would have violated base regulations), or why I never got to meet any of her grandchildren. Even so, I loved her to pieces: At the age of seven, I announced proudly that I was going to marry her someday.

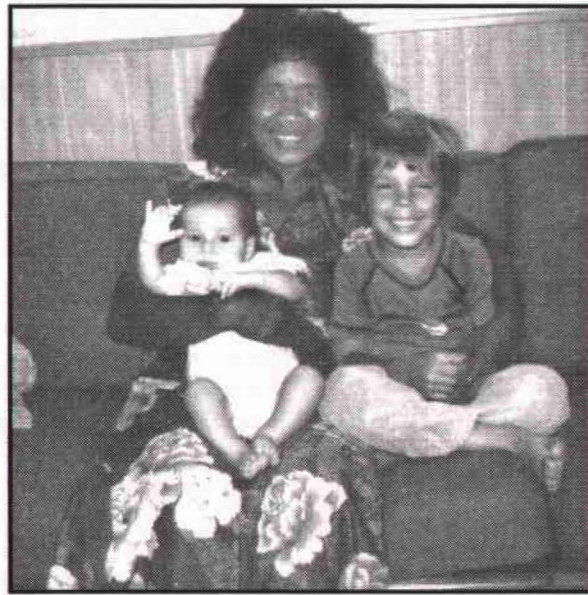


Figure 17. My Younger Brother, Neitari, and Me, 1979

Our little gated piece of America did not protect from me the fact that we lived on leased land in the middle of the Marshall Islands. Into our artificial Disneyland, Marshallese people would come and work jobs to feed sometimes families of sometimes twenty people or more. And while I was not fully aware of all the economic disparities, I could see in Neitari's eyes that she was proudly just doing what she had to do to get by so that she could care for all her relatives. I could see the frustration and humiliation when Neitari would ask

my mother to use her supermarket privileges to buy medicine or food that she could not get on Ebeye (most Marshallese were forbidden to shop in Kwajalein retail stores at the time that we lived there.) Or perhaps my sensitivity was just my projection—or my internalization—of the pity and guilt that the Americans around me expressed so often toward the Marshallese people.

In *Melal*, Barclay portrays an encounter between a group of reckless Kwaj Kid teenagers and two brothers from Ebeye. After nearly drowning the brothers by causing their fishing boat to capsize, the Americans rescue them and take them back home. As they pull away in their fancy speedboat, the Americans reflect upon their impressions of Ebeye:

“That island done give me the creeps,” Kerry said. “You see them dogs? An’ that creepy ol’ man?”
 “Nah,” Travis said. “What’s really creepy is how all those little kids seemed so happy.” (256)

These words encapsulate the ambivalent fascination/bewilderment/repulsion that is encoded in much of the interaction between Kwajalein Americans and the Marshallese communities throughout the atoll. In contrast to the notions of “poverty,” “suffering,” “third world,” “unsanitary,” etc. that tend to permeate the way in which American discourse imagines Ebeye, the happiness of these children suggests that Ebeye residents might experience their own situation quite differently. Their smiles challenge the American boys, making it difficult for them to write off Marshallese as “those poor, poor people.” Despite the expectation, however, that these Marshallese people would actually be frightening or miserable, their sincere smiles of resilient dignity shatter the illusion and make Americans confront their own contradictory and uncomfortable reality. In a typical postcolonial scenario, as the Americans from the manicured world of military base life project their

nightmares onto the Native Otherness of Ebeye, the question ceases to be about Ebeye, but actually about *Kwajalein's* "creepiness" itself.

On the trips we would take to Ebeye I would see the streets overflowing with life, with people of all ages. Music would be playing, songs were being sung, kids were playing hopscotch and basketball at the dock. Whole families would be raking the gravel outside their homes and preparing the night's dinner. With all the kids playing inventive games in the streets (for examples, see Horowitz' documentary film *Home on the Range*, 1991) it seemed more social, and in some ways more fun. In comparison, Kwaj evenings were silent, the streets abandoned. In a strange way I envied the life I saw on Ebeye—especially as a child where it seemed like there were so many more adventures to be had. While the military "installation" tried to keep the Marshall Islands "out there," beyond its safely reinforced boundaries, it never quite succeeded. But my place was on Kwajalein, and the world of the "real" Marshall Islands would remain a mystery for several years to come. Though I had many questions, my parents would just tell me, "It's a military base; that's just the way it is."

Homecoming

Walking with my mother when I was in second grade across the landscaped playing fields on the way to the airport to greet my father as he returned from work one day, I remember being surprised to see hundreds and hundreds of Marshallese people sitting on the grass. Silently, patiently, firmly they sat there, speaking not a word and looking straight ahead. This time my mother nervously explained to me, "Well, it's just very complicated. I think they're angry because we're using their land without paying for it." Seeing this silent protest in front of the Richardson outdoor movie theater where we had all crowded a week before to watch *Star Wars* became indelibly etched in my mind. I began to understand that,

in fact, in the bigger scheme of our own “Star Wars,” these were neither “happy natives” nor hapless victims. They were concerned, thinking people who cared about their lives and home on our missile range—or, rather, *our range on their home*.⁴²

Complicated: Kwajalein was complicated. This was the first time I ever realized that I was living on leased land—borrowed land—even stolen land.

I had witnessed one of the famous “sit-ins,” movements organized by the Kwajalein landowners when the U.S. failed to renew its lease for use of the island in the early eighties but continued to use the island anyway. Soon after, beginning on June 19, 1982, nearly 1,000 Marshallese, motivated by leaders like Congressman Ataji Balos, would launch Operation Homecoming, which involved a major “sail-in” to Kwajalein and other islands throughout the missile-testing complex (Horowitz, 1991, Johnson, 1982). Re-inhabiting their islands, the people of Kwajalein Atoll demanded a resolution to the problem. They camped at different sites throughout the island, and the U.S. Army retaliated by arresting leaders or shutting off water to the areas where they stayed (Johnson, 1982).⁴³

No sooner was the interim lease renegotiated by the Marshall Islands Government, the people were forcefully removed from Kwajalein and other islands throughout the atoll. In following years, the military took unprecedented precautions to keep Marshallese people off Kwajalein, erecting concertina wire fences on the reef (Figure 18), setting up searchlights to scan the lagoon, and increasing the scrutiny of ID badges.

⁴² While it is a catchy title, I think this wording is much more appropriate than Adam Horowitz’ 1991 film title *Home on the Range*.

⁴³ According to Giff Johnson, a U.S. federal court ordered the water turned back on when Marshallese officials complained that children were suffering from typhoid as a result of drinking contaminated water.



Figure 18. Concertina Wire at North Point, Kwajalein, Early 1980s⁴⁴

I never experienced that part, though, for rather ironically, I myself was soon to be “relocated” from Kwajalein. It was exactly around this very time, in fact, exactly three days before the re-occupation of Kwajalein that my parents initiated their own sort of Operation Homecoming to New Jersey on June 16, 1982. In their case, they truly got to go home and stay home. Yet for me, having known nothing but Kwajalein, moving back to the states was *everything but* coming home. For the first time in my life I knew what it felt like to be relocated to a place that was unfamiliar, strange, and unwelcoming.

Like the courageous people who participated in Operation Homecoming, I soon learned that unless I, too, had official permission to be on Kwajalein, I couldn’t go back without becoming a trespasser in what had always felt like my own home.

⁴⁴ Photo from the website of former Kwajalein resident Bob Hampton, <bobhampton.kwajonline.com/kwajphotos.html> accessed 9 March 2004.

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 1982

Hourglass

Jeramon Non Kom

"Jeramon non kom" is the Marshallese way to say, "Goodbye and good luck, friends."

Leaving Kwajalein on Wednesday's MAC flight will be WALT and CHRIS DVORAK with GREG, 8, and Kwaj baby TIMMY, 3½.

The Dvoraks were on Kwajalein six and a half years. Walt worked for RCA at Tradex, and he and his family are being transferred to Marlton, N.J.

The Dvoraks kept busy while on island with many varied activities and projects. Walt received his Masters Degree in Systems Management from U.S.C. and Chris worked on an undergraduate at-home study program leading to a degree through Goddard College in Montpelier, Vt.

Walt and Chris were active members of the Scuba Club and Running Club. Both finished the 1980 Honolulu Marathon. Chris was a member of the Yokwe Yuk Women's Club and for a period served as a buyer for Ponape for the Micronesian Handicraft Shop.

Traveling was part of the Kwajalein experience for the Dvoraks who went to New Zealand, Fiji, Japan and through Micronesia on a tour with Rev. Buck.

Greg participated in some Fun Runs and enjoyed Cub Scouts and creative writing while on island.

For Chris, the contact and friendship with the Micronesian people has been the most enjoyable part of her stay. In goodbye, the Dvoraks say, "Kwaj was a time for growth, friendship and fun, and we are both happy and sad to leave."

* * *

Figure 19. Jeramon Non Kom⁴⁵, leaving Kwajalein in 1982

3. CONNECTING THE DOTS

This was my own detached history, my own sort of legend: Boy's life begins on tropical island; he is happy (or so he remembers), and then he is transplanted unwillingly—taken far from Eden and tossed asunder on the cold, cold flatlands of northeastern America, too far away to return. I made sense out of it, though—and soon I had built a new social life, a safe sort of world for myself that made sense. Yet the life I lived in New Jersey was disconnected to the one in Kwajalein; for unlike the diaspora who spread from homeland to frontier, my homeland was not a real homeland. The island I came from, I learned, was somehow fake and artificial, somehow a non-place.

⁴⁵ Kwajalein Hourglass, June 14, 1982

When I went to look for Kwaj on maps, it was not there. When I scoured the bookshelves of libraries for Kwaj, all I could find was a passage here and there in *National Geographic* or some history book—which dismissed the island as “a military base where American civilians and their families live” or a “key battlefield that helped us win World War II.” History teachers in school would say the same thing and little else.

So I resorted to writing my own histories and imagining my own Kwaj, my own nomadology I suppose, in the sense that it was a story of rootless roots—after all, I really wasn't *from* Kwajalein and I knew that. So I made it up as I went along, began to embellish, in my homesickness, a sense of place and rootedness that may never have actually existed in the first place. I reached out in various directions, pulling together whatever pieces and strands I could find.

Walking along the beach at Long Beach Island, New Jersey one summer I began to draw upon my memory of the reef that night at North Point, the way in which the coral had connected me in a seemingly endless chain to the other islands, to Ebeye and beyond, to places I had never been. I was energized by this image of connectedness, because it flew in the face of everything I had been told about my home. I imagined that chain of islands stretching like roads headed toward different dimensions across that black sea—to the stars, to primordial times, to distant futures, to Asia, to Africa, and even to New Jersey right where I was standing. And slowly it began to make sense: It was all connected and I had never left.

By the age of sixteen, I was trying to study Marshallese and had subscribed to *The Contemporary Pacific* and the *Marshall Islands Journal*. I read about the land disputes between Kwajalein landowners and the U.S. Government, about compensation for the suffering of nuclear test victims. I could see that there was more to Kwaj than I had ever believed possible, and that the United States was far more involved than I had realized. I ordered a

Nuclear Free Pacific T-shirt and wore it in protest, aligning myself with the movement in Palau and across Oceania. I was beginning to connect the dots, and I could see how I fit into the picture.

When I was given the opportunity to travel to Japan in 1989 with my high school teacher and a group of students, I saw it as the next best thing to going back to Kwajalein. Indeed, when I traveled the countryside of Japan that summer, I felt a resonance with something that felt very much like home. It was actually through my early experiences on Kwajalein that I had been attracted to Japan in the first place. I had Japanese friends as a child—the children of Japanese engineers who also supported the Kwajalein project, and I was also in frequent contact with Japanese relics around the island. Although I was too young to scuba dive, there were Japanese battleships sleeping at the bottom of the lagoon—and out at the end of the island there was a small cemetery with a red *torii* gate for all of the fallen Japanese soldiers of the Battle of Kwajalein.⁴⁶

Perhaps it was the postwar architecture, the way in which people related to the ocean, the friendliness; but I decided to study the language and return as an exchange student. As much as I loved my family, Japan became an alternative space in which I felt comfortable and enthusiastic about life. I would go on to live back and forth between the U.S. and Japan—studying for a year of high school and later a year of university in Tokyo. Eventually I would return as a consultant to a local government in the town of Nango, on the southeast coast of Kyushu.

As I grew up and lived my life progressively more and more between Japan and the United States, I began to realize how in some way I was centered and grounded by my rootless (or, actually, rhizomatic) Kwajalein roots. Geographically at the center, Kwajalein

⁴⁶ The remains interned in this cemetery were finally repatriated to Japan in the 1990s.

mediated a space between Southern Japan and Southern New Jersey, creating a triangle over the Pacific. Very often people in Japan would question my identity and wonder why a *gaijin* like me would want to immerse myself so deeply in the middle of the Japanese countryside. Yet somehow it all made sense to me, and I felt home, living by the sea, hearing the rumble of boat engines and knowing that everything was connected in some way. I came to understand that my ability to live in between was something I had been nurturing throughout my entire life, and in Japan, as I helped in the intercultural relations of the local region, I began to see why it came so naturally to me.

My local government work in Nango eventually led to my appointment as part of the G8 Summit 2000 Promotion Council, where I worked with diplomats and media to prepare for and facilitate the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit. As a part of my Summit job, I found myself engaged in a serendipitous turn of events when my office was also designated to facilitate the Japan-South Pacific Forum Leaders' Meeting (PALM 2000). This gave me a completely new perspective on how Japan—and specifically, the part of Japan where I was living—related to the Marshall Islands, connecting me with another long-buried history that I had never quite seen before.

To educate the public about the meetings, I was sent with a team of staff throughout Miyazaki Prefecture to talk to schools and other groups about internationalization, but I took advantage of the opportunity to raise awareness about the Marshall Islands. To explain to schoolchildren how fisheries were a major factor in the contemporary Marshallese-Japanese relationship, I carried with me a larger-than-life Styrofoam tuna head, which I would unveil part of the way through my talk. It was bizarre, if not absurd, but somewhere along the way, I earned the reputation of trying to bridge the Marshall Islands with Japan.

By the time the leaders' meeting came around, the Japanese government appointed me to work as a local liaison for the Marshall Islands delegation.

Trembling with disbelief, I remember entering the hotel suite of Marshall Islands President Kessai Note, where we sat and talked for two hours.

“What’s a Kwaj Kid like you doing here in Southern Japan?” he chuckles.

“Where do I begin?” I respond.

So, in the summer of 2000, in the most surreal fashion I could possibly imagine, I returned to Kwajalein nearly two decades after I had left it. I was escorting seven diplomats and local officials from Japan, and we were being sent on a “friendship mission” to the fishing bases on Majuro. This trip was on behalf of the Japanese Government with orders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to the program that I had initiated with President Note.

It was quite symbolic, as the mayor of Nango, the little town that had become home for me in Japan, was literally stepping off the airplane with me onto the tarmac of my childhood home. He turned to me and asked me quite innocently how long it had been since I had been back, but I was already in tears as I told him it had been *jun-bachi nen*, eighteen years. Finally, I had come full circle—or actually, full triangle. And despite what everyone had warned me, I felt like I had truly come home.

4. THE SNACK BAR

I am sitting in the Snack Bar in January, 2001, eating a cheeseburger, just like I used to do when I was seven, and watching several elementary-school-age boys at a nearby table, mussing each other's hair and talking about superhero action figures as they eat ice cream. They are talking about MTV, Britney Spears, and Phoenix, Arizona. At a table beside them, two elderly Marshallese women are sitting with a group of Marshallese children with backpacks and books, probably just finished with a day of school. The old women jokingly slap the arm of a passing Marshallese cook and call out something to him as he runs away sheepishly. I look at the American children in their little world and think, "Ugh, little brats—where do they think they are?" And then, to my horror I realize they are in fact *Kwaj Kids*, just like I was when I was their age. And I realize that I once shared the same oblivion that they do.

Granted, perhaps they are new arrivals, or perhaps they have lived longer in the U.S. than on Kwajalein, but a light and giddy feeling comes over my body as I realize that it's all about *leaving* Kwajalein that has made me into who I am. It is about taking the journey, flowing between the changing tides and finding my own space. Only after experiencing the uncertainty of "anxious anticipation," going far, far away in body and spirit, and coming back again, coming full-circle and making the refrain, did I realize how good it could feel to exist just in-between. And even then, some Kwaj Kids leave and never look back.

In my mapping and remapping the contours of this journey away from and back to Kwajalein, I came to terms with my own sense of history and betweenness, and I liked it. Conventional histories would dictate that I was an American who followed my parents on a seven-year tour of Kwaj, but my consciousness traced this differently. Nomadologies, in

Deleuze and Guattari's imagination, are independent; they freely crisscross multiple dimensions (23). But even nomads have a love of place: They simply exist between different points of the itinerary, knowing and appreciating the homes they create wherever they go, and connecting each site together. I was not aware of my own nomadology until I began to understand how I *did* have roots in Kwajalein, how I came *from* Kwajalein but also from multiple other places and contexts. Remembering, like the coral reef, the multiple contexts that had made my life on Kwajalein possible, it all began to make sense.

Never quite Pacific Islander *nor* American, I grew up with a paradoxically certain sense of uncertainty about who I was, and this gave me the incredible freedom to create my own sense of home wherever I went. Not unlike Etao, the trickster who flickers in and out of dimensions, making mischief and raining blessings, my sense of liminality allowed me to play at the borders of different ways of being. Through this ability to live in-between, I survived the semi-rural suburban life of New Jersey, immersed myself in Japanese village life, and eventually returned to Kwajalein. I played the roles of artist, schoolteacher, bureaucrat, ad executive, and academic. My personal awareness of my own sense of multiplicity and rhizomatic betweenness came through leaving Kwajalein, through growing older, through feeling the pain of not being able to go back. It came forth as I began to claim my own sense of self and discover aspects I had never had a chance to experience before.

I learned also about histories and contexts that had been oppressed—the histories of the Marshallese people of Kwajalein and other atolls, their own struggles for control of the land and their stories of relocation and resistance; the experiences of Japanese settlers and soldiers who died for their Emperor; the histories of all the Hawaiians and other Islanders who worked to build postwar Kwajalein, the people who dredged the lagoon to enlarge the island; the histories of Americans who were kicked off the island for not playing along with

the rules; the histories of gay men and women who lived in the margins and had their own sense of place. I may never have seen this had I never left Kwaj and longed for it so intensely—and begun to see past my illusions of home, and my illusions of myself. As Martin and Mohanty (1986) write:

“Being home” refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; “not being home” is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even in oneself. (196)

Thus I returned to Kwaj, and I continue to do so, but the sense of home I feel there is different from that which I once knew. Now I have met several of the landowners who actually own Kwajalein. Now I have heard what it looked like to see the atomic tests, even from Kwajalein Atoll. Now I can read the Japanese inscriptions on the sunken ships. Having stayed with Marshallese families on other atolls,⁴⁷ where children taught me words to describe the environment I had always known, I know now to eat the *bob* (pandanus fruit) that grows around the island or spearfish for *jera* (squirrelfish) that hide under the coral as the tide goes out. Now I know about Greenpeace activists chaining themselves to missile launchers on Kwajalein and waving banners in front of radar globes. Now I know there are no good guys and bad guys, but that some manage to make it look that way for their own benefit.

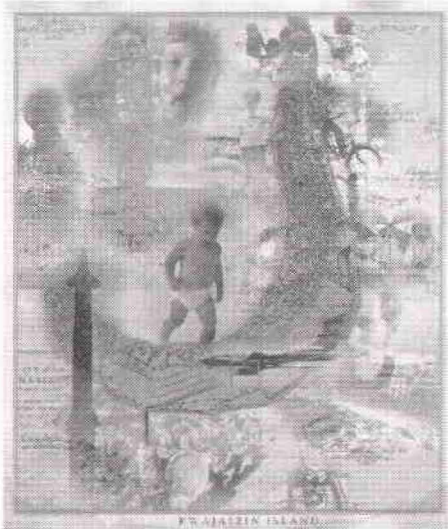
Now I see beyond the suburbia and feel at home in the overlapping of multiple contexts, in the complexity and contradiction that I have come to recognize even within myself. Kwajalein has become an icon of this for me. It has come to represent all the multiplicities, all the oppression, and all the betweenness that I have experienced within.

⁴⁷ Though at the time of this writing I have not spent an extended period of time on Marshallese atolls other than Kwajalein, I have stayed at Arno, Majuro, and Likiep Atolls for a total of three months between 2000 and 2004.



KWAJALEIN ISLAND

Figure 20. Map Insert: The Cartography of Home



This visual map insert, based on my childhood on Kwajalein, is a sort of 'nostalgia map.' I have included it as a reference to the large fold-out maps included in issues of *National Geographic* magazine. Combining archival elements from colonial maps of Oceania in the 1800s (from the University of Hawai'i Map Collection), and logistics maps that appear in the 2001 Kwajalein Telephone Directory, it articulates narratives of State with my own personal sense of place in the 1970s and '80s. I have inscribed onto this "God's eye view" map a series of dreamy, thought-bubble-like images from my childhood on Kwajalein and tried to construct a balanced composition that reflects the homey-ness of my childhood along with the contradictory, steely technology and militarism of Kwajalein's mission.

The center part of the map contains images, photographs taken by my father, that are very central to my childhood experience on Kwajalein. They include images of me walking on the beach as an infant (mapped to the actual beach where I was walking); an image of my late father superimposed over the 'special place' he and I used to visit for picnics; and images of my mother, my going to school, and playing (sticking my tongue out, etc.) On the periphery of the map are images of Marshallese and the Marshall Islands—abstract, distant, dark, unclear, symbolizing the way in which they were detached and marginalized from Kwajalein. The vague placement of these Marshallese faces corresponds in part with the geographic location of Ebeye and other Marshallese-inhabited islands to the north of Kwajalein, which is where I imagined Marshallese to live as a child. My mother mediates this space symbolically, as she was involved in conducting research on Ebeye in Marshallese childbirth methods and had more contact than the rest of my family with that world. There is also an image of myself in the periphery, silhouetted against a brilliant Kwajalein sunset, which I intend to reference the way in which tropical fantasies of paradise decorated the landscape of my childhood and diverted attention outward and away from the "official business" taking place on the island.

I have framed this inside an actual map-like format as a refrain to the "remapping" of this project, while summarizing the overall tour itinerary in visual form. I am also critiquing the arbitrary and highly political nature of mapmaking as a practice.

DETOUR 2: Poison

Death ruled the ocean. The ocean itself was not a dead thing, having never been alive, but the life in it existed only as a byproduct of death. Every living thing in the ocean was fleeing from something trying to kill it and eat it, and every living thing was out to suck the life from something else. You could cut open a living shark and it would eat its own guts. The same thing was true of life on land, even with people—if one thing wanted to live then it had to take the life of another, to kill, swallow, and then crap out as much life as it needed to stay alive. Life was a shark eating its own guts, an eel chomping on its own tail, a twisted game where the goal was not to win, because nothing ever did, but to put off losing for as long as possible and to have a good time doing it.

Robert Barclay, *Melal*, 214

June 25, 1999

Dear Greg,

I think I may have told you about the guided imaging session I had with Jim. He hypnotized me very lightly and we "explored" the tumor on my spine at L5. Prior to the session he had asked me what kind of animal did I envision attacking the tumor and I told him a leopard.

During the week prior to the session I attempted on my own to visualize a leopard attacking the tumor, but with only marginal success - no lasting burned in images. When we started the joint session I could see immediately what was wrong. Leopard was hanging from tree and not particularly hungry. Leopards are solitary hunters who prefer lively healthy prey rather than rotten old tumors. So what kind of animal? I visualized the T cells attacking the tumor.

Jim: "What do they look like"

Me: "Hammerhead sharks?"

Flash image: Large school of grey reef sharks ripping and tearing the tumor apart. It has stuck in there and I can see the sharks swimming and tearing any time I want.

I have to get to my session, ready to start in about an hour.

Love, Dad

I contrast the two passages above, the poetry of Robert Barclay and the poetry of my father in an e-mail to me, as a way of rhizomatically threading seemingly disparate but deeply interrelated contexts across the reef of Kwajalein and my life—connecting these plateaus through life and death, through cells and bodies, through sharks—life-giving and death-

giving sharks. After a heroic fight that ensued one summer in the suburban meadowlands of Medford, New Jersey but which involved grey reef sharks, my father died at home early in the afternoon on September 10, 1999 of advanced malignant metastatic melanoma cancer. He was 54 years old and had only been diagnosed about six months earlier. It was on the day he died that I knew it was time to return to Kwajalein.

A few weeks earlier, my father and I were having a conversation. He lay there with his eyes closed, holding my hand, tranquilized and dreamy from the morphine that coursed through his veins. I wasn't quite sure if he was really understanding what I was saying, and he seemed to be dozing off. In fact I felt tranquilized myself by the calm of that moment—not particularly sad or happy at all, just somehow content to be where we both were.

—Dad?

—Yeah.

—Remember that place on Kwaj we used to go to have picnics together?

(silence)

—Yeah.

—You do?

—The place with all the trees, right? The Special Place?

—Yeah, Dad.

—Maybe we can go there again.

—OK, Son. Let's do that.

Back in Kwajalein Atoll, a year and a half later:

It is “Liberation Day” on Ebeye—February 7, the anniversary of the day American forces swept across Kwajalein Atoll and “Liberated” it from the Japanese—granting the Marshallese people “Freedom” as they bulldozed over these small coral islands with their tanks and guns during the Second World War. We used to celebrate it when I was a kid on Kwajalein with the Kwaj Karnival, a fair with rides and games and festivities that lasted for several days. Now it is remembered with simple parades and parties on Kwajalein and Ebeye.

I walk from the dock toward a massive crowd of people of all ages, wearing colorful green school uniforms and purple choir gowns. The *iroij*—high ranking chiefs—of Kwajalein Atoll and the Marshallese minister of foreign affairs are clapping as the U.S. ambassador plays musical chairs with a bunch of schoolchildren to a remixed version of “The Farmer in the Dell” dubbed in with the Marshallese children’s song “Ta Kijom In Jota.”⁴⁸ The hot, gritty air of the Ebeye streets sticks to my lips and makes my eyes itch.

I have been told to look for her house, my former housekeeper Neitari’s house, back behind a small general store and down a narrow cinderblock alley. Along the way, I ask a teenage girl, who nods her eyebrows affirmatively and guides me back, under low-hanging clotheslines and telephone wires, to a small house made of plywood with two sawed-out holes for windows. Neatly-cut lace curtains dangle motionless in the breezeless heat. My heart races with anticipation, as I have not told Neitari of my visit ahead of time. I have not seen her since my childhood on Kwajalein, and I know that she is quite old now. Will she recognize me?

⁴⁸ This children’s song features at the end of the “Kwaj Kid” video stop in this tour.

When we arrive, however, a familiar face peers out from the front door, smiling a toothless grin. She has white hair now, and her face is wizened but radiant. As soon as I explain who I am, Neitari's eyes open wide, she giggles, and gets up to embrace me, immediately remembering me. She pats me on the back again and again with arthritic fingers, "My grandson, come inside!" I respond in mispronounced Marshallese, "My *bubu!*"—my grandmother.

