Iien Ippān Doon

Celebrating Survival in an
‘Atypical Marshallese Community’

Monica LaBriola
\textit{liem Ippān Doon} (This Time Together)

Celebrating Survival in an 'Atypical Marshallese Community'

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For Jowa and Juni
Inaaj iökwe komro ñan indreö.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Naan in kammooolol

First, I would like to thank God for this time together—this opportunity to celebrate Ebeye, Marshall Islands. It is my hope that this “gathering” will provide a space to explore and share ideas, knowledge(s), experiences, and memories, and to reflect on what it can mean to celebrate survival, to celebrate and to survive on a 78-acre island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean where people make and redefine meaning and culture for themselves and their communities on a daily basis. I would also like to thank God for the lives of the people of Ebeye and the Marshall Islands, and for granting me the time and opportunity to share and celebrate life with some of you over the past four years—and in the years to come. Anij ippami.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of those who have come together over the years to give vision and meaning to this project, which represents a gathering of the author, the readers, and all those who have participated either directly or indirectly in the development of its current content, structure, and form. While many of the contributors will reveal themselves throughout the course of this paper through their words, their actions, their spirit, or some combination of the three, others remain behind the scenes, contributing in ways readers may not detect. I will therefore take this opportunity to acknowledge them with my own words, and with my deep-felt love and appreciation.
Family or baamle in the Marshall Islands takes on a variety of meanings within many different contexts, and I would like to acknowledge the many families who have made me part of their lives. First, I wish to recognize the members of my own immediate family, who have made my life, my time in the Marshall Islands, and my education possible. Mom, Dad, Jamie, and Michael: Thank you for raising me to be an independent thinker, and for allowing me to venture so far away from home. Thanks also to my husband John "Jowa" deBrum and stepson Juni who have taught me so much about myself, and about love, caring, and sharing, as well as about Ebeye and the Marshall Islands, and who have stood by me even through the most difficult times. Nan Jowa im Juni: Kompro lukkuun emŋol kòn amiŋ iŋkwe, im kòn amiŋ ekatakìn eō ilo mejele in "baamle." And thank you, Jowa, for always being available to answer my last-minute questions, for talking me through my ideas and my confusion on more than one occasion, and for all of your help and support in the drafting of this paper.

I am also grateful to the many families who made me a part of their lives while I lived on Ebeye. Nan baamle eo an Queen of Peace, baamle eo an St. Mark, baamle eo an Group Eman (“Group 4”), baamle eo an Joachim im Teresa deBrum, baamle eo an Mark im Marcella Sakaio, baamle eo an Wayne im Wanda Korok: Kom lukkuun emŋol kòn ami kar kòjparok eō, jipan eō, im iŋkwe eō ilo ien ikar pād ilo Ebeye. Anij ippāmi.

I would like to thank Jesuit Volunteers International (JVI) for “ruining me for life” (the JVI motto) and for choosing Ebeye as my two-year placement, as well as my JV roommates Brian, Katy, Kirra, and Scott for sticking with me even when times got rough. A big komŋolata also to Amber for opening your home to me and my family on more than one occasion (I couldn’t have made it without your continual help and support!), and to all the families on Kwajalein who sponsored us all over the years. And to all my former students: Ikonaan bar lejok juon naan in kamŋool ànan aolep rijikuul ro ilo Queen of Peace High School (known today as Fr. Leonard Hacker Catholic High School) im bar ilo Ebeye Public Elementary School. Elukkuun jap ami kar katakin eō jān aō kar katakin kom...
I would especially like to acknowledge all those who participated in my fieldwork either by granting interviews, extending invitations to parties, or lending technical or other kinds of support. =explode: komemmol kon jipañ ko ami relap im meleko remjuan tata. Ejjah maroñ in kar kadedeik jok burejáak eo eñaññe ejjah kar jipañ ko ami. 1 Bar kammoool Qon Queen of Peace Catholic Church im jikuul eo an moñ bata, im bar Qan St. Mark Rosary Group kon ami kar karuwanene eñ im kar kobaik wój eñ ilo iien mofono ko ami. Thanks also to Wayne for the use of your scanner (jolok aô bôdi) and for all the music, and to Delia for allowing us to stay in your home while we were back on Ebeye.

I would like to acknowledge those at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies and the East-West Center who have made my time at UH not only possible, but also meaningful. First, thank you to my thesis committee—Katerina, David, Terence, and Julie—for having faith in me, encouraging me to do my best, and expanding not only my understanding of Oceania, but also my vision of academia’s place in the great Pacific Ocean which, for me and many others, has become a second home. Thanks, too, for your abiding patience, and for understanding the trials and tribulations of students with families. And to Julie: The honesty and integrity of your scholarship and research on the Marshall Islands has inspired me throughout this project. Thanks for all that you do.

I would also like to acknowledge professors David Chappell and Byron Bender for encouraging my passion for the Pacific and for Marshallese language, as well as Tisha Hickson for your help with the maps of Oceania and the Marshall Islands included in this paper. Thanks to Alfred Capelle, Maryia deBrum, Wanda Korok, and Sandy deBrum for your last-minute advice and assistance. Many thanks also to those at the East-West Center, and in particular Mendl Djunaidy and Stella Kolinski, who helped make my time at UH and my fieldwork in the Marshall Islands possible, as well as to the entire staff of

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1 Since the majority of interviewees asked to remain anonymous, for simplicity’s sake I have decided to leave them all unnamed. As such, I have thanked them here as a group rather than individually, and will later identify each of them with a pseudonym to help the flow of the narrative.
Hawai‘i Hall 209, whose support, flexibility, and words of encouragement have helped me through this process perhaps more than they know. Thanks also to all those in the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Hamilton Library Pacific Collection for helping me locate invaluable resources that I hope to use for years to come.

And to my friends, who continue to help me not just through academic challenges, but also through the journey of life. Arti, Sue, Andrea, Marcella, Wanda, Amber, Katherine, Teri, Mymy, and many others: Thanks for being you and for letting me be me!
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NOTES ON SPELLING, TYPEFACE, AND DIACRITICALS

Marshallese (*kajin maje*) is a complex and beautiful language, with distinctive sounds and a unique alphabet. Some letters, such as the *mj*, appear only in Marshallese and in no other language; it has therefore been a challenge to find a font that allows me to type Marshallese words with the appropriate accent marks. For this reason, I have elected to use Lucinda Sans Unicode throughout this paper. While it may not be a standard academic font, it does allow me to supply accurate Marshallese spellings.

To the extent possible, I have used the “new” Marshallese spellings as standardized by Abo, Bender, Capelle, and deBrum in the *Marshallese–English Dictionary* (1976) (as opposed to the “old” spellings first introduced by missionaries). Note, however, that I (and many others) have until recently been more familiar with the “old” spellings, since these often appear on signs, in the newspaper, and in other popular media. In addition, the Bible—which is perhaps the most read Marshallese language text—was transcribed using the old spellings.

The following is an example of the difference between the old and new spellings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Old spelling (Marshallese)</th>
<th>New Spelling (Marshallese)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello/love</td>
<td>Yokwe</td>
<td>ɭoŋwe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not uncommon to see this and other words written in the “old” spelling (or in some combination of old and new). While I do my best to use the new spellings in my own writing, when quoting other sources I type Marshallese words and phrases as they appear in the original text, regardless of the spelling used. In order to help clarify any

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1 Peter Rudiak–Gould recently made me aware of the availability of an “Arial Majer” font, and while I plan to use it for future endeavors, at this point it would be difficult and time-consuming to go back and reformat the pages I have already typed in Lucinda Sans Unicode.

2 See, for example, the Marshallese website *Yokwe Online*, which uses the “old” (but still very common) spelling of “yokwe” in its name and URL (http://www.yokwe.net). Another common spelling for this word is “iakwe.”
confusion on this matter, I have cited words I use frequently together with possible alternate spellings in the GLOSSARY OF MARSHALLESE WORDS: Ukok in majej at the end of this paper. This being said, I take full responsibility for any orthographical or other errors in this paper.

In order to provide a brief introduction to the Marshallese alphabet and pronunciations, I have adapted the information in Figure 1 from Maggie Peter’s “Marshallese Alphabet” available on the College of the Marshall Islands Library website, Peter Rudiak-Gould’s Practical Marshallese, and Laurence Carucci’s “Typological Conventions for the Spelling of Marshallese Words” in Nuclear Nativity: Rituals of Renewal and Empowerment in the Marshall Islands (Peter 2005; Rudiak-Gould 2004, 7-8; Carucci 1997, 1).3

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3 For a more complete explanation, see the Marshallese-English Dictionary by Abo et al. (1976) or Peter Rudiak-Gould’s Practical Marshallese (2004).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
<th>Sound approximation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A a</td>
<td>An</td>
<td>Its/his/hers</td>
<td>Like the ‘o’ in cot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Å å</td>
<td>Åne</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Like the ‘e’ in pet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B b</td>
<td>Bwin</td>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>Like ‘p’ at the end of words and ‘b’ everywhere else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D d</td>
<td>Di</td>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>Like a Spanish unrolled ‘r’ or the light ‘t’ in gotta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E e</td>
<td>Ek</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>A cross between the ‘e’ in pet and ‘i’ in pit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I i</td>
<td>Ij</td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>Pronounced beat, bit, or yet depending on the word and placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J j</td>
<td>Jijet</td>
<td>Sit</td>
<td>Pronounced s, sh or ch at the beginning or words; like the second ‘g’ in garage everywhere else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K k</td>
<td>Kiki</td>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Like the ‘c’ in cot at the beginning or words; like the ‘g’ in got when between two vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L l</td>
<td>Lik</td>
<td>Back/ocean side</td>
<td>Like lull, but NOT like lull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḍ Ḍ</td>
<td>Ḍadik</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Like lull, but NOT like lull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M m</td>
<td>Mā</td>
<td>Breadfruit</td>
<td>Like the ‘m’ in imprecise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N n</td>
<td>Ni</td>
<td>Coconut tree/coconut juice</td>
<td>Like the ‘n’ in knit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N n</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wave</td>
<td>Like the ‘n’ in nova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O o</td>
<td>Ok</td>
<td>Net</td>
<td>Like the ‘o’ in tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O o</td>
<td>Ọn</td>
<td>Vitamin</td>
<td>Like the ‘u’ in buck or the ‘oo’ in book, depending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O o</td>
<td>Ọj</td>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Like the ‘au’ sound in caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P p</td>
<td>Pidodo</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>Like ‘p’ at the end of a word and ‘b’ everywhere else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṛ r</td>
<td>ṛab</td>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>Like a Spanish trilled (rolled) r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T t</td>
<td>Tipħōl</td>
<td>Outrigger</td>
<td>Like ‘d’ when between two vowels; otherwise like ‘t’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U u</td>
<td>Ukulele</td>
<td>Ukulele</td>
<td>Like ‘u’ in tune, but with lips rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ū ū</td>
<td>Ūlōl</td>
<td>Ax</td>
<td>Like ‘oo’ in book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W w</td>
<td>Wia</td>
<td>Buy/shopping</td>
<td>Like English ‘w’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Marshallese Alphabet and Pronunciation
Adapted from Carucci (1997), Peter (2005), and Rudiak–Gould (2004)
I was still getting ready when I heard a soft, persistent knock at my door. After a brief pause, I heard the door handle turn and the front door open and close quietly. I knew it was Meria, one of the neighborhood girls, coming to tell me it was time to head over to the birthday party keemem.2

"Dejñi," I called out. "Come on in."

"Kwöpöjak ke?" Meria asked. "Are you ready?"

"Kōttar jidik," I told her. "Wait a few minutes. I'm not quite ready."

I went into my room to finish getting dressed. I put on the aloha-print dress I had had made the previous year for the Christmas celebration and dance competition. To match, I chose some Marshallese handicraft amimåŋɔ jewelry and a pretty, handmade Marshallese ut—a style of handicraft floral head wreath that women on Ebeye love to wear, especially to parties and to church. I had received this one from a friend a few months earlier after I had made the mistake of admiring it on her one morning after church.

"Elukkuun aiboojø ut eo amŋ," I had told her. "Your ut is very pretty." She immediately took it off her head and placed it gently on mine.

"Amŋ," she told me with a smile. "It's yours."

"I mean, it's nice on you!" I insisted, reaching up to remove the ut so I could return it to its rightful owner.

"Marshallese custom," she said with a smile.

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1 I gratefully acknowledge John deBrum, Julie Walsh Kroeker, Maryia deBrum, Wanda Korok, Jan Rensel, Marata Tamaira, and Katerina Teaiwa for their help with the drafting and revising of the narrative portions of this thesis, as well as all those who have taken the time to sit down with me and share their knowledge at parties and other occasions over the years.

2 Although fictional, the events I describe in this story are based on my own experiences at keemem on the island of Ebeye over the past five years.
“That’s a tough one to argue,” I said, and we had both laughed as two older ladies passed by and whistled.

“Shwi-shwu! Likatu!” they had teased. “Enię’am ut ne am!” they said to me. “Nice ut.”

Once I finished getting dressed, I made sure I had everything else I needed—the most important thing being a dollar bill to jiŋap, or line up and present to the birthday boy while singing a version of “Happy Birthday” in Marshallese. I stashed the dollar bill in my purse and then remembered to grab a few extra to give to my friends in case they didn’t have any with them. I had learned to save up dollar bills after the very first birthday I attended on Ebeye, when a woman standing in line behind me had noticed that I didn’t know what was going on and had stealthily slipped a dollar bill into my hand. I was grateful for her kindness to me, and would gladly pass along the favor to anyone at any time.

Just before closing my bedroom door, I remembered to grab my camera. “This will be a good night to take pictures,” I thought. “Everyone will be dressed up and having a great time.”

“Ekwe, ipojak,” I told Meria as I pulled the door shut. “I’m ready. Let’s go!” I was looking forward to having a good time with my friends and family at the keemem.

We stepped out of my front door into the sweltering heat. It was already seven o’clock, but the sun had just gone down and it hadn’t rained for almost a month. The air felt heavy and I immediately started to sweat.

“Kōttar mōk,” I told Meria. “Let me get a fan before we go.”

“Kwomaroŋ ke bōktok juon aŋ?” she asked. “Can you bring me one, too?”

“Aaet,” I replied. “Sure, no problem.”

Having retrieved the fans from my room, we started on our way, taking the usual shortcuts through the back alleys of “Rōk Town” at the south end of Ebeye to the newly built community gym, located at the center of the island close to the dock. By now it was
almost completely dark, and I took a small flashlight out of my purse to help us find our way. Luckily there were no muddy puddles for us to avoid, although a bit of rain would have been nice after such a long dry spell. Water catchments were starting to run dry and boys were missing school in order to fill gallon jugs with water at the filling station, or to take the half-hour ferry ride to Kwajalein to fetch drinking water. The colonel recently had the water faucets relocated so that they were again accessible to everyone from outside the Kwajalein Dock Security Checkpoint (also known as the DSC), rather than just to badge holders, as was often the case. Once it rained he would probably order the faucets to be brought back around to the other side of the DSC, once again making them inaccessible to those without Kwaj privileges.

“Good night,” a man acknowledged us with the standard evening greeting as we passed him on the road.

“Good night,” we replied, even though we weren’t sure who he was.

“Good night, Miss.” This time the greeting came from a group of teenage girls—probably some of my students, I surmised—although I couldn’t see them, since by now it had grown completely dark.

Up ahead I could see that the lights were on at the gym and some people were filing in through the back entrance. Others were standing outside by the fence looking in, listening to the electronic keyboards and the familiar Marshallese melodies that filled the air for blocks around.

“Good night,” I told the girls—although our evening had just begun.
INTRODUCTION: **Juumemmej**

Despite the Marshall Islands' and Kwajalein Atoll's long and complex histories—spanning approximately 2,500 years and 375,000 square miles of ocean—*Marshall Islands Journal* editor and *Pacific Magazine* contributing editor Giff Johnson once commented that Ebeye Island in the Kwajalein Atoll complex "always has been synonymous with the word 'slum'" (Johnson 1993, 41, emphasis added). Modern discourse surrounding *Ebîjä* (Ebeye)² often pegs it as the complacent "slum of the Pacific," implying that militarism and Americanization have accelerated the loss of meaning and culture among Marshallese people or nimajel living there (Robie 1985, 30).³ Those who are either from or have some knowledge of the Pacific Islands region—and, more specifically, the region called Micronesia⁴—are perhaps familiar with the recent history and development of Ebeye Island and this discourse over the past fifty odd years. This particular segment of the island's history has been repeated ad infinitum in magazines, newspapers, scholarly journals and books, pamphlets, and even in literary works of prose and poetry. It typically reads as a sad one: a peaceful, tropical, and virtually uninhabited island until the United States "liberated" Kwajalein Atoll from Japanese domination in 1944 has since transformed into the "slum of the Pacific" with a population estimated at approximately 12,000 on 78 acres (one-tenth of a square mile)

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1 See Appendix B for a full explanation of this and other Marshallese proverbs and sayings (Stone et al. 2000, 4).
2 Cris Lindborg of the Marshallese Cultural Center on Kwajalein notes, "The now commonly used Americanized name of Ebeye is due to an error in labeling the island on a U.S. map" (Lindborg 1999, 1). Since Marshallese now commonly use both the English (Ebeye) and the Marshallese (*Ebîjä*), I use them interchangeably throughout this paper.
3 Hereafter, I refer to Marshallese people with the Marshallese word "nimajel" whenever possible (since this is how they refer to themselves). In order to avoid awkward English phrasing, however, I use the English adjective "Marshallese" and refer to the "Marshall Islands" in English.
4 Dumont d'Urvillé coined the terms Polynesia ("many islands"), Micronesia ("many islands"), and Melanesia ("dark islands") in the mid-nineteenth century. Pacific archaeologist Patrick Kirch notes, "Such labels provide handy geographical referents, yet they mislead us greatly if we take them to be meaningful segments of cultural history. Only [the term] Polynesia has stood the tests of time and increased knowledge, as a category with historical significance" (Kirch 2000, 5). Despite its problematic nature and colonial origins, I nevertheless use the term "Micronesia" throughout this paper to refer to the vast geographic region in which the Marshall Islands is located.
Figure 2: Map of Oceania

*University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies (used with permission)*
REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

New spellings in black, old spellings in grey.
of land at the beginning of the 21st century (Wypijewski 2001, 45). According to this version of the “Ebeye story,” the island’s booming population has affected a mixture of grave social and economic dilemmas that continue to plague Ebeye even today.

Throughout the second half of the 20th and into the 21st centuries, authors have repainted a picture of Ebeye as the overcrowded–unloved–Pacific–urban–time–bomb–ghetto. A comprehensive (or even partial) reading of the variety of materials offering descriptions of “the Ebeye problem” reveals not only that Ebeye’s rich history, culture, and diversity have been consistently overlooked, but also that the majority of authors have repeatedly omitted the more human side of Ebeye—that is, the stories, experiences, and events that truly make the island a place “worth knowing” (Meyer 2004, 125). Instead, they often reuse and recycle many of the same images and accounts that have been used to describe Ebeye since anthropologist Jack Tobin published his first report for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) Marshall Islands District in 1954.

Even Robert Barclay’s recent and much-acclaimed novel *Me/a/*, for example, perpetuates the stereotypical notion of Ebeye as a dismal ghetto, suggesting that the island amounts to little more than a so-called “slum.” Such accounts utilize a host of negative imagery—from floating Pampers and smoldering trash to rusting rebar and scrap–wood stores—to give readers the distinct impression that Ebeye’s current lack of natural resources and squalid living conditions make it repulsive and even uninhabitable by human beings (although Barclay and others notably do much more than this6). While one of the intents of these kinds of descriptions may be to condemn the effects of American activities in the Marshall Islands and Kwajalein Atoll, they nevertheless have the effect of creating and reinforcing negative perceptions of Ebeye and effectively

5 *Me/a/* means “playground for demons; not habitable by people” (Barclay 2002, vi).

stripping ri–Ebjà of their dignity and often their humanity—meanwhile negating the rich histories and traditions that long preceded the Japanese and American administration of the Marshall Islands, and continue to shape the lives and experiences of ri–Ebjà even today.9

In order to celebrate the many and overlapping histories and traditions that have converged to form and shape the island community known today as Ebjà or Ebeye, this project re/constructs a story of the island as a site of “creative survival” despite, and perhaps in spite of, its more recent history of colonialism and the discourse that has emerged as a result. In order to offer a critique of the more common representations of Ebjà—and to share the incredible sense of community, connectedness, and culture I experienced during my three years on the island—I show that, despite popular perception, ri–Ebjà have in many ways retained essential components of their unique cultural values and practices. These particular elements of mantin majej or Marshallese culture allow ri–Ebjà to imagine and experience the island much differently than the typical outsider. Perhaps even more significantly, they help ri–Ebjà cope with the many pressures and hardships they grapple with today—from power outages and the lack of suitable drinking water, to faltering social services, extreme overcrowding, and other challenges—much as they have contributed to their survival over centuries despite harsh atoll conditions.

With this, I hope to draw attention to the richness and complexity of a story that authors generally portray as straightforward and one-dimensional. This is not to say

7 In Marshallese, the prefix “ri–” means “person from” or “person who,” as in rimajej (Marshallese person) and rjerbal (worker, employee, commoner). Throughout this paper, I refer to those rimajej living on Ebeye as ri–Ebjà, although I recognize that not everyone on Ebeye identifies as such. While my primary reason for doing this is to avoid awkward labels and phrasing (i.e., “Ebeye rimajej,” “Ebeyeans,” or “people living on Ebeye,” etc.), I also hope to suggest that, despite a perception by outsiders and rimajej alike that Ebeye is little more than a “temporary home” to the majority of people living there, the Ebeye community has quickly developed into much more than that. I explore this idea further in Chapter 4 in the Conclusion.

8 After introducing frequently used Marshallese terms like rimajej, ri–Ebjà, and a few others in italics, I subsequently leave them unitalicized. Terms less frequently used remain italicized throughout. All Marshallese terms in the interlude sections, however, remain italicized.

9 Note that, although Mejà is a work of fiction, it nevertheless perpetuates a stereotypical image of Ebeye by feeding readers descriptions surprisingly similar to those found in the popular media.
that I want to glorify Ebeye or gloss over the many challenges the island and its people face to this day. Having lived on the island for almost three years, I have experienced many of those problems first hand, and they are indeed real and of great concern. This being said, there are also many other layers to the so-called “Ebeye Story” that are “true” and just as real (Neumann 1992, 44). It is some of these stories—as told from the perspectives of several ri-Ebjä together with my own narrative construction of an Ebeye keemem or birthday party—that I begin to capture here.

To construct a story that is contextualized both historically and culturally, I rely on the stories and ideas I encountered during my fieldwork on Ebeye, several Marshallese jabönköonnaan (proverbs) and bwebwenato (stories/legends), my own experiences on Ebeye, as well as the work of several indigenous Pacific scholars. The stories and arguments I present are grounded in extensive library research over the past two years, as well as a month of fieldwork on Ebeye during which I conducted interviews and filmed cultural events—from dance practices and an anniversary party, to Christmas day song and dance competitions. I also look to some of the experiences I had and observations I made while “learning in” Marshallese culture during three years I spent on Ebeye first as a Jesuit Volunteer (JV) and later a public school teacher, wife, and mother (Neumann 1992, 48). Although I am not Marshallese and thus cannot offer an authentically “rimajel” or “insider” perspective (if such a thing even exists), I ground my argument in Marshallese epistemology, values, points of view, and iien emman (special moments or events) in order to offer a “true construction” of Ebeye that reflects and honors its complexity, depth, and diversity (ibid., 44).

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10 It is important to note that I spent the majority of my time on Ebeye as a member of the Queen of Peace Catholic Parish community, as a teacher at Queen of Peace High School, and later as a teacher at Ebeye Public Elementary School. As such, most of my own reflections about my time there, and perhaps even some of the generalizations I inevitably make throughout this paper, reflect the experiences and the relationships I developed within the context of those particular communities.
Throughout my research process, several key components of Marshallese culture and epistemology have come up time and again. The two that stand out in particular are the centrality of relationships and connections between and among people, and the importance of sharing and distributing material wealth. These core features of Marshallese culture or mantin maje\l in many ways seem to define and give direction to the lives of rimaje\l today—and especially those living on the so-called “atypical” island of Ebeye (Tobin 1954, 10), a place where Marshallese culture has been deemed by some to have all but vanished.

In order to situate these values within the larger context of Pacific Islands scholarship, I look at recent discussions and debates on so-called “indigenous epistemology” (see Gegeo & Watson Gegeo 2001; Meyer 2001; Roberts et al. 2004; Huffer & Qalo 2004). According to Manulani Meyer, for example, epistemology is “how one knows, indeed, what one prioritizes with regard to this knowing”; she argues that what is worth knowing constitutes a fundamental component of cultural identity (Meyer 2004, 125). While Meyer’s focus is on Native Hawaiians, I contend that the same can be argued in the case of rimaje\l and Marshallese epistemology, and show this by exploring some of the ways in which jabonkonna\n in maje\l (Marshallese proverbs) and bwebwenato (stories) encapsulate and convey specific Marshallese values (ibid.). These expressions—many of which “are still observed by the Marshallese community” and some of which “have been altered to fit a more modern world”—represent Marshallese “first principles” in that “they justify certain values and solidify customs that bind the culture together” (Stone et al., vi-vii). These stories and proverbs—along with countless other sources of Marshallese traditional knowledge—have been “handed down from a cultural past whose words speak truth” (ibid., vi). In this sense, bwebwenato, jabonkonna\n in maje\l, and other Marshallese oral traditions embody essential elements of Marshallese epistemology in that they communicate particular cultural values that many rimaje\l consider important and worth knowing (Meyer 2004, 125).
With this, I do not wish to imply that the rimajel community is in any way homogenous, or that all rimajel think or act in the same way. Indeed, rimajel are a tremendously diverse group of people, with assorted and even divergent backgrounds and historical experiences. The lives of many rimajel, for example, have been forever transformed by the ravages of American nuclear testing and the displacements, illnesses, and deaths that occurred as a result, whereas others see little or no effects of nuclear testing and its aftermath on their daily lives. And while some rimajel continue to live rural, outer-island lifestyles, others find themselves adjusting to life in the urban centers of Majuro and Ebeye—as well as Honolulu, Hawai’i, Salem, Oregon, and Costa Mesa, California. Despite these and other differences, core Marshallese ideas about what is worth knowing—many of which have been passed down through centuries in the form of oral histories—bridge the many gaps that exist between and among rimajel on Ebeye and elsewhere. Despite their many different experiences (and the disputes that often divide them), rimajel are in many ways unified through their rich history and cultural heritage—through a unique set of values that shape and are shaped by Marshallese identity and culture, and are embodied in the personal and social relationships that hold people together on Ebeye and beyond.