Neitari offers me her only chair, even though she and three of her small grandchildren are sitting on the floor. I politely decline and sit beside her, where she has been weaving an elaborate necklace out of cowries and palm sennit. As if she had been planning to give it to me all along, she ties the final loop in the necklace, leans toward me, and places it around my neck. This reminds me of the many gifts she would give my brother and me when we were children—little pandanus balls, baskets, boxes, hats, and fans, and I am instantly reconnected with a different time, before I went back to the states.

Completely unable to repay her generosity as usual, I open my bag to reveal the small stash of canned corned beef, ramen, lollipops, and Tylenol that I have carried from Kwajalein. I feel embarrassed that my gifts are 100% purely cheap global commodity items. "Ohhh," she clucks, disapproving of my giving her any gift at all, "you don't need to do this. Thank you."

I hold Neitari's hand and help her to walk out into the sunshine and find a seat along the main road, where the parade is fast approaching. She is obviously suffering from arthritis, and it is hard for her to take even more than three steps at a time. Her grandson Flag tags along behind us, TootsiePop in his mouth.

We sit down on a wooden crate along the road and watch the parade. Father Hacker's Assumption Band comes marching by, just as it did in the 1970s on Kwajalein. This is followed by several floats that enact different periods in Kwajalein's history. The first is a large truck filled with Marshallese boys dressed like Japanese soldiers in trenches, holding toy guns and swords, wearing *hachimaki* headbands with the Japanese imperial flag emblazoned upon them. They peer out from between a grove of cut palm fronds that surround the float to make it look like the pre-war jungles of the atoll. In *kanji*, the characters for "The Great Japanese Empire" are painted in black on a long white piece of fabric, raised high on bamboo poles. The float is entitled "Kwajalein Atoll Before."



Figure 21. Television Coverage of "Liberation Day," Ebeye 2001⁴⁹

The next float carries an enormous *papier-mâché* missile, emblazoned in block letters, "U.S. Army." Several Marshallese boys and girls, dressed like engineers in white labcoats, holding clipboards and wearing fake black-rimmed glasses, stand seriously behind the missile

⁴⁹ *Window on the Atoll*, February 2001

in the “Kwajalein Missile Range Control Room,” tapping at computers and pretending to scrutinize data. The float is labeled, “Kwajalein Atoll Today.”

Cleverly and artfully, the present and past of Kwajalein Atoll are paraded through the streets by the Ebeye community, much to the amusement of the massive crowd that has gathered from various islands, including the American community. To witness the action, people of all ages line the road, sit on the rooftops, lean out from windows, stand on top of old trucks and busses, and ride each other’s shoulders.

Neitari turns to me and asks how my parents are, my mother and father—motherandfather, all one word slurred together as a natural set—inseparable.

“My father died last year,” I explain.

“Ohhhhh, no,” she says.

“Yeah, he died of cancer.”

“Ohhhh.” She just looks at the ground for awhile.

“*Enana, enana*, no good, no good, so young... Ohhh, so sorry,” she mutters.

“But it was very fast, he didn’t suffer so much.”

“Why, why cancer?”

“I don’t know. He had cancer all through his body. Maybe just his genes, maybe radiation of some kind, from the sun, or from his work. We don’t really know.”

“No... you mean Poison, like from radars and missiles and bombs?”

“Maybe, yes, probably radiation, Poison, probably mostly from the sun.”

“I hate Poison, so *enana! Ennnana*, so bad!” She enunciates. “Too much Poison was brought to Marshall by America, on Bikini, on Rongelap, on Enewetak. Now Marshall and America are friends. You know? But plenty of Marshallese people get Poison—you look: her and her and that guy and those boys there, and that one and that lady and that one over there—they all had problem and death from Poison, like your Papa.” Neitari points in all directions aggressively, calm anger welling up in her eyes.

“Why do Americans make poison?” She asks, obviously not expecting an answer.

We sit for nearly five minutes, feeling our smallness amidst the ocean of colonialism, militarism, racism, nuclearization, and exploitation.

“Marshallese make Medicine, not Poison,” she says.

“You could have made medicine,” she points to a lone, decrepit palm tree above us, one of the few dried-up trees left standing on Ebeye’s cluttered surface. “Marshallese medicine is good, you know.”

“So sor-ry,” she repeats and stares quietly with glazed eyes at the Americans from Kwajalein High School Band, who march proudly by, playing the Star-Spangled Banner as they pass us in the salty dust.

The noisy silence is overwhelming.

Too much medicine is poison but just enough saves lives; too much poison kills, but just a drop works miracles. Like the sharks—killing and giving life all at once. Just enough radiation eradicates tumors; too much creates them, and any more than that exterminates. Cancer caused by the nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands is so prevalent that some people know by heart exactly how much compensation you can get from the Nuclear Claims Tribunal (if you're one of the lucky few who get compensated). The compensation table for Marshallese affected by nuclear testing reads like a shopping list:

Thyroid cancer, \$75,000

Esophagus cancer, \$125,000

Stomach cancer, \$125,000

Lymphomas, \$100,000

Breast cancer (requiring mastectomy) \$100,000

Breast cancer (no mastectomy) \$75,000

and so on.⁵⁰

Analyzing recently declassified documents, Barker (2004) explores the perpetual impact inflicted by radiation from the nuclear testing the United States conducted in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958, demonstrating that the government was aware of the exposure the tests would inflict on the human population and deliberately used Marshallese for research purposes (see also Niedenthal, 2001, and O'Rourke, 1985). She also

⁵⁰ §23(13) of the Marshall Islands Nuclear Claims Tribunal Act 1987, amended October 1996. I am indebted to Dr. Julie Walsh-Kroeker for bringing to my attention this table of compensation awards brought forth from the Nuclear Claims Tribunal in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. This table is also quoted by Barker (165).

points out that the direct impact of the tests was far more widespread than the U.S. first admitted, stretching beyond the most impacted areas of Bikini, Enewetak, and Rongelap:

The declassified documents demonstrate, without question, that the level of damages and injury from radiation was much more widespread than previously understood. The RMI⁵¹ government has conclusive documentary evidence that atolls previously considered “unexposed” to radiation, atolls such as Ailuk, Likiep, Wotho, Mejit, and Kwajalein, received dangerous levels of radiation. Furthermore, the documents show that the U.S. government was aware of the high exposures to these atolls during the testing program but did not provide the evacuation, clean-up, and medical care warranted by the exposure. In the case of Ailuk atoll, a recently declassified U.S. government document states that the U.S. government made a purposeful decision not to evacuate the people of Ailuk although they knew that the atoll received substantial fallout from Bravo. (Barker 39)

American researchers who examined the environment of Rongelap for three years between the Bravo test and 1957 (during which time the Rongelap community lived in Majuro Atoll) concluded that there were very high levels of cesium and strontium in the plant life, far above acceptable levels for human consumption (Barker 45). When the community returned to live on Rongelap, the people suffered severe health problems as a result of eating contaminated food, but the United States government insisted that Rongelap was a safe place to live (Barker 46).

It is this sort of outrageous atrocity that inspires Teresia Teaiwa’s poem, “Bad Coconuts,” which she sings together with author Sia Figiel on their album *Terenesia* (2000). Even coconuts, sustainers of life throughout this island Pacific, can be poisonous: Though over fifty years have passed since the Bravo test, the eating a daily small amount of locally-grown coconut, breadfruit, or other otherwise nourishing plants can be fatal:

An apple a day/ Keeps the doctor away.../ But a coconut a day / Will kill you...

(Teaiwa and Figiel, 2000)

⁵¹ Republic of the Marshall Islands

The intense sunshine of the Marshall Islands, meanwhile, is both a healing dose of vitamin D and a serious health hazard—a suntan with which to mark the Western body with the tropical lifestyle of Kwajalein, and ultraviolet radiation to penetrate and mutate skin cells, growing cancerous moles and killing fathers at the age of 54. And my own skin: My body carries that equatorial sunshine, mapping with melanin my every day spent outdoors too long.

Cancer, however, is fought with that very same poison called radiation. Aim a beam at a malignant growth and it might just go away. In the era of McCarthyism in the U.S., soon-to-be Vice-President Hubert Humphrey called the Communist Party a "political cancer in our society." Diplomat Adlai Stevenson went even further to say that it was worse than "cancer, tuberculosis, and heart disease combined" (Paterson 106.) And so they aimed their medicine at the cancer and hoped it would go away. "For the Good of Mankind," it was said of the military "Medicine" used on Marshallese bodies and islands to fight the distant and irrelevant communist "cancer" of the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Niedenthal, 2001).

Derrida muses about this when he writes about the dual nature of the *pharmakon* in Platonic discourse as both poison and remedy:

This *pharmakon*, this "medicine," this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence" (Derrida 70)

His passionate argument is that words and concepts have multiple meanings; we often suppress one or another to our advantage, and too often because we refuse to accept the contradictory nature of language and meaning-making.

How many meanings and maps have been suppressed, oppressed, repressed, in Kwajalein?

I look over at Neitari, trying to imagine all that she has seen in her 74 years of life, moving between islands, running from the fighting of World War II, seeing the sky turn red with atomic explosions, and watching friends and relatives get sick and die around her. And through the death of my father, I can see how these cancers and diseases and sufferings connect us. Poison and medicine, it's all the same.

STOP 5: Mission Control

1. KWAJALEIN: A USER'S MANUAL

On the Formica counter in the lagoon-side trailer-home, next to the clunky black telephone, sits the telephone directory for U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll/Kwajalein Missile Range. On its cover and throughout its pages are ballpoint pen drawings of smiley faces and tic-tac-toe, the names of teenagers on island who can babysit, trailersit, or water the plants—a pastiche of carefree thoughts doodled by a whole family while chatting on that phone in the air-conditioned kitchen. As a child on Kwajalein, I watched the elaborate scribbles of my mother as she talked, cradling the receiver between her cheek and shoulder—practicing her signature, jotting down work shifts, important birthdays, food to buy: pork chop, ham, cabbage. My father's slanted, left-handed engineer handwriting also found its way onto those pages, noting haircut appointments and the time of day his Caribou propeller-plane flight would leave to deliver him to his radar console room on Roi-Namur. And my graffiti was there, too—a caricature of a man in a top hat with stick legs on the back cover in sprawling red magic-marker ink.

“Recommended Reading”

This stop on the tour is a contemplation—a remapping—of how the *2001 U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll/Kwajalein Missile Range Telephone Directory* produces an ambivalent sense of home for the community that lives on the island of Kwajalein, and how it conceives of their “Mission.” My objective is to understand how the military imagines—and how it wants its readers to imagine—the island, how it maps its own meanings onto the landscape. My reading of the directory is a means of “remapping” the military imaginary of Kwajalein so

that it can be understood and contextualized alongside other ways of conceiving the same place. Using semiotic visual discourse analysis in combination with psychoanalysis, feminist inquiry, and other methods, I explore what might otherwise seem like a banal text in order to distill some of the larger, unconscious themes at play throughout its pages.

I write, however, not as a total outsider but as someone whose family was once listed in this directory in the 1970s and 1980s, who looks through current personnel listings excitedly to see which friends are still on island and which have gone away. Times have changed since my own family lived on Kwajalein—the missile test site has had its name changed to “U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll” (USAKA) or “Reagan Test Site” (RTS); the Marshall Islands has become an independent republic in Free Association with the United States. The Cold War, so crucial to the missile-testing project during my childhood, has ended.

Mission “communications” is essential to mission itself, thus the telephone system and its directory takes utmost importance. Bell Laboratories, a contractor that established a base to facilitate the development of ballistic missile test systems in the 1960s, described this significance in a corporate brochure:

“The fundamental contribution of communications research and development to national security is also the most obvious: it is the technology itself, from which the whole art and system of communications are fashioned. This is a basic resource in times of peace and war. Bell Laboratories’ contribution to the country’s strength, therefore, may be judged essentially according to one’s view of what it has done to establish and advance communications and electronics technology. Perhaps it should be repeated also that communications have been indispensable to military competence from time immemorial, and leadership in the art carries with it great responsibility.” (Mabon, 141)

Throughout the years, the telephone directory has not changed very much. It has always been more than a phonebook: It has been a household essential. The book serves as a comprehensive way of weaving the tightly-knit community even more tightly

together—listing personnel and their families on the island along with offices and organizations. It also includes an exhaustive collection of important rules and regulations, military protocol applicable to all military installations, helpful hints, and general information. As the commander notes in his welcome message at the beginning of the publication, the telephone directory is “recommended reading for newcomers to our island community.” From the outset, this is no mere phonebook with listings of phone numbers; it is a primer for how to live on island, endorsed by the authority of the U.S. Army. It is a user’s manual to Kwajalein, rather more like directions than a directory.

The directory is published on an annual basis, and it has taken on various appearances over the decades, evolving from being a photocopied, staple-bound packet to a professionally printed publication that includes decorative photography and tabbed section-dividers. Though the format has been largely the same for the past 3-4 editions, I have chosen to focus in on the 2001 edition, as it represents a time when I returned to Kwajalein for the first time since my childhood. This particular volume is a 132-page booklet printed professionally in black and white and interspersed with full-color printing on its five glossy section separators and front/back cover. The outside of the book and the intervening partitions are designed to look somewhat like an album of vacation photos, as its sturdy pages feature color photographs that appear to be fixed to the page by graphic renditions of black, scrapbook-like photo hinges. In contrast, the thick sections of black-and-white-print that sit between the glossy color separators are filled with banal officialdom, telephone listings, rules, charts, and maps. This “monochrome” world, however, is broken up by a hodgepodge of warnings and announcements, highlighted by neatly organized clipart imagery and illustrations. The text is almost exclusively in English, with the exception of some unusual instances where the Marshallese language appears.

The booklet is authored by a team of technical writers who comprise what is known as the Documentation Control Office, a group of people who—not surprisingly—specialize in editing manuals for mission-related technology. The discourse that appears in the phonebook, however, clearly is not produced from a single source. It is an ongoing project, with elements borrowed from previous directories, an encapsulation of a set of beliefs and practices that were put in motion by the military long before Kwajalein Missile Range came into existence. Many of the authorities in charge of Kwajalein protocol are not even present on-island, as many aspects of the base are remote-controlled by strategists at the U.S. Army Strategic Defense Command and USAKA Directorate in Huntsville, Alabama (Wilkes 41). Much of the booklet—its layout and imagery—is likely produced without much editorial oversight. Surely, correct directory listings are quite important, but the details of which photographs adorn the cover and the pages, or what clip art is used, is probably not deliberated to the extent that it would be were this a publication in mass-circulation produced by media-savvy editors, let alone a major telephone company. There is a high probability that most images and layout decisions were made out of necessity, to fill space, or for simple aesthetic reasons.

Yet certain things “look nice” for a reason. Most tourists frame their photographs of Waikiki so that hotels and consumerist schlock are cropped out of the image and only Diamondhead, surfers, and breaking waves remain in the frame—so that it “looks nice.” *National Geographic* selects sensational photos of partly-clad indigenous people to support its project of surveying foreign and “exotic” people and places—because that “looks nice.” Whether this process is conscious or unconscious, the process of image-making and layout is a very political practice that reveals much about the perspectives and agendas of its authors.

The telephone directory is an icon of residential life on Kwajalein and a valuable text—a virtual encyclopedia—by which to understand its contours. But reading between the lines of this prosaic material is not something that most people do; for telephone directories are generally considered “the truth,” not worthy of interpretation. They are reference materials imbued with officialdom, and therefore they are rarely questioned. Writing about such “encyclopedic” texts and their semiotic structures, Ramona Fernandez writes:

The ironic goal of the encyclopedia is to provide a semiotic map by means of the construction of the list, but a list cannot supply semiosis. A list invites and sometimes demands an interpretative act of semiosis by an individual... The text can only supply a surface; the individual supplies depth by calling on deep semantic competence that reflects the individual’s knowledge of context. (54)

Interpreting the listings of Kwajalein’s telephone directory requires a context. Kwajalein’s directory provides the terminology and the deeper core issues of USAKA and its Mission; yet these concepts are inconceivable and inaccessible without being able to situate the directory within a “bigger picture.” The directory, for me, is no longer “the phonebook” that my family relied upon; it is a text that has specific relevance to a specific community within Kwajalein Atoll at the beginning of a new millennium. It is a description of a world imagined by U.S. policy and realized on USAKA, and as such, the booklet is labeled “government property.” Its audience is “individuals located on or adjacent to the installation”—the civilians and handful of military personnel, many of whom live together with (or away from) their families to support the testing Mission.⁵² The context upon which the community is based is American small-town life—Hometown, USA—mixed with

⁵² In general, telephone directories—especially outdated ones—are a part of the public domain. In the case of Kwajalein, where the directory contains personnel listings and some minimal logistical information, the use of this directory is limited to people who receive telephone service on island or other official users. My own access to the directory has been not only through library holdings, but through my personal connection to Kwajalein and use of telephone service, as well as my contact with current residents. My objectives in this study are to gain a deeper understanding of how official discourse produces culture—not to divulge what may be in any way construed as classified information.

military-speak, techno-talk, and local gossip. USAKA is a place that exists more within the United States than in the Ralik Chain of the Marshall Islands; yet it is in constant dialogue and in “contact” with, or in denial of, its surroundings.

This context is by no means a simple one. Kwajalein is a complicated place with a messy history, and it is not easy to generalize, nor would it be correct to demonize the community itself. The residents who live on island are everything but typical middle-class Americans; they are generally highly educated, highly qualified people who have been given special permission to live on-island. There is a wide variety of different ethnicities and even other nationalities that make up the population, including a rather large group of Hawaiians. Nowadays, there are increasing numbers of Marshallese residents who work, live, and go to school on Kwajalein as well.

There is, nonetheless, a tension between this rather atypical American small town community and the way in which the military imagines the island. For many long-term residents, Kwajalein feels like home, with its sleepy residential area beneath the palm trees, the cozy interiors of houses, children playing in the street. This idea of “home” is produced out of the love, connectedness, and nostalgia of the people who live or have lived there. Yet “home” is somewhat counterproductive and inconsequential to USAKA’s testing agenda, which views every assignment at Kwajalein as a contract-based situation. Residents are not unlike migrant birds nesting in the tops of telephone poles—they have created comfortable, believable homes out of a relatively temporary situation. The anxious relationships between USAKA and “Kwaj,” between hometown and defense “installation,” are some of the island’s core contradictions.⁵³

⁵³ This is not to mention, of course, the personal tensions for me between my “Dad” as a family member and his role in the mission.

On bases throughout the world, the U.S. Army spends a considerable amount of money to facilitate the adjustment of its constituents to their environments. The military aims to create spaces and places that are conducive to effecting favorable results. The directory is one of the few texts through which authorities can “write” this comfortable Kwajalein lifestyle, scripting out its contours, cataloguing the base facilities, and orienting inhabitants toward proper behavior within its borders. Though the project has been haphazard and inconsistent, as different contractors and commanders, or budgetary concerns, have prevented thorough implementation of any “master plan,” Kwajalein authorities have continually honed their approach to managing the island community for optimum success. Earlier evidence of this sort of planning is a 1977 report by an Army-commissioned fact-finding team, which justifies the island’s comfortable features:

The ‘quality-of-life’ facilities on the island are those believed by the Army, and developed over some 12 years of experience, to be those appropriate for maintaining a high standard of performance and effectiveness from a small, concentrated, well-educated, affluent community. (Linka, 1977)⁵⁴

One can imagine that by now, with nearly forty years of “experience,” the Army has further mastered techniques of developing the island’s suburbia to achieve maximum results. It becomes clear that the military ultimately does not endow Kwajalein with this American-style “quality of life” for the purposes of making everyone feel at home; it does so in order to test missiles as effectively as possible. Herein lies the paradox of life on Kwajalein: It feels just enough like “home” that residents can imagine it really is home, while the military establishment is indifferent—so long as the Mission proceeds uninterrupted. To the military, USAKA is a sustained but temporary existence.

⁵⁴ This particular fact-finding project was ordered by the Assistant Secretary of Defense after over 100 newspaper articles appeared in 1976 that described the “contrast in living standards” between Ebeye and Kwajalein being so great that the Army became concerned it would undermine the effectiveness of Kwajalein’s mission.

Most of the authorities on Kwajalein are stationed only temporarily: Every few years, a new, uninitiated colonel is dispatched to lead the island and replace the former base commander, bringing along another new series of rules, regulations, and idiosyncrasies. And roughly once every decade, the main contractor for the island changes, accompanied by an influx and exodus of “personnel” and a restructuring of everything from the hospital to the supermarket. As an installation administered by the U.S. Army, there is a particular prescription readers of the telephone directory are expected to swallow, a particular way of seeing the island and their lives on it—whether they like it or not. Readers are to be reminded of their duty to the Mission while they look up the phone numbers of their friends or local offices. They are to be instilled with a sense of distance and separation from the Marshall Islands while they learn to link Kwajalein semantically to the continental United States. They are to understand that any infraction might result in their being asked to leave the island and remember that in the bigger scheme of things, their lives on island will not last forever.

I hope here to explore and read more deeply these and other “official” American mythologies of Kwajalein—messages, images, assumptions—which are transmitted through seemingly “innocent” texts like the telephone directory and later reproduced by many American residents as a matter of everyday life. In doing so, I invoke Barthes, who, in his classic 1957 treatise *Mythologies*, elaborates that the core characteristic of myth as a semiological process is that it “transforms history into nature.” He explains:

We now understand why in the eyes of the myth-consumer, the intention, the adhomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as motive, but as a reason. (129)

Page three of the telephone directory is a perfect example of how this naturalizing process takes place. As introductory background text, the page describes the geography of the islands of Kwajalein Atoll, with brief references to Marshallese land rights and geophysical attributes such as the coral reef ecosystem and the size of the lagoon (the world's largest). Twelve of the sixteen paragraphs on the page are concerned with Kwajalein's climate—its weather patterns and average temperatures. Thus for the most part, the introduction is about the “nature” of the atoll. But what is most interesting about this page is that at the bottom, in bold white text against a black background, a separate paragraph appears that has nothing to do with the “natural” environment whatsoever. As if it were yet another aspect of the ecosystem, the passage asserts: “The U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (USASMDC) has responsibility for management of U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA) Kwajalein Missile Range (KMR)...” and continues to locate the island within the hierarchy of the U.S. Army. Seamlessly, military protocol and power is fused with the natural environmental order of Kwajalein, becoming itself inherent, native, and natural. The army and its ballistic missiles are thus transformed into elemental forces as inevitable as typhoons, floods, or tidal waves.

Naturalization is not only a literal process of “making natural;” it is also a way of “making national,” as in the granting of citizenship or the appropriation of “foreign” elements.⁵⁵ The directory naturalizes Kwajalein Atoll and its environs into the United States, distancing it from its physical location in the Marshall Islands and the Central Pacific and articulating it with North America. Despite the one brief sentence that explains how the use of Kwajalein is made possible through lease agreements with the Marshall Islands

⁵⁵ Now that the former Immigration and Naturalization Service has been absorbed into the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the concept of “naturalization” takes on another significance—the idea of “securing the home/land.” This is, after all, the main purpose of missile testing at Kwajalein; yet paradoxically the island is neither a true United States territory nor a rightful “homeland” of the Americans who live there.

Government (page 3), there is little indication anywhere in the publication that would indicate the land is not American territory.

The mythologies in place at Kwajalein are encoded throughout various texts produced by and for the community⁵⁶; as I explore later (page 121), they can even be read through Kwajalein's landscape, its layout, and its street names. Reading these mythologies through the *2001 Telephone Directory* reveals how living on Kwajalein means living with uncertainty and change. It imagines an ambivalent place that exists between several binaries: a place that is home and not home; both military base and missile test site; vacation resort and super-serious workplace; matrilineally-inherited Marshallese land and landscaped American suburbia; artificial tropical landscape and unpredictably dangerous, natural terrain. Yet above all, these fragile uncertainties are held together by the idea of Kwajalein's shared Mission, a duty to be upheld by all residents. The directory reminds its readers of this obligation and promises security and comfort in return.

What does this directory, this discourse, imagine the Mission to be, and how does it construct it? Where does it come from and what are the myths it perpetuates? What ideology frames its glossy photos and clip art? How does the directory want Kwajalein residents to understand their temporary home and their surroundings? How does the directory imagine security? How does it understand Marshallese-ness and how is this mapped in relation to American-ness? Here I begin interrogating this "recommended reading" in an effort to answer these questions in an effort to disentangle the discourse from the people and place it frames.

⁵⁶ I describe some other examples for future exploration on page 127.

Mission: All of the Above

mis-sion *n.* **1. a.** A body of persons sent to conduct negotiations or establish relations with a foreign country. **b.** The business with which such a body of persons is charged. **c.** A permanent diplomatic office abroad... **2. a.** A body of persons sent to a foreign land by a religious organization, to spread its faith and provide assistance... **5.** A welfare or educational organization established for the needy people of a district. **6. a.** A special assignment given to a person or group. **b.** A combat operation assigned to a person or military unit. **c.** An aerospace operation intended to carry out specific program objectives. **7.** An inner calling to pursue an activity or perform a service; a vocation...

mis-sion-ary *n.* **1.** One sent on a mission, esp. to do religious or charitable work in a territory or foreign country. **2.** One who attempts to persuade or convert others, as to a doctrine; a propagandist...

—*American Heritage College Dictionary*, Third Edition

“Mission” is a word with plenty of baggage, which should be contemplated in all of its obvious and not-so obvious implications before we proceed any further. Throughout this stop on the tour, I have chosen to spell the word with a capital “M.” I do this because I feel that in the specific context of Kwajalein, all the definitions above feed into a larger symbolism of paramount importance and near-sacred centrality in the mythology of official discourse at Kwajalein. In its multiple meanings, the word articulates myriad and seemingly irrelevant concepts with each other, all of which have significance when viewed inter-contextually.

When used in everyday parlance by Kwajalein residents, “mission” is a cover-all phrase that refers to the actual testing operations and rocket launches that occur sporadically amid heightened security and an atmosphere of secrecy throughout the atoll. Though a mission may last only a matter of hours, preparation for a test often requires months of

advance preparation. Several weeks surrounding a mission, temporary-duty (TDY) specialists from various U.S. defense contractor companies descend on Kwajalein in droves, significantly boosting the population. The entire mood of the island shifts, as work schedules intensify and unfamiliar faces appear. During the mission itself, engineers and support staff—not only on Kwajalein but simultaneously at other sites throughout the atoll and key defense locations throughout the United States work overtime in their control rooms, monitoring every aspect of the particular project at hand, while security forces are engaged, ID badges are scrutinized, and the base raises its level of alertness.

Without under-emphasizing the importance and seriousness with which missions are regarded, though, it is worth noting that they are such a common occurrence on Kwajalein that they are generally taken for granted by dependents and other personnel who have little to do with the testing or logistics involved. They are at most an awesome spectacle for residents to watch from beach chairs while eating snacks. Daytime missions are even observed by school science classes.

Arguably, however, there is much more to the Mission of Kwajalein than an occasional missile interception or rocket launch. Although such layers of meaning are encoded in the word itself, “mission” communicates a devoted sense of purpose, a higher purpose and shared identity, and an inherent recognition of *extra-territoriality*, working beyond the boundaries of the United States toward a common cause. Kwajalein Missile Range (Reagan Test Site) is itself a mission—an institution physically located within the Marshall Islands that serves as a major bargaining chip and site of intense diplomatic exchange between the Marshall Islands and America.

Then there is the notion of permanence—Kwajalein is an “installation”: leased land, not only like military bases but also like the American embassies and consulates worldwide.