Genealogy, or peoples’ relationships to one another and to their land,\(^\text{11}\) is an essential component of Marshallese epistemology, which I maintain not only \textit{values} relationships, but also deems them \textit{worth knowing about}. In the Marshallese tradition, knowing and understanding the familial and social relationships that bind people to one another is a priority, and those who are able to identify them are considered wise. With this in mind, I suggest that in order to begin to know, understand, and experience Ebjä on a level other than that of data and superficial descriptions (i.e., what is worth knowing in typically Western or American epistemology), it is essential to take into consideration that which might be worth knowing about Ebeye from a Marshallese

\(^{11}\) While land is certainly a fundamental aspect of Marshallese identity, I leave that discussion open for future research.
perspective—that is, the relationships, connections, social institutions, and events that have not only brought people there, but also continue to make life on the island possible and meaningful.12

In the Marshallese tradition, knowledge stems from an intricate understanding of these connections and relationships—of the spaces that connect people in complex and often overlapping genealogies and social hierarchies. The Marshallese expression jitdami kapeel suggests that wisdom is assured to those who study and understand these genealogies. While on the one hand jitdami kapeel translates roughly as "seeking knowledge guarantees wisdom," the words by themselves have more precise connotations: jitdami means "to study one's genealogy," while kapeel means "skillful; clever . . . wise; astute" (Abo et al. 1976, 109). Put simply, those who study genealogy and other aspects of mantin majej grow wise, skillful, and astute. With this, I do not wish to suggest that by considering matters of relationships and genealogy I will be able to understand or re/present Ebjä in ways others have not. I do hope, however, to contribute to the mounting discussion on Pacific epistemology and ways of knowing,

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12 I do not want to suggest that other "Ebeye stories" are not highly significant or worth knowing, or that rimajel on Ebeye don't care at all about Ebeye's structural or material attributes. Nor do I wish to imply that rimajel are happy or comfortable with Ebeye's difficult living conditions. I do want to propose, however, that Ebeye has other features that are equally—if not more—important in the eyes of many rimajel (and some others). These genealogies, these relationships, may help explain, for example, why many rimajel continue to stay on Ebeye despite the fact that the Compact of Free Association allows them unrestricted entry into the United States, and why many return to Ebeye after attending school or training in Majuro, Honolulu, and beyond.
and to approach Ebeye more on Marshallese terms and vis-à-vis Marshallese voices—if not by actually studying Marshallese genealogies and social structures, then by placing their significance at the forefront of this discussion.

In addition to jitdam kapeel, I consider several other proverbs to help explain related features of Marshallese epistemology as manifested in Marshallese cultural values and practice on Ebeye. The first reiterates the significance of genealogy, meanwhile emphasizing the centrality of social rank and hierarchy: jede ak eo (point to the frigate bird) “reveals the level of respect [rimajel] hold for their Irooj” (chiefs) in particular, and for the Marshallese system of social ranking more generally (Stone et al. 2000, 53). Jake jebo eo, on the other hand, an expression that translates as “provide life to others,” is one of many jabönkönnaan that indicate the importance of jaketo-jaketak (distributing or sharing) in Marshallese culture, as well as its role in assuring the physical survival of people in such a fragile atoll environment (ibid., 64). In the Marshall Islands, “providing for and helping others is essential and ‘jaakejebo/’is a highly desirable trait taught to children from a young age” (ibid., 64). With these and other proverbs in mind, I show that despite the general perception that Ebeye’s modern development has resulted in rapid and extreme cultural loss, ri–Ebjä continue to observe and practice these (and other) essential features of mantin majei in their daily lives.

To do this, I consider some of the connections between the centrality of genealogy, social rank, and sharing in Marshallese culture and epistemology and the cultural practice of keemem (celebrations or parties) on Ebjä—since at many levels keemem embody these and other aspects of Marshallese culture and values. I argue that keemem in fact represent “living genealogies” in at least two ways. First, much as written or recited genealogies trace family lineages and social hierarchies, the guests at

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13 While the word keemem often refers specifically to a child’s first birthday party—a highly significant event in the lives of rimajel—it can also refer to other kinds of parties. According to the Marshallese-English Dictionary, a keemem is a “feast; birthday party; anniversary; banquet; celebration” (Abo et al. 1976, 139). (Other words for party or celebration include karopoj and bade.) Although at times I use the word keemem to refer specifically to a first birthday party, for the most part I use it to mean “party” or “celebration” more generally. As such, readers should rely on the context of the word for clarification of meaning.
a keemem signify living records of lineage and rank, and as such the specific relationships that hold families and groups together in particular ways. What’s more, these events give people the opportunity to pay tribute to these relationships, to learn about their histories and genealogies, and to jaket–jaketak (share or redistribute) within large-scale, formal contexts. As such, keemem play an essential role in the continuance of Marshallese cultural and genealogical memory, whether they take place on the outer-most island atolls, or on Ebeye or Delap (Majuro), in Hawai‘i or Arkansas.

While some might argue that the prevalence of material goods like cola, keyboards, and styrofoam plates make Ebeye keemem too “Westernized” or “Americanized” to be considered “authentically” Marshallese, I maintain that the presence of so-called Western material cultural should not serve as an indicator of cultural persistence or continuity. Similar to keemem across the Marshall Islands and beyond, keemem on Ebeye embody essential aspects of Marshallese culture and epistemology. As such, they serve to honor and celebrate not just special occasions or the lives of honorees, but also the very culture that has nourished rimajel over the centuries and continues to sustain them even today.

With this project, I hope to do at least three things. First, I “celebrate” or pay tribute to the resolve and determination of rimajel on Ebeye to continue to make life work even under difficult political, social, and economic circumstances and on an island many have deemed uninhabitable. Whereas to a certain extent I hope to achieve this goal implicitly vis-à-vis my approach and through careful consideration of the subject matter, I also engage in some level of reflection on what it can mean to celebrate or honor people, place, history, and cultural practices—that is, to celebrate life, culture, and survival itself.

Secondly, I show that, as key features of Marshallese epistemology, genealogy, and genealogically-based values lead rimajel to see and experience Ebeye and
Marshallese culture there much differently than the typical outside observer (not excluding myself). Unlike the image of Ebeye frequently set forth in popular literature and the media as the "slum of the Pacific," many ri–Ebja understand and experience life on the island in terms of relationships and responsibilities—that is, the multiple and overlapping connections, relations, and obligations that make the island home for some and a second home to many. It is these relationships and responsibilities that sustain individuals, families, and other kinds of associations on Ebeye, making the community there much more than just the Kwajalein labor camp or "bedroom community" the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administration may have intended it to be (Johnson 1998, 40).

Finally, I suggest that keemem on Ebeye not only help people cope with their circumstances and the many challenges they face, but also provide a context for the practice and expression of particular aspects of Marshallese epistemology and culture. These parties represent "living genealogies" and as such affirm, embody, and reinforce Marshallese customs and values. They offer the space and occasion for people to come and work together and grow in their relationships with one another, and to learn about and affirm those relationships in ways that are culturally appropriate and significant. Parties thus function to celebrate not just special occasions or particular honorees, but also the very customs, traditions, and relationships that make these gatherings possible and meaningful.

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Structurally, this paper is divided into four chapters and seven interludes. In each interlude, I construct a segment of a fictional narrative of a keemem on Ebeye in which I visit many of the themes and ideas explored across the "chapters." In the tradition of Vilsoni Hereniko and Klaus Neumann, I introduced this paper with the first installment of that narrative rather than with a typical scholarly introduction. My intent in doing so was not just to "arrest your attention" by starting an academic paper off with a fictionalized
story, but also to privilege local Marshallese perspectives, knowledges, and ways of storytelling (*bwebwenato*) over Western knowledge and discourse. Although the mode of narrative I employ here diverges significantly from a traditional Marshallese *bwebwenato*—that is, it is neither oral, in Marshallese, nor told by a Marshallese *ri-* *bwebwenato* (storyteller)—I nevertheless believe that this kind of account has the potential to capture certain "emotional truths" about culture and life on Ebeye that purportedly objective academic descriptions simply cannot convey (Neumann 1992, 40; Hereniko 1995, 9).

I alternate these narrative segments with more traditional academic chapters, in which I explore elements of Ebeye's history and development, the colonial discourse that has attempted to describe and define the island since World War II, as well as some of the ways we might begin to deconstruct this discourse in order to allow more local voices and perspectives to emerge. To this end, I construct a summary of the history of Ebeye in Chapter 1, with an emphasis on its development over the past 50 odd years into what is "possibly the most densely populated island in all of the Pacific" (Graham & Paul 2002, 1), with a current population of perhaps more than 13,000 on a land area of 78 acres (Wypijewski 2001, 45).14

Chapter 2 explores some of the ways in which Ebeye has been "imagined" in more recent years by the media and popular literature, suggesting that "slum discourse" has confined *ri'majel* in general and Ebeye in particular to extremely narrow definitions of development and cultural loss—overlooking many of the real human experiences and relationships that make the island a unique and dynamic urban and cultural center. I suggest that approaching Ebeye vis-à-vis *ri'majel* voices, experiences, and events can "jibe," and thus potentially overturn, the image of Ebeye that has dominated the popular media over the years (Julie Walsh Kroeker, personal communication, 25 May 2006).

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14 A 1999 census estimated that the population of Ebeye by that time had reached nearly 10,000 (Graham & Paul 2002, 1).
In Chapter 3, I explore topics like re/presentation, transdisciplinarity, indigenous epistemology, and genealogy, arguing that a transdisciplinary approach grounded in Marshallese epistemology and cultural values affords a re/presentation of Ebeye that is typically overshadowed by slum discourse (Jolly 2003). I apply Linda Tuhiwai Smith's notion of "celebrating survival" to the Ebeye case, suggesting that ri-Ebjä celebrate their own survival by practicing their culture and epistemology everyday, and in particular within the context of parties and celebrations. I suggest that highlighting celebrations and survival allows for a re/presentation of Ebjä that "focus[es] on the positive"—that celebrates and affirms Ebeye rather than denigrates and demoralizes it (Smith 1999, 145).

In Chapter 4, I consider Marshallese epistemology and values by looking at particular jabōnkōnnaa in majel (Marshallese proverbs or expressions) such as jitcham kapeel and others. Here, I look at the important role that genealogy and social relationships and obligations play in everyday life and survival on Ebeye. I present jitcham kapeel and other expressions as a way of getting to know Ebjä from a local Marshallese perspective. Having done this, I suggest that māntin mjelej Marshallese culture holds a prominent place in the lives of ri-Ebjä; this becomes increasingly clear once we look beyond Ebeye’s material culture and begin to consider instead the various connections and obligations that weave people together across multiple and overlapping genealogies, forming an Ebeye community that is vibrant, vivacious, and very much alive (Ka'ili 2005, 91).

In sum, this project pays tribute to the Ebjä community, and to the traditions and customs that nourish and sustain people even through what some regard as the worst of

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I have borrowed the term "transdisciplinary" from Margaret Jolly's paper "Our Sea of Islands or Archipelagoes of Autarchy?: Some Preliminary Reflections on Transdisciplinary Navigation and Learning Oceania" (http://www.hawaii.edu/cpis/conference/Jolly.htm).
times and circumstances. Keemem represent just one of the many ways ri-Ebjä express and affirm their cultural values and epistemologies. These events destabilize grand narratives of militarism, development, and cultural loss on Ebeye and reveal in their place a community that is dynamic, vibrant, and uniquely ri-majel. By focusing on celebrations and juxtaposing important Marshallese values such as kadkad (genealogy), jaketo-jaketak (sharing), and iien ippän doon (time together) against more common representations of Ebeye—which usually focus on buildings, statistics, and institutions rather than on relationships, genealogies, or Marshallese social and cultural institutions—this project challenges the discourse that typically confines Ebjä to perpetually narrow definitions of modernization and cultural loss. This counter-discourse is grounded in a local understanding of Ebjä and of mantiin majei, and as such offers a glimpse into some of the many relationships and occasions that constitute Ebeye’s community and spirit.

Jen kammoolol Anij kön iienin ippän doon. Let us thank God for this time together... May we celebrate the space that lies between and among us, as well as the relationships that connect us to one another through time and across the vastness of the great Pacific Ocean.
INTERLUDE: lien bwebwenato

"The woman sitting up there at the table next to Bata," the old woman informed me, "is the daughter of an a/lap. Her family owns land on Ebeye, Kwajalein, Carlos, and many other islands in Kwajalein Atoll. Her father is the a/lap for this wåto, but could not be here tonight because he is very sick and so he sent her in his place. That is why she is sitting up there at the head table. My husband's oldest brother is married to her younger sister."

I studied the face of the woman sitting up front, convinced I had seen her before. Then I remembered that she had come by the school the week before to pick up her grandson's report card.

I looked around, noticing that the large room now held a couple hundred people. Young children were running around and having a good time together. The rows of white plastic chairs that had been lined up behind the head tables were filling up with women and a few men, although most of the men stood along the sides of the gym, bwebwenato (talking story), taking photographs or videos, waiting for things to get started.

More guests were coming in through the back entrance with trays and large plastic containers filled with food. This was going to be a big keemem, because the child's grandparents on both sides were well known and highly respected in the Ebeye community. Moreover, the little boy was the first grandchild on the mother's side. Some of their relatives had come from the outer islands, or Majuro, or even as far as Honolulu and the U.S. mainland to attend this important event.

The gym was decorated with balloons, streamers, and coconut-frond kimej. A large banner displaying the birthday boy's photograph hung at the front of the room above the stage. The baby was sitting with his mother directly below the banner on the

1 "The old woman" and "my friend" represent a composite of all the kind elderly women who took the time to jîtdam kapeel with me over the years.
floor just in front of the stage on a woven pandanus-leaf mat, or *jaki*. The band had their equipment set up on the stage and they played one song after another as the guests arrived. The grandfathers greeted people as they entered, and the baby's father walked around nervously making sure everything was in order. I turned around in my seat and noticed the grandmothers and other female family members and family friends at the back of the gym, lining up all the food and plates on long rows of folding tables. The extended family was easy to identify because the men were all wearing matching aloha shirts, while the women wore matching dresses. The baby and his parents also wore clothes made of a similar material and pattern, but a different color from the rest of the family.

The head tables faced the baby’s mat area and were decorated with green tablecloths and balloons. A bottle of water and a drinking coconut, *ni*, had been set at each place. Several seats at the tables were still vacant, waiting to be filled by the VIPs who were expected to arrive any minute.

The proposed start time for the *keemem* was 7:00 pm and it was now approaching nine o'clock. Things would start soon.

"Who are the two women taking their seats next to the *ajap*’s daughter?" I asked, even though I knew the answer. I hoped this kind of questioning would show my friend that I was interested in learning more about Marshallese culture.