It operates on many levels with its own agenda, as both projection and apparatus of American power in the Pacific, monument to World War II and the Cold War, and extension of the Central Pacific Command. This leads to “special assignment” and “combat operation,” concepts deeply inscribed in Kwajalein’s history. Kwajalein was not only launch pad for “Star Wars” interceptors, it has also been splashdown site for the Nike-Zeus missile testing program. Before that, it was a support base for Operation Crossroads, the atomic testing program in the Marshalls in the 1950s. Before that it was where the 7th Infantry Division carried out a mission called Operation Flintlock between January 31 and February 5, 1944, making Kwajalein a textbook case for military strategists.⁵⁷ Prior to this, Kwajalein Atoll had been the stage for Japanese military missions of fortification in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and the site from which submarines were launched in the assault on Pearl Harbor (Peattie 257).

As Laurence Carucci illuminates in his study of perceptions of American power since World War II, Marshall Islanders tend to believe that, for the United States, the war never ended, and the larger battle to become the “strongest military power on earth” has been going on ever since (Carucci, 1989: 77). This interpretation of America’s agenda helps Marshallese to explain the enduring U.S. presence and involvement in Kwajalein, and it also expresses a particular, global version of the “mission” concept at the same time. Interestingly, the U.S. Army keeps the memory of its battlefield alive in perpetuity on Kwajalein with its monuments, memorial services, and “World War II Battlefield Tour” placards. In this sense, the battlefield legacy does become symbolic of and contiguous with the ongoing mission of American power throughout the world.

⁵⁷ See Marshall, S.L.A. *Island Victory: The Battle of Kwajalein Atoll*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. (Originally published in 1944 by *Infantry Journal*.) This volume presents a one-sided but highly detailed account of the battle and strategy employed in the mission to capture Kwajalein Atoll from Japanese forces.

Missions of military power—whether through invasions or weapons testing—are also deeply intertwined sacred and religious connotations of “mission” on Kwajalein. Even the names of missiles themselves—Nike, Zeus, Sprint, Spartan, and other invocations of male Greco-Roman spirituality, such as Mt. Olympus, the manmade hill where the telemetry radar station sits—aligns Kwajalein’s purpose with a divine realm. There is of course also the massive stained-glass window in Kwajalein Chapel that portrays an American soldier in fatigues on one knee, his head raised up toward the American flag, his back to the Marshallese flag (which begs the question, is he protecting—or ignoring—the Marshall Islands?).⁵⁸

This leads to the notion of religion and proselytization, indeed the “missionization” of the Marshall Islands. ABCFM missionaries first arrived on the *Morning Star* in the Marshalls at Ebon in November of 1857, at a time when the islands were considered dangerous territory for outsiders to set foot (Hezel 201.)⁵⁹ Though conversion to Christianity began in Ebon, it soon spread throughout the islands as mission schools were established very successfully and large numbers of students came to study (Hezel 207). As in many places throughout Oceania, missionaries opened the way for copra traders and entrepreneurs, beachcombers, and others to follow into the area. They made a significant impact in local politics, affecting alliances with European governments and transforming local cultures. Missionaries are still quite active in the Marshall Islands and Oceania in general, though these earlier “missions” have become established as powerful churches and leadership bodies in communities, under the direct control of Islanders themselves, such as the United Church of Christ (UCC) and other international congregations. Missions and missionaries,

⁵⁸ I feature this stained glass in the first film of this thesis project, “Flight.” (see Figure 45)

⁵⁹ Hezel notes that Marshallese had gained a reputation for retaliating against injustices committed by past visitors to their shores, including an incident recorded at Kwajalein in 1850, where two passengers from the *William Melville* were “surprised and murdered.” (200)

nevertheless, set a precedent for “salvation” of souls, thus promising—not entirely unlike the United States at Kwajalein Atoll—enduring security and protection.

At the same time, the image of phallic American missile re-entry vehicles penetrating the depths of the Marshallese Kwajalein Lagoon is more suggestive of a “missionary position” than just a “Giant Catcher’s Mitt,” the way in which the lagoon is typically described by engineers and defense analysts.⁶⁰ The latter is a hackneyed sports analogy that has served for decades to rationalize the masculinist-military pursuit of phallic power; yet this ritual target practice is decidedly more rapacious than a friendly game of catch, as shown by the environmental damage done to mid-atoll islands and the overall suffering weapons testing has brought to the Marshallese people over the past fifty years.⁶¹ Thus, in its fetishization of missiles, the Mission also genders space, subjugates Marshallese agency, and transforms the environment.

The “propagandist” dimensions of “missionization” should not be overlooked, either. Commodore Ben H. Wyatt’s invocation in 1946 to the people of Bikini that the U.S. nuclear testing program was “for the good of mankind” (Niedenthal 2) occurred in a different, but related context to the rationalizations employed by the U.S. Navy to relocate the people of Kwajalein and several Mid-Corridor islands to Ebeye and elsewhere in the atoll a decade later. Both situations involved weapons of mass destruction, ensuring “protection,” and justification in the name of humanitarian concerns. The “propaganda” represented by the telephone directory is thus an integral part of the Mission as well.

⁶⁰ For a typical use of this term, see Woodard 69. Harding (2002) explains that most “customers” prefer to have their payload shot into the center of the lagoon, where the relatively shallow water (200 feet) allows for easy retrieval of devices for experimentation or security reasons. The inaccessible depths of the outer ocean (7,000 feet) are also targeted on occasion to protect the security of classified operations (31).

⁶¹ The documentary film *Home on the Range* (Horowitz, 1991) illustrates the damage done to Illeginni and other Mid-Corridor islands as former congressman/protector Ataji Balos shows the film crew a landscape littered with shrapnel and other debris clearly left behind by the missile testing project.

Undoubtedly there are multiple missions and discourses at play within the official Mission of Kwajalein, with multiple implications for everyone concerned. In the pages that follow, I can only hope to explore some of the ways in which this Mission orders its personnel to engage with and understand their American home in the Marshall Islands.

Aircraft Carrier or Cruiseship?

We are comprised of nearly 2,500 contract employees, soldiers, civil servants, and family members who work together to maintain a world class missile test range and space operations base, sustain an international partnership with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, provide a quality community, and transition Kwajalein Missile Range into the 21st Century... Today, as in the past, the men and women of the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll/Kwajalein Missile Range are performing an important mission, essential to the security of our country. I am pleased to have you join us, and I am confident that you will find your stay enjoyable.

—Commander's Welcome Message, 2001 Telephone Directory

The commander's recipe is clear: Thou shalt test missiles, shalt act like "partners" with the Marshall Islands Government, shalt behave as an exemplary "quality community," shalt deliver the promise of American National Missile Defense to a new millennium, and shalt by all means enjoy thy stay. These are the commandments fundamental to USAKA's Mission.

Phrased as a cordial welcome, these words recruit the reader to claim an identity located within the heroic legacy of many other brave, proud "men and women" who have served "aboard" what might as well be the "world-class" aircraft carrier called Kwajalein.⁶²

⁶² Heavily fortified Pacific islands, especially during World War II, were often described by Navy strategists as "unsinkable aircraft carriers." (see Duncan Campbell, *The Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier*. London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1984)

The text thus interpellates its reader in classic Althusserian terms and then follows through, by listing them with their contact information in alphabetical order, committing each and every one of them to the Mission. Yet these evocative military overtones are contrasted by the saccharine last line, “I am confident that you will find your stay enjoyable,” which would more likely be spoken by a tour guide, cruise ship captain or *maitre d’hotel*. In the space of only a few words, the authoritative voice of Kwajalein’s military-scientific-political agenda transforms itself into inviting tones reminiscent of the hospitality industry.

There is, no doubt, a dialectical relationship between “enjoyable stay” and the “security of our country.” Teresia Teaiwa’s concept of “militourism,” what she describes as “a phenomenon by which military or paramilitary force ensures the smooth running of a tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it” (Teaiwa, 1999:251), applies here to some extent. Despite the absence of a tourist industry on Kwajalein, the “touristic” notion of a carefree stay on a tropical island is employed by the U.S. Army, thus obscuring neocolonial power and the severity of missile testing. At another point in his message, the commander *orders*, “Take advantage of this chance to experience island life. We have a wide variety of community and recreational activities available. Take time to sit along the ocean reef, relax, and listen to the surf...” R&R is required; it is just as important as the order to work.⁶³

The military makes this vacation possible—providing the resources to maintain a quiet, tranquil(ized) ambience all over the island, replete with a golf course, two swimming pools, life-guarded beach, bowling alley, movie theaters, yacht club, dive house with free tanks of air for certified divers, among other fully-staffed recreational “quality-of-life” facilities and programs. The regularly airlifted cargo shipments from Hawai’i and the

⁶³ According to one of my informants, similarly, the current president of Kwajalein Range Services (KRS), the contractor that operates Kwajalein, ordered in 2003 that all employees go on vacation at least once a year.

continental United States carry everything from portabello mushrooms, frozen steaks, and a full range of liquor to 5 brands of pet food, fine silverware and electronics.⁶⁴ Though these comforts pale in comparison to true resort-style living, even the electricity, 24-hour air conditioning and fresh drinking water that residents take for granted are major luxuries, considering the island's location. Kwajalein's pleasant lifestyle has become an integral part of the Mission, and maintaining this standard of living is a major undertaking that requires huge financial resources, dedicated staff, equipment, supplies, and constant effort. The commander's message rationalizes this comfort and pleasure as a byproduct of the "essential" military project, while contextualizing national security within the everyday domesticity of the "island community."

The two narratives of 'important duty' and 'holiday in paradise' are literally bound together within the pages of the telephone directory, paralleling the way in which work and play are both crucial to the Mission. Yet business and pleasure are not mixed: They are distinguished by the way in which color images are used in opposition to black-and-white text. The colored imagery is constructed as a photo album or travelogue that traverses the larger text. The black-and-white text is a combination of home and office phone numbers, interspersed with chapters that refer to a wide range of protocols—from recycling trash to thwarting terrorism. The latter is clearly the serious side of the text, and the color images are its intended decoration. The "colored" narrative of pretty pictures indexes the seductive pleasure of R&R, while the "black-and-white" officialdom of text and clipart depict the day-to-day business of the base, creating a rather unstable dance between fiction and non-fiction, fantasy and "reality."

⁶⁴ As of 2002, an Air Mobility Command (AMC) flight delivered food supplies three times a week, and a barge carrying 130 containers unloaded at Kwajalein on a monthly basis (Harding 35).

This binary opposition is worth consideration, as discourses like the directory oversimplify and create their own fictions of Kwajalein while they simultaneously repress its multiple histories and overlapping, rhizomatic complexities. In the sections that follow, I intend to flip this paradigm, by looking seriously at these otherwise “unserious” colored images and problematizing the authoritative objectivity that the black-and-white narrative takes for granted.

2. BLACK-AND-WHITE AND READ ALL OVER

Like the military, science prefers to see the world as orderly and classifiable, with its own taxonomies, hierarchies, and nomenclature. The defense companies that perform tests and experiments with over two billion dollars⁶⁵ of equipment on Kwajalein’s missile-testing Mission have a massive investment in finding concrete, objective answers—from impact scoring, telemetry, signature monitoring, interceptor launches, and so forth. It is in this context that I draw attention to the “black-and-whiteness” of the telephone directory; for it is this need for certainty that frames the Mission’s official discourse. Unlike the “white pages” of telephone directories throughout the United States, which are also black-on-white (or sometimes black-on-yellow, grey, blue, etc.) but usually consist mainly of the telephone numbers and addresses of private residences in a given area, the Kwajalein directory is a text intent on deliberately creating objective, factual knowledge about the island from a specific vantage point.

The Kwajalein listings are indeed useful in locating telephone numbers, but they also serve as a comprehensive listing of all adult personnel on island, where they work, where

⁶⁵ Wilkes, 15 (figure from 1985)

they live, and whether or not they are married.⁶⁶ This roster pledges each woman and man on island to the Mission, while it advertises the “family values” of prescriptive heterosexual normativity. Like a black-and-white television series from the 1950s, the text conjures up an image of a town where things are simple, manageable, predictable, and homogenous, despite the contrary. The listings of all 2,500 employees and their families literally suggest a place where everyone knows each other’s name. The directory belies whatever variety and difference exists, tidying it up under the umbrella of a shared Mission. It thus elides the existence of unmarried or same-sex partners who share one another’s residence, married personnel whose contracts do not provide for spouse accommodations, or partnerships with residents of other islands.⁶⁷

Safe, Secure, Suburbia

One of the most striking features of the black-and-white text is its preoccupation with safety and security. USAKA, administered under the Department of Defense, is by default a very defensive place. On one level, the base is a place where dedicated people work hard with sincere intentions to defend America and its friends from sabotage and attack by developing superior deterrent technology. They are also interested in preserving life as they know it—the status quo—by helping to perfect an arsenal of weaponry that can be deployed immediately, lest any country threaten the American way of life.

⁶⁶It seems that even if personnel prefer to have their home numbers “unlisted,” their office numbers are still displayed, and their names are nevertheless printed in the directory, along with their quarters, spouse, and employer’s name.

⁶⁷Cohabitation of two unmarried personnel is not prohibited, but only married couples on accompanied contracts or single parents with children are officially recognized and granted shared housing (and listed in the phone directory); thus unmarried couples often improvise by sharing one of their residences, if they have quarters large enough to house dependents. However, personnel who have relationships with Marshallese or other people who do not have permission to enter the base need to improvise: There is, for instance, a number of Kwajalein residents on bachelor contracts who spend nights on Ebeye with their Marshallese spouses or partners, because the other party does not have permission to access the base. Regardless, unions not acknowledged by the “family values” of the base are not recorded in the directory.

At the very least, USAKA's rules are designed not only to keep outsiders off the base, but also to keep insiders in. The directory helps to enforce and regulate the separation between Kwajalein and its surroundings. Thus, the black-and-white, "defensive" text of the Mission is in direct opposition with the glossy color photographs of Paradise that appear throughout the directory. The risk of danger—real or imagined—becomes an apparatus by which the black-and-white priority of the Mission is reconciled against the "R&R" vacation promised by the color photography. The directory flaunts its imaginary of Paradise, but it warns that too much indulgence could be fatal.

This theme runs through the entire directory, appearing mostly in the form of frequent, illustrated messages throughout that warn of a wide array of dangers. Readers learn from repeated bombardment by these warnings that in fact the island is not necessarily a safe place to be, and that one ought to be prepared at all times. The directory neatly sets up a semiotics of danger that ranges from the seemingly most insignificant to the most severe, but without placing them in any particular order—creating a grammatical structure that meanders between the risk of minor injury to the risk of death. These messages appear at the bottom of ordinary directory pages, casually punctuating the mundane black-and-white text with comical artwork and bold print.

Mitchell's description of the "dialogue" between image and word is useful to keep in mind:

Perhaps the redemption of the imagination lies in accepting the fact that we create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representations, and that our task is not to renounce this dialogue in favor of a direct assault on nature but to see that nature already informs both sides of the conversation. (Mitchell 46)

The conversation between the clip art and the text it adorns is quite crucial to understanding the telephone directory's deeper meanings. Mitchell, like Barthes, explains

this in relation to nature: The combination of text and imagery is informed by nature and thereby natural unto itself. Emphasizing real or imagined dangers through the use of clichéd illustrations makes them all seem quite natural, while attracting the reader's attention through palatable, simple visual language. For instance, two of these warnings are accompanied by an illustration of a magnifying glass and the title "Practice OPSEC" (operation security). The magnifying glass clearly becomes both a metaphor for spying and scrutinizing information; thus, although there is no overt indication that Kwajalein phone lines are tapped, the combined warning of text and image provides a context in which the reader learns that, quite "naturally," s/he is being watched and listened to—figuratively, put under a magnifying glass.

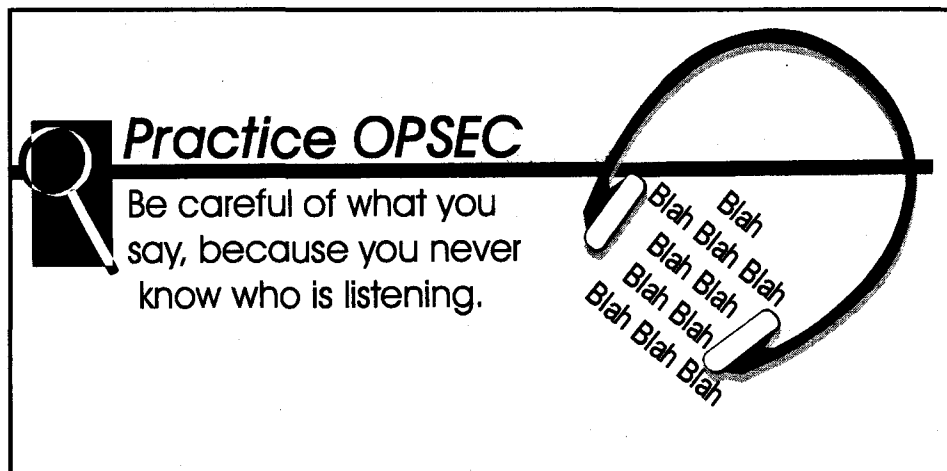


Figure 22. You Never Know Who is Listening

The text that accompanies the first 'magnifying glass' warning on page 21 says, "Don't give them the missing puzzle piece!" and is illustrated by a drawing of a puzzle. The pieces of this puzzle are labeled "phones," "info. on forms," "shop talk," and "e-mail." One last piece, dangling mischievously from the rest of the puzzle, is labeled "trash." The

resulting message is that even Kwajalein trash is worthy of interception, and it should be handled with utmost care. This sort of message is repeated again in another ‘magnified’ blurb on page 51, where an image of headphones is accompanied by the words, “Be careful of what you say, because you never know who is listening.” (Figure 22.) Between the headphones, the words, “blah, blah, blah, blah, blah....” appear, as if to indicate idle talk, even gossip. These visual cues remind readers that they should never entirely let their guard down, echoing the Mission’s articulation of business and pleasure.

These Orwellian metaphors appear in the midst of office telephone listings and telephone service setup instructions as friendly little hints: Careless trash disposal is dangerous, and so is gossip. It does not specify who might be weeding through the garbage or tapping the phone circuits—spies? The army? These warnings serve as a panopticon, as a way for the phone directory to instigate self-discipline among Kwajalein resident—to figuratively turn the magnifying glass on themselves, out of the fear that they might not only jeopardize the security of the United States but that they might be caught by local authorities for other transgressions (and suffer their own personal demise by being kicked off the island immediately.)

Outside of these “Big Brotherly” caveats, most of the warnings in the booklet deal with personal safety. Labeled “Safety Note,” they each appear next to a single musical note (clearly a pun on “note”), which seems to suggest that perhaps these notes could be set to a tune. This musical analogy acts to break up the monotony of the text while replaying, like an advertisement jingle, the recurring themes of danger, fear, vigilance, and security. There are exactly ten such “musical” safety notes in the directory, which appear to be arranged in random order. Exploring how some of these notes break up or highlight the text tells much about how security and danger are imagined on the island.

At the bottom of the same page (40) that contains office listings for the Federal Aviation Association, National Missile Defense Agency, and Lockheed Martin, there appears the first “Safety Note,” which warns of the hazards of gathering shells on the reef and features a cartoon of a straw hat, sunglasses, boots, and tongs (Figure 23). Again, even pleasure is serious business, fraught with its own peculiar dangers. These warnings about environmental hazards effectively turn everyday life itself into a mission. “For your protection and comfort while reefing you should take a few simple precautions,” it nags (or sings?) True to typical Mission discursive practice, the contradictory activities of missile testing and reefing are thus packaged together as a matter of everyday domesticity. Defense-related offices are listed in small Helvetica print among food services and other banalities, so boringly that they might easily go unnoticed. Yet the danger (and thrill) of seeking out precious cowries on the reef is advertised with much embellishment, illustration, and a significantly larger typeface, filling up two-thirds of the page. The directory thereby visually offsets and obscures the presence of missile testing in favor of a more leisurely and tropical (albeit somewhat “dangerous”) pastime, which it simultaneously flaunts and exaggerates to draw attention away from missile defense.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Most atoll islands possess an outer side that faces the rough, open ocean (“oceanside”) and an inner side that faces the calm lagoon (“lagoonside”). Kwajalein’s strict safety code dramatizes the dangers of the open ocean, instilling in its residents a tremendous fear for the ocean side of the island. While swimming or any unauthorized marine activity is forbidden on oceanside Kwajalein, small children on Ebeye construct makeshift surfboards out of plywood and casually brave the waves on their oceanside, only a few miles up the atoll chain.

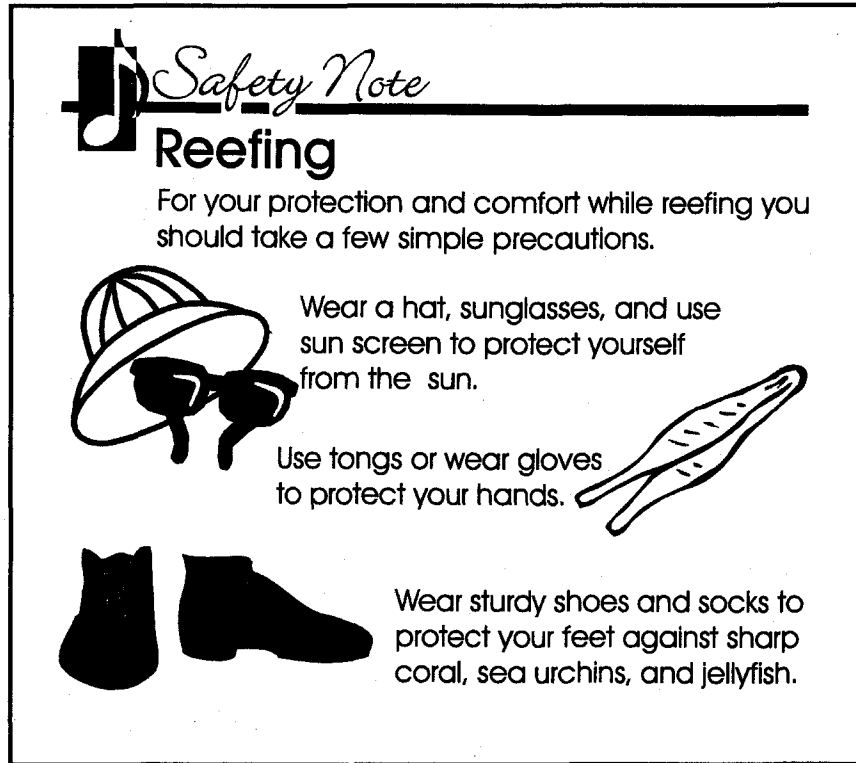


Figure 23. The Perils of the Reef: Leisure as Part of the Mission

The same technique is used on page 113, where another warning—this time about fishing—appears immediately after a rather authoritative section that delineates “off-limits areas” like ammunition and explosive storage areas. Such text, which hints at the darker side of the Mission, is thus lightened by the recreational image of fishing. While this particular “Safety Note” with its smiling fish illustrations actually warns against eating poisonous reef fish (“Do not eat fish from the lagoon until you understand which fish are safe”), this nonetheless represents a less threatening form of danger that is pleasantly distracting, accessible, and thought-provoking. Subtly the message also dissuades residents from engaging with their natural environment.

Earlier in the text, on page 96, the same page that lists the telephone numbers and hours of operation for the golf course, country club, and racquetball courts, one ad warns against overextending oneself in athletic activity. The ad features a clip-art illustration of a

soccer ball and says in large print, “Don’t do too much too soon, ease into sports and exercise.” Such a simplistic disclaimer enforces the parental tone of the directory and suggests that personnel might not even know how to care for their own bodies were it not for these instructions. It also reveals the seriousness with which sports and recreation are taken on Kwajalein, to the extent that recreation managerial staff members work demanding, full-time jobs. Recreation is, after all, a core component of the Kwajalein Mission, as in the case of most military lifestyles—for which “R&R” is entirely indispensable. This “Safety Note” thus presumes that all residents will engage in rigorous athletic activity; it simply urges that they warm up first.

There are of course other, more serious and terrifying aspects to the Mission. In Kwajalein’s delicate atoll environment, hazardous materials or spills are a major danger, as is the terror of natural disasters like tidal waves or typhoons, which could potentially sweep across the island and submerge it entirely. These two are handled with full-page warnings that describe “Spill Notification Procedures” (which I will describe in more detail later) and “Evacuation Sirens.” The latter is accompanied by extensive text that describes the evacuation plans for the island and other islands in the atoll and implores residents to follow the directions of military authorities when it comes to such matters. Another “Safety Note” on the following page, however, bluntly reminds readers that it is their “responsibility to become familiar with...evacuation rules and regulations.” An unstable opposition presents itself: The conflicting orders “let us take care of you” and “you should take responsibility for yourself, or else” reveal a fundamental sense of ambivalence and instability in the Mission.

Such a contradiction eerily echoes the ambivalence with which the United States’ Compact of Free Association governs America’s relationship with the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Since the days of the postwar U.S. Trust Territory in Micronesia,

Marshallese have been encouraged to “take responsibility” for their own well-being (and “safety”) while also complying with the wishes of the United States, much in the same way that a child would cease to be a burden to its parents upon reaching adulthood but still remain under their influence. Ronald Reagan—after whom Kwajalein has been aptly named “Reagan Test Site”—characterized this rhetoric best in his paternalistic 1986 speech to former Trust Territory citizens, saying:

Under the Trusteeship we've come to know and respect you as members of our American family, and now, as happens in all families, members grow up and leave home. I want you to know that we wish you all the best as you assume full responsibility for your domestic affairs and foreign relations... But you'll always be family to us.⁶⁹

USAKA employs a similar rhetoric with the Americans who live on the base. On one hand residents are expected to follow the rules unconditionally and allow themselves to be taken care of by the proper authorities, but at the same time they are expected to “assume full responsibility” for learning these rules and not getting into dangerous situations. Like mature children, they are supposed to be independent but obedient, and to act as congenial, compliant members of the Kwajalein neighborhood, the “American family.”

⁶⁹ (President Ronald Reagan's Address to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 1986.) In exchange for a wide range of benefits, including the ability to use Kwajalein Atoll as a missile test site, the United States extends several million dollars in aid to the Marshall Islands Government and provides for the defense of the country. It also allows free migration into the United States for Marshallese citizens and access to federal programs like social security and welfare, among other things. As a part of this agreement, the newly negotiated Compact II provides roughly \$15 million a year in “rental” payments for the atoll, an amount that is insufficient in the eyes of Kwajalein Landowners. In 2003 the Kwajalein lease was renewed provisionally until 2016, with plans to lease the site for another sixty years. However, at the time of this writing, the landowners of Kwajalein have yet to agree to these terms and threaten to evict the military in 2016.