"That is our *Lerooj* and one of her daughters," the old woman responded. "The *Lerooj* is the most prominent and highly respected woman on this island. Her great-grandmother was older than my grandfather. Her oldest brother is one of the *Irooj*apfap, or high chiefs for parts of this island and many other islands in Kwajalein Atoll. Her other brother is also a chief, or *Irooj* and is a senator for Kwajalein Atoll.

"Did you see the way that young girl gathered her skirt and bent over when she walked in front of the table where they are sitting? That is one of the ways we show
respect to our leaders, and also to people who are older than us. We must lower our bodies and excuse ourselves as we pass by saying, ‘Jojoқ böd,’ which means, ‘Throw away my mistake’—in other words, ‘Excuse me for being disrespectful and walking in front of you.’"

“Do the Irooж and ajap attend every keemem?” I asked.

“For large celebrations like this, we are expected to invite our traditional leaders, and they are expected to attend. If they cannot make it because they are busy or are not on the island, then they send a representative in their place. It would be unheard of for them to be absent without someone coming to represent them. It is our obligation to invite them, and it is their obligation to attend. Not like our new government leaders—we invite them, but often they do not come or send anyone in their place.”

I watched the Lerooж and her daughter take their seats. One of the baby’s grandfathers immediately approached them and extended his hand in greeting. Meanwhile, another young woman passed in front of the table. As she did, she lowered her head, bent forward, and gathered her skirt with one hand. She noticeably avoided looking directly at the head table. The young woman—whose clothing indicated that she was a member of the baby’s family—approached the baby’s mother, who gave her a large plastic shopping bag. From it, the young woman took several amifl}olo (handicraft) flowers. Still bent over slightly, the woman approached the head table. Avoiding direct eye contact, she said something to the Lerooж, and then placed one of the flowers behind the woman’s ear. She then did the same for the Lerooж’s daughter and the ajap’s daughter, and then made her way through the rows of plastic chairs. She approached each woman as she had the women at the head table, repeating the same phrase each time before placing the flower behind each woman’s ear. Just as I began to wonder what it was she was saying, she approached first my friend, and then me.

“Jojoқ böd,” she said as she placed the flower behind my ear.

“Ejjejoқ, komjoool,” I said, thanking her for the beautiful gift.
CHAPTER 1: The Emergence of an ‘Atypical’ Marshallese Village

For centuries, the islands of the Marshall Islands have been home to relatively small populations ranging anywhere from five or ten to a few hundred people in most cases. Today, rimajel who reside on what are now referred to as “outer” islands continue to live primarily rural subsistence lifestyles, supporting themselves through fishing and agriculture, and by producing handicrafts and farming copra\(^1\) for export. In the 21\(^{st}\) century, the major exceptions to this “typical” Marshallese way of life are Majuro, the nation’s capital, and Ebeye or Ebjå, one of the 93 tiny islands that make up the Kwajalein Atoll complex, the world’s largest coral atoll covering an approximately 900 square mile area.

Whereas Majuro is presently the seat of government for the 20-year-old Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ebeye is located approximately three miles from Kwajalein Island, the present headquarters for the United States Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA), overseer of the Kwajalein Missile Range (KMR) and the Regan Test Site (RTS)—“the U.S. Army’s premier Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site” and a major source of income for the Republic of the Marshall Islands (United States Army Space and Missile Defense Command). Relative to the population of the Marshall Islands as a whole, Majuro and Ebeye are major urban centers: together, they accommodate around 78 percent of the country’s population, with anywhere from 20,000 to 25,000 people living on Majuro and 10,000 to 13,000 people on Ebeye (Wypijewski 2001, 45).\(^2\) These figures suggest that the so-called “typical” or “traditional” rural Marshallese way of life is changing rapidly.

\(^1\) Copra is dried coconut meat, the by-products of which include coconut oil and coconut feed. In 1999, almost 24 percent of non-public sector employees in the Marshall Islands declared “copra farmer” as their occupation, making copra production the “largest single occupation group” in the Marshall Islands (Graham 2002).

\(^2\) A census conducted in 1999 estimated Ebeye’s population at just under 10,000 (Graham & Paul 2002, 1).
Although the intent of this thesis is to construct a story of Ebeye that goes beyond statistics and “dumping” (Hanlon 1999, 188), and to access the island via ri-Ebjä experiences and voices rather than through figures and metaphors, a brief overview of the island’s history and development will help situate those voices, events, and experiences within a larger historical context. Keeping in mind that many readers likely have little or no knowledge of Ebeye or its complex and difficult recent history, this section outlines some of the key events, statistics, and information that constitute a particular (and certainly significant) side of “the Ebeye story.” This chapter thus serves as a brief summary of how a tiny strip of coral reef in the middle of the Pacific transformed from an island with a population of only about 20 people in the early part of the 20th century to one of the most densely populated places on Earth in the early part of the 21st (Gorenflo & Levin 1989, 99 & 91).
The Marshall Islands lies in the central Pacific Ocean roughly halfway between Hawai‘i and Australia. The country is composed of 29 coral atolls and five single low-lying islets spread over 375,000 square miles of ocean and grouped together in two atoll chains—the Ratak ("sunrise") in the east, and the Ralik ("sunset") to the west. Like much of Oceania, the Marshall Islands has not gone unaffected by colonialism in recent centuries; in fact, the gradual intrusion of first the Spanish, and later Russians, Germans, Japanese, and now Americans (not to mention the many Filipinos, Chinese, Taiwanese, Fijians, and others who live there today in relatively large numbers) has brought significant changes to all aspects of Marshallese life—from the actual physical appearance of many of the islands, to politics and governance, economics, culture, and Marshallese social organization.

Perhaps not surprisingly, stories about the Marshall Islands often start off by summarizing its colonial past, meanwhile overlooking the histories that extend over thousands of years—the reason perhaps being that written records of Marshallese life and society emerged only with the arrival of foreign ships. Faced with the “lack of written materials” by scholars about their history, scholars often look to foreign records and interpretations of the Marshallese past to construct stories that are inevitably “imperfect and incomplete accounts shaped and limited by author and audience” (Walsh 2003, 113). That such accounts (of which this thesis is certainly one) are also constructed using foreign (i.e., not Marshallese) languages and media only compounds the already problematic task of constructing histories that remain sensitive to local understandings and interpretations of the past.

Like societies across the Pacific, Marshallese is traditionally an oral culture whose language, genealogies, and histories, as well as its many cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, have been passed down through generations by word of mouth through bwebwenato (stories), inqen (legends or myths), jabonkonnaan (proverbs or wise sayings), kadkad (genealogies), roro (chants), eb (dances), and al (songs), as well as other media such as ep (tattoos) and meto (stick charts). Today, many of these and
other traditions persist; for example, rimajel continue to use eb (dances) such as jebwa (stick dance), deelel (fan dance), and even the more modern biit (line dance) to express and transmit their histories, customs, and values to younger generations.

To be sure, the breadth of history contained in oral and other traditions may not seem as accessible or historically accurate as the logs of ship captains and other printed documents that have presumed to illustrate and even explicate Marshallese culture, society, and people. Unlike printed documents, oral and other traditions "were gradually modified and changed as time went by, fitting the needs of the time," and many scholars thus point to their inherent subjectivity and variable nature as indicators of their unreliability as sources of history, factuality, and "truth" (Downing et al. 1992, 2; Neumann 1992, 117-119).³ For this reason, many historians and other scholars have

³ Klaus Neumann maintains that oral traditions are "true constructions of the past, no matter if they are factually correct reconstructions of the past," and that the power of these traditions lies not in their capacity to prove the past.
relied primarily on printed documents and scientific records to construct historical chronologies of "how things really were" in the Marshall Islands and beyond—often using oral and other embodied traditions (legends and tattoos, for example) either as "sources" of history or not at all (ibid., 117 & 107). Still others have attempted to deconstruct the colonial past by accepting their own and others' inevitable subjectivities and the possibility that, in addition to facts, "untruth" also "makes history by becoming real" (ibid., 119). To this end, scholars like Klaus Neumann look to oral traditions as "elements" of history, recognizing that the stories he constructs are not "history" per se, but rather assemblages of stories that might help "move toward the truth of things" (ibid.).

Marshall Islanders have a long tradition of oral narrative and storytelling, as well as rules that regulate when stories can be told and to whom. "It is not customary for storytellers in the Marshall Islands to share legends with just anyone. By custom the iroi [chiefs] own the legends, and the ones who are chosen to remember them can share them only when the iroi says so" (Kelin 2003, vii–viii). These traditions contain a "wealth of knowledge" essential to survival in the atoll environment, and often describe and explain the origins of land, people, and customs (Downing et al., 1992, xiii). According to one Marshallese bwebwenato (story or legend)—as told by Jelíbör Jam of Kwajalein Atoll in 1975 and later transcribed and translated by anthropologist Jack Tobin—four men, Ɂowa, Ɂōmtal, Ɂewōj, and Ɂaneej, created the islands and the vast ocean, and all the creatures that inhabit the land and sea. A woman later gave birth to the first coconut, the versatile crop that has sustained Ɂi̱majel over many centuries:*

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* This is just the beginning of a long story that goes on to describe all the stages of growth of the coconut tree and its many uses, as well as the early development of many aspects of Marshallese life, including the emergence of clans, rank, and social structure.
In the beginning, there were four posts. They remained there. And the post in the east fell down and made the sky in the east. And it was given the name Łökômnaan. It remained a short while, and the post in the south fell down to make the sky in the south. Its name was Łorôk. A short while later, the post in the north fell down to make the sky in the north. Its name was Łajibwinâmôñ. It remained a short while, and the post in the west fell down to make the sky in the west. Its name was Łrojirilik.

The sky was very foggy. It remained there, and two men appeared from the sky. The names of these men, Łowa and Łonîtal. And Łowa made the islands with his voice. He said, "Łowa and reefs." And there were reefs. And he spoke again, "Łowa and rocks." And there were rocks. And he spoke again, "Łowa and islands." And there were islands. And he spoke again, "Łowa and human beings." And there were human beings.

The sky remained foggy. One could not see afar.

Now Łonîtal. He made the sea. He said with his voice, "Kick out in the depths of the sea and make it flow to the east. It flows to the east." And he again said with his voice, "Kick out in the depths of the sea and make it flow to the south. It flows to the south."

And he spoke again, "Kick out in the depths of the sea and make it flow to the north. It flows to the north." And he spoke again, "Kick out in the depths of the sea and make it flow west. It flows west."

Now there was much water. And now he made fish. And he said, "Kick out in the lagoon of Ep and flow." Fish flowed in. (Ep is the name of a legendary island. We have not seen it.)

He spoke again, "Kick out in the lagoon of Ep and flow."

The birds of the sky came. Now there were many islands, many seas. And all of the things belonging to them.

After a while, two more young men came. These men came to tattoo. (In the ancient language, kabun eqqıqı means 'to make tattoos'.) These people saw these men come down from the sky there at the northern end of Buøj [Island, Aelôñjapap Atoll]. The name of the land parcel there was Jimwinne, as it is to this day.

Now the two came to begin their tattooing. And they came to make their tattooing paint (dye). (Marjwàj in the ancient language means 'to make paint [dye] for tattooing from earth': black, green, white, yellow, blue; many kinds.) And they came to paint all of the living things.

And one of the men, Łewoj, called all of the fish. And said, "One come here." And one came, and the other man, Łanéej, colored it. And said, "Your name is kupan . . . [surgeon fish] . . . And released it into the sea.

And the one man, Łewoj, again called a fish, and the other man Łanéej, painted it and said, "Your name is twewwe" [yellowfin or bluefin tuna]. And released it into the sea. Łewoj again called one, and Łanéej again colored it and released it into the sea and said, "Your name is mao . . . [wrasse] . . . And thus the two of them did to all of the fish in the sea. And Łewoj called all of the birds in the air, and Łanéej again colored them a different way and gave each one of them a separate name. And Łewoj again called everything that crawled on the island. And he colored them with individual kinds of paint.

And he named each one of them. And he called the human beings [sic]. And he improved the appearance of their faces from one another, so that they would not all be the same, but should be separate from each other. And it is thus to this day.

But the sky was not light yet. It was still dark.

A woman became pregnant through the power of love. And after nine or eight months, this woman gave birth to her child, a ripe coconut. (Because it was not yet light. And food had not yet appeared. But people and animals and all kinds of living things were ready.)

And the woman named the coconut Łakâm. (Łakâm is the name for this ripe coconut in the ancient language. Only one.) And she treasured it highly.
Scientists and anthropologists explain the early history of the Marshall Islands (Aelōn in Majel or Aelōn Kein) a bit differently, using linguistic analysis and other scientific data to explain the origins of land, peoples, and plant and animal life. Much like the story cited above, this kind of research has also been utilized to explain “origins.” Anthropologist Patrick Kirch uses such data to describe the gradual inhabitation of the Pacific Islands through migration and sea-voyaging, which may have begun as much as 30,000 years ago in western Melanesia, accelerating with the eventual migration of Austronesian people out of what was perhaps Taiwan approximately 3,000 to 3,500 years ago (ibid. 67, 86–93). The initial settlement of the Marshall Islands may have occurred an estimated 2,500 years ago, when the first rimajel likely arrived in the islands “from the Solomons–Vanuatu region as a northern prong of the Lapita expansion” (Kirch 2000, 170).

Kirch also describes the formation of coral atolls, using a since modified version of Charles Darwin’s subsidence theory:

As islands migrate westward on the relentlessly moving Pacific Plate, they gradually subside and, in combination with the erosion of their subaerial surfaces by wind and water, are slowly reduced. [Coral] reefs begin to develop around the island’s margin, so that in time an older high island will have a small volcanic core surrounded by a lagoon and barrier reef . . . Eventually this remnant volcanic core also becomes submerged, and only a ring of coral reef remains above the ocean, since coral will continue to grow upward . . . Coral heads and sand generated by storms and biological processes accumulate at places on the reef to form islets (Kirch 2000, 48–49).

Kirch notes that the first inhabitants of atoll Micronesia (including the Marshall Islands) may have arrived so long ago that the atolls themselves were still in the process of

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6 The story jinoin La/ In ("The Beginning of this World") was recounted by Jelibôr Jam and later transcribed and translated by Jack Tobin in Stories from the Marshall Islands (Tobin 2002, 11–13). The Marshallese version of this story appears on pages 26–36 of the same work, and while I have not done so here, I plan to include Marshallese-language texts whenever possible in the future.
formation: “Micronesian atolls were in their initial stages of subaerial formation and stabilization when late Lapita populations began to explore the seaways north of the equator” (Kirch 2000, 174). While some might argue that little is known about the pre-colonial history of the inhabitants of Kwajalein Atoll and Ebeye Island more specifically, the following bwebwenato is just one of many oral traditions that comprise essential elements of that history not just in its content, but also in its structure and form. This story describes the formation of Kwajalein Atoll as the result of the greed and jealousy of island a/ap (land managers). It suggests that, during this time, all the islets in the atoll (which would have included Ebeye) were populated, and that the Marshallese system of social rank and hierarchy had already taken shape:

| Kwajalein Atoll covers a vast area and is the largest atoll in the world. The islands are spread apart and a person could not possibly see all the other islets from any one place. Also, today many of the islets are unpopulated, but in the past they all had people on them. Long ago, however, the islets were very close together. Then a very beautiful woman appeared on Kwajalein. She came from nowhere. She was so beautiful that all the landmanagers desired her. The landmanagers were called a/ap in Marshallese, and they were very greedy and jealous men. Since the islets were so close, a person could easily go from one to the other, and so no single a/ap could completely possess the beautiful woman. The people did not know the name of the lovely woman so they called her Lien, which means “that lady” in Marshallese. Soon Lien disappeared, leaving all of the a/ap desiring her. The landowners decided to move their islets away from each other so that when Lien reappeared, they would not have to compete for each other. So the a/ap of Ebadon, the largest islet of Kwajalein, said, “Lien and Roi Namur, move to the west.” And so the island moved westward. Then the a/ap of Roi Namur said, “Lien and Roi Namur, move north,” and the island moved northward as soon as the words disappeared into the air. Then the owner of Kwajalein said, “Lien and my island, move to the south,” and Kwajalein moved to southward. All of the other a/ap also told their islands to move and so today they are so scattered that they are out of sight of each other. Today, a bird flew completely around the coral reef of Kwajalein atoll, it would see the results of the a/ap greed and jealousy. Ebadon is far from the rest of the islets and is even close to Lae Atoll. Roi Namur is located far toward Likiep Atoll, and Kwajalein islet cannot be seen from either Ebadon or Roi Namur. It is located just near to Namu Atoll.7 |

| It is important to note that the translation and transcription of oral traditions inevitably distorts their various and nuanced meanings and objectives, and defies the |

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7 “Why Kwajalein has Separate Islets,” as recounted in Bwebwenatoo Etto: A Collection of Marshallese Legends and Traditions (Downing et al. 1992, 87–88; Storyteller unnamed).
contexts and circumstances under which they have been told over the years. Nevertheless, I feel it is important to include available versions of some of these (hi)stories here—as they embody elements of the Marshall Islands’ (and, as such, Ebeye’s) long and complex history not generally available in typical Western representations. By including these and other stories, I do not intend to “prove” how the atolls of the Marshall Islands formed or how the original inhabitants got there; instead, I wish to suggest that oral traditions contain essential “truths” about Marshallese history, culture, and society (Neumann 1992, 107). The stories cited above as such serve as an introduction to my own attempt move toward a “true” story of Ebeye that is both reflective of and reflected in local Marshallese voices, stories, experiences, and events (ibid., 121).

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With only 78 acres (one-tenth of a square mile) of total land area, Ebeye’s present population density is comparable to or even higher than that of the United States’ most densely populated urban center, although high-rise buildings are noticeably absent and public utilities like available safe drinking water and reliable electricity are not guaranteed on a daily basis. Although the residents of Ebeye are primarily rimajel, the island also hosts permanent residents and guest workers from other parts of the Pacific, Asia, and the United States. Approximately 1,000 to 1,500 rimajel and other Ebeye residents work on nearby Kwajalein Island; others hold jobs in Ebeye’s public sector (e.g., government, education, health care, etc.), as well as in its small private sector (e.g., stores, restaurants, Mobil Oil, and the like) (Graham 2002, 2). Some people own their own businesses, which they often manage from their homes. Aside from the widespread mom-and-pop stores that can be found on almost every side

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* The 2000 United States Census indicates that the most densely populated areas of New York City house populations over 150 people per acre. With a population of approximately 12,000 on 78 acres, Ebeye’s population density is approximately 154 people per acre (New York City Department of City Planning).
street, other examples include selling cakes and other baked goods, the production of local music and CDs, making handicrafts, creating party invitations, and running on-island taxis as well as water-taxis from Ebeye to Kwajalein. Some people make extra money by selling items brought or sent from the U.S. mainland and handicrafts from the outer islands, and even by carrying drinking water from the pumping facility or from the Kwajalein dock, when necessary. Some choose to stay home to raise their children. Others yet remain jobless and poor, a fact that many authors and other outside observers blame on laziness and nostalgia for the pre-colonial past.

As a result of extreme population density and the historical mismanagement of resources by both foreign and domestic administrators, health and social services on Ebeye are limited, and sanitation is a continual challenge (one garbage truck serves the entire island, for example, taking daily loads to the open dump in peoples' "Dump Town" backyards on the northern end of the island). The combination of an extremely dense population, poor social services, and defunct and faltering public utilities makes outbreaks of sickness and disease on the island not uncommon. Ebeye faced a polio epidemic in 1963, for example, as well as a measles epidemic in 1978 that "afflicted 329 people and resulted in two deaths" (Hanlon 1998, 199). An outbreak of cholera hit the island as recently as December of 2000, infecting 306 people and killing six (Johnson 2001).

Limited and restricted access to the other islands in Kwajalein Atoll, including Kwajalein Island itself, only compounds these and other issues. As a U.S. military installation, access to those islands housing Kwajalein Missile Range facilities and operations—including Kwajalein, Roi-Namur, Meck, and others—is either limited or all together restricted for rimajel and others (including American citizens). Access to Kwajalein Island, for example, is limited to those with work or other kinds of badges, and the rules governing access change as often as the Kwajalein Range Command. When

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9 Many rimajel and some Ebeye nurses and doctors also claim to notice consistently higher rates of sickness occur immediately following RTS missile testing in the Kwajalein lagoon.
I first lived on Ebeye, badge workers could go to Kwajalein up to three hours before their scheduled shifts and stay up to three hours after finishing work—allowing workers to eat, exercise, and do their laundry. When I returned to Ebeye in December 2005 this rule had changed, however, and workers were only allowed one hour on Kwajalein before and after work. Other ways of accessing Kwajalein from Ebeye and elsewhere include (but are not restricted to) obtaining a day pass from the Ebeye local police, the Ebeye local government, or a Kwajalein Island ajap (landowner or lineage head—these are limited to their family members only), or “sponsorship” by a Kwajalein resident either for the day or for a more extended visit.

Ebeye business owners are also able to access Kwajalein to go to the airport to pick up shipments, and those with airline reservations can get on the island in time to catch their flight. In the past, Ebeye school principals also had special permission to access Kwajalein, but when I was there in 2005 these had been revoked. Access to the “Mid-Corridor” region of Kwajalein Atoll is also highly restricted, especially during RTS “missions” (i.e., missile and interceptor tests). People are forbidden from living on these islands, and their ability to gather local foods and supplies from their land and the surrounding waters is limited. Kwajalein Atoll landowners receive monetary
compensation for these and other restrictions, some of the details of which I will discuss briefly later in this chapter.

The list of Ebeye's challenges goes on, and while I have barely begun to scratch the surface, it is not my intent to explore or explain all of them here. Nevertheless, these figures do call to mind the following question: How did a tiny island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean end up with one of the world's highest population densities and a lifestyle outwardly more reminiscent of an urban ghetto than of island life on neighboring atolls? While the following chronology provides some insight into the situation, it is important to keep in mind that Ebeye's history is complex and multifaceted, and could be told in hundreds of ways and from even more points of view. Like most histories, what I have conveyed so far and what follows is a partial text based on partial texts. As a (hi)story constructed in English, on paper, and by an American author, it surely deviates significantly from the many ways ri–Ebja have experienced and retold their stories over the years.

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Since it is not my intent to present a comprehensive history of the Marshall Islands, I begin this section by constructing brief review of its colonial past from the German administration through World War II, emphasizing the emergence of Kwajalein Atoll as the strategic center of Micronesia. I then go on to describe the American administration of Kwajalein Atoll with a particular focus on the development of the Kwajalein Labor Camp on Ebeye Island.10

The presence of outsiders and foreign powers in the Marshall Islands was relatively limited until the mid-1850s; “although the Marshall Islands officially became part of the Spanish Empire in 1494 . . . very little interaction between the Marshallese and Europeans occurred during the first three centuries following initial contact”

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While it may be true that German trader Adolph Capelle was the “first foreign trader ever to reside in the Marshalls” when he established his trading station on Ebon in 1859, this is not to say he was the first to attempt to make his way there (Hezel 1995, 46). Up to the time of Capelle’s arrival, rîmâjel had encountered their share of scientists, explorers, whalers, and missionaries from places like Britain, the United States, Hawai‘i, and even as far away as Russia (Walsh 2003, 128–156). In fact, when Capelle arrived in 1859, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had established its first mission in the Marshall Islands just two years earlier, also on Ebon.

The eventual German administration of the Marshall Islands, which began in 1885 and lasted through 1914, brought with it notable changes to Marshallese society. For one thing, the German-administered copra industry affected the urbanization of places like Jaluit, and turned many rîmâjel into wage laborers for the first time (ibid., 164). Perhaps more significantly, however, the German presence effectively altered Marshallese social structure in the Râlik chain (including Kwajalein Atoll) by “increasing [chiefs’] control over the land” and “recording land ownership”—the distribution of which had previously been “fluid and constantly negotiated through changing alliances, the availability of resources, and through battles” (ibid., 173). The Germans also influenced the alteration of land inheritance patterns from matrilineal to patrilineal and effectively “fixed the Marshallese hierarchy” by recognizing “Kabua as ‘King’ above the other trooj” (ibid., 165, 168). These and other modifications to traditional customs have influenced Kwajalein Atoll land ownership and inheritance—and, more recently, Kwajalein land payments—ever since (ibid., 165).

At the end of World War I, Germany was forced to surrender its colonial holdings in the Pacific, and in 1914 Japan began its administration of Micronesia, including the Marshall Islands. According to historian Mark Peattie, the Japanese naval administration regarded the acquisition of Micronesia as “a vital strategic advantage in any future
Figure 8: Map of Kwajalein Atoll
conflict with the United States” (Peattie 1988, 42). As such, Japan’s initial drive into Micronesia after World War I was primarily strategic, and also represented a step in Japan’s politically and economically motivated “southward advance”—that is, the anticipated gradual occupation of Melanesia and Southeast Asia (ibid., 223).

From 1914 to 1922, the Japanese Navy administered Micronesia on Japan’s behalf. It was during these years that the “Japanization” of Micronesia began in full swing—from public works projects, new laws and regulations, and Japanese language instruction, to the “restructuring of traditional political hierarchies” and forced “conformity to Japanese values and customs” (ibid., 64, 66). Despite the Navy’s initial role, however, the League of Nations Mandate that had appointed Japan as Micronesia’s official guardian in 1917 required that a civilian government eventually take over. To this end, the civilian Nan’yo-cho or South Seas Government took over the administration of the islands in 1922. This administration was “intensive and dominating,” and governed Micronesia as it would a colony right up to the onset of World War II—at which time the Marshall Islands (which had been all but ignored throughout the Japanese administration) “took on vital importance” as Japan oversaw the gradual militarization of the region in preparation for war with the United States (ibid., 68–69, 231).

It was at this time that Kwajalein Atoll in the western or Ralik chain of the Marshall Islands became regionally and internationally significant, first as one of four Japanese “Base Force’ headquarters” in Micronesia, and later as the “nerve center for the surrounding bases (ibid., 252, 259). Peattie explains:

As the funnel through which all shipments of men, weapons, and material flowed into the Marshalls, Kwajalein became particularly important. Roi and Namur islands at the northern tip of the atoll’s vast lagoon, Ebeye on its southeastern side, and Kwajalein at its southeastern corner, became jammed with barracks, runways, communications facilities, and aircraft of various types (ibid., 259).
By this time, the Japanese had constructed a seaplane base together with a "ramp and a small fortified base to repair and maintain [planes]" on tiny Ebeye Island (Lindborg 2000, 1). If they had not already been relocated or conscripted by the Japanese, Ebeye's Marshallese inhabitants—who were probably not many more in number at that time than they had been in 1935 when a Japanese census counted 16 people there—surely began to brace themselves for the devastation that was to come (Gorenflo & Levin 1989, 98).

The American invasion of Kwajalein Atoll was a "fire-storm of aerial and surface bombardment, [which] suddenly and simultaneously struck the northern and southern ends of the atoll on 31 January 1944":

The Americans quickly overran Roi, which consisted mostly of runways and air facilities, but the resistance of the naval combat troops on adjacent Namur was ferocious... On Kwajalein Island, the struggle was even more frenzied... [as the] men resisted the steel avalanche that roared down upon them, fighting from their rapidly crumbling positions, dashing out in small clusters in futile suicide charges, sniping from the palm trees, scrambling over enemy tanks to try to drop hand grenades down the hatches, their officers even beating their swords in helpless rage against the advancing machines... The fighting reached a crescendo during the Japanese resistance in the central blockhouse area in the center of the island, now reduced to a jumble of twisted girders and rubble... On [February] fifth the survivors... made a direct frontal attack on the American positions and were completely annihilated. From 2 through 6 February, the invaders then turned the weight of the offensive to Ebeye Island on the southeastern side of the atoll and the desperate resistance and subsequent slaughter was repeated until the island's last defenders were blasted away" (Peattie 1988, 267–268).