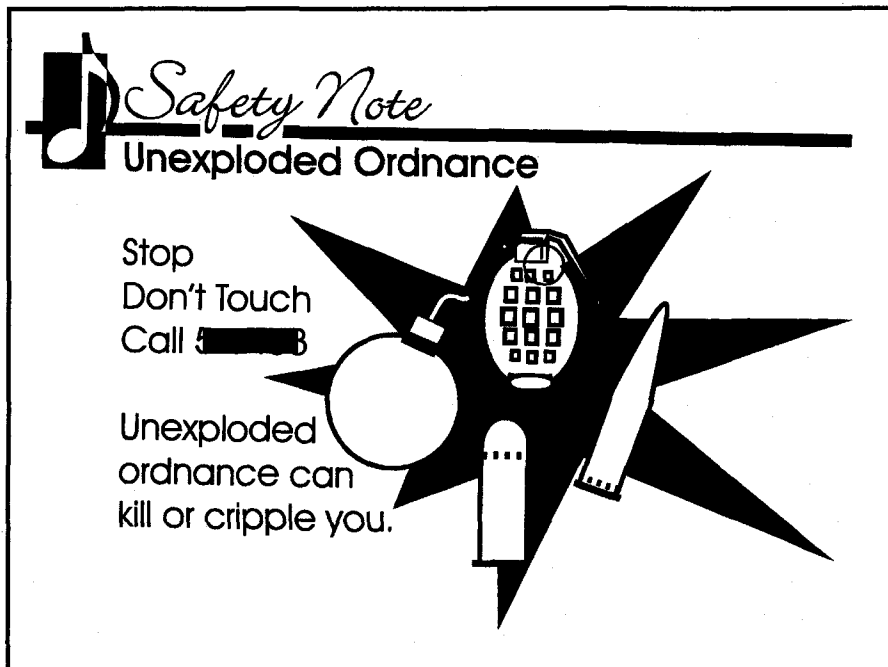


Figure 24. Old Explosives

On page 117 and 118 appear the last two verses of the directory's song of safety. These two messages deal with battlefield hazards, and signal another sudden shift from the lighter "Note" about sunburn that immediately precedes them. The first (Figure 24) is a note about "Unexploded Ordnance," which bluntly warns, "Stop, Don't Touch...Unexploded ordnance can kill or cripple you" and is accompanied by cute renditions of a grenade, cannonball, and two bullets, framed against a sinister black explosive flash motif (the cartoon might as well feature the word "BOOM.") The text of regulations above this ad explains how to report unexploded ordnance if found and reminds the reader, "You do not want a souvenir like this." The following page features a similar message that warns against climbing on or entering the Japanese fortifications from World War II, cautioning that such activity "poses an unnecessary risk of injury" (as if to differentiate from "necessary" risks of injury, such as guiding ballistic missiles and re-entry vehicles, working with hazardous chemicals and ammunition, maneuvering radiation-emitting antennas, or

otherwise defending National Security.) Both of these messages are also very careful to contextualize such military hazards as relics from Kwajalein's days as a World War II battlefield, not relevant to contemporary military pursuits, which are portrayed not as lethal but as protective, essential, and inevitable.

For all the dangers listed in the directory, not one "Safety Note" warns of the danger of missile testing itself, which is intriguing, considering Kwajalein's prominence as a major national missile testing site. In fact the only indications that missile testing is conducted in the atoll come forth in the commander's welcome letter on page 1, the listings for the National Missile Defense Agency on page 40, the map delineations of the forbidden "Mid-Atoll Corridor" splashdown zone on page 4, and the description of the siren warning system on page 105—which includes "Special Mission Alerts" to "alert certain personnel who must respond to special mission support requirements on an unannounced basis." Nowhere in the telephone directory are missiles conceived as dangerous or of any public concern. This elision only emphasizes that the real dangers for Kwajalein are those which compromise the mission or the capacity of its agents.

"Myth," writes Barthes, "hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion." (129) In the greater "mythology" of Kwajalein's Mission, it is not that the existence of missile testing is entirely obscured; it is merely reframed or "distorted." To borrow Barthes' terminology (131), missiles are thus naturalized by way of this mythology, and, in turn, the danger of missile testing is accepted innocently, as a fact of nature on par with sunburn. Though the directory never directly confronts the fact that unarmed re-entry vehicles hurdle from outer space toward Kwajalein many times a year, its mythology attempts to displace the uneasiness of this reality by punctuating its more catastrophic text with the more domestic dangers of leisurely life on a

tropical island, like fishing, reefing, and sports. In fact, though the “Safety Notes” appear to warn residents against succumbing to such dangers, they are actually compelling in the way that they advertise these dangers and excitement, creating a dramatic script for rehearsing—not only compliance, self-censorship, and self-defense, but also heroism and bravery in the face of fear.

3. STOLEN RAINBOWS

Iakwe from the Marshall Islands

When one utters a colour term one is not directly pointing to a state of the world (process of reference), but, on the contrary, one is connecting or correlating that term with a cultural unit or concept. The utterance of that term is determined, obviously, by a given sensation, but the transformation of the sensory stimuli into a percept is in some way determined by the semiotic relationship between the linguistic expression and the meaning or content culturally correlated to it.

—Umberto Eco, “How Culture Conditions the Colours We See” (160)

Eco argues that each culture accords varying meanings to different colors, and therefore color is not objective or universal—color terms must be contextualized within the conceptual or cultural frameworks from which they originate. Expanding upon this, the same could be said of the entire color term or unit described in English as a “rainbow.”

Interestingly, the Mission possesses its own mythology for rainbows. The “graceful arc” made by ballistic missiles “up towards the sky and then down toward the earth again” was termed “Gravity’s Rainbow” by Thomas Pynchon, upon observation of the German V-2 missile in World War II (Wilkes xv.) Indeed, even missiles are beautiful on Kwajalein: As

one character in the juvenile novel set on Kwajalein, *Living on Nothing Atoll*, explains, “It’s considered a big deal around here when a missile’s headed our way. A lot of people congregate on the beach to watch the splashdown. It’s a pretty impressive sight, particularly at night.” (Kelly 93)

The Marshallese language also has a deep respect for rainbows. *Iakwe-eok* [ee-ah-KWEH-yok], the Marshallese everyday greeting literally means “You are the rainbow” or are “beautiful like a rainbow.” (See Kelin vii.) The second part of the expression is the Marshallese grammatical suffix *eok*, which specifies that this greeting is directed to a singular listener: “greetings to *you* in particular,” or literally, “*you* are a rainbow.” As a greeting the word, *iakwe* is used much like the Hawaiian word “aloha” to communicate love and appreciation. The expression is complimentary, respectful, and kind. Likely very few Kwajalein residents grasp the rainbow implications of this expression, but they are quite familiar with the greeting, usually spelling it “Yokwe” and often pronouncing it “yuk-wee.”

In response to this colorful greeting, Mission discourse appears to answer to its Marshallese other by portraying Marshallese and their natural environment in photography that embraces all the brilliant colors of the rainbow. Exemplifying the idea that Kwajalein is an ideal American small town with the *scenery* of the Marshall Islands, the directory uses color imagery to evoke postcards from the Pacific Islands. Yet it does so to indulge the fantasies of its own official Mission, to decorate the “reality” of its important project—not to compliment or appreciate, but to fetishize the Marshallese people. In answer to “You are a rainbow,” the telephone directory says, “*They* are colorful, not us.”

The *2001 Telephone Directory* creates a virtual rainbow of bright colors that interrupts the official black-and-whiteness of its text. By interspersing color photography throughout the booklet, there is clearly an attempt made by the directory’s authors to simulate a family

photo scrapbook of vacation snapshots. But these are carefully selected shots of Kwajalein's surroundings that portray an idyllic Marshallese world that entirely contradicts the protocol and decorum of the Mission appearing elsewhere in black and white. In these images can be found an idealized Land of Oz, a colorized tropical fantasy: The camera paints flowers in Pago-Pago Purple, the lagoon in Bora-Bora Blue, coconut fronds in Galapagos Green, and Marshallese skin in Bali Ha'i Brown.⁷⁰

There are eleven color photographs arranged throughout the directory. The front cover features a close-up of orchids, which evokes images of the lush nature of paradise. The image situates the viewer in what would appear to be a deep rainforest full of orchids, where only specks of daylight shine through. Yet on Kwajalein, which is a flat and relatively sparse coral island, such a scene could only be made possible by crouching in between the plants at the small "municipal" gardens facility to create the effect of being in a jungle, just as I once did as a child by burrowing in the bushes along the lagoon and pretending I was in the mountains. As if to title the image of the lavender-colored petals, the words: "U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll/Kwajalein Missile Range" appear beneath the scrapbook-hinged photo. Orchids, not missiles, thus signify one of the most elaborate National Missile Defense test sites in the world. Indeed, this is the first instance of Kwajalein's mythology "naturalizing" its missile-testing Mission.

⁷⁰ I explore this paradigm further in the final film in this tour, "Suburbia."

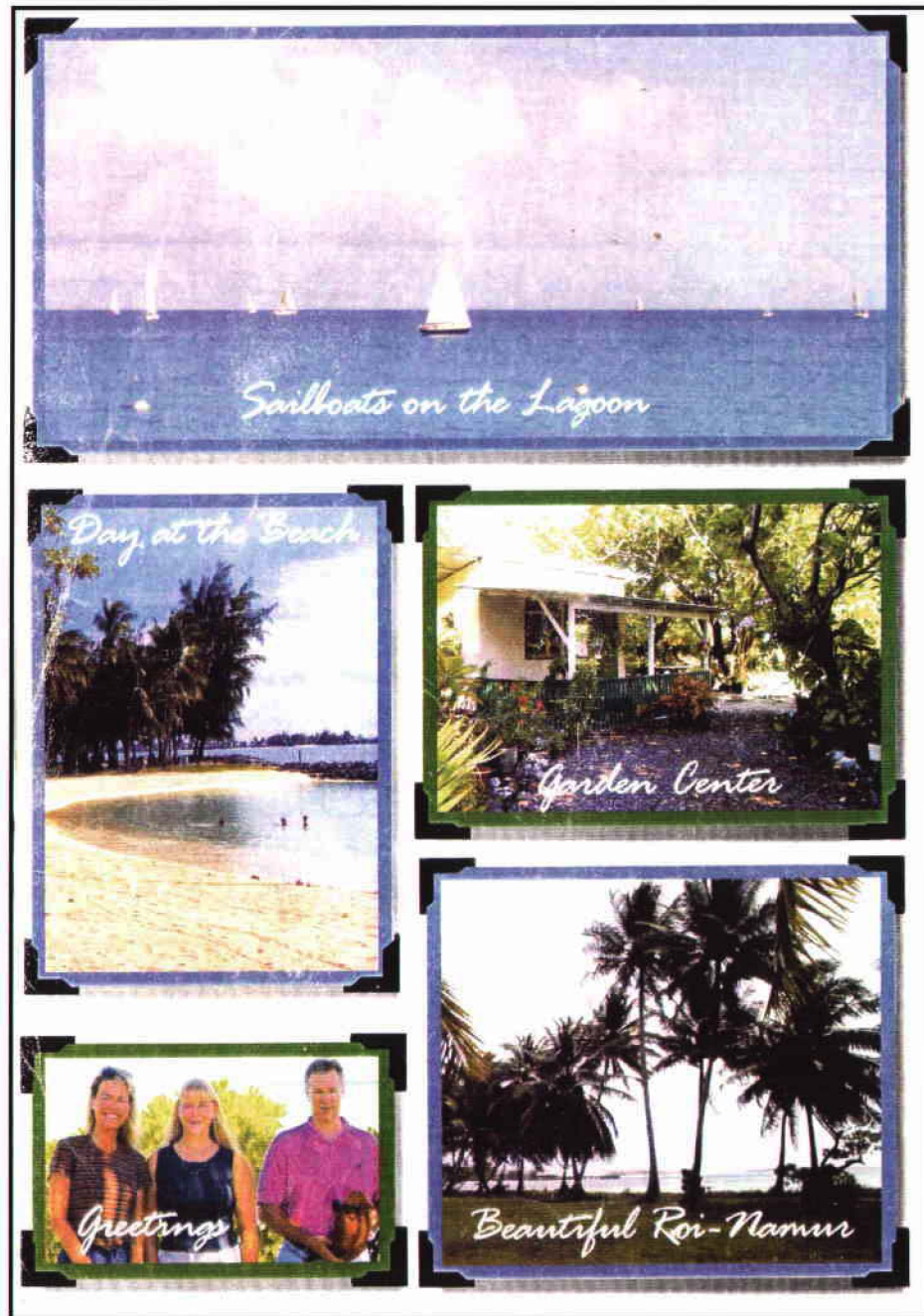


Figure 25. Island Montage

On the back cover is a montage of island scenes, each labeled in cursive typeface and once again “hinged” to the white page with illustrated black brackets and shadow-effects (Figure 25.) A rather generic photo of white-sailed yachts pleasantly tacking across the

lagoon is labeled “Sailboats on the Lagoon.” Beneath this is “Day at the Beach,” a wide-angle shot of Kwajalein’s meticulously-maintained Emon Beach on a lazy day, with the distant silhouettes of three children playing in the still water. This image seems to offer the invitation to enjoy frolicking on the spacious white sands of the beach. Next to this is a well-framed photo of a white building with a porch, surrounded by an orchard of verdant trees and potted plants, labeled “Garden Center.” In the right hand corner, this is balanced by a postcard-like shot of palm trees lining the lagoon at Roi-Namur, the island at the northern tip of the atoll where one of the world’s largest and most sophisticated radar installations sits. The radar and other techno-military equipment, as well as all the concrete fortifications left from the Japanese era, are neatly elided from the photograph, and the title, “Beautiful Roi-Namur” is attached.

In the lower left-hand corner, there is a fifth photograph, the only one in the entire directory that shows the faces of American Kwajalein residents. The image is labeled “Greetings” and features three white, blond, sunburnt people—who appear almost like a father, mother, and daughter—smiling as they pose for the photo in the afternoon sun. They are dressed casually and could easily pass as tourists. The man, wearing a bright pink Polo shirt, playfully holds up a coconut and pretends it is a human head by holding a pair of sunglasses against it. This humorous photo is reminiscent of carefree holiday fun, but it also represents the novelty with which many residents on Kwajalein regard their atoll surroundings. Unlike Marshallese communities, which on most atolls rely on the entire coconut tree for food, medicine, shelter, and income from the copra trade, Americans on Kwajalein do not harvest coconuts and have little use for them.⁷¹ At best they make them

⁷¹ This is of course not to say that Marshallese do not sometimes play with coconuts and Americans do not use them; my point is that, ironically, despite the fact that Kwajalein is physically located in the Marshall Islands, the coconut looks strangely out of place here.

into interesting toys: In my first-grade class we fashioned them into turkeys and used them to decorate our Thanksgiving Day feast between “the Pilgrims” and “the Indians” (yet again, another misappropriation of an “indigenous” context.) The coconut, recontextualized into Kwajalein’s middle-class American suburbia, becomes an extraneous stage prop that references the pleasure of Paradise. In the absence of Marshallese representation throughout the directory, the coconut also becomes a stand-in for the Marshall Islands and the Marshallese people themselves.⁷²

In actuality, however, I learned upon revisiting Kwajalein in January of 2004 that this is in fact not an image of a family but in fact a cameo appearance by the very people who authored the telephone directory, the Documentation Control staff themselves, one of whom was apparently terrified of falling coconuts⁷³ and did his best to befriend this particular one. I add this commentary because this added insight points toward the gaps and distortions in my own reading of the phone directory, while it also reveals the personalities of the people who produced it and makes them more accessible. In the same respect, as I am engaging here in discourse analysis, it provides an illustration of how my emphasis in this part of my study is on existing representations and mythologies rather than on authorship and/or *who* is responsible for these discourses. Yet in fact this added context only expands upon my argument—for in fact the image symbolizes “coconut phobia” in many respects on multiple levels.

Looking at the inside of the directory, the color photographs that appear on the five tabbed dividers serve as introductions to each section. Each image seems to have been chosen to correspond in some way to the section title on that divider page, but each of these

⁷² As Wilsoni Hereniko writes, “coconut” has been used by *pakeha* in Auckland as a derogatory term for migrant Islanders, while the same word can also be evocative of shared Islander identity in other contexts. (137)

⁷³ I am grateful to Alison Lord for pointing this detail out to me, since I would have had no other way of appreciating this context otherwise.

photographs serves to package the black-and-white text it precedes within the same scrapbook motif of tourist-like postcards, often in highly contradictory ways. The disjuncture between the “seriousness” of the written text and the “fantasy” of these images results in irony.

The first divider, for the chapter “Organizational Listings” features a full-page photo of a stone wall with a planted flower bed and plumeria tree, a small landscaped zone in what is technically known as the community epicenter of Kwajalein’s “Downtown” area. On the photo, white cursive script titles the photo “Downtown Gardens” (see Figure 26). In 1988, the Pacific Ocean Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers consulted with a U.S. firm to generate an exterior design guide for Kwajalein that would help to improve consistency and appropriateness for Kwajalein’s American community. The planned renovations were intended to give this gathering area a “mall-like atmosphere” and included the shrubbery featured in this photograph.⁷⁴ The plant life in the photo, however, is a very small plot, among the only areas of foliage in the relatively newly redesigned post office and retail facilities—certainly not worthy of the title “Downtown Gardens.” It is rather appropriate that such a photo should mark the beginning of the Organizational Listings, since it represents the micro-organization of Kwajalein’s topography together with the bureaucratic imagination of that space as a somehow natural “garden.”

⁷⁴ CH2M Hill and Belt Collins and Associates, “Design Guide: Installation Exterior Design Theme and Guidelines” Honolulu, 1988.

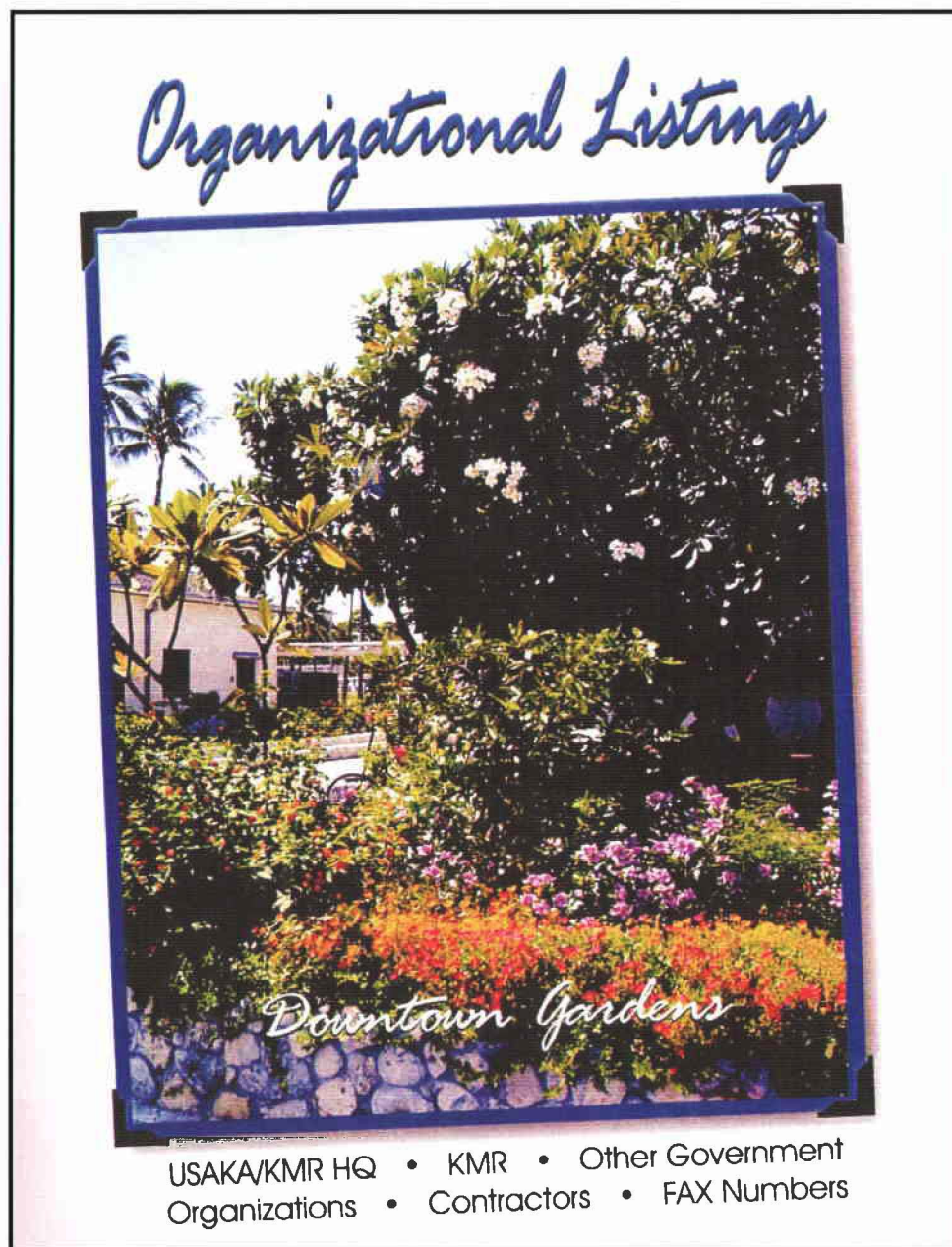


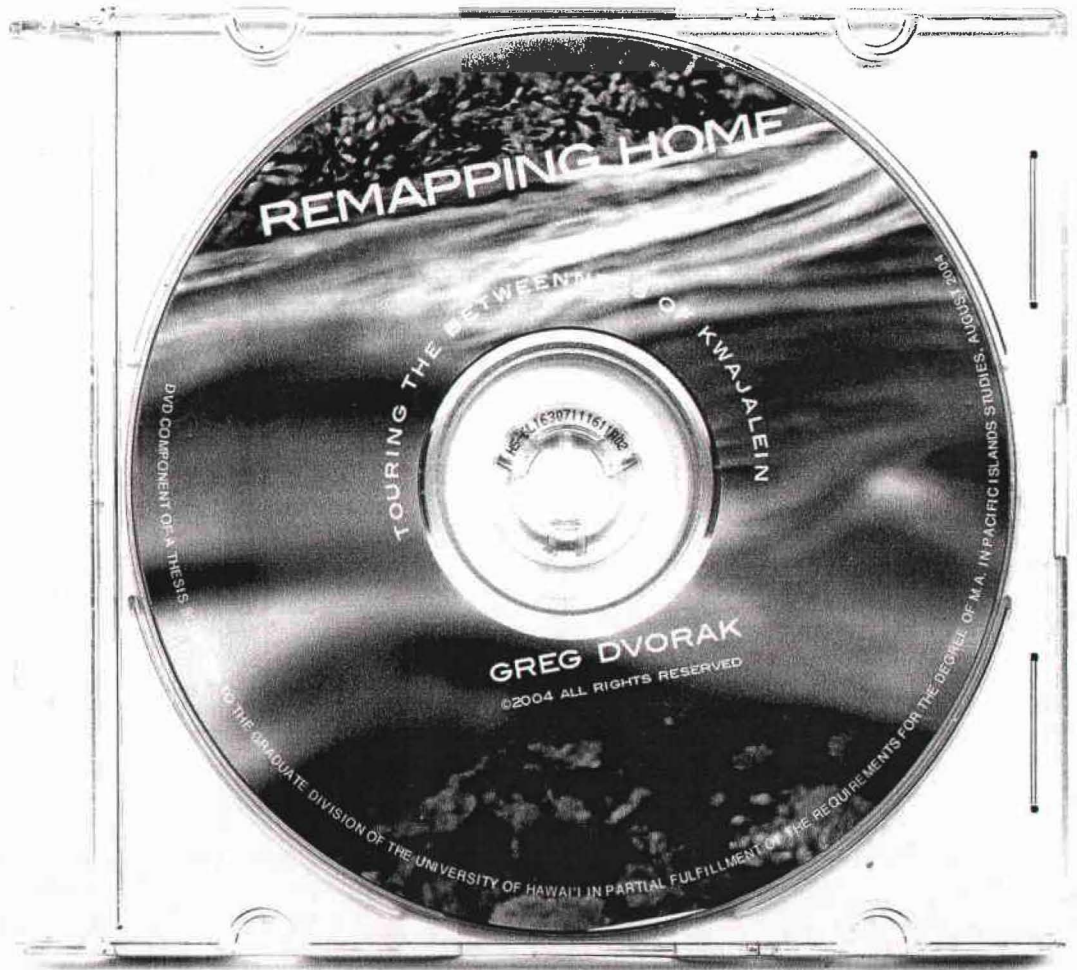
Figure 26. Downtown Gardens

The nicknaming of this part of Kwajalein as “Downtown” is also worth noting, as in fact Kwajalein does not have any real “town” to speak of. This naming is another inside joke, a way of using humor to soften the blow of living on a military base on an island several thousand miles removed from the continental United States. Like the naming of the Army’s home supply and clothing shop “Macy’s” or the food store “Safeway,” these are

affectionate ways of familiarizing the otherwise cold and unwelcoming aspects of residential life. Another example is the island's Ten-Ten convenience store—a play on 7-Eleven—a sundry shop only open until eight in the evening (not ten) at the latest. In actuality, “Downtown” is a cluster of symmetrical cinderblock buildings painted with the same off-white paint and accented with the same discreet brown signage, more like a college campus or a warehouse complex than a city center. This is part of the irony of life on Kwajalein, the willing make-believe that transpires between residents and their contrived surroundings—again, a reflection of the tension between “home” and “installation.”

Following the black-and-white “Safety Note” page regarding reefing is the section entitled “Office Index” (Figure 27). Its tabbed divider is decorated with a very colorful photo of the relatively new Marshallese Cultural Center. The image is taken at an angle low to the ground, from between the hibiscus branches, so that the thatched roof structures of the Center appear to sit deep within some uncharted jungle, as if to place the viewer in the position of a European explorer who has stumbled across an “authentic” Marshallese village. The photograph is meticulous—not one trace of the whitewashed trailers, water towers, streets, streetlights, air-conditioning units, or satellite dishes that actually surround the thatched structures is visible. No sign of modern Kwajalein appears to exist. The two “traditional” structures were built as examples of Marshallese building techniques with local materials. Yet the actual Marshallese Cultural Center building—a non-descript, climate-controlled cinderblock structure—sits beyond the frame of the photograph.

RECEIVED
AS
FOLLOWS



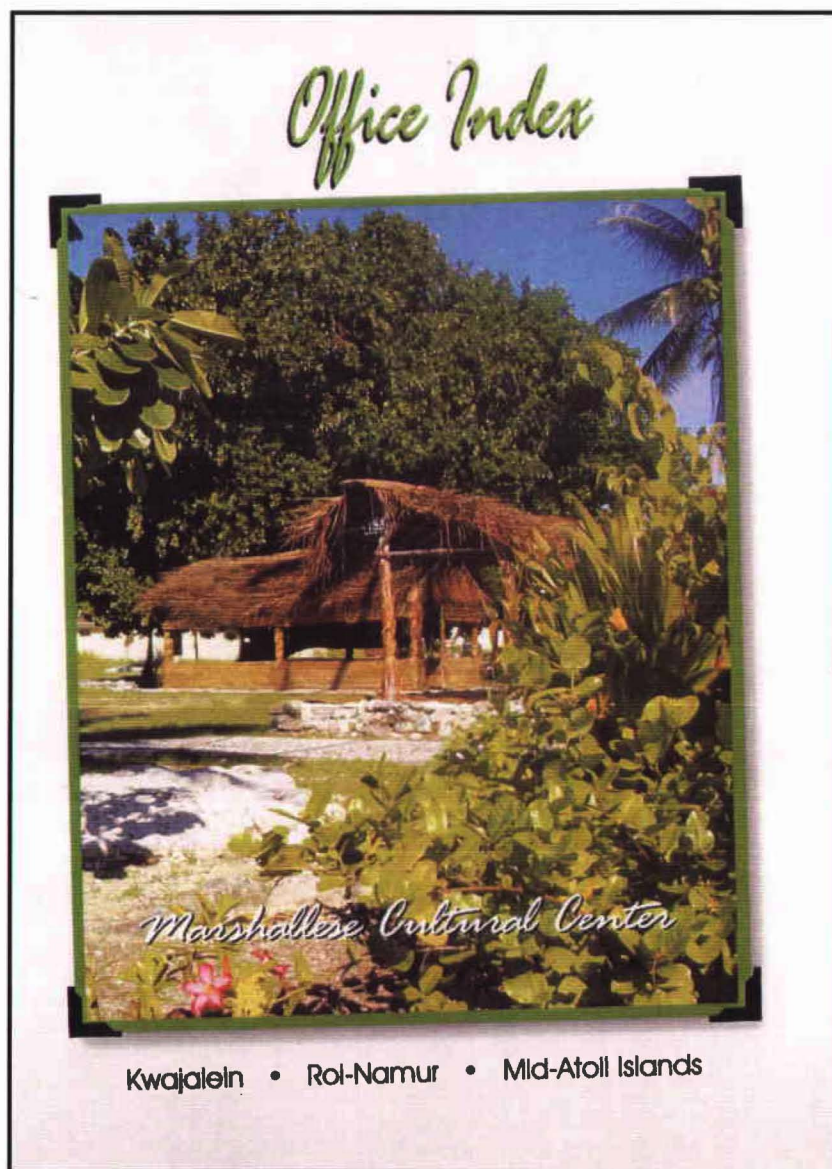


Figure 27. Office Index?