Although the American invasion of Kwajalein was just one of many battles waged between Japanese and American troops (together with their Micronesian conscripts, to be sure) all over Micronesia, the battles fought on Kwajalein Atoll signified a "fatal blow" to Japanese defenses and the "loss of the nerve center" of those defenses in the Marshall Islands (ibid., 268). Within two months of Japan's "loss" of Kwajalein Atoll, the Americans had overrun all six Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands. Japan's war against the Americans had been lost (ibid., 271).

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While the American occupation of Micronesia may have been "piecemeal and gradual," the seizure and conversion of Kwajalein into a U.S. base of operations was immediate and conclusive (Hanlon 1998, 28). At the end of World War II, Kwajalein Atoll's strategic location and potential did not go unnoticed by the Americans: "its enormous lagoon and deep anchorages attracted the attention of the United States military, first as a naval base, then as a support facility for nuclear testing on Bikini and Eniwetak, and later as a missile testing range" (ibid., 198). The war had wrought devastation across the atoll, however, much as it had throughout the Marshall Islands—both in terms of infrastructure and the lives and welfare of rimajel. In order for Kwajalein to resume its position as the now American-controlled strategic "nerve center" of the Marshall Islands and all of Micronesia, the rubble and debris of World War II would have to be cleared and the island rebuilt. To this end, the U.S. Navy brought in Pohnpeians and Marshallese from outer islands to help reconstruct Kwajalein Island for use by the United States military. Kwajalein landowners were not consulted in this matter, nor would they be compensated for the use of their land until 1964 (Tobin 1972, 2).

By 1950, most of the Pohnpeians had returned home, and rimajel workers and their families lived in a Kwajalein labor camp separate from the housing facilities of American personnel then stationed on the island. By that time, the camp's population had reached 559 and according to American observers began to present a "squalid, shantytown appearance, contrasting sharply with the spick and span buildings of the adjacent [American] military establishment" (Tobin 1954, 2–3). As a result, on January 26, 1951 the Kwajalein Labor Camp was relocated to the island of Ebeye approximately three miles north of Kwajalein Island (Figure 8). Although Navy officials have claimed that "the expansion of naval operating base facilities on Kwajalein" necessitated the camp's relocation (Richard 1957 vol.1, 556), others have argued that it was moved in

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12 For more detailed descriptions of the impact of World War II on the lives of Micronesians and rimajel in particular, see Hezel (1995), Lindstrom & White (1989), Hanlon (1998), and Poyer et al. (2001).
**Ebjå Landownership: An Overview**

Historian David Hanlon observes that, "despite the navy’s cavalier decision” to relocate the Kwajalein Labor Camp to Ebeye in 1951, "Ebeye was not a free or deculturated zone” (Hanlon 1998, 194). It has been noted that in pre-colonial times, for example, Ebjå "was the location where the chiefs kept their commoner wives and sleeping partners. [As such, Ebjå] residents belonged to the social class called bwidak, the offspring of an irooj (Chief) and a commoner wife” (Lindborg 2001, 1).

In the Marshall Islands, land parcels or wāto consist of “land that runs across the width of an island from lagoon beach to ocean reef,” and are jointly owned and managed by irooj (chiefly) and kajoor (commoner) families (Walsh 2003, 124). At any given time, the iroojjapjap or paramount chief is primarily “responsible for the land that is controlled or ‘owned’ by the chiefly family” (ibid.). The iroojjapjap oversees the management of each wāto in conjunction with one or more ajap or senior members of the commoner bwij or lineages inhabiting a given wāto (ibid.). Since colonial times, irooj families are regarded as the primary owners of the land, whereas kajoor families have “usufruct rights” (ibid., 124). This arrangement allows kajoor families to live on and reap the rewards of the land, yet at the same time obliges them to care for and preserve it.

Traditionally, the iroojjapjap inherited his title matrilineally and in accordance with his mother’s birth order (i.e., sons of the eldest female sibling held power before sons of younger female siblings) (ibid., 122–123). The ajap is generally the “eldest living sibling [preferentially, although not necessarily, male] within a generation” (ibid., 124). The ajap’s main responsibilities are to “enact the dictates of the chief” and to mediate communication between the kajoor and the iroojjapjap or a representative (ibid., 125).

According to Marshallese tradition, irooj and kajoor families descend from particular jowi or clans and bwij or matrilines. The following story, as told by Laşan and Jekkein and reproduced in Tobin’s *Stories from the Marshall Islands* (2002), tells of the origins of Liwatuonmour, whose daughter irooj “is the mother of the line of chiefs that [has] controlled the Ralik Islands for generations” (Walsh 2003, 119). Today the bwij in irooj or irooj matriline maintains recognition as the “primordially ordained and unquestioned irooj” of the Ralik chain (ibid.).

The out of Ralik is Najo. It is the place of the irooj ejap (paramount chiefs). The out of Ratak is Majo and is likewise the place of the paramount chiefs.

There are only two out in the Marshall Islands.

Bōke-en wāto (land parcel) is the out wāto on Mājo Island, Mājo Atoll. And Libuojar wāto is the out wāto on Najo Island, Najo Atoll.

Libuojar wāto is important because the high power Liwatuonmour once lived there.

Liwatuonmour and her sister Lidipdepbju came to the Marshall Islands long, long ago from the land of Uap in the west in a canoe.

They landed on Ero Island in Kujoleen Atoll. All of the jowi (clans) in the Marshall Islands came from those two women on Ero Island. After a while, they left Ero. Liwatuonmour went to Najo Atoll, and Lidipdepbju went to Aur Atoll.

Liwatuonmour was the dekā (stone) located on Libuojar wāto on Najo Island. When walking on Libuojar wāto, one does not have to badlik dik (bow down when passing in front of people), even to the irooj. Because the higher power, Liwatuonmour, once lived there.

In the olden days and even today, this exception to the rule of homage and respect to the irooj is observed.

The people worshipped Liwatuonmour and made offerings of food and mats to her (Tobin

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13 I gratefully acknowledge Julie Walsh Kroeker and Sandy deBrum for their invaluable advice and assistance in the drafting of this section.

14 For recent debates on this issue, see “Women Riled over Mike’s Alab Stand” (Johnson 2006b).

15 Tobin explains that the word *out* comes from the language of *roro* or chants and refers to an “important place of the irooj (chief)” (Tobin 2002, 54).
As is the case throughout most of the Marshall Islands (Likiep being a notable exception), land on Ebeye is “privately owned” by Irooj and Kajoor families and overseen by the customary leaders of these families. Today two Irooj families, the Kabuas and the Loeaks, share ownership of Ebeye and other islands in Kwajalein Atoll and the Ralik chain. Both families trace their sacred origins through the bwi in Irooj/Irooj matriline) to Liwatoimnour’s daughter Irooj, although today these origins pass through patrilineal, rather than matrilineal, lines of descent.

When German traders established headquarters first in Epoon (Ebon) and later in Jalooj (Jaluit) (both in the Ralik chain, see Figure 8), Ralik chain Irooj became particularly prominent. After Irooj Kaibuke died in 1863, a feud over inheritance of the Irooj/ajap title erupted between two of Kaibuke’s sisters’ eldest sons, Loeak and Kabua. His mother being next in line to pass on the Irooj/ajap title to her eldest son, Loeak inherited the title of Irooj/ajap immediately following Kaibuke’s death. Kabua was able to oust Loeak, however, by marrying Kaibuke’s widow and adopting their son (Walsh 2003, 167).

Although the Germans recognized Kabua as “King,” the feud between Loeak and Kabua over Ralik lands did not end there. In fact, the two took the matter to German court. In 1907 and again 1910, German officials ruled on the matter, dividing and distributing the lands in question among Kabua and two of Loeak’s other cousins following Loeak’s death. The 1910 ruling “set a pattern for patrilineal inheritance for particular plots of Ralik land that continues to the present” (ibid., 170). After Kabua’s death in 1910, the German administration divided and distributed these lands, which helps explain why Ebeye is now owned both by the Kabuas and the Loeaks.

By the mid-20th century, Ebeye was divided into ten wato and according to Marshallese custom ownership and usage rights were shared among the Irooj, ajap, and lineage members—“many of whom lived elsewhere in the greater Kwajalein Atoll area” (Hanlon 1998, 194). According to this arrangement, Ebeye would have been jointly owned and managed by the two reigning Irooj/ajap, Jeimata Kabua and Albert Loeak, and the ajap of four Kajoor lineages, known today by the last names Dribo, Jajo, Kibin, and Lamar. Already somewhat blurred by a history of colonial administrations and World War II, land tenure and living arrangements on Ebeye were further complicated with the relocation of the 559 residents of the Kwajalein Labor Camp in 1951 (many of whom were from atolls other than Kwajalein), and subsequent relocations from Roi-Namur, Lib Island, the Kwajalein Atoll Mid-Corridor region, and elsewhere.

Today, the Kabua and Loeak families continue to own and manage Ebeye together with the ajap of the four Kajoor lineages. Anjua Loeak and former President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands Imata Kabua are the reigning Irooj/ajap of Ebeye and other islands in Kwajalein Atoll and beyond.

The title of ajap for many of the islands in Kwajalein Atoll is being disputed in court to this day.17 These kinds of cases are highly significant because they are closely linked to substantial rental payments from the United States for use of Kwajalein Atoll land which amount to approximately $9 million per year and the distribution of which (i.e., from Irooj to ajap to Kajoor or rjebim) follows “flexible, traditional” arrangements “rather than Western legal prescriptions” (Julie Walsh Kroeker, personal communication, 3 July 2006).18

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16 The Marshallese version of this story is not available in Tobin 2002.
17 See “Dribo Case Drags on in the High Court” (Johnson 2006a) and “Maie Files Suit in Land Fight” (Johnson 2006c).
18 For recent developments on the debate over Kwajalein rental payments, see “Irooj Imata: US Money Move Illegal” (The Marshall Islands Journal 2005a) and “Morris Stands by the 2066 ‘Deal’” (Johnson 2005b).
direct response to its stark contrast to American facilities—in other words, to “remove
the eyesore” from Kwajalein Island (ibid.; Johnson 1984, 19).

In 1947, the United States Naval administration of the Marshall Islands was
terminated and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) came into being, with the
United States government as the administering authority (Richard 1957 vol. 3, 3).
Despite this transfer of power, the military retained control of Kwajalein Island and its
holdings on Ebeye. 19 A debate quickly ensued as to whether the military or the
Trusteeship would administer the rest of Ebeye (i.e., the labor camp, otherwise known as
“Ebeye Village”). It was eventually decided that the Trust Territory would administer the
“village” under its civil administration of the Marshall Islands District—even though it
existed primarily to serve the needs of the U.S. military. 20

The relocation of the Kwajalein Labor Camp to Ebeye aggravated many of the
challenges rirajel living on Kwajalein Island already faced. For one thing, the move
further divided the American and Marshallese communities, and separated rirajel in two
distinct groups: Ebeye Village and “Squatter’s Town” (Tobin 1954, 9). Ebeye Village, on
the one hand, was home to the transplanted Kwajalein Labor Camp—its residents were
primarily outer-island rirajel from places like nearby Likiep, Aelōniaplap, and Ujae
atolls. 21 “Squatter’s Town,” on the other hand, was home to approximately 54 outer-
islanders and “124 Kwajalein Atoll people, many of whom [were] unable to return to
their war-ravaged and in some cases U.S.-occupied islands” (ibid.). Left with no visible
option, the residents of “Squatter’s Town” constructed for themselves “27 wooden and
sheet metal buildings . . . most of which [were] nothing but ‘shanties’” (ibid., 8–9).

19 “The U.S. Navy [used] the northern half of Ebeye for a transmitter; the Coast Guard operated a station of its own on
10.73 acres at the southern end of Ebeye” (Hanlon 1998, 191).
20 This transfer of authority over Ebeye to the civilian administration eventually proved a convenient way for the
military to distance itself from the so-called “Ebeye Problem” (Tobin 1972, 2)—a problem that would only be
exacerbated as the distance between Ebeye and Kwajalein continued to grow over the next fifty odd years.
21 Although the population of the Kwajalein Labor Camp had reached 559 people by 1950, the Navy built only enough
housing to accommodate 370 workers and their families in Ebeye Village proper, as well as four duplexes for the
approximately forty people who resided on Ebeye at that time (Tobin 1954, 3; Richard 1957 vol. 3, 561). Those
without accommodations had to go at it alone, and did so by constructing their own housing on the outskirts of the
village (and, incidentally, on that part of the island still controlled by the Navy).
Squatter's Town" was also the area of Ebeye designated by Tobin as Ebeye's "slum area" 22 (ibid., 32). Unfortunately, this label would eventually become detached from Ebeye's colonial history, and would as such come to represent not only everything that is wrong with U.S. imperialism and militarization, but also what, for many outside observers, epitomizes everything that is supposedly wrong with Marshallese culture and people.

By 1954, Ebeye's population had swelled to 981, and presented a blatant physical and structural contrast not only to Kwajalein Island, but also to "any other village in the Marshalls" (ibid., Appendix & 7). 23 Although "Ebeye had already reached its maximum sustainable population density," in 1960-61 the challenges faced by the island's residents were aggravated and intensified further by the U.S. Navy's decision to move rimajel from Lib island south of Kwajalein and from Roi-Namur in the northeast end of Kwajalein Atoll "as a precautionary measure in connection with the testing of the Nike-Zeus weapons system" (Hanlon 1999, 192). 24 As a result of these relocations and a variety of other factors (including neighbor island migration and increasing fertility rates), the population of Ebeye had reached 2,600 by 1963 (Gorenflo & Levin 1989, 108). The situation was further exacerbated the following year when the U.S. Army—which had by that time assumed control of Kwajalein operations—moved another 487 rimajel from Kwajalein Atoll's Mid-Corridor region in order to assure "the safety of the people of that portion of Kwajalein Atoll" (ibid., 208). David Hanlon notes:

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22 I cannot help but note the irony here—"Squatter's Town" was the one area of Ebeye that actually had a Kwajalein Atoll majority population and, while most Ebeye Village residents were from other atolls with no land rights in Kwajalein Atoll, they were not considered squatters because the Navy placed them there and gave them housing.