Though the Marshallese Cultural Center is a major improvement for the American community on Kwajalein in that it represents a deeper commitment than earlier years to learn about Marshallese history and “culture,” why do its abandoned, thatched structures become the image chosen for “Office Index”? Is this a simple coincidence, or is there another dynamic at play? The contradiction of the color image of these thatched pre-modern buildings next to alphabetized office listings—from Alcoholics Anonymous to

Xerox Copier Repair—is hard to ignore. It humorously suggests not only a romantic wish for what an office could be on a small Pacific island like Kwajalein but a commentary about the “underdevelopment” of the Marshall Islands in contrast to America’s “quality of life.” Ironically the obsolete Marshallese structures are also a part of the American Kwajalein landscape, and they are numbered like all other buildings, appearing on the logistical maps later in the directory as location numbers 1155 and 1156. Appropriated into Kwajalein’s Mission, the buildings are thereby made into willing colonial subjects, the stand-ins for Kwajalein’s largely absent Marshallese population. In its emptiness, the image suggests that there are no more “real” Marshallese people to live there anymore.

The same sort of technique is engaged in the layout that appears on the next section divider for “Personnel Listings.” Though the section that follows is a listing for every adult employee and dependent who lives on island, the photo featured is one of eleven young Marshallese men and a small boy sailing an outrigger canoe in the lagoon, an image that again signals a “traditional” and idyllic Marshallese context located mainly in the past and not the present (Figure 28). Considering that sailing Marshallese outrigger canoes in the lagoon has very little to do with the work that Kwajalein personnel do, the image is another subtle joke that plays on the contrast between the hi-tech world of Kwajalein in relation to its imagined “primitive” environs. The photo is captioned “Sailing with Friends,” which gives a sense of outrigger canoe travel as a pastime—though it would be in fact far more common to see members of Kwajalein’s Yacht Club or windsurfers out for a “sail with friends” than it would be to see a group of Marshallese men piloting an outrigger across the lagoon as they once did centuries before. The canoe imagery thus freezes Marshallese people in a timeless era by articulating “traditional culture” with modern Islanders, who are wearing T-shirts and jeans aboard their *wa lap* canoe.

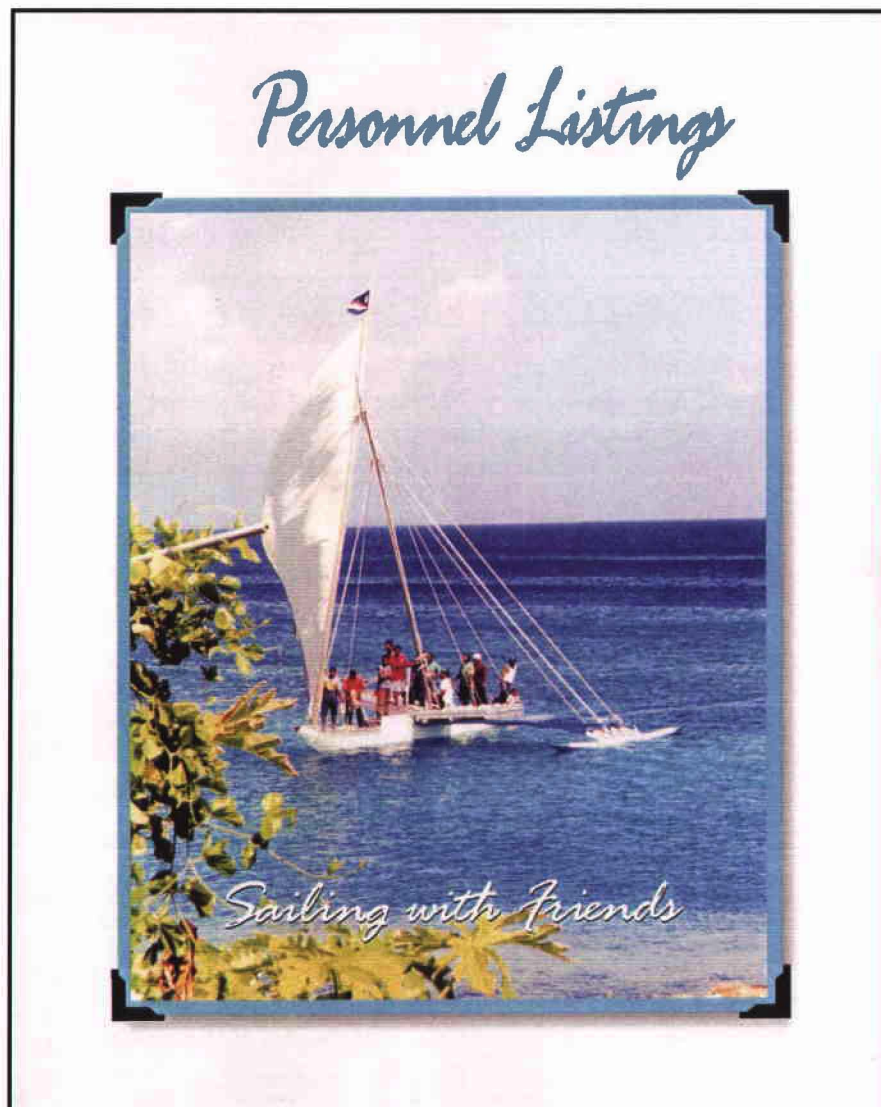


Figure 28. Sailing With Friends

Like the photo of the Cultural Center, this image is also voyeuristically captured from between the leaves and vines of Kwajalein's lagoonside, much like the illustrations made by Ludwig Choris during Russian explorer Kotzebue's 19th century anthropological expedition in the Marshall Islands (Choris, 1822). Yet this problematic image that conflates Native bodies with nature and Marshallese with "prehistory" heralds the listings for a predominantly American community of engineers and support staff. The obvious contradiction between

“happy natives” riding a canoe and the militaristic exclusiveness of “personnel” (a category to which few Marshallese belong) reproduces the binary of insider and outsider while projecting the neocolonial fantasy to escape modernity and return to a “primitive” state of imagined bliss and harmony with nature.⁷⁵ In this sense it is an expression of the desire to “go Native,” escape the controlled suburbia of Kwajalein, and, indeed, to “sail with friends.”

These color images, strategically placed throughout the publication, seem to be looking outward, away from the core of the island. They portray a wistful world of Nature, Natives, and Nostalgia that does not have much of a place amid the black-and-whiteness of the Reagan Test Site. The camera catches the Otherness of the Marshall Islands—its breathtaking scenery, warm climate, and exotic foliage—and mixes it together with the Otherness of the Marshallese people—their “traditional culture,” their “simple” lifestyle. Islanders become one with the environment, part of the wallpaper decoration that adorns the official text, part of the gimmickry that makes Kwajalein Missile Range unique. The orchids on the front cover are the same as the Marshallese “boys” in the canoe—natural, complacent, idle—a Paradise that lies just beyond the fingertips of Kwajalein residents.

Irony seems to be the dominant trope of these images, and it is possible to read the entire directory as inflected in this way, which would suggest an interesting sort of self-consciousness among the staffers of USAKA. Andrew Cowell offers the idea that most Western representations of the Pacific Eden inevitably show that “this paradise is...finally inferior to the true ‘best of all possible worlds (if not paradise itself)—the West’” (Cowell 151). Not only is life on Kwajalein represented as more superior, it is also rendered more important to the business of the real world. By ironically juxtaposing the detailed

⁷⁵ As Goss writes: “tourism...depends upon a conscious or subconscious desire for modernity’s Other, for a simple economy uncorrupted by commodity relations and natural relations with nature, and for society free of instrumentality and rational design.” (Goss 153-154)

propaganda of USAKA with a simplified, blurry fantasy of Marshallese “pre-modern” life, the user of the phonebook is reminded that American “personnel” have more serious things to do for their country.⁷⁶

There is a darker side to these images of Paradise. These “colorful” outbursts of imagined Marshallese-ness, depicted with multicolor flowers, turquoise water, verdant foliage, and brown skin are not very different from travel brochures that entice potential tourists to visit the archetypal “grass shack” or “sail with friends” in canoes. Arguably most Americans, including the personnel on Kwajalein, have seen these sorts of images before, in Hollywood films dating back to the 1920s. Most of those films have also depicted the stereotyped images of Islanders as cannibals, fools, or miscreants of some sort—and these characterizations come hand-in-hand with their idyllic counterparts.

Desnoes, critiquing photography in the context of how the “developed” world of North America and Europe views the “Third World” of his native Cuba and other colonized sites, writes:

In press and advertising photographs...the view of the noble savage or the atrocious cannibal is obvious. Either we are innocent and docile, living in surprising harmony with our surroundings, or this natural beauty turns into the ferocious grimace of the irrational savage, who manifests his discontent by overturning cars and setting fire to shops and proconsular offices, incapable of understanding the civilizing influence of Europe and the United States. Either we are noble examples of utopia, or we are soulless inferior beings, incapable of joining the modern world: docile parrots or dangerous jaguars. (Desnoes 397)

While the colored images in the directory seem to paint a romantic (but inferior) portrait of the Marshallese and their islands, there is also a concurrent narrative of danger, ridicule and distrust. This brings me to the second part of the expression *iakwe eok*. In the

⁷⁶ Urry (1989) writes that “Tourism is a leisure activity which presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organized work,” and in this sense the tourist gaze employed by the ‘colored text’ of the directory presupposes that Marshallese people don’t have anything meaningful to do but relax and enjoy life.

case of the Yokwe Yuk Dining Club—the closest Kwajalein has to a “fine” restaurant—the expression is often abbreviated to “yuk,” as in the nickname “Yuk Club” or “The Yuk.” Pronounced like “yuck” by Americans, this *double-entendre* has throughout the years provided a humorous way of complaining about mediocre food.

Though it would be an unfair exaggeration to imagine that this therefore represents a conscious disdain for Marshallese or their islands, this corruption of the Marshallese language suggests that there is a flip-side to the rainbow, a sort of “yucky” dimension to Paradise. Even nicknaming a restaurant “Yuck” bears some degree of significance on how the expression *iakwe eok*, and indirectly, Islanders, are deprecated by Kwajalein’s Mission, regardless of whether the intended nuance here is one of humor or disgust.

Color thus becomes a metaphor for a fantasy world that is, in the end, inferior to America. It signals all the tempting *scenery* of Paradise that sits just beyond the fringes of Kwajalein’s safe and predictable suburbia. It portrays a “Native” context that legitimates the use of Kwajalein Atoll for missile testing, reconfiguring the colors of the rainbow to paint its own dreams—and in many respects, its own nightmares—of the Pacific. Meanwhile Marshallese people, their histories, and their atoll environment become ingredients in this rainbow-colored icing on the Mission’s missile-shaped cake.

“Speaking” the Language


In the tradition of the Hawai'i tourist industry's co-option of the Hawaiian words “aloha” and “mahalo” to “indigenize” and exoticize vacationers' experiences, the *2001 Telephone Directory* co-opts the “Marshallese rainbow” by using the language itself. The actual expression “Yokwe Yuk” makes its first appearance on the first page in the commander's welcome message. It is the commander himself who writes these words, an American using the Marshallese language to an American audience. Underneath this bold typeface, “Welcome” appears in a smaller font, in parenthesis, as if to suggest that the expressions are synonymous. Though I should emphasize that the particular commander writing this greeting was known for his benevolence and genuine concern toward the Marshallese communities of the Atoll and his intentions were likely sincere, it is clear from this usage that he is saying “Yokwe” to give a local flavor to his words for the directory's readership.

Colonialism's tendency co-opt local words and imagery in this manner has many precedents throughout Oceania, often with unfortunate results for local communities. In the Marshall Islands in particular, the name of Bikini (Pikinni) Atoll was co-opted by French designer Louis Reard to name his “atomically explosive” bathing suit for women, to the extent that most people in the world are more familiar with the bikini bathing suit (and the sexualized female body it references) than they are with the disastrous nuclear tests conducted by the United States at Bikini, Enewetak, and Rongelap in the 1950s (Teaiwa, 1996: 95). In the case of Kwajalein, the rainbow imagery conjured up by Americans' everyday usage of “Yokwe Yuk” has a way of sugar coating Marshallese displacement, irradiation, and suffering under colonial rule.

There is overall a scarcity of Marshallese representation in the directory. Separate from actual phone number listings, which include a handful of Marshallese residents, there are only 17 instances throughout the telephone directory in which explicit references to the Marshall Islands, Marshallese language, or Marshallese people appear. Of these instances, there are four references to “Marshallese people”—including the “Sailing with Friends” canoe photo and three textual references in the introduction that refer to the Marshallese population, Marshallese land inheritance, and the number of Marshallese employees that work on the base. There are a total of ten instances in which Marshallese-ness emerges in terms of geography, “culture,” or politics—either in the form of introductory narrative and maps or in the names of buildings and streets (such as the Yokwe Yuk Club, the Marshallese Cultural Center, or Ralik and Ratak Bachelor’s Quarters—named after, but completely irrelevant to the two major chains of the Marshall Islands.)


There are also three instances in which Marshallese language is actually used expressively, including the commander’s two words—“Yokwe Yuk”—to all personnel at the beginning of the booklet. Curiously, the other two appearances of actual Marshallese text in the directory are whole paragraphs of the language. The first instance of this is in the black-and-white “Safety Note” for hazardous material spills (Figure 29). A rather comprehensive explanation and text on the top of the page indicates in English what kinds of materials are considered hazardous and it explains the rationale behind immediate reporting of such spills. However, beneath the notice appears a portion of the same text, translated into Marshallese. This specific portion is the part of the English text concerning how employees should handle spills, and it is clearly targeted at Marshallese employees handling toxic substances. The likelihood of any Marshallese employee illiterate in English is quite low, but even so, this text hails the Marshallese reader in its use of the Marshallese language. In so doing, it does


not aim to protect the personal safety of the Marshallese worker as the above text does for Kwajalein residents; instead it implores that individual to take action in the interests of Kwajalein, lest s/he encounter such a hazardous situation. In its unusual use of Marshallese, this warning also singles out spills among many of the other hazards that could be explained in the language—as if to suggest that Marshallese employees would be somehow more prone to spilling toxic fluids. The message confirms the status of Marshallese on Kwajalein as nothing more than workers, while it also serves indirectly as another safety message to residents: Marshallese workers are dangerous.



Safety Note

Spills

In case of a spill notify the
Fire Department at 



Ikijjeen Idin Im Lutok Ko Rejidimki!

Armej eo im ej loe lutok eo ej aikuj:

1. Mokaj in kajenolok im bobrae an ajeeded jabdewot lutok ko rejidimki ne ej jab kauwotata nan armej.
2. Mokaj in kojelaik booj eo an.
3. Mokaj in kur 911 im jiron armej ro kon lutok ko remaron jelot ajmuur.
4. Uwaake aolep kajitok ko an Fire Department eo jonan wot an maron.

Figure 29. Spills

Another warning follows this one on page 110 about “Off-Limits” Areas. Under an English description that clearly enumerates each of the off-limits zones on island, an image

of the actual warning signage along Kwajalein's airstrip is reproduced. Perhaps out of convenience, this image is used exactly as it appears by the runway, including the Marshallese translation on the sign that warns about restricted access to the airfield. The sign is reproduced clearly for safety reasons, but once again the rarity of Marshallese elsewhere in the directory brings attention to this particular eruption of language. The printing of an "off-limits" sign in Marshallese in a telephone directory symbolizes the larger theme of land access, not only for the runway—which, as Carucci has observed, is itself a highly significant site in Ri-Kuwajleen cosmology (Carucci, 1997: 194-195). This sign is reminiscent of the "no trespassing signs" by the harbor area that warn unauthorized persons—often including the Marshallese inheritors of Kwajalein—to stay off the island.

Such slippages in the text are moments that reveal the ambivalence with which the Mission allows the uncontrollable "colored" world to seep into its neatly edited realm of "black-and-white." To buffer against the possibility that Marshallese might stain or soil Kwajalein, the telephone directory makes a special effort to call out directly to potential trespassers or spillers before anything goes awry. In doing so, it subtly suggests to the reader of the directory that Marshallese people cannot quite be trusted.

4. DIS/LOCATING KWAJALEIN

Sticks and Sextants



Figure 30. “Marshallese Navigation”

“Island Maps” is the title of the last section of the *2001 Telephone Directory*. It plays again on the binary of “primitive” versus modern by making the analogy between what it portrays to be Marshallese mapping techniques versus those of the West. A somewhat blurry color photograph of a Marshallese “stick chart” (Figure 30) announces a black-and-

white section devoted to locator guides and detailed maps of radar installations, resident quarters, and administrative buildings on the key USAKA islands of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur. The familiar narrative white cursive script labels the photograph: “Marshallese Navigation.” Here, by juxtaposing Marshallese navigation charts with logistical military maps, the directory equates one small component of a complex, ancient system of intuitive/empirical way-finding based on stars, ocean currents and swells with modern, linear Western cartography based on latitude/longitude. In much the same way that the “Office Index” section uses an image of thatched roofs to say, ‘they’ve got their houses, but we’ve got ours—and they’re better;’ the “Island Maps” image sends the message, “they’ve got their ‘stick charts,’ but we have maps, and they’re much more sophisticated.” Once again, this is humor at the expense of the Marshallese people.

Ultimately this ridicules Marshallese knowledge. While the Marshallese stick map is a nuanced, tactile tool demarcated by bent reeds and shells that signify major atolls and wave patterns, the American mapping of Kwajalein is a tight grid of perfectly-measured geometric shapes, numbers, and labels. The comparison of military maps against the ambiguous notion of “Marshallese Navigation” serves to diminutively reduce Marshallese knowledge to “cute” archaic simplicity while envisioning Western mapping as comparatively complex, serious and “developed.”

Meanwhile, the “stick” map of the Marshall Islands appears blurry, fuzzy, cheap, and inferior—it is photographed on top of a straw beach mat—giving it the feel of a handicraft souvenir from a vacation, like the “stick charts” once sold at the air terminal on Kwajalein and still sold in Majuro Airport. In contrast to the crystal-clear, up-to-date rendering of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur in the pages that follow, this is a defunct Marshall Islands that was never worth having. This symbol of “Marshallese Navigation” could almost be seen as a

metaphor for the Marshall Islands that was dismissed in the dissolution of the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific. Unlike Kwajalein Atoll, the rest of the country is no longer desirable—it is old, flimsy, and cheap, the ‘yucky’ leftovers of another era.

The final twelve pages of the directory are devoted to “Island Maps,” which detail practically every inch of both Kwajalein and Roi-Namur, the two islands where Americans reside. These maps are elaborate, labeled by military acronyms, codes, and a uniform numbering system to account for every building, radar, water tower, tennis court, and fire hydrant. Even the water skiing dock that floats some distance off Kwajalein’s shoreline appears. Yet in contrast to these two zoomed-in maps, there is no detailed map of Ebeye, which in 2001 had an estimated (mostly Marshallese) population of at least 13,500 (Wypijewski 5), the largest in Kwajalein Atoll. There is also no map that illustrates any of the other thirty-three atolls of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Kwajalein’s relation to them (except of course in the blurry photo of the “stick map,” in which islands are marked by shells).

One map on page four (Figure 31) depicts all the islands of Kwajalein Atoll. The only conceivable purpose of this map, however, is to indicate the other main testing stations where employees work and to indicate the rectangular outline of the Mid-Atoll Corridor. This zone, off-limits when the range is in operation, is extremely dangerous during missile tests. Everyone, including Marshallese landowners, is prohibited from entering the zone unless in conjunction with the Mission. Like a gaping hole, the Mid-Atoll Corridor sits unoccupied and abandoned, waiting for missiles to plunge from the sky, or to puncture the surface of the island of Illegini, on its Western side (Wilkes 56).

Thus Kwajalein Atoll is imagined as a passive target, a goal, available and waiting for the phallic power of America to penetrate. The Mission establishes a “missionary position”

with the U.S. on top and the Marshall Islands on bottom—a scheme that takes Marshallese submission for granted. The directory’s maps reproduce and reinforce this gendering of space by delineating the Mid-Atoll Corridor as if it were a target, a goal to be “scored.” This is consistent with the way in which the directory defines Kwajalein’s Mission in masculine tropes (military, missiles, law and order, black-and-white) while it describes in imagery the Marshall Islands that lay outside as coterminous with passive “femininity” (flowers, handicrafts, smiling Islanders, pretty colors.)

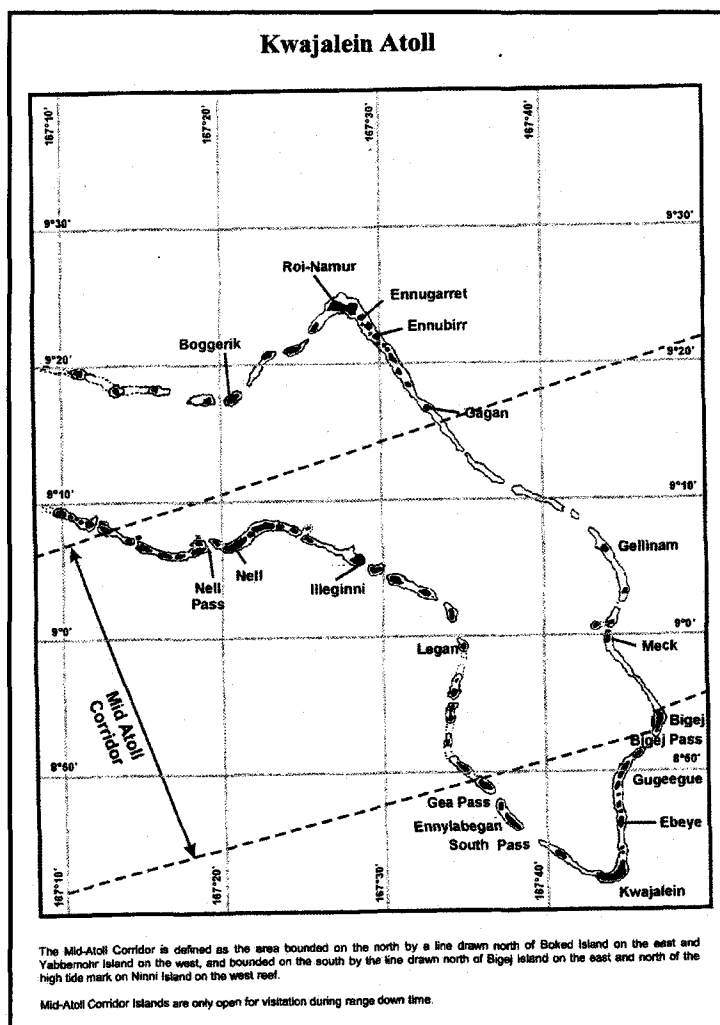


Figure 31. The Mid-Atoll Corridor

Mapping the Mid-Atoll Corridor in this fashion, setting it apart from the rest of the atoll, is ironically quite consistent with Marshallese cosmology, as Carucci suggests:

...for ancient Kuwajleen people this median sector of the atoll must have been one of extreme importance in delimiting and mediating between the spaces of sky and earth. (162)

Yet such maps exist not to privilege but to forbid access to this very important location, and in this sense the Mid-Atoll Corridor takes on its own traumatic significance, in that so many inhabitants were moved off their land and relocated to Ebeye in the 1950s, or that the United States targets this very area with its missile-testing program. The novel *Melal* also deals with the importance of this part of the atoll, as it describes two boys who daringly return to Tar-woj, their ancestral island that sits in the middle of the corridor, despite the risk of being caught by the surveillance of army helicopters. (see Barclay, 2002)

The pursuit of missile testing is also mapped and enshrined on a microscopic level in the naming of Kwajalein's streets. A close examination of the detailed maps that appear toward the back of the booklet reveals that, along with the more predictable names, like Lagoon Road, Ocean Road, Palm Street, or Pacific Drive, there are several others that bespeak the Kwajalein Mission and its history. Starting at Kwajalein's northern tip, Redstone Street references Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, site of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency and name of an oversized V-1 rocket; Lincoln Street references not the U.S. president but MIT's Lincoln Laboratories, which pioneered many of the Missile Range's early testing programs (see Wilkes); Vandenberg Street, which refers to the California Air Force base from which ballistic missiles have been launched toward Kwajalein since the 1960s; Speedball Lane, which refers to Speedball Rocket launches, such as the first successful launch in 1961 from Roi-Namur Island ("Spartan," *Nuclear ABMs of the USA*).

The list goes on: Nike Drive, Sprint Loop, and Zeus Drive also all refer to the names of missiles.



Figure 32. The Corner of Vandenberg and Lagoon

These features of the Kwajalein landscape may go unnoticed by residents, many of whom are so familiar with the small residential area that street names have no importance. The naming of streets in this manner, however, is part memorial to ballistic missile history and part folksy missile engineer humor. It serves, in Teaiwa's paradigm (1994:96), to "domesticate" missile testing and assimilate it, "naturalize" it, like Barthes "mythology" into Kwajalein's friendly neighborhood. This naming is subsequently normalized and documented by the "Island Maps."

Looking from a broader perspective, the directory's maps distort and conceal Kwajalein's actual location on the globe. As I have already noted, throughout the directory, the only detailed maps that appear are of Kwajalein and Roi-Namur. With no larger map that locates the atoll in its Marshall Islands or Micronesian context, where, then, does USAKA imagine the island to be?

Perhaps the answer to this question is to be found on page eight, where a comprehensive map of the time zones of the continental United States—labeled “U.S. Time Zones”—is shown (see Figure 33) next to extensive listings for U.S. Area Codes (most American towns and cities are listed here). An insert in the lower left corner of the map indicates three additional time zones: Alaska, Hawai'i, and Kwajalein. USAKA is thus framed as another territory of the United States, if not as the 51st State.

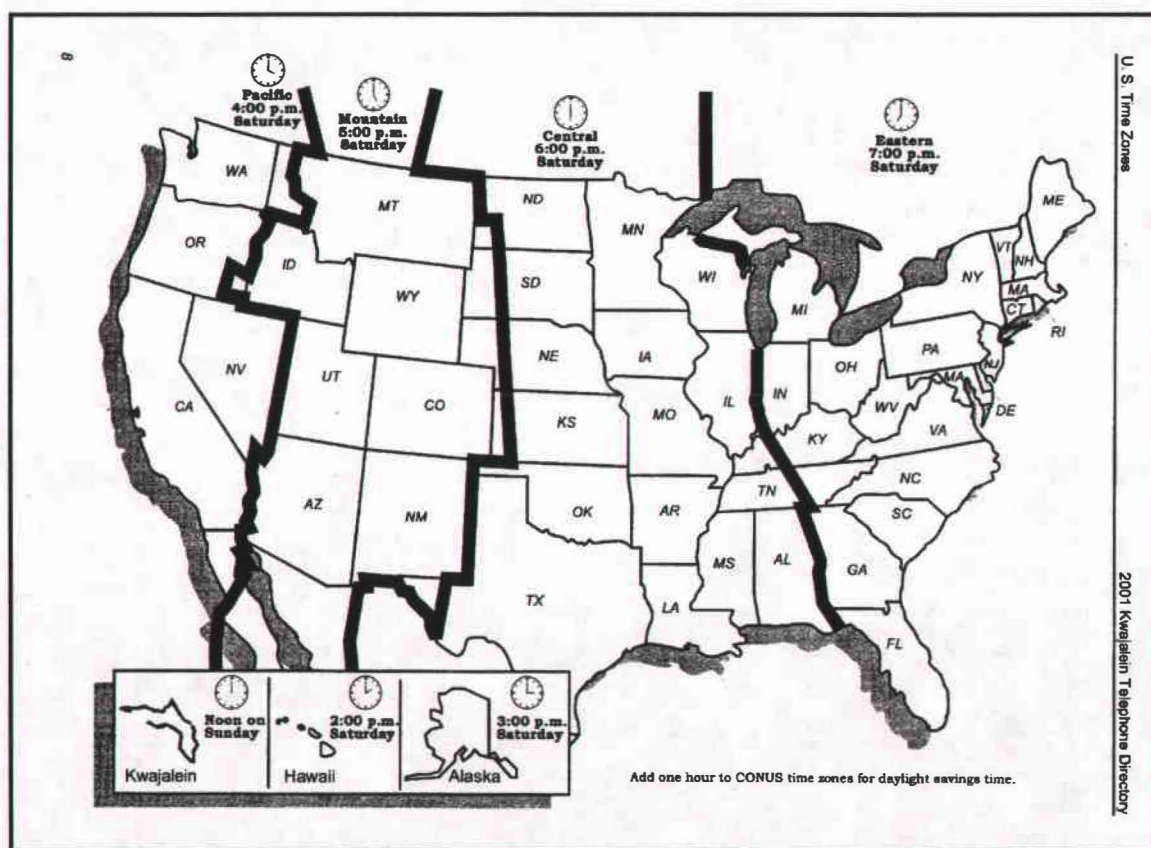


Figure 33. Kwajalein: the 51st State?

The rest of the Marshall Islands are neatly elided from the picture, sliced off the map. There is not even an indication of Majuro Atoll, the capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which lies within a one-hour flight to the east. Kwajalein is contiguous with America, just as Alaska and Hawai'i are imagined to be. This style of mapping is not

particularly unique; in fact it seems to be quite a common colonial practice. Kwajalein appears similarly, for instance, on a map (Figure 34) drawn during the German administration of the Marshall Islands as well, although in this particular case the colonizer appears in the inset, while Kwajalein is zoomed-in, likely for size comparison. The implications of these mapping techniques are worth further research and consideration, but it seems that they are each techniques for semiotically possessing territory.

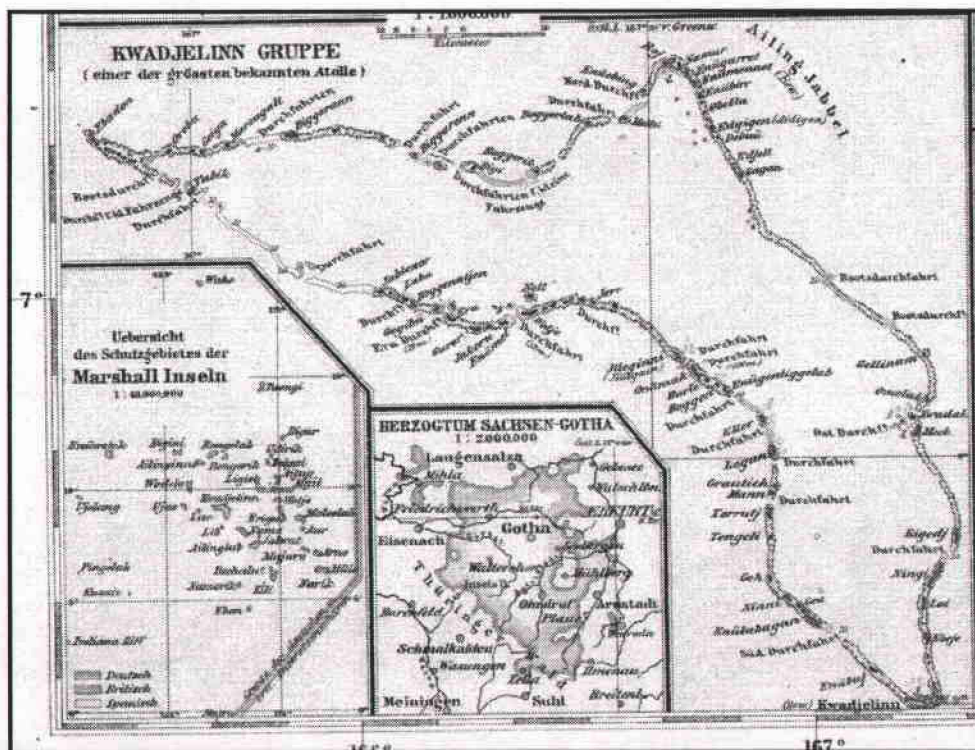


Figure 34. Kwajalein as a District of Germany in 1893 (Langhans, 1897)

The time-zone mapping of Kwajalein serves another purpose, as well: to sort out confusion. Beginning in November 1964, despite the fact that the Republic of the Marshall Islands sits on the opposite side of the international dateline, Kwajalein Missile Range ignored this convention in order to synchronize itself with the work schedule of the United

States (Wilkes, 1991). This was somewhat confusing, as Majuro and other atolls observed the correct date.⁷⁶ It was eventually devised in recent decades that Kwajalein would observe the dateline, but that its weekend would fall on Sunday and Monday, with work/school days running from Tuesday through Saturday. This arrangement has put pressure on the Marshallese who commute to work on Kwajalein, as Saturdays have traditionally been a day to prepare for the feasts and prayer conducted on Sundays.⁷⁷

This process of dislocating Kwajalein happens within the actual directory listings as well. While the map on page four is the only place in the directory where the other islands of Kwajalein Atoll make an appearance, actual telephone number listings for calling those islands are quite scarce. The only numbers that appear for islands with telephone service are the extensions of USAKA-related offices on Roi-Namur, Meck, and other islands. There are no listings for reaching any party on another island outside of those for USAKA official business, though there are four numbers listed for the on-island liaison office of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Despite five pages-worth of U.S. and Canada Area Codes, and two additional pages listing the numbers of frequently-dialed military bases worldwide, there is not even one explanation printed in the directory for how to place a phone call to Ebeye or anywhere else in the Marshall Islands. In the most literal sense, the directory thus isolates Kwajalein Missile Range from the Marshall Islands. The telephone service itself is also completely separate from Marshallese networks—a technicality likely based on the fact that Kwajalein uses military communications satellites that route its private calls through an exchange in Pasa

⁷⁶ This is not to say that it didn't have its intrigue: My parents ran with the Kwajalein Running Club, which devised "The Last Run of the 1970s, First Run of the 1980s in 1979—where the group flew to Majuro, essentially into the "future" to run their first lap on January 1, 1980, and then promptly flew back to Kwajalein, where they completed their run back on December 31, 1979 and celebrated the new year all over again.

⁷⁷ There was considerable discussion of this topic on the www.yokwe.net online forums between 2001 and 2002, when the new contractor for USAKA was being negotiated.

Robles, California. So even while over 1,000 Marshallese workers and students commute daily to work on Kwajalein by a 30-minute ferry ride from the nearby island of Ebeye, a simple phone call back home for them is routed as an international call from Kwajalein.

Even though Ebeye is visible from Kwajalein and even accessible by foot at low tide, the telephone directory offers no directions whatsoever about how to call anyone there, as if to presume that no one would have reason to do so. While there is copious information on how to place calls to the mainland United States and to U.S. military installations all over the world, in order to locate an Ebeye resident and make a phonecall, one needs first to locate a telephone directory for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, pay extra fees, or find one of the few telephones hooked up to Ebeye lines.

Mission Accomplished

All of this makes sense when understood as part of the project of the Mission: By dis/locating the island and centering it virtually in the United States, devoid of any meaningful connection to the Marshall Islands, the ideology of securing “our country” is justified, regardless of Kwajalein’s actual location in a “foreign” country.

The directory draws the tidy conclusion for its readers that Kwajalein is indeed a small town in America—a small town with nothing but the “background” of the Marshall Islands—and it carefully edits out anything that would suggest otherwise. It prescribes a binary way of viewing things, a clear split between insider and outsider, seriousness and frivolity, American and Marshallese, work and play.

In its mapping of Kwajalein, the directory overlooks the connections, the multiply-situated contexts, the rhizomatic relationships that might complicate, blur, and frustrate the

neatness and picture-perfect Mission of the United States in the Pacific. It ignores the “color” of Kwajalein’s community—the diversities, the hybridities, the betweennesses. Mooting its project of American national defense, it takes its officialdom for granted, turning its eyes outward to the glistening rainbow-hued horizon, to placid fantasies of romantic island life in Paradise.

There are of course other examples of this editing process distributed widely throughout Kwajalein’s Mission. There is Kwajalein’s weekly *Hourglass* newspaper, for instance, which could easily be read in a similar fashion, or the local cable television channel that broadcasts official bulletins and public service announcements. The message comes forth even in cookbooks, calendars, and high school yearbooks, posters and T-shirts and myriad other paraphernalia. Yet the telephone directory is by far probably the most widely-read and least-criticized document produced. In its pages it subtly instills the spirit of the Mission into all its users, presuming their compliance in constructing and perpetuating a mythology to hold the fragile illusion of American suburbia in place.

However, whether or not Kwajalein residents actually believe fully in this mythology is a completely different matter. While it may be a prerequisite to living on Kwajalein as a contract employee to comply with rules and regulations, many people likely see through the official propaganda and view it with some degree of skepticism. Yet Mission discourse breeds a sense of *status quo* as well; for although most residents acknowledge their actual location in the Marshall Islands, there are only a relative few who ever venture beyond Kwajalein, even to Ebeye. There are few who dare to ask the questions that the Mission’s deeply-engrained semiotics disallow.

The mythology of the Mission, nonetheless, is only but one of the countless layers and possible “literacies” of Kwajalein. There are other mappings of the island, many

considered far more precious than the rhetoric of nationalism or defense. Whether Kwajalein is an island imagined in the United States, the Marshall Islands, or the Middle of Nowhere, those who call it home produce their own mythologies, meanings, maps, and memories.

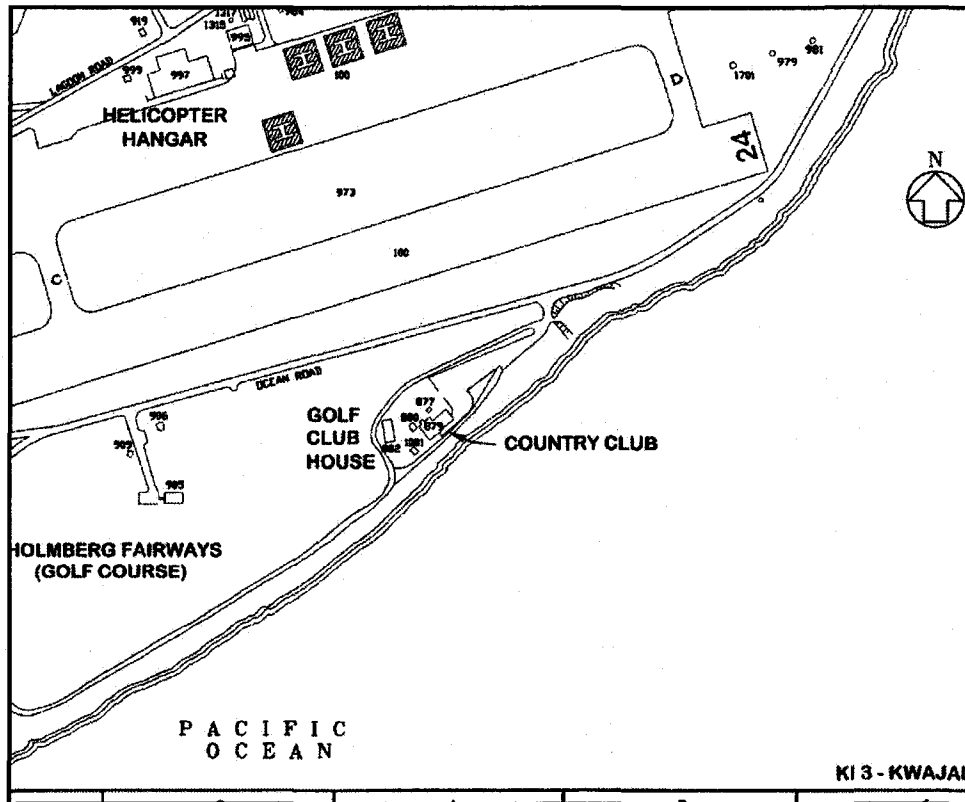


Figure 35. Detail of the Special Place (2001 Telephone Directory, 125)

DETOUR 3: Air-Con

I walk along the beach on Likiep, January, 2004, awkwardly carrying the video camera I have borrowed from the Center for Pacific Islands Studies and trying to look nonchalant as I capture moving images of fishermen tying up their boats at the end of day (but drawing attention nonetheless). Pradland, the friend I made on my last trip, is sitting on a log untangling a net when he notices me there. He smiles broadly and smacks me on the back, explaining that he was sleeping all day after hunting for coconut crabs on the other side of Likiep Atoll the evening before and hadn't realized I had arrived on that day's plane.

Across from us is another Marshallese man in a baseball cap who introduces himself as Sam. He explains that he was Pradland's tutor in elementary school, and we begin talking. Sam tells me that he is also visiting Likiep like me, where his wife and two daughters live. He works at Kwajalein, he explains, looking out at the receding tide:

"Sure is nice here," he says, squinting at the fish jumping out of the water and scintillating as they chase each other in the yellow light.

"So you live on Ebeye?" I ask.

"Sucks, doesn't it?" he says, "Cuz you know my wife and my kids live here, and I only get to see them every few months. Can you believe Air Marshall Islands tickets cost \$150 round-trip? I gotta get back here for my daughter's graduation in May and I don't know if I can even afford it."

"So you must hate working at Kwaj, then, right?" I ask, not quite sure what to say.

"No, it's alright. So clean. And the people are OK. Ebeye's not bad, either—there are so many people there. I have a good house to stay at, lots of relatives there, too. But it's

not beautiful and fresh like here. You can't even catch fish, man! People don't even realize there are good places like this in the Marshall Islands, you know."

In the course of our conversation I realize that Sam is returning to Kwajalein Atoll on the same flight as me. He invites me to come back and visit his house on Ebeye if I like, and I oblige. Over the next few days, as I wander around Likiep with Pradland and my other friends, playing with kids by the dock, I bump into him now and then, telling stories to his daughters, helping out his relatives by fixing a wheelbarrow and rewiring a generator. He nods at me—"Saturday, don't forget our plan!"

Saturday comes around and Sam and I board our Dornier flight back to Kwaj. Sam lugs with him a heavy, red ice-chest taped tightly shut. He tells me it is packed with local food from Likiep. Our plane lifts off from the island's small coral runway, flying over the long chains of interconnected islands on the shimmering blue, as we travel the 100 or so nautical miles back to Kwajalein Atoll. At Bucholz Army Air Terminal, we sit next to each other in the shuttle bus. As usual, we both are ordered to put our bags along the red line painted on the floor, where police officers in white polo shirts, black shorts, and sneakers (most of whom we both know personally) coax their gargantuan drug and bomb-sniffing dogs to inspect our luggage. The sardines in Sam's cargo arouse some interest from the German Shepherd, who immediately ignores my big duffel bag full of filthy laundry to sniff the red cooler from all sides.

Sam and I are then brusquely cordoned off into separate worlds. I am waved over to a high counter, where my temporary "Kwajalein Retail Services" identification badge is returned to me and I head out into the open air. Sam waits in a long line behind other Marshallese returning to Kwajalein to get checked off the long list of Marshallese citizens with permission to access the island before having his badge returned to him. Sam and I

agree to meet at 5 PM. I go back to my friend's room to shower, change my clothes, and take a nap. The room is quiet, dark, and smells like a corporate hotel room, the air conditioning on full blast.

Having overslept, I get on the LCM ferry just seconds before it pulls away from Echo Pier and take a seat next to Sam and his cooler. The boat is packed with other Marshallese workers like Sam, with coolers and packages, each displaying their proper military badges on their aloha shirts and *mu'u-mu'us* as they cram tightly into the rows of grey wooden benches in the lower deck, under a canvas canopy. We talk over the drone of the engine:

“So what kind of work do you do at Kwaj?” I shout.

“I fix the air-conditioning. Been doing it for six years now, since I was twenty-seven. I used to work in special education, tutoring kids like your friend Pradland, but it didn't pay so good.”

We disembark at Ebeye Pier and unload the cooler together, together with at least a hundred others who jump off with their cargo, to join a river of people headed into the center of the island. Unlike Kwajalein, where there are no private vehicles and most people ride bicycles, on Ebeye at least five taxis and trucks cram toward the boat to carry passengers back to their homes.

Sam and I haul his luggage through the crowd, across the main street and back in between several houses, through three makeshift alleys paved with coral and lined with wooden planks, and into a yard where a gigantic black dog leaps up and starts growling at me. A neighbor gives the dog a stern glance and it retreats, allowing us to step up into the sweltering kitchen of his house. Sam and I drop down the cooler in the middle of the room.

A young woman with a “Micronesian Games” T-shirt pushes herself off her chair and extends a limp hand to me, shyly introducing herself as Sam’s cousin. She is joined by an older woman with a towel draped on her shoulders who smells of deodorant soap, Sam’s auntie. The two of them set about cutting the packaging tape with X-acto knives, and soon they begin unpacking bags and bags of fresh sardines, pandanus, breadfruit, wild chickens, bananas, and coconuts. They break off one of the pandanus fruit to give to a little boy who scampers into the room, and he immediately puts it in his mouth and starts sucking on the sweet orange pulp.

Sam transfers at least a quarter of this load into a smaller cooler and then nods for me to follow him. We walk between another two alleyways to reach a house.

“Wait out here,” Sam tells me. “I’ve got to give this stuff to my *iroj*.”

A few minutes later, he emerges and the two of us begin walking around Ebeye. As we walk I carry the video camera, trying to find a way to hold it so as not to look any more conspicuous than I do already.

Sam shows me the old hospital, the church, some of the schools. He describes to me the different towns on the tiny island, like Mid-Corridor town, where the displaced people from the Mid-Atoll Corridor live. He points out relatives as they pass and smile at him and explains to me how he is from the Ri Mai Clan, and how even though he didn’t know too many people on Ebeye at first, when he came from his own atoll, Ailinglaplap, people took care of him. He tells me how he met his wife on Likiep and how she eventually decided to stay there with her family so she could raise their daughters.

“Where’s your home?” I ask him, trying to adjust the camera as he walks.

“Well, let me think... Home is where my family’s at. Home is where my family’s at, because if I don’t see my kids—ohh, man, I feel bad.”

We keep walking, past kids playing basketball, past the Bank of the Marshall Islands, past the new water treatment plant. A man walks past with glazed eyes, partly hiding a can of Budweiser under his T-shirt.

“Aw, man, he’s doing that because the new mayor just started this rule that you can’t walk around with open alcoholic drinks here,” Sam comments. “It’s working, though, sort of—there aren’t so many drunks on the street anymore.”

Sam and I hop onto the back of a truck, a taxi, and ride the rest of the way to the end of the island on the ocean side, where we pay our fare and hop off. We enter a flimsy white gate and are greeted by a heavysset man with a booming voice, who introduces himself as K and welcomes me to his home.

“Where you from, Kwaj?” he probes.

“Nah, he’s from Likiep,” Sam giggles, “I found him there.”

“Actually I grew up on Kwaj, but I left when I was nine,” I explain.

“Oh, well welcome home,” says K. “We don’t see too many kids like you around here, comin’ back like that. C’mon, sit down.”

We are joined by three other men. All of them except K, I soon learn, are air-conditioning technicians on Kwajalein. Sam takes out a Ziploc bag of Likiep sardines, and K’s sister brings him a plastic jug of vodka, which they mix with 7-Up and serve to me in a paper cup.

The men talk in a combination of Marshallese and English, sometimes translating, sometimes speaking only in English, but never leaving me clueless. As the night goes on, they boast about their repair skills, and one of them begins to go off on a tangent:

“You know, there are these guys over on Kwaj who’ve just been there a few days, and they get a good job and start acting like the boss, even though I know what I’m doing and I do it so much better than them. And you know what, those guys, those American guys, they get paid so much more than we do.”

K looks at the ground silently, nodding for a little bit and then pounds down his fist, “You know I lost my job when that new contractor came to Kwaj! I’m a *good* carpenter. I built that whole dock security checkpoint, and now they don’t let me through it!”

The others smile and chuckle at him, patting him on the thigh, “He’s just drunk and crazy, you don’t listen to this Marshallese crazyman!” they say.

“Hey!” K yells, shrugging them off, and looks me in the eye again, raising one finger, “You know what happened after that? I go back to Kwaj and I try to fill my water tank up on the dock when we ran out of water over here on Ebeye, and you know what, this security guard comes up to me and asks me, ‘who told you you could do *that*?’—and so I said, ‘I told me I could do that.’ And so he takes the water tank away from me and writes me a goddamn violation ticket! It’s my islands and they do that to me—I don’t care what you say but they’re racists! *I’m* the guy who fixes things when they go wrong, not the Americans!”

The men laugh again and try to calm him down, and then they look at me, “Stop looking so serious, man! It’s not your fault,” says Sam. “Have a sardine.”

And so I nibble at the wide-eyed Likiep sardine, which seems to look with me back at K breathing heavily across from me. I’m not really hungry, but the salty taste of the sardine, from other Marshallese waters, where the turtles and dolphins chase each other and there are no ferries shuttling workers back and forth, is otherworldly.

K reaches out and shakes my hand vigorously. “I like you. Thank you for listening to me. We gotta fix this, you know what I mean?”

It is nearly 10:30 by the time I leave Ebeye on the last boat back to Kwaj. I have never been here so late. The vibrations of the diesel engines roll up through my legs and blur the silhouette of Sam standing on the dock waving to me. I sit up on the upper deck by the steering compartment, looking back over to Ebeye, to the church, the fuel tanks, the radio antenna. From my vantage point I can easily trace the two miles back to Kwajalein with my eyes, back to the familiar layout of radars and globes and blinking lights. Somehow, almost like a cruel joke, it all exists in the same 180° of vision.

I am almost in disbelief about the world I have just seen, the jarring reality of it all, the laughter of Sam and his colleagues as they tried to console their friend—the way all of this transpired as my friends on Kwajalein slept soundly in their soft beds, in the cool of their houses, air-conditioned by those men I just met. I feel sad, genuinely sad and hopeless. Yet the stars are all out in the sky, and the lagoon glows magenta as the warm tradewinds skirt across the deck. And as I look back to Kwaj I begin to feel seduced again into the comforts of home, the quiet calm of it all. I can feel the seduction happening, can feel it creeping over me, and I do not resist.

The next day I make a stop at the Micronesian Handicraft Shop. As I browse the book section, I overhear the two American saleswomen sitting behind the register:

“You know our air conditioning broke down last night, and it was horrible. I couldn’t sleep, Ron couldn’t sleep, the kids were cranky. I thought I was going to melt down it was so damn hot.”

“So what did you do?” the other asks with a look of utter horror on her face.

“Well it was so awful that we just had to call the emergency service number.”

“Of course, honey, you just have to call them right away when it’s that bad. It’s a disaster when the air conditioning goes. “Ya can’t sleep, everything gets so hot. And the humidity! It just ruins everything, and the mold that grows! You can get sick! Did you get it fixed?”

“Yes, immediately. Best thing I ever did. My husband started even complaining he was freezing, but you know I just left that thing running at top speed, and I curled up in my bed with extra covers and just slept like a—”

“Oh, yes, sir, that will be \$25 for the Marshallese fan. Good choice! It’s so beautiful, isn’t it? It’ll probably look great on your wall!! Don’t you think? Have a great day and come back soon!”

Just another day on Kwajalein, I think as I head back out into the fresh air.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ These events took place January 24-January 25 2004. A portion of my interview with Sam appears in the Suburbia film piece.

STOP 6: Home/sickness

Kwaj is shaped like a boomerang... That's why people just keep on comin' back.

—Quote by Long-term Kwajalein Resident⁷⁹

When we are home, we don't need to talk about it...To feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia...When we start speaking of home and homeland, we experience the first failure of homecoming.

—Spetland Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 251

1. SIMULACRA

“I am back on Kwaj,” I recite in my head like a mantra. *BackonKwaj-backonKwaj-backonKwaj*. ‘Can’t believe it, I’m back on Kwaj.

I might as well be a ghost, joined by other ghosts and demons that whisper on the island’s quiet streets. It looks just as it did before, years before, as far back as I can remember. I ride a bicycle, one of the strange 1960s-style rusty but somehow sturdy bikes with upright handlebars and fat seats. This bike is named after her former owner, indicated by the spray-painted name DOT on her rear fender.

Dot is navigated not by me in my present consciousness but by my childhood self, piloted from another dimension. I ride through the streets in a silent trance, with no desire to speak with anyone, no need to communicate, just to recite the familiar turns and circles I used to make when I was eight. I am a bee dancing out the route from flower back to hive as I retrace the route I took from George Seitz Elementary School, past my old babysitter’s

⁷⁹ One of my sources explains that this quote is attributed to G.L. “Cowboy” Galloway.

former home, past the Nursery School, shortcutting across the bumpy coral rubble and grass of the playing fields by what used to be the Ivey Movie Theater (and now has become a gym) and the building that housed my kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. I ride back out onto Lagoon Road, hang a left onto Project Lane, around the loop near where Jo's Seashell Shop used to be, across Palm Drive, and up onto the concrete sidewalk that leads over through a grid of silver trailers—with all their patios, lawn ornaments, potted plants, and marine sports equipment—back to the trailer where I last lived.

The trailer is an old one, probably never even moved once since the sixties. The addition that was once tacked onto the outside of the trailer, the olive-green painted living room and separate screened-in porch with the wooden swing, are all gone now. Just a concrete foundation is all that remains. The palm and plumeria trees are the same ones that I played with as a boy, but my father's papaya and hibiscus garden has been replaced by stubbly grass. The hum of the air conditioning kicks in and I long desperately to open up the back door of the trailer, half believing I can smell the reassuring aroma of my mother broiling marinated chicken inside or the sounds of my brother, still in diapers, trampling up and down the hallway.