23 This contrast should not have come as a surprise since it was the Navy's primary motivating factor for relocating the labor camp in the first place.

24 Nike-Zeus was the United States' first anti-ballistic missile (ABM) project—a complex weapons system originally planned and implemented during the Cold War. "The Ballistic Missile Defense/Anti-Ballistic Missile concept is quite literally a 'bullet stopping a bullet'... For the United States, most of these capabilities are developed and refined on the complex of facilities that end at the Kwajalein Missile Range. Missiles launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in Southern California race across the 4,800 miles to splash down in or near Kwajalein's lagoon. Traveling at speeds above 10,000 miles an hour, the missiles take barely 30 minutes to reach Kwajalein" (Johnson 1984, 51 & 43).
The testing of the Nike-X missile system, and later the tracking and the retrieval of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) from the Kwajalein lagoon, necessitated the exclusive use of the central two-thirds area of the atoll complex, including the islands of Meck, Lagan, and Ningi (ibid.).

This series of relocations, together with high rates of outer island migration, were a recipe for disaster for Ebeye, which had quickly developed into "an overcrowded, unpleasant, difficult place to live" (ibid., 197).

By 1966, Ebeye's population had swelled to 4,500; twelve years later it reached 8,000 (ibid., 194 & 196). This extreme population pressure magnified many of the problems the island had faced since 1954, which included, but were not limited to: widespread sickness and disease, an under-equipped educational system; substandard housing at best; high rates of teenage pregnancy and juvenile delinquency; low wages and a high cost of living; and restricted access to other islands in the Kwajalein lagoon, limiting peoples' intake of healthy, local foods (ibid., 198–199). To make matters worse, Kwajalein Atoll landowners and displaced people from the Mid-Corridor and other regions were grossly under-compensated by the United States for

Figure 9: "Village on Ebeye" during the TTIP
the use of their lands. That same year, Trust Territory administrator Francis Mahoney noted:

[EBeye is] the most congested, unhealthful, and socially demoralized community in Micronesia . . . [It] is socially disorganized, with most of the problems encountered in an urban American slum with its frustration and confinement—epidemics and malnutrition, child neglect (many mothers are employed), alcoholism, law breaking and juvenile delinquency. An estimated two thirds of the community’s members are from atolls other than Kwajalein, have no land ties in EBeye although they may lived there for years [sic], and feel no loyalty to its officials and lineage chiefs. All inhabitants, landowners and tenants alike, feel “pushed around,” cheated and at the same time singularly dependent on American largesse . . . It should be added that EBeye is almost totally dependent on wages to procure food, since food producing tracts on the island are non-existent and copra producing islands in the atoll are “off limits” to natives except with the consent of the military authorities (Mahoney 1966, 1).

Despite U.S. Department of Defense plans to rebuild and rehabilitate EBeye into the “most modern, prosperous, and well-organized community in the Trust Territory” under the EBeye Improvement Plan, the combination of difficult living conditions, inadequate and unfair land-use compensation, and restricted access to their home islands resulted
The protests began in 1969 "with a demonstration by 31 Kwajalein landowners" who left Ebeye and returned to their home islands in the Mid-Corridor region to protest the United States' refusal to address the "crucial issue of just compensations for long-term land use" (Johnson 1984, 19; ibid., 195). By that time, Kwajalein Island landowners were being compensated under a 99-year lease agreement of $750,000 per year, amounting to approximately $10 per acre per year; islanders from the Mid-Corridor region were receiving housing on Ebeye and a monthly stipend of $40 per month (Johnson 1984, 19 & 27). In response to the hardships imposed by such inadequate levels of compensation, rimahel from these islands protested further during the 1970s and into the 1980s; their activities included sail-ins, letter writing to Army and Trust Territory officials, lawsuits, and even the direct occupation of Kwajalein Island itself—culminating in 1982 with "Operation Homecoming," the "peaceful" return of more than 1,000 rimahel to Kwajalein, Roi-Namur, and some Mid-Corridor islands (ibid., 32; Balos 1982, 2). The outcomes of these protests included "total adjusted compensation" for the use of the Mid-Corridor region, as well as an eventual increase in Kwajalein rental payments to approximately $9 million per year (Hanlon 1998, 195 & 210).

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It may be that, in many ways, the island of Ebjä is indeed unlike any other island in the Marshall Islands. Anthropologist Jack Tobin referred to Ebeye as "atypical" as early as 1954 in response to the Kwajalein Labor Camp relocation and its resulting physical appearance, meanwhile noting Ebeye’s supposed lack of community and its residents’ waywardness in terms of respect for traditional customs and leaders (Tobin 1954, 10). Since the publication of Tobin’s original report, the island’s population has continued to surpass the fragile carrying capacity of such a small coral islet, as rimahel—together with people from other parts of Micronesia, the Pacific and beyond—continue to move there to pursue jobs, to be with their families, and perhaps even in search of the “easy life” on an island that has a relatively steady supply of power, running water, food, and other
provisions. This population explosion has indeed affected Ebeye living conditions, and Trust Territory officials and later Republic of the Marshall Islands administrators have struggled to match the island's booming population with appropriate levels of infrastructure and public and social services.

Figure 11: "Main street, Ebeye" during the TTPI Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands Digital Collection, Pacific Collection, University of Hawai'i, http://hibweb.hawaii.edu/~digidoll/ttp_htms/2875.html, Photo 2, date unknown (accessed 19 June 2006).

Ebeye's rundown appearance and unusually high rates of sickness and disease, together with other difficulties such as malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, truancy, alcoholism, and suicide, have earned it a reputation as one of Micronesia's "unloved islands": a "shantytown," a "ghetto," a "biological time bomb," the so-called "slum of the Pacific" (Kluge 1968, 31; Tobin 1954, 10; Malone 1976, 27; Keju & Johnson 1982, 26).

What's more, outside observers (and perhaps even some rimajel) frequently conflate Ebeye's development—or, as some might say, lack thereof—as a Marshallese urban center with Westernization and cultural loss. They often assume that since Ebeye looks so structurally different from any "typical" island in the Marshall Islands, something about the culture and the people who live there has surely changed as well. In Chapter 2, I explore some themes of Americanization and cultural loss as the popular press has sometimes interpreted them. I go on to argue that, despite Ebeye's appearance and
outsider assumptions that grocery stores, power plants, corrugated tin roofs, and a circle-island taxi service signify the loss of culture, individuals and communities on the island have indeed managed to retain crucial aspects of Marshallese culture or მაჯელ, not the least of which are the primacy of family and community bonds, as well as reciprocity and sharing. I argue that, more than its ramshackle houses and dependence on imported foods, it is the community’s adherence to these particular values and traditions that today makes Ebeye “atypical” in ways that most representations tend to overlook.
INTERLUDE: lien keemem

At that point, the music ended and the room began to grow quiet as a man approached the podium. The young woman continued with her task of distributing the handmade flowers.

“What’s going on?” I asked my friend.


“Who is that up there on the stage?” I persisted.

“Tom?” she asked. “He is the emcee. He is a close relative of the birthday family and is good at speaking in front of people. And he is funny. He is also my relative. My mother is older than his grandfather. Tonight it’s his job to keep the keemem flowing smoothly and also to ensure adherence to our custom, our manit.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, let’s see. He makes sure the keemem doesn’t start until all the right people are here, like the Iroo or Lerooj and the a/jap, for example. He also sees to it that the Lerooj and her family are served their food first before everyone else gets in line to make their plates. Ekwe, jen jab keroro kiɔ bwe rej itôn jinoe. Let’s be quiet now, because it’s going to start.”

“lōkwe in jota,” the emcee said into the microphone. “Good evening.” There was a faint muffled reply from the guests.

“What was that?” he laughed. “Bar juon mɔk. Let’s try it again. lōkwe in jota,” he said more loudly this time.

“lōkwe in jota,” the guests responded, this time with a bit more enthusiasm and some scattered laughter.

“Mɔktata ikônaa kàmmolo Anij kôn liënîn ippân doon,” Tom continued. “First, I would like to thank God for this time together, for this opportunity to celebrate the life of baby Christopher, who today celebrates his first birthday. On behalf of Christopher’s
family, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have come together to celebrate this occasion, and in particular to our Leroo and her family, and to all the ajap and their families who have joined us here this evening. Let us also take a moment to remember those members of the family in particular who could not be here with us tonight because they are far away from home, as well as those who are sick or have passed away.

"I would like to welcome Bata Joe, who is here with us tonight, to start the celebration by offering a blessing over the baby and his family, and to bless the food before we begin our meal together. Bata Joe..."

"Kolool, Tom," Bata Joe thanked the emcee. "It is my great honor to be present here this evening. Jen kampool Anij kôn iienin ippän doon. Im bar kampool kom kôn ami kar koba tok ilo jotinin raininin. Let us once again thank God for giving us this time together, and for this opportunity to come together this evening to celebrate the life of Christopher. Before I proceed with the blessing, I would like to acknowledge everyone who has gathered this evening to make this event possible, and in particular our Leroo and her daughter, as well as all the ajap and their families. It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces, as well as the many family members who have traveled such long distances to be here this evening. If the father and mother of the baby would please stand, I will proceed with the blessing of the child."

Bata Joe then stepped down from the stage, taking the microphone with him. I stretched my neck up in the hope of catching a glimpse of what was going on, although by that time all the rows of chairs had filled and it was difficult to see through all the people sitting in front of me. By the time I had adjusted my seat so that I could see the family, Bata had already extended his arm with his open palm resting in midair just over the baby’s head. The mother and father stood quietly with their heads bowed. They must be feeling nervous now that the big event has finally started, I thought to myself.

Bata was speaking a soft blessing into the microphone, and even though the room was almost completely silent by then it was almost impossible to hear what he was
saying. I looked around and saw that most of the adults in the gym had their heads bowed slightly. Some were shushing the little children, encouraging them to be quiet during the prayer. "lien jar," they whispered. "It's time to pray." I didn't dare lean over to ask my friend what Bata was saying, although I had a pretty good idea.

When Bata Joe finished his blessing, he began to speak a bit more loudly into the microphone. This time, I could hear that he was offering the blessing over the evening and the food.

Then, "Jouj im jutak," I heard him say. "Please stand."

Everyone who was sitting down stood up as Bata began the prayer. When he finished, he asked all of us to join him in a song. This one I knew from church, as did most people, and I was glad to be able to join in the singing:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Anij iqkwe} & \quad \text{God of love,} \\
\text{Anij in jouj,} & \quad \text{God of kindness,} \\
\text{oŋāake im} & \quad \text{protect us} \\
\text{kōjpārok kōj.} & \quad \text{and care for us.} \\
\text{im kōn men in} & \quad \text{For this we} \\
\text{kōmij kāŋŋoolol,} & \quad \text{give you} \\
\text{elap joŋan} & \quad \text{our highest} \\
\text{maroŋ ba.} & \quad \text{thanks and praise.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kwar kapool jō} & \quad \text{You filled me} \\
\text{kōn am iqkwe.} & \quad \text{with your love.} \\
\text{Oŋāake jō} & \quad \text{Protect me} \\
\text{jān aŋ jorrāān.} & \quad \text{from harm.} \\
\text{Tōl im dābij jō} & \quad \text{Lead me and hold me} \\
\text{ilo lōpiden.} & \quad \text{in the palm of your hand.} \\
\text{Lōpiden pān jī aŋŋomman.} & \quad \text{In the palm of your hand,} \\
& \quad \text{I am at peace.}
\end{align*}
\]

The perfect four-part harmony filled the gym, growing progressively louder as more and more men, women, and children joined in. It sounded so beautiful that my eyes began to swell up with tears, and the hair on my arms stood up straight for just a second. As the next round started, I stopped singing just so I could stand and listen for a while.
By the time we started getting in line for our food, the gym had grown extremely hot, even though it was almost ten o'clock. Many of the women were carrying *amimôpo* fans like the one I had brought and were fanning themselves and their children as we stood in line. I made sure to fan my friend, too, since she had forgotten hers and was obviously very hot.

"*Lale môk,*" she began. "All the people sitting at the head table have their food already. The *Lerooj* and her family were the first to receive their plates and drinks, and then *Bata* and the *alap."

I looked over. Besides his or her bottle of water and drinking coconut *ni,* each person at the head table now also had a can of soda and two styrofoam take-out plates of food.

"Why do they all have two plates?" I asked.

"One plate is probably filled with meats, or *jâlele,*" she said, "and the other is filled with rice, salad, and all the best side dishes and local foods. The baby’s family has also set aside plates for those members of the families of the *Lerooj* and other *Irooj* who could not make it here tonight, and they will deliver them to their homes later on. Did you know that in our custom only certain people can cook food for and serve the *Irooj* and his family? This is one of the other ways in which we *kairoojooaj* or show respect to our chiefs."

"Wow, they really get special treatment," I said in a lowered voice.

My friend looked a bit surprised at my comment and was quiet for a minute. I wondered if I had offended her. Then she looked around and responded quietly, "We do treat them differently, but that’s out of respect for our *manit.* *Ekar ñan jabônkônnaan ej ba, ‘Jede ak eo.’ This saying reminds us to respect our *Irooj,* who are like frigate birds. But you must keep in mind that, as *Irooj,* they also have special responsibilities and obligations. There are things they are expected to do as well."
“Like what?” I asked in a louder voice, trying to be heard over the noise of the band, which had started playing again right after the prayer.

"Jen etal im bōk kijed mōnā mokta," she replied. "Let’s get our food first, and then I will tell you more."