But I swallow my longing as I see someone headed in my direction. I make a friendly nod and grunt out an awkward, half-audible "hi" to the strange man who flashes a smile at me as he hauls a bag of snorkeling equipment past me in the other direction, cigarette between his lips. The disappointment of seeing my old home as a mere house for someone else—their home—a home for a middle-aged snorkeling smoker I don't know, chills me inside, makes me feel empty, lonely, estranged. I feel like a spaceman descended from another planet, a planet of melancholic nostalgia-seekers, a Kwaj junkie, a time-traveler. I've come home to Kwaj, but I'm not home. Home but not home. The realization

of this is alarming, no matter how many times I have experienced it and how much I anticipate the same sensation. Worse, I take this route *every* time I return to Kwajalein, wishing that by some strange magic maybe I will come back and find the trailer as it was in 1982—my father drenched and caked with soil as he waters the plants, my mother returning from an afternoon jog, my brother re-enacting fairy tales with his preschool friends.

I sit on the rocks in front of my old trailer and watch the sunset as two LCM boats pass each other, ferrying passengers back and forth from Ebeye. I used to play on these rocks with my best friend and my cat, and I slip down between their jagged cool surfaces to hear the water sloshing around inside and down into the foundations of the island.

Riding back along the coral dirt access road toward the dock, I am haunted again by other memories—of riding up that road toward Emon Beach on my father's shoulders at Christmas, when my mother would stay back home laying out all the presents; or going at night to Echo Pier, holding hands with both my parents and watching our shadows stretch out on the concrete in the bright moonlight, listening to the dock creak and moan as the terrifyingly large Navy vessels yanked at the thick ropes that moored them.

Looking out over the lagoon, to the other tip of the island, where the clusters of radar balls and oddly-shaped structures and warehouses sit in the fading sunlight, the trance washes over me again—I see that bright blue water, smooth and expansive, those distant globes on the horizon, the blinking lights, the buoys, the antennas, and the other islands in the atoll—long mounds of land, thick with coconut groves... The boat that sank in front of my old trailer and protected it during Typhoon Alice in 1979 is there, too—only its mast rises up, a corroded pole sticking out of the sea. I see this scene, this exact scene I have known since I was a baby, and I remember once again that I *am* home indeed. In a way I relate to what Epeli Hau'ofa (2000) said, for my history, too, is written on the land and the

sea; yet for me it is also the rusty shipwreck, the radars, the cranes, the missile silos, and the blinking beacons at sea that tell me this is home, that I know this place.

I slowly pedal Dot up the dirt road and approach the pier, with its new Dock Security Checkpoint (DSC). The wind smells of diesel, fresh paint, and seaweed. Marshallese women, men, and children walk up Sixth Street toward the checkpoint and the boat that awaits them after a long day of work and school. A group of men cluster along the chain-link fence, filling large tanks with fresh Kwaj water from a faucet for their families back home. Through the middle of this scene, my friendly old neighbor Ray—like an uncle to me—speeds through on rollerblades, walking his dog. He shouts out my name and waves as he rounds the corner.

I park the bike without locking it by the bachelor's quarters where I am staying this time—a recently renovated building with studio apartments that feel not unlike rooms in a corporate business hotel, with standard grey carpeting, recessed lighting, and paisley wallpaper. Nibbling on take-out Snack Bar food from a Styrofoam pack, I sit down to my computer to procrastinate for a little by playing *The Sims*⁸⁰, a video game that simulates real life. The game lets me build a new Sim[™]-house for my Sim[™]-friends in their Sim[™]-hometown, and I begin by bulldozing the land and planting Sim[™]-grass. Landscaping my Sim[™]-grounds with Sim[™]-palm-trees and Sim[™]-plastic-pink-flamingoes; installing my pine Sim[™]-flooring, massive Sim[™]-windows, a Sim[™]-grand-piano; decorating with comfortable white leather Sim[™]-sofas, some tasteful Sim[™]-artwork, a big oak Sim[™]-chest, I relish this moment of imaginary home/making. Only after I have absorbed myself in this virtual world for three hours do I realize sheepishly that here I am back on Kwaj, literally trying to

⁸⁰ "The Sims," produced by Electronic Arts, Inc., 2003, is a popular avatar-style simulation game that allows players to customize families of simulated people with unique personalities, build houses and neighborhood for them, and essentially live a virtual life within their computers.

reconstruct my sense of home, based on all that I have known about home, everywhere I have experienced it. And then the thought arises—Isn't this what everyone else who lives on Kwaj does every day anyway?

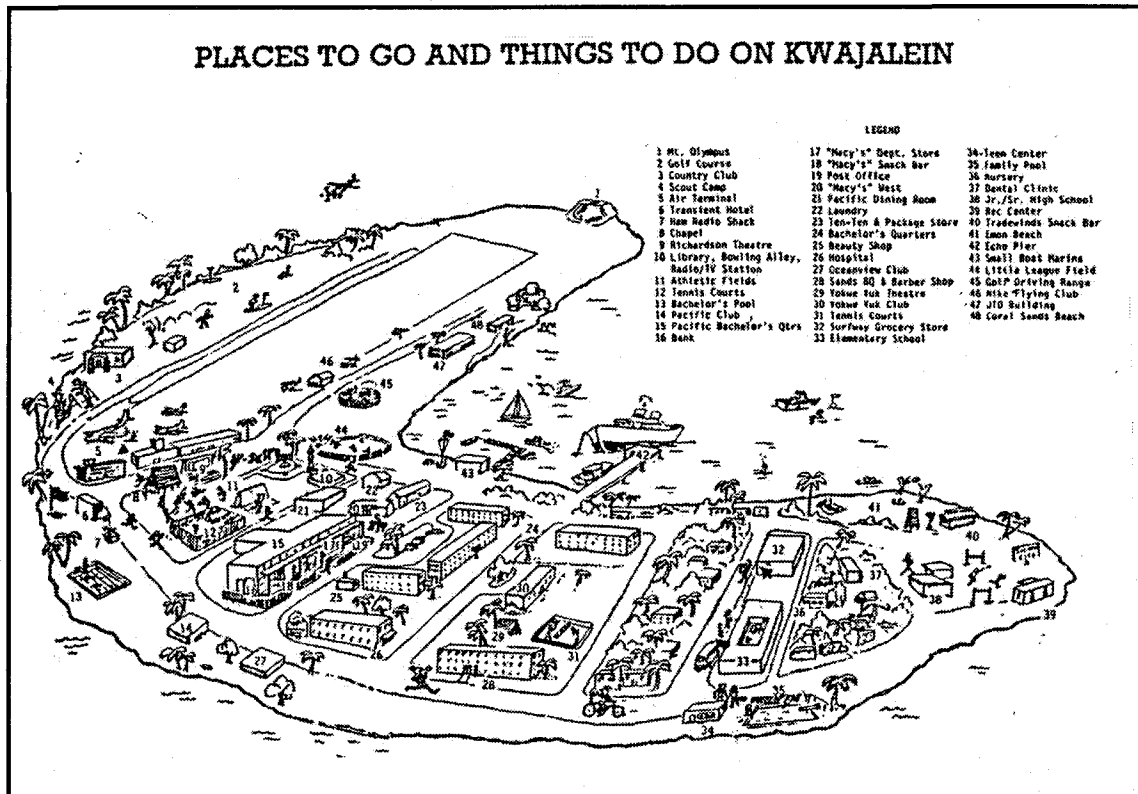


Figure 36. Places to Go and Things to Do on Kwajalein (c. 1975, Bell Laboratories)

Where are we? Is this a little town in the middle of New Jersey, or is it really in the Marshall Islands? Or is it Disneyland? My mother sends me a map from the orientation materials she and my father received when we first arrived on Kwajalein in 1975. It is entitled "Places to Go and Things to Do on Kwajalein" (Figure 36) and looks like a theme park brochure, a cartoon, a caricature of itself, where little stick people run around happily playing volleyball on the beach, riding bicycles, and playing golf. These little people might as well be little Sim™-Kwaj people, happily living their carefree lives, raising their children,

drinking wine while watching the sunsets, and waiting for the barge to come and bring a fresh load of frozen lamb chops.

Of course Kwaj is not a simulation game; it is deeply real and very important for many of the American residents who live—or have lived—on the island and love it, including me. I draw the above comparison, however, as a way of pointing out that this sense of home is not something that arises out of thin air—it is a project, a creation, an investment of energy.

Like finding oneself alone in a vacant apartment after having moved to the bright lights of an unfamiliar city and painting the walls again and again to find the right color that “feels right,” a house does not become a home until we transform space into place, until we imbue it with our own meanings and nostalgic desires. Kwaj is a complex and dynamic home that is personalized through a series of negotiations and negations, both collective and personal. The coral layers of the island remember the traces of the people who have come before, and in turn, those people remember Kwaj, even long after they leave.

2. “KWAJAPEOPLE”

The number of present and past American residents of Kwajalein throughout the world is no doubt quite large. Including all the Navy officers who worked on Kwajalein in the 1940s-1950s, the workers who came to help rebuild the island after the war, the generations of families that came to live and work from the sixties up until the present, this figure would likely reach into the tens of thousands. And while this is an enormous number, there is a sort of rhetoric of genealogy that connects these individuals, an imagination that all Kwaj people are in some way related. This notion is exemplified, for instance, by the alumni

club-style network put in place by Jody Ragan, my former preschool teacher, whose *Kwajaletter* subscription newsletter has been published since the mid-1980s from her home in the Pacific Northwest. The newsletter's motto: "News and Views Especially for Kwajapeople."

Yet the 10,000-plus Marshallese of the atoll are not necessarily counted among "Kwajapeople." *Their* histories are not quite represented by the newsletter; they are rarely given a passing thought in its pages. And while this may be disturbing, it should not come as a surprise, given the way in which U.S. military bases worldwide perpetuate their own isolated culture, their own gated suburbias independent of their surroundings. The same phenomenon could be found on the bases of Okinawa or Saudi Arabia, for that matter. Which came first, *Kwajaletter*, or Kwajalein Missile Range? The latter enables the former—it sets boundaries that create and define "Kwajapeople" and their definitions of home and place.

Kwajalein, however, is extremely unique among other military bases, and the definitions of Kwaj and its residential culture are constantly evolving. Outside the rigid gatekeeping enforced at the dock and the airport, there are few actual fences or gates—only ocean—around its outer limits. The island itself is only one square-mile, and thus everything is condensed into a small walking or bicycling distance. Its civilian community (which outnumbers military personnel by about 125 to one) is eclectic, well-educated, and diverse—with multiple ethnicities and backgrounds. Knowing this, it becomes difficult to draw tidy conclusions about "Kwajapeople" or how they relate to the rest of the Marshall Islands.

To complicate this, over roughly the past fifteen years there have been major changes in the way Kwajalein relates to its "host nation." Nowadays, for example, five

(carefully-chosen) Marshallese students from Ebeye are admitted into Kwajalein's school system, and there are several Marshallese families who actually live and work on Kwajalein alongside others. There is now a Marshallese Cultural Center, funded by the U.S. Army, which makes a concerted effort to engage Kwajalein residents in dialogue with Marshallese throughout the Republic of the Marshall Islands, all the while planning events and curating exhibits that facilitate a deeper appreciation of multiple histories.

There is no easy polemic of "victims and perpetrators" on Kwajalein, although home and community are nonetheless produced through a strange combination of oppressed histories and exaggerated privileges, established by the colonial norms of the missile-testing Mission. As Martin and Mohanty's essay suggests,

Community...is the product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities; and it is the product of interpretation, interpretation based on an attention to history, to the concrete, to what Foucault has called subjugated knowledges. There is also, however, a strong suggestion that community is related to experience, to history. For if identity and community are not the product of essential connections, neither are they merely the product of political urgency or necessity. (210)

There are, of course, multiple contexts at play at Kwaj, as I have already noted throughout this project. There are some "home contexts" and narratives on Kwaj that essentialize the islandscape and blatantly "subjugate knowledge," and still others that exploit this subjugation altogether. Take, for instance, Theresa Kelly's 1999 teen novel *Living on Nothing Atoll*, an obvious play on "nothing at all." This Christian-themed narrative, written by a former Kwaj Kid, describes the misery of a protagonist named Cass Devane, who reluctantly follows her mother as she relocates to Kwajalein to follow her new husband, a long-term island resident:

Tears streamed down Cass's cheeks... "I can't believe I actually have to live here. You know what I kept thinking as I drove around the island? This place is nothing.

You took me away from my home, my family, and my friends, and brought me down here to live on...on...nothing atoll." (98)

Eventually Cass comes to terms with her new surroundings and the friends she makes, even accepting her new stepfather. In a rather surreal and summer-campy way, she begrudgingly accepts her fate of living on an island "in the middle of nowhere," while constantly comparing it to a happier life back home.

While the book preaches Christian morals to its readers and clearly just borrows the setting of Kwajalein as a backdrop for all the usual adolescent dramas of high school romance, first dates, and sexual repression, it represents a particular kind of history that entirely negates the existence of Marshallese people (or any non-white, non-Christian individuals). At the same time the graphics that appear throughout its pages are further detached from the actual Marshall Islands: The front cover features a melancholic white girl who sits on a beach with lush high mountains in the background, and chapter headings are illustrated with parrots and smoking volcanoes.

Patrick Lane inscribes another sort of "home" narrative onto Kwajalein in his work, "My Mourning Turned to Dancing," an unpublished young-adult novel written as an M.A. thesis in 1996. Lane's Kwajalein is darker, more troubled. His autobiographical account details his family's struggle with alcoholism that ends with the death of his mother from alcohol intoxication. Yet his protagonist, Casey, is a Kwaj Kid who runs free throughout the island, getting into trouble with his friends, hunting for sharks against the restrictions of the military, windsurfing across the lagoon and nearly drowning:

It was almost paradise. Where else could a boy run around without a worry in the world? Even my parents didn't worry about me. I was surrounded by water in every direction. The ocean served as a fence, keeping me within the island's boundaries at all times—but I quickly learned to climb that fence. And that is how the ocean became my land. Within its waters, I had all the adventures and happiness a boy could have. (6)

Unlike Kelly's Cass in *Nothing Atoll*, Lane's protagonist is sensitive to the extreme contradictions of Kwaj, just as he is keen to note the disconnect between his family's external presentation and the secrets it hides from the ears of the gossipy Kwaj community. He is also observant of contrasts—of the irony of having to request the Army's permission to camp out one night with his friend on a Marshallese island on the other side of the lagoon, or of the presence of the “Japanese ghosts” (56) of Kwajalein Atoll and other forgotten histories.

The theme of the novel is alcoholism; yet this becomes a metaphor for the inebriation and obliviousness of the adult protagonists in Casey's world.⁸¹ Literally the adults of Kwajalein in “My Mourning Turned to Dancing” are “out to lunch,” while the children of the island, Casey included, have eyes to see the jarring absurdities and awkward tensions. They do not play by the rules; instead they linger at the fringes, testing the limits and interfering with their parents' extended vacations in la-la land.

Later in the book, however, Casey uses these tensions to his advantage as a way of hiding his own drinking problem. When he gets drunk during an important high school band performance at the Kwaj Karnival, he escapes to his home and, before fainting from drunkenness, tells his father that he was beaten up by Marshallese boys, hoping to avoid punishment. This ends up arousing the suspicion of the Kwajalein Police Department, who launch a search for Marshallese suspects until finally the truth is revealed and Casey ends up being silently ostracized by his peers. This, and a suspension from school, is the brunt of his punishment, however; whereas his false accusation ends up spurring several fights between innocent Marshallese and American teenagers.

⁸¹ It is quite telling that although Wypijewski (2001) was easily able to gain the information from Kwajalein authorities that residents there consume exactly 2,640 boxes of Cascade dishwashing soap in one year, the Army refused to release the figures to evidence the “extraordinarily high” consumption rate of beer.

Lane's portrayal of this kind of scapegoating is suggestive of a larger theme of Kwajalein projecting its own problems (including heavy drinking) onto Ebeye, perceiving the *other* island or the Marshallese people in general to be the ones in need of help or proper disciplining. In comparison to the *Nothing Atoll* narrative of denying the contradictions between Kwajalein and the Marshall Islands altogether, Lane's characters use those same contradictions in such a way as to conceal the unsavory side of their Kwaj paradise.

Robert Barclay's *Melal*, on the other hand, takes a different approach by mediating these contradictions through a Marshallese spirit world. There are characters like Casey in *Melal*—such as the three drunk boys, Kerry, Travis, and Boyd, who maliciously sink the small fishing boat of the Marshallese brothers Jebro and Nuke; and similarly characters like Cass from *Nothing Atoll*—the pious churchgoers in the chapel scene toward the end of the book. However, these actors are positioned in relation to something much larger and more complex; for the “playground” in *Melal* extends far beyond the limits of Kwajalein Island and stretches out into the Marshallese cosmos.

The trickster Etao, for example, recounts his experience of seeing the first foreign ships in Kwajalein Atoll, a memory which is juxtaposed against the abusive actions of the rowdy Kwaj teenagers in their “foreign ship.” Jebro and Nuke's fate, meanwhile, is determined and aided by the goodwill of a kind Noniep dwarf, who whispers ancient Marshallese wisdom and magic into a breadfruit tree he intends the boys to use as wood for making an outrigger canoe one day. Thus past, present, and future converge in one liminal space, a sort of coral rhizome that remembers and resuscitates important memories for the sake of redeeming the birthright of the narrative's snubbed Marshallese protagonists.

While Barclay's treatment of Kwajalein Americans is rather monolithic and negative, there is, nonetheless, a quality to *Melal* that is able to embrace the multiplicity of contexts,

the confluence of different subjectivities and histories. Home for Barclay's characters is really a home for demons, spirits, and tricksters, a place where the lives of mortals are negotiated precariously by the whim and fragile balance of another dimension. In this sense, the novel privileges a way of handling contradiction more akin to the Tarlan legends of betweenness in Kwajalein Atoll, and it opens up space for a more sophisticated reading, and remapping, of home.

3. TALKING ABOUT HOME

As I remap home in January of 2004, I find myself challenged by instability and contradiction; for had I not returned here while in the thick of my current inquiry, I would have been inclined to situate myself in opposition to Kwaj residents, to oversimplify and essentialize. It would have been all too easy to stylize the rough edges and incongruities of life here. However, I am reminded constantly of context. The people with whom I speak—old friends and new acquaintances alike—are for the most part very aware of the complexity of their world, aware of the context in which they lived, and very conscious of the gaps or contradictions in their relationships to a larger Marshallese sense of place. Many are even critical of the military's agenda or the treatment of Marshallese employees. In many ways they remind me of my own parents, or how my parents probably were when they lived here.

At the same time, however, there is a general consensus among the people I speak with that Kwaj is a good place, a special place with its own idiosyncrasies and peculiarities. This awareness is framed, however, within a deep context of ambivalence and uncertainty. Even some of the people who are the most adamant about their disgust for the military and

the overall situation of Marshallese, like a middle-aged European woman married to an American man, lament the thought of leaving the island one day. “This place,” she says, “has got to be the best place in the world to save money while raising our children in a safe and friendly environment. I pray we never have to move back to Pittsburgh!”

Sitting in the Snack Bar again, I am joined by my former neighbor N. and her friend T. We are eating globalized food—dried-out fried chicken breast that has been shipped frozen from a farm in northern Arizona, together with defrosted lima beans from Indiana, watercress salad greens shipped from Washington State, and blue cheese dressing from New Jersey. The two women have radically differing viewpoints of Kwaj, but I find myself able to sympathize with both of them. N., who has spent much of her life on-island and has assumed a high-ranking position in community services, has a strong sense of Kwaj as her “hometown;” T., who has only lived on Kwaj for two years and works with missile tracking, is generally skeptical of the American community, calling Kwaj nothing more than “a big American playground.”

N. is defensive at first—She tells me of her frustration about all the reporters and writers who talk about all the discrepancies between Ebeye and Kwaj without looking at the “real” community, especially like Wypijewski’s article in *Harper’s* (see page xxi of this thesis). “They just don’t get it,” she says:

Why is this place home to me? Home is so complex, it has so many different factors, not just familiarity but knowing how to act, how to dress, what to do. I feel at home because I know how to act here, I know all the social mores; I know how to be myself here, and I love it... If someone needs a hand with their bike or something, or they need me to carry something down at the post office, I like that I can do my part to make a difference, and on some other day they might help me... This hometown could be anywhere in the world, because it’s just like a small town in the USA, but it’s got something even more special. With my job I see all these kids who come here who are geeks and nerds back in the States, and when they come here, just because of the friendliness of the community, they find a place, they are accepted, feel good about themselves...

N.'s comments remind me of a sort of feeling of unconditional love, of being embraced by family members. Indeed I remember feeling taken care of, known, understood, as a child on Kwaj; and yet as I listen to her speak, I look around the restaurant at all the strange faces, at the dejected-looking bachelor sitting in the corner, wolfing down his chow mein. Does *he* feel like family? T. interrupts my thought, saying,

You know, what I don't get is all these Americans who just live here for years and years and act like they own the place, like it's really their home. They're so righteous, so entitled! I'm sorry but I liked that *Harper's* article, and I sent it to all my friends and relatives and said, "This is it, this is Kwaj for you." I think that reporter was right—she showed just how absurd it is, how Americans here are working to test missiles and living a comfortable lifestyle while people are practically starving over on Ebeye. I was so damn disgusted today during the mission, in that control room—watching those guys celebrate as their little rocket went up into the sky. Like little kids playing war games out here. I am thankful I can be here and meet these people and learn more about the Marshall Islands and all that, but I just wish I weren't out here under these kinds of circumstances, doing the kind of work that I do. It's just not right.

T. and N. both speak as they candidly share their viewpoints with me in public, and no one around us even turns to look in our direction. N., having listened patiently to T.'s assessment of the situation, responds:

But, hey, look, when I was a kid that's what my dad did for a living out here, and you know you can blame people and yourself for being complicit in a multimillion dollar defense industry, but you know what? You could say the same thing about the people who work for Coca-Cola and big pharmaceutical corporations, rippin' everyone off, making them sick, putting people out on the street? How about all the ordinary consumers who eat meat and buy products from multinational corporations? *And* if everyone were to quit, the military would quickly find replacements for all of us anyway. I feel like if I can do my job well and make this place a good hometown for the people who live here, including all the Marshallese people who work for me and all the kids that study here, than I'd rather it be me, who loves this place and cares about it, than someone who doesn't care where this place is and thinks it's in the middle of nowhere.

T. still shakes her head:

I guess what it is is that when I think of hometowns, I think of people doing their part for the community, helping out, making a difference for the people around them. And here on Kwaj I've seen so little of that—it's just deeply appalling and it makes me sick.

N.:

What are you talking about? Not here on Kwaj. Everybody here helps each other out! Maybe there are some exceptions, for sure, but if you compare it to some town in the States...

T.:

Well, I think it depends on what your definition of "the community" is. If you're talking about just this island, fine, I agree. But we're in the Marshall Islands here. What are we doing to help out our neighbors?

N. replies,

Keep in mind, though, that there are some Americans here who feel like they *are* helping out the Marshallese, but then they feel really cheated when they lend money and it never gets repaid, or when employees don't show up for work, or when money and wealth from the rent payments go to supporting huge luxury houses in Hawai'i and stuff like that...

The discussion continues for another hour, but as we talk we all realize how arbitrary and flexible these definitions all are—home, community, "helping out." Though I appreciate T.'s perspective fully, I also deeply understand N.'s deep love and commitment to home, her sense of belonging, the grounded-ness she feels. It becomes clear to each of us that Kwaj is such a contextual place, that so many readings of "home" are possible but that it all gets down to one's consciousness, perspective, and position of power.

N. acknowledges that a part of her frustration with the portrayal of Kwajalein as nothing more than a post-Cold War missile-testing site is that she feels like "home" is missing from the picture, that the story is unbalanced and no one has tried to show the other side. It feels awful to be "othered," to be made into the object of someone else's

generalizations and stereotypes. Yet at the same time, all three of us simultaneously other Marshallese, while making assumptions about the 2,500 residents of Kwajalein, most of whom even N. and T. admit they do not really know.

“It is crucial...to avoid two traps, the purely experiential and the theoretical oversight of personal and collective histories,” write Martin and Mohanty (210.) Indeed, home on Kwaj is related to deeply interwoven, but highly contextual and specific histories. Even the personal histories of T. and N., two American Kwajalein residents, differ radically, while they both share relatively the same collective history on the island. Meanwhile, this sense of home has to do with whose history is suppressed and whose is privileged—who gets to, literally and metaphorically, do the landscaping and choose the curtains of “home.”

That Sunday I spend the day with a young married couple, roughly my age. We genuinely enjoy each other’s company and continue to talk about our different experiences and their impressions of Kwaj after living there for two years. I find them deeply self-reflexive, aware of the complexity of the island but also completely conscious of their own ignorance as well. They talk about their positive experiences of dealing with their Marshallese nanny, and what good, loving care she takes of their children. They talk about all the friendships they have developed on-island.

“Is this place home?” I ask them. They both agree immediately, even though the wife describes her feelings of missing her family around Christmastime. The husband insists that he has everything he needs there, that he could live the rest of his life there happily, snorkeling in the water and raising his kids. “It’s a good place to get a head-start in the world, to save money and have a comfortable lifestyle. We wouldn’t be able to live like this, both working jobs with three kids, if we lived in the States. We couldn’t come home and eat lunch with the kids or spend as much time with each other like we do now.”

“How long do you see yourselves living here?” She answers, “I’d stay here anywhere from two to five years, and he’d stay here forever if I’d let him...”

The next day I bump into my former babysitter at a barbecue by Emon Beach. When I tell her about my project, she immediately reveals to me that she is half-Marshallese, half-American, something I had never realized. She tells me of how her family owns the *wato* (land parcel) that includes the beach where we are standing, and some of the land where the residential community of Kwaj sits. Her grandmother, she explains, was the first Marshallese person to emerge from hiding to talk to the Americans after the Battle of Kwajalein.

“But I can only live here because my husband and I have jobs here,” she says. If my contract is up, that’s it. I’m out of here, and you’d better believe I don’t want to live over on Ebeye. You know I have relatives over there, but I can’t stand it. It’s so dirty, so hot. Everybody’s always trying to get money without working for it.”

She tells me how upset she was when she had to act on behalf of her ill grandmother to help distribute the rental payments for the land they received from the U.S. government. She describes huge amounts of money, unbelievable amounts of money, “here one day, gone the next,” to pay off longstanding loans, to get the whole family out of debt.

“I tell them I love them but I don’t want to have anything to do with the money anymore. I am Marshallese and I love my home. But I’m American, too, and *this* is my home, here on Kwajalein. I love it here with my kids and my family...we’ve got so much freedom to do what we want here. You know people say it’s paradise, but it *is* paradise. It’s so safe, so easy, so comfortable...”

My babysitter’s complicated notions of home fresh in my mind, I revisit my elementary school, where I talk with my old classmate from third grade who I have not seen

for twenty years but who remembers me perfectly. Now she works as a teacher in the classroom next to where we used to have art class. “You used to wear those huge glasses and your teeth kinda stuck out,” she says. “Yes, that’s me,” I reply. She shares with me her own experiences of leaving Kwaj as a little girl, her trauma of not being able to fit in with her new environment, and how eventually she could think of nothing better than to come back home to the island, that she was so lucky to be able to get a job there and return.

Kwaj is about the friends, about the people you know your whole life. It’s just so emotional when people leave for good, when they PCS. Parents don’t realize what a big stress that is for kids. I mean it’s like your whole world out here... I know this guy who came here after you left. He went away when his family moved, and now he’s in his thirties like us, but he’s scared to come back. He doesn’t want to mess up the memory. He wants to leave it just the way it was.

She continues:

Then there are those kids who come here to study from Ebeye. My heart goes out to them because they try so hard. They come here on the boat everyday, leading double lives. The little girls, they have to change their clothes before they get on the boat, get out of their shorts and change into skirts to cover their thighs [as per Marshallese custom]. And you know they get treated differently by the other Marshallese kids from Ebeye, like those “water boys” who used to ride the speedboats over here to fill up tanks of water. It’s like they’re from different worlds, but they are so good at existing in different dimensions at the same time. Here they are in our classrooms, just like you and me were, and the other kids here are pretty nice to them but they don’t always appreciate why these kids don’t always understand English. We’re trying to implement a standardized Marshallese cultural education component in the curriculum, and would you believe that there are some parents and teachers who actually totally oppose it? I just don’t understand why people can’t see the reality of where they live!

Again, the theme of betweenness—double lives, liminal lives, complex lives. Why, we both wonder, does it have to be so hard for some of us, and why so much easier for others? Why do we keep coming back? We are so homesick, sometimes in the most literal sense—nearly pathological. And why can’t some of us leave?

Boarding my flight back to Honolulu, I bump into another classmate of mine, who tells me that he will be leaving Kwajalein finally, with his wife and two children, after living there for nearly twenty-five years of his life. He tells me, “You remember all of this as well as you do because you left, because you missed it so much; but I’ve just been taking it all for granted. It’s home, it’s really home to me, but I just can’t stay here anymore. It’s time to go.

“You’ve been all over the place, you’ve seen so much. Think about how I feel—Now I’m headed to the mainland. I’m pretty scared about it, man, but I guess it’s an adventure, right?”

The man in front of us, a temporary-duty engineer on his way back to the U.S. after completing a month-long assignment for last Wednesday’s missile test, is wearing a banana-yellow tank top. Its bold lettering, like a banner dangled in our faces by the trickster Etao, screams out:

“LIFE IS A JOURNEY, NOT A GUIDED TOUR.”

STOP 7: Suburbia



Figure 37. Girl Running Across Sunset, Kwajalein, 2004

Please select the DVD movie file “Suburbia” and view. For a synopsis and commentary, see Appendix C, page 169.

INTERMEZZO: Return to the Special Place



Figure 38. Writing at the Special Place

26 January, 2004 1:35 PM

At the Special Place, Kwajalein, Oceanside

So here I am back at the special place. I thought it important to bring the computer right here to this very place and actually type the thesis here. It's a bit extreme, but there is nothing like the feeling of genuinely producing on-site, live like this. There is a considerable difference between this and just writing the thesis while in an air-conditioned room. The color of the ocean here is simply incredible today. Strange how Oceanside on Kwaj like this has been from my childhood such a dangerous place. The discourse of Kwaj always *made it into* a dangerous place—spooking us all out and making us fear for our lives, despite the fact that over on Ebeye, kids are constantly surfing in this stuff. Go figure. Kwaj is indeed, as a colonel apparently once said, “a cross between Star Wars and Leave it to Beaver.”

So how do I describe this place now—not the memory, the present day place on January 26, 2004? How do I describe the hot smell of my own perspiration fusing with the salty coral, that smell of rubber tires and wetsuits?

The sounds, the ocean's incessant, infectious roar, pounding, receding, angrily, softly, and then gently trickling and stroking the reef delicately in those little moments *between* the waves. The palm fronds constantly swishing and fluttering in the tradewinds, gently, delicately, calmly.

A *kwolej*, a sandpiper, tiptoes its way along the exposed low tide reef. My friends on Likiep told me that in Marshallese cosmology, sandpipers are the spirits of ancestors. Perhaps it is my father visiting with me here in this place, in this time, in the only way that he can.

The picnic table is still here, though it seems to be a newer one than before, but just as bent and weather-beaten. Does anyone ever come here to this place? It seems so forgotten, so lonely, and yet so privately my own place. My body feels calm, almost perfectly at ease, as if I might just be dreaming this, the sound of these waves, the freshness of the air, the cloudless sky and the radiant sun. I sit on the coral rocks and rubble amid hundreds of cigarette butts, dessicated palm fronds, coconut husks, an empty can of grape soda, a plastic take-away lunch tray. The air is scented heavily with brine and the astringent, bitter aroma of *konnat* leaves, the plant with the half-white flowers.

The very process of my engaging in this research and writing, in writing Kwajalein, has taken me from one Cold-War context to another, from the East-West Center to the Missile Range. Yet it still feels like I am coming home—even though in some ways I'm not

anymore—most of my friends are gone and few people remember me. No matter how much I learn, how much pain I feel, how much vision I have been given, from the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, from my experiences in Japan, throughout the Marshall Islands, in the suburbia of New Jersey, I only see more, and I feel more, and I know that Kwajalein is one place that cannot be taken for granted. I feel this earth and the hot coral beneath my body, and my body connects down into the miles of coral reef below that reach down deeper and deeper, thousands of feet to the bottom of the sea and deeper, roots reaching down through the center of the planet. I know that despite the illusions that play on this coral rim, there is also something enduring, something important. I feel home here, between the fragile yet rock-solid coral networks of possibility.

Here in this special place, amid the anxious anticipation of not quite knowing where I stand, where any of us stand, I reaffirm my betweenness, the slightly uncomfortable liminality of always being in between, in flux, in transition, and I pray that everyone keeps their eyes open and sees what's really going on, despite the tremendous desire to dream of better days in a paradise that doesn't really exist.

Everything is changing, and the reef is expanding, constantly. I feel deeply mournful, on the verge of tears; and simultaneously I feel overjoyed and awed by the largeness of this all. This coral rhizome is amazingly large. It is so much bigger than me, than any of us.

Appendix A: Synopsis/Commentary for “Flight”

The process of making this video piece in June 2003 took me to the archive map room of Hamilton Library, which is probably one of the few places in the world that actually possesses piles and piles of Kwajalein maps. With a digital video camera, I took footage of each map, "flying" over it as if I were in an airplane. I also was given access to several aerial photos from the Trust Territory Administration period. I flew in over these as well, taking several quick passes.

However, all of the footage in this particular film shot on Kwajalein was taken with nothing but a small digital camera in short, 15-second shots. Editing these pixellated, grainy clips together was an interesting part of the process, as I had taken these shorter, lower quality, shots originally in 2002 without any intention of making them into a longer piece. The brevity of each shot made each a compact moving image that lent itself well to being montaged and collaged with the others. Additionally, the underwater casing for my camera made it possible to take shots of bubbles in Kwajalein Lagoon or images of sunken

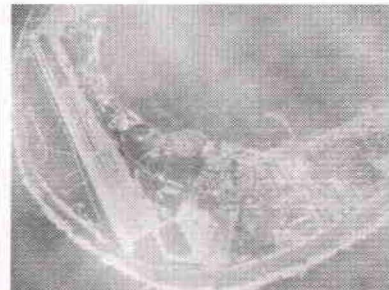


Figure 39. Fly-In

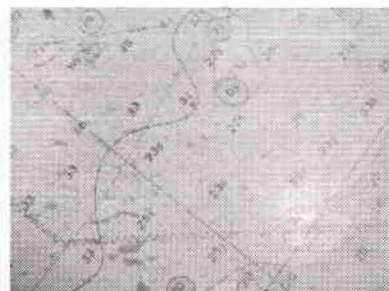


Figure 40. Depth Charges



Figure 41. Japanese Ship

Japanese ships while diving.

The soundtrack begins with the imagined sound of a mission control countdown for a Spartan missile test. This lapses into a flurry of cockpit voices, followed up by morse code transmissions, the roar of commercial jet engines and the announcement of a cabin attendant on Continental Airlines, the main commercial carrier in Micronesia, which makes frequent stops on Kwajalein. This evolves into my own voice, at age 5, saying the Pledge of Allegiance. This fades into the sound of a marching band (Father Hacker's Assumption Marching Band, a band of Marshallese children from Ebeye who would march in the parade on Kwajalein in the 1970s—the sound coming from an old family recording of that parade.) This shifts then back into the sound of the jet cruising and evolves into the sound of a Marshallese choir, which plays until the end of the film, where the choir cuts out back into the sound of cockpit transmissions and morse code and ends in the whoosh of a missile shooting out into the lagoon.

I 'mapped' my visual imagery into this soundtrack. The film begins with a quick, missile-like pass over Kwajalein (from the visual archive photos) and fades into a submerged underwater sequence with bubbles floating up to the surface of the lagoon (actually taken by me

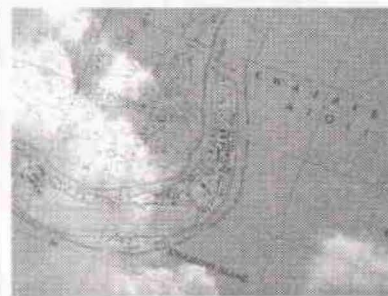


Figure 42. Japanese Map

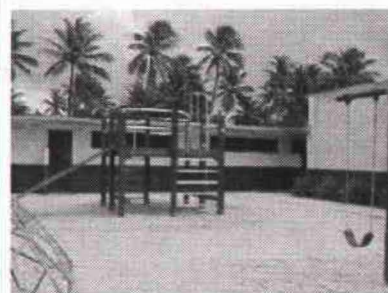


Figure 43. Schoolyard



Figure 44. On Coral Sands



Figure 45. Stained Glass

underwater in Kwajalein in Summer of 2002). This underwater imagery is superimposed with the image of a depth charge sounding map, which then evolves into the actual landscape of Kwajalein—images of suburbia. The next thirty seconds is a series of crossfades from maps to ocean to sky to landscape, to Kwajalein housing and various logistics of that nature. However, this domestic scene contrasts sharply with the technical and nervous noises of airplanes in flight and missile tests. The visual, too, of being submerged underwater is an attempt to bring forth another image of Kwajalein—underwater—Kwajalein seen from the reef that gave birth to it—my attempt at bringing forth the eternal Kwajalein that has not been quite as manipulated as the island itself. Then again, I also show an image later of a submerged Japanese battleship at Kwajalein, showing buried history and buried layers of meaning.

The next section of the film is announced by my saying the Pledge of Allegiance, which coincides with imagery of the U.S. flag flying beside the Marshallese flag on Kwajalein, and this crossfades into an image of stained glass in Kwajalein Chapel, which portrays a soldier, on bent knee, looking up to the heavens—looking upward lovingly to an American flag with his back toward the Marshallese



Figure 46. Ebeye Aerial



Figure 47. Greg on Rocks

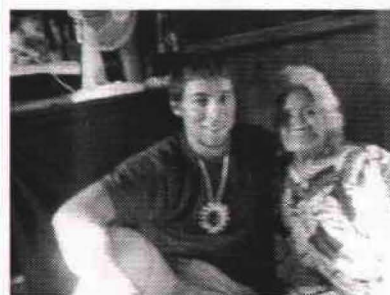


Figure 48. Tim and Neitari

flag. Then there is a short flash of the actual Father Hacker's Band that was taken by my father in the 1970s as the parade music plays.

This introduces a segment of film that montages over the juxtaposition of tree-lined and "suburban" Kwajalein in contrast to barren, slum-like Ebeye. At the beginning of this segment there is a short shot of my silhouette in the 1970s in front of the sunset that cuts into my walking in exactly the same place in 2001. This cuts shortly into an aerial of Ebeye. There is then the awkward shot of my brother posing with our former maid Neitari in her plywood home on Ebeye, the fast-paced, nervous aerial flights over maps and photos of Ebeye and Carlson (other islands in Kwajalein Atoll), and several other contradictory images.

This shifts into another pass over a detailed map of Kwajalein, showing water towers, logistics, and so forth, and an image of the turtle pond on Kwajalein is visible for a few seconds—suggesting otherwise free marine animals living in captivity—and this moves upward into a montage of undersea bubbles with the trailer home (these are the predominate form of housing on Kwajalein) where we lived when I was a child, give the feeling again of submersion (how it's all just an era, just a time that will



Figure 49. Turtle Pond



Figure 50. Tarlang Rainbow



Figure 51. Net Fishing



Figure 52. Eating Sashimi

come to an end someday).

This is followed by a series of images taken by my father, spliced into footage taken from an airplane of taking off and leaving Kwajalein. These images are shots of Marshallese people making baskets, net-fishing at sunset in front of a huge missile silo, a shot of the 'special place' where my father and I would picnic, and then the film fades into blue sky and lagoon, more shots of Marshallese maps and then a pan over a Marshallese navigational stick chart (charting the way). The chorus begins to fade, washed out in cockpit transmissions, etc., and as the sound of the missile comes through, the camera makes a very fast swoop like a missile re-entering the atmosphere over Kwajalein and a final fade to black.

My thoughts throughout this process were intense. I felt a sense of intuitive guidance about where to place my visuals in terms of the soundtrack, and how contradictory images could work together to form a sort of 'third language.' This was very important in helping me to articulate many of the complex messages I am dealing with in my inquiry about Kwajalein.



Figure 53. Special Place



Figure 54. "Stick" Chart

Appendix B: Synopsis/Commentary on “Kwaj Kid”

This video was produced mainly out of footage taken by my father on Kwajalein in the early 1980s with an 8mm movie camera. Reviewing the footage with a renewed sensitivity to the contradictory tropes of home and missile testing, I was startled to remember how insignificant it had always been to me as a child that a three-story high Nike-Zeus missile had always sat on a concrete pedestal on the grassy playing fields near the air terminal. A monument to missile testing, the rocket stood there as a symbol of Kwajalein’s mission—and it served as an “innocent” prop in one of the short clips in my father’s family film.

In juxtaposing these images, I was conscious of Teresia Teaiwa’s theory of militourism, in which touristic pleasure and “paradise” is achieved in colonial Pacific contexts through military intervention and military operatives are domesticated by tourism. Here I contrast my own childhood touristic pleasure in Paradise not only with the image of our local domesticated “pet” Zeus missile but also with archival images from the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands Archives that show Marshallese people evacuating Kwajalein and being



Figure 55. Riding bike

relocated after World War II, walking in the same places where I ride my bicycle in the film. I also interrupt my family's fun at Emon Beach with overlaid imagery of Marshallese children playing similarly, to reference a time on Kwajalein when all Marshallese children once had the privilege of swimming there.

On another level, this short film is in dialogue with the work of Katerina Teaiwa (2003) whose filmic montage style of combining old archival footage of phosphate mining in Banaba and her own video footage of present-day Banaba operates as a way of describing highly complex and contradictory realities. I was also inspired by the film *Coming Home to Banaba* (1989), a documentary that contrasts the experiences of relocated Banabans and expatriates returning to their childhood homes with radically differing reactions of nostalgia and bitterness. I chose also to use a film projector sound effect as in Teaiwa's films to simulate the ambience of old newsreels and family movies.

I also consciously modeled the film as a response to Adam Horowitz' documentary *Home on the Range* (1991) a piece that explores Kwajalein Marshallese landowner's experiences of Operation Homecoming, the peaceful protests against the U.S. unfair use of the atoll in the early 1980s.



Figure 56. Relocation

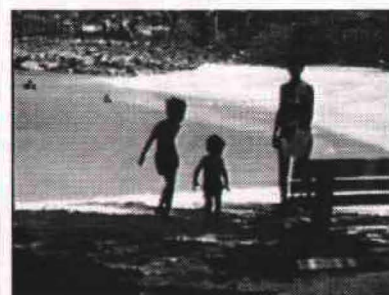


Figure 57. The beach

The film begins with a recording of me as a five-year old asking my mother if she's ready to go on our picnic lunch, if the food is ready. Here I am playing with the idea of picnicking, and how it can be such a colonial process—claiming land and using it as one sees fit—and also with the idea of eating, eating land and eating history. I emphasize this with a shot of myself riding down the dirt road outside our house and fade it in with a shot of the same exact road at the end of World War II, when Marshallese people were being escorted by American soldiers.

The imagery flirts back and forth between a vibrantly colored scene of idly playing with my mother and brother at Emon Beach, and the same shot of my brother and me playing on the missile. The latter shots are in sepia, to give a feel of oldness, forgotten-ness, almost banal history. The third narrative that flows through this, then, is a series of shots of me traveling home on my small bicycle with training wheels. In between I have also inserted images of underwater coral, and black and white images of Marshallese children playing on the beach, to indicate how their histories, too, are erased or obscured by my childhood Technicolor playground.

This film used music, as mine does, by a

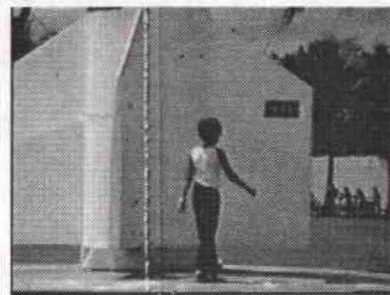


Figure 58. The missile



Figure 59. Holding hands 1

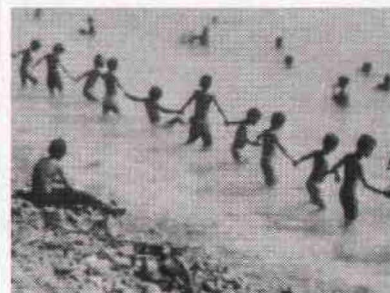


Figure 60. Holding hands 2

Marshallese folk band called Skate-Em La; however, the images shown together with this music are of Marshallese children playing with trash on Ebeye. My intent here is to flip the “good guy/bad guy” contrast suggested by Horowitz by showing American children (myself and my brother) playing on Kwajalein during exactly the same period—along with the remarkable absence of Marshallese children, except in short “glimpses” from another era. The folk music in the background serves a different purpose than in Horowitz’ narrative, where it is merely an indigenous accompaniment to Marshallese play time.

Rather, here, with the images of idyllic American childhood, the music becomes oddly uncomfortable and seemingly misplaced—and it is this tension between Marshallese land and American colonialism that I am trying to bring to light. Skate-Em La’s lyrics sing of ‘being proud to be from these islands,’ which again is contradictory to the American childhood that transpires on screen.

The final song that plays, at the end of this film, is of my friend Ujaju on Arno Atoll reciting a children’s song called “Ta Kijom In Jota,” which basically translates as “What did you eat today? Breadfruit, coconut, pumpkin...,” and so on. This is the complement to the “going on a picnic” theme that I begin the film with.



Figure 61. Swimming kids



Figure 62. Speeding home

Appendix C: Synopsis/Commentary for “Suburbia”

This final film in the trilogy of three short videos included in this project represents an editing process of the on-site filming fieldwork (or “homework,” as Katerina Teaiwa would say) at Kwajalein Atoll. This final film is only roughly ten minutes of the eight hours of footage I took at Kwajalein, Likiep, and Kosrae during January 2004. Here I am trying to expose the complexity of Kwajalein—the warm coziness and sentimentality of the residential community in all its black-and-white predictability and old-fashioned innocence—while also bringing forth the overall displacement of Kwajalein to its surroundings. I also try to confront the realities of weapons testing, and the dislocation of Marshallese in the atoll. My methodology was to combine soft and domestic black and white shots of Kwajalein’s calm suburbia and to engage those with the brightly-colored world of Kwaj fantasy. These images are then played against an old fashioned, sentimental but childlike soundtrack, which is actually the theme to Kurosawa Akira’s *Dodeskaden*, a Japanese film from 1973.

The first shot is the most important—it is an image of the 6:00 siren (and the actual sound) that I have

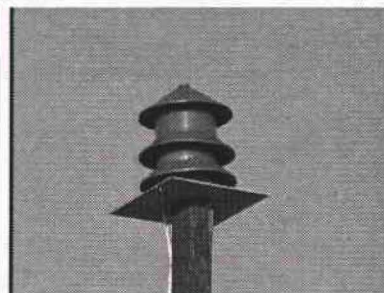


Figure 63. The 6:00 Siren

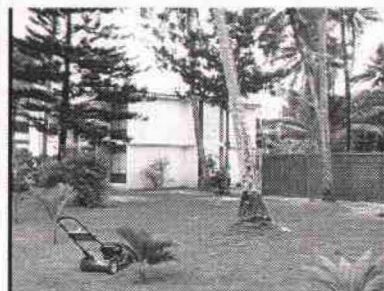


Figure 64. Lawnmower



Figure 65. Sandy and Chris



Figure 66. Coconut

mentioned so many times throughout this project. It is of course symbolic because it not only signals missile tests (or impending nuclear holocaust) but because it means to Kwaj Kids that it is time to go home. It also means quite clearly that it is time for Marshallese workers to leave the island and go back to their homes. Thus there are multiple meanings here, and the sound of the siren is an invitation into the Suburbia of Kwajalein—a Suburbia that comforts and domesticates at exactly the same time that it oppresses and represses.

My friends Sandy and Chris spoke frankly and very sincerely about all of this, and I worry that I have misrepresented their very well-balanced and ambivalent comments by selecting so few key points. They talked openly about their experiences of life on Kwaj, and it was my intention to have them narrate their own innocent and comfortable lifestyles. They talk, for instance, about how Kwaj is more like a small town in the States, with the scenery of the Marshall Islands. Thus I show the scenery, the lush scenery, but I also try to show that mixed up in this “scenery” are real Marshallese bodies, who are in fact marginalized by the Kwajalein worldview. This is why I show idealized Marshallese body parts—my grandmother’s

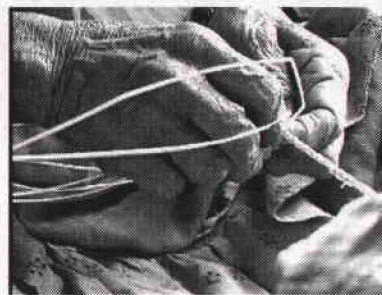


Figure 67. Bubu’s Hands



Figure 68. Golf Course

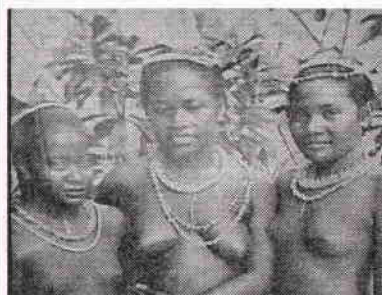


Figure 69. Mili Girls⁸²



Figure 70. Joe

⁸² This image, used in the film, was courtesy of the Marshallese Cultural Center on Kwajalein.

hands weaving sennit, my friend Pradland cutting a coconut, my friend Joe gutting a fish, detached from their faces.

It was interesting to observe how this young couple were so divided in their views about Kwaj; while both considered it home, one was eager to leave and the other eager to stay forever. “Everything I need is here...,” he says, while I pan over the limited canned food and highly-priced commodities on sale to Marshallese on Ebeye. But as I try to show in the second part of the film, there is more to the Kwaj experience than just safe and happy suburbia. Joe DeBrum recounts the experience of watching Kwajalein missiles flying overhead Likiep, though his assessment is more one of awe than concern. I then show the denial of Kwajalein’s suburbia, with its plastic flamingoes (which are in fact from the lawn of a friend of mine, who collects them fully knowing how tacky they are, almost to embellish the suburban pastiche of the island) and neon palm tree lawn ornaments. This is set to a warped version of “Bali Ha’i,” overdubbed with the sounds of radars, Geiger counters, electronic beeps, missiles, and other military techno-paraphernalia, as John F. Kennedy’s radio address during the Cuban Missile Crisis plays. I

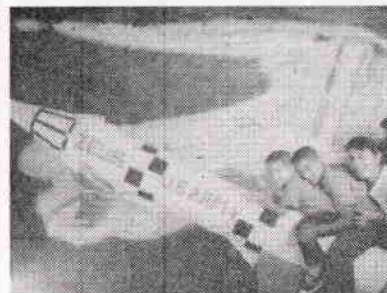


Figure 71. Kids on Missile⁸³

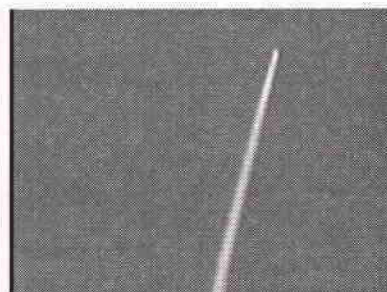


Figure 72. Mission



Figure 73. Flamingo



Figure 74. Explosives

⁸³ Photo: National Air Traffic Controllers Kwajalein Control Facility website.

emphasize, and remember through replaying, the President's expression, "nuclear missiles are so deadly, and ballistic missiles so swift..." to bring attention to discourse, to the ways in which ballistic missile testing becomes a substitute for atomic tests, a "swift" means of defense and the entire grounds for Kwajalein's existence in the 21st century.

I then focus on Ebeye, shifting the soundtrack to a Marshallese folkdance song, as the montage onscreen travels between the ferry to Ebeye, scenes of Ebeye life, images of the dump on Ebeye, and barbed wire and "keep out: explosives" or "keep out: radiation" signs back on Kwajalein. My point here is to transcend the idea of apartheid—not to ignore it or brush it over, but, on the contrary, to emphasize the blocking out and erasure of certain histories, and how this produces its own myopia.

This shifts to a short comment from my Marshallese grandmother, who decisively says that she feels more at home on her home island of Mejit—where she hasn't set foot in over fifty years—than on Ebeye, where she has lived for several decades. This is followed by a shot, again, of the wise old turtles in the turtle pond on Kwajalein, and then an image of my friend Sam, who explains that his home is where his family is. This leads

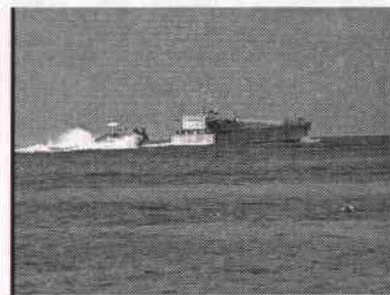


Figure 75. Ebeye Crossing



Figure 76. Disembarking



Figure 77. "Dumping"



Figure 78. Sam

into the last part of the film, where I show the faces of children. The irony of the Kwajalein couple's last comment, that they could stay 2-5 years or forever, operates on two levels—on one, it shows deep affection for Kwajalein; on the other it points out that in fact, if they wanted to the U.S. lease arrangement is such they probably *could* stay on Kwajalein; whereas most Marshallese would not have such a privilege. This explains my cut to the old rusty chains that sit out at the “Shark Pit” at the south tip of the island—chains that have long since lost their purpose, but which still remain.

The final shot is a refrain of me riding home in the 1970s, but it overlaps with a shot of that same exact road today, showing my own history and how I still fit in the suburbia. After the final credits, there is a final shot of me sitting at the Special Place and typing this thesis—in fact, writing the first words of the final section.



Figure 79. Dancing



Figure 80. Chains

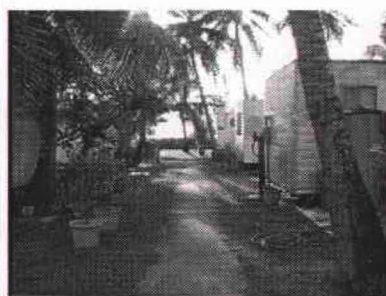


Figure 81. Home Stretch



Figure 82. Conclusion

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