The line for the food seemed like it was about a mile long, stretching all the way around the gym, and even out the back door. Some people stayed in their seats, waiting for it to get shorter, while others asked their younger friends or relatives to stand in line for them. As I finally approached the table, I noticed that an assembly line of the baby’s family members were dishing up the plates for us. The first person hurriedly grabbed a styrofoam take-out plate, filled one section with plain and fried raij, or rice, and then passed it on to the woman next to her, who served one raij bobo rice ball and a scoop of potato salad. Next came a small portion of noodles, and then a series of mōnā in majel or Marshallese foods including jaajmi (sashimi), banana and grated coconut jukjuk, arrowroot or tapioca starch and grated coconut mākmok, preserved breadfruit bwiro, a slice of kwanjin mā or roasted breadfruit, and boiled pandanus peru with starch, grated coconut, and coconut juice. These local foods were some of my favorites, and I could hardly wait to get back to my seat and try each one.

Just when it seemed like a plate was completely full, one of the servers passed it further down the line where still more women were serving different kinds of meat, which they placed right on top of all the other dishes that had already been served. Some of the choices included barbequed chicken and steak, short ribs, pork, and, of course, fish.

"Where did all the fish come from?" I asked my friend as I picked out a can of soda for her from the enormous cooler at the end of the table.

"Jān ‘outer island’," she replied. "The baby’s parents’ families sent them and brought them from the outer islands. I think the father also asked some of his relatives to go out fishing around here. They probably brought in some of those small fish from the lagoon, and some of that jaajmi might be from the ocean side."
I quickly grabbed a couple of bottles of water and followed my friend back to our seats.
CHAPTER 2: Imagining Ebeye

The name Ebeye recalls a Marshallese proverb that explains the likelihood of capsizing or jibing while sailing to the island: Ebeye, bwe en ja [Literally, “Approaching Ebeye, it will jibe” (the sail will swing toward the outrigger, across the wind, a potentially dangerous situation that can cause a canoe to capsize)] (Julie Walsh Kroeker, personal communication, 25 May 2006).

In navigation terms, to ja or “jibe” means “to shift a fore-and-aft sail from one side of a vessel to the other while sailing before the wind” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition). This sudden change in the sail’s position presents a “potentially dangerous” situation in that it might (although does not necessarily) cause a canoe to capsize or overturn (Walsh Kroeker, personal communication, 25 May 2006).

Cris Lindborg of the Marshallese Cultural Center on Kwajalein Island notes further:

Ja is a navigation term that means the outrigger canoe’s sail and mast fall onto the outrigger’s platform. The proverb translates as: Ebeye-bound you’ll ja. The legend is that there was a spirit in ancient times which deterred canoes from approaching or landing at Ebeye. Canoes violating the taboo would ja. Practically speaking, because of winds and currents Ebeye may have been a difficult upwind destination from many other islands of the atoll. A contemporary understanding of the Epja proverb is: live cautiously, and do not get into trouble (Lindborg 2001, 1).

According to Lindborg’s (and, in turn, Walsh Kroeker’s) interpretation, the expression Ebjä bwe en ja has an inherently negative connotation in that it associates Ebeye with spirits and the eminent danger of capsizing—and thus potential death. Lindborg implies that, according to Marshallese oral tradition, there is something intrinsically dangerous about Ebeye and that, for this reason, the island was customarily a place to be avoided except by spirits and the class of people known as bwidak, or those born to an irooj [chief] and a commoner mother (ibid.). Lindborg’s interpretation elicits apprehension about going to or even approaching Ebeye—a sentiment that, as I will show, is generally mirrored in other written representations and interpretations of the island.
In this chapter, I look at some of the literature that has presumed to explain and even define Ebeye over the past 60 years. These interpretations, I contend—which often present Ebeye in ways that elicit fear and loathing and presume that urbanization, modernization, and cultural loss necessarily go hand in hand—metaphorically represent the “winds and currents” that often make it difficult to approach Ebjä today (ibid.). I then propose that it is possible to approach Ebeye without fear of the dangerous and even deadly repercussions of potentially “jibing.” By persevering and traveling upwind against the strong currents created by a type of discourse rooted in colonial assumptions and interpretations, we are able to encounter a multiplicity of Ebeye stories and experiences, and as such access the people, experiences, events, and community that today make Ebeye a “beautiful” place in many ways (Mina interview, 4 January 2006). Indeed, much like the outrigger’s jibing sail, a closer encounter with Ebjä vis-à-vis local voices, perspectives, and events can be “potentially dangerous”—however in this case it is not the canoe that might capsize or overturn, but rather the typically monolithic versions of the “Ebeye story” that have presumed to characterize the island and its people over the years. In this respect, such an encounter is “dangerous” only in that it has the potential to unravel some of the firmly established stereotypes and interpretations of the place so often referred to as the “slum of the Pacific.”

By taking a risk and approaching Ebeye at a more human and personal level, it becomes possible to see that despite outward appearances and the discomfort some people might feel at the sight of ramshackle buildings, blind alleyways, and a festering open dump, Ebeye is not an island to be feared or abhorred (Tobin 1954, 10). Rather, it is a place where individuals, families, and communities practice and celebrate life, their culture, and their values in ways that are often loving, kind, and respectful. I contend that, while it has perhaps not always been the case, today people on Ebeye take pride in
their families and their communities, in their culture and their multiple and overlapping histories, and, perhaps most significantly, in their identities as riŋajel and as ri-Ebjä.

*****

Since Jack Tobin wrote his first Ebeye report in 1954, discourse surrounding Ebeye has been laden with colonial assumptions about not just development and progress, but also about Marshallese people and culture, as well as about so-called cultural loss. In this section, I argue that “slum discourse” not only obscures a history of injustice carried out by the United States across the Marshall Islands, but also perpetuates a flawed understanding of what it means to be a riŋajel living on Ebeye—leaving little room for the complexity of Marshallese culture and experiences there. To show this, I first highlight some of the characteristics of “slum discourse” through a series of quotes by authors like Mike Malone, David Robie, Luafata Simanu-Klutz, and others. After drawing some conclusions about how such discourse affects perceptions of people and culture on Ebeye, I suggest that a closer look at Ebeye today through more local and localized “contested accounts” reveals that, despite the island’s recent history and development as an urban center and its continued (colonial) relationship with American Kwajalein, Ebeye is a vibrant community where people continue to practice essential elements of their culture every day—and in particular within the context of parties or keemem (Smith 1999, 33).

As I see it, slum discourse as it relates to Ejba has several features, the first of which is the history and context of colonialism from which it emerged. Similar to the “discourse of development” discussed by David Hanlon in Remaking Micronesia: Discourses Over Development in a Pacific Territory, 1944-1982, the significance of slum discourse also rests in its power to “create a reality through the representing of it” (Hanlon 1998, 10). In this sense, slum discourse is about representations and the representing of Ebeye—an island that today remains mired in the imperial power play.
slum (slûm) n. Often slums. A heavily populated urban area characterized by poor housing and squalor. —modifier: slum housing. —intr. v. slummed, slum-m·ing, slums. To visit a slum, esp. from curiosity or for amusement. Usually used in the phrase go slumming. [Orig. unknown.]

squal·or (skwôl’ar) n. The state or quality of being squalid; filth and misery. [Lat.]

squal·id (skwôl'id) adj. 1. Having a dirty or wretched appearance. 2. Morally repulsive; sordid. [Lat. squalidus < squalere, to be filthy, squalus, filthy.] —squa·lid·i·ty (skwô-lid'i-tê), squal·id·ness n. squal·id·ly adv.

Figure 12: Definitions: “Slum,” “Squalor,” “Squalid” The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition

over the control of American Micronesia.

The kinds of representations I explore in this chapter have arisen from within the confines of colonialism and imperial knowledge, and have as such created a portrait of Ebeye that is more a reflection of the “imperial imagination” than of the island itself or of the people who live there (Smith 1999, 23). “Imperialism and colonialism are the specific formations through which the West came to ‘see’, to ‘name’ and to ‘know’ indigenous communities,” as well as to decide and determine what about these communities, their history, and knowledge counts and is “worth knowing” (ibid., 61–65; Meyer 2004, 125). To this end, authors of slum discourse have painted a picture of Ebeye that is not only rooted in particular notions of race and gender, of individuals and society, and of time and space, but one that also privileges Western knowledge and sources of knowledge over and above local indigenous knowledge and perspectives about Marshallese history, culture, and society (Smith 1999, 42–56). These local “contested accounts” are stored not in books, newspapers, or magazines, but rather in oral traditions—that is, within “genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people” carry (ibid., 33).
As a discourse rooted in imperialism and colonial assumptions, slum discourse has several features. Not only does it typically present the story of Ebeye as a chronologically coherent narrative, often focusing on development and progress rather than on local human experiences (ibid., 25–32), but it also has an overwhelming tendency to blame rimajel for the situation on Ebeye. David Hanlon observes: “Calling rimajel the ultimate makers of their own problems [has] helped obfuscate the more direct and immediate causes of the situation in the Kwajalein Atoll complex”—that is, the presence of the Kwajalein Missile Range and its perpetual need for Marshallese laborers (Hanlon 1998, 205). In the case of Ebeye, victim blaming happens in a variety of ways, not the least of which is a propensity to target outer-island migration as the main cause of the Ebeye population crisis. The general explanation for why so many people have moved to Ebeye goes as follows: rimajel move to Ebeye first and foremost to look for work on Kwajalein; outer-island life is boring, and rimajel are therefore attracted to the “Big City” and all its luxuries and conveniences; the Marshallese “extended family” system dictates that a family member with a steady job must support any members of the family who are not working (Malone 1976, 27).

In 1954 and again in 1972, Jack Tobin pointed first and foremost to economics and the attraction to the “big city” lights, as well as extended family obligation as the main causes of this migration pattern, and in 1976 Mike Malone wrote that:

the majority of Ebeye's people left their secure coconut-and-fish outer island long ago to come to Ebeye to live and work at the edge of America, where wages are high compared with local standards . . . [Another] factor behind Ebeye’s crowded population is the ‘extended family system,’ an Island custom where relatives come to live with a single wage-earning cousin or uncle . . . Most of its population left the outer islands of the Marshalls to come to Ebeye for status and money (ibid.).

1 Blaming rimajel became even easier when the Marshall Islands gained independence in 1983. Independence proved a convenient “out” for the United States; just as the Trust Territory administration of Ebeye Village allowed the Navy to wipe its hands clean in the 1950s, so did Marshallese independence allow the Army to further distance itself from its Marshallese neighbors on Ebeye later in the century.
Sometimes, this attitude is not as subtle. In a 2001 article by Howard French, former United States Ambassador Michael Senko remarks:

> Everyone knows that Ebeye is horrible... But what we are working with is a culture in which everyone who is your relative moves into your home if you have a job (French 2001).

Not only are these kinds of statements devoid of the historical context of Ebeye's development (i.e., nuclear imperialism and forced displacement), but they also blame rirājel and their customs (i.e., the Marshallese “extended family system”) for Ebeye overcrowding and its consequences (Malone 1976, 27).

While it may be true that these kinds of explanations rarely take into consideration the many and complex factors that have lead people to move to Ebeye over the years, Jack Tobin’s 1972 report did attempt to acknowledge the “social relationships and human aspirations” that also play a role in peoples’ decision not to just move to Ebeye, but also to stay there:

> Those who work on Kwajalein, and Ebeye, prefer this to making a living from copra production and subsistence farming. Some of them work to make money for school expenses for their children who are attending school on Majuro or on Ponape, Palau, Guam, Hawaii or on Mainland U.S. [sic]. Others work to accumulate capital to establish businesses on their own home atolls or to build homes there... People come to the tiny overcrowded islands to be with their children attending school on Ebeye, a better school, they believe, than [sic] those on the outer islands. They also are there to receive medical treatment which is superior to that available on home islands, and to be with their sick relatives. Access to a usually reliable supply of imported foods and others [sic] consumer goods is another attraction (Tobin 1972, 3).

Here Tobin acknowledges the reality of outer-island living and what it means to live in a place with no electricity or running water, regular shortages of food, fresh water, and money, a bare minimum of medical supplies and facilities, as well as other social services. During an interview I conducted in January 2006, Alice, an elementary school teacher whose parents and immediate family moved to Ebeye many years ago from...
Likiep Atoll, gave the following explanation for why many people choose to move to and settle on Ebeye:

Armej rej itok jän outer island bwe ren kappok jerbal im elukkuun bar pidodo mour, ke, jän outer island . . . bwe elōn jerbal . . . jerbal elap jän kowainini, kappok waini. Im elōn jikin jikul, erŋan jikul ko, im . . . elōn jarom, aet e bar erŋan. Im epidodo mour . . . epidodo an armej mour [ilo Ebeye in].

People come [to Ebeye] from the outer islands to look for work. Life is also easier [on Ebeye] than on the outer islands because there are jobs—there are jobs other than just gathering coconuts [for making copra]. There are also schools [here], and the schools are good. And there is electricity, which is also good. Life is just easier; peoples’ lives are just easier [on Ebeye] (Alice interview, 5 January 2006).²

Alice indicates that people move to Ebeye not because they are starry-eyed and lured there by so-called “big city” lights or the hope of taking advantage of one or more of their family members’ steady incomes, as suggested by Howard French, but rather because the island offers an “easier” life in that it provides better access to jobs.³ With this explanation, Alice calls into question yet another presumption set forth by slum discourse—that is, the idea that Ebeye is the way it is today because ri-Ebja are lazy.⁴

In addition to blaming ri-Ebja for Ebeye’s fate, slum discourse also degrades and dehumanizes the Ebeye community by continuously describing the island’s “squalid” conditions in almost shocking detail—commenting, for example, on how and where people use the bathroom and have sexual intercourse:

The smell of human excrement lingers on Ebeye. Ebeye’s new sewer system collapsed in 1979; when people flushed their toilets, human waste gushed into their sinks. Visitors to Ebeye still say many toilets do not work . . . forcing them to often wait for nightfall to use the beaches. Ebeye’s youngsters give realistic view [sic] of how

² Unless otherwise noted, I conducted all interviews on Ebeye between 30 December 2005 and 5 January 2006. The translations are likewise my own, although I would like to acknowledge John deBrum for his tireless assistance in the effort to transcribe and translate the Marshallese-language interviews.
³ The reasons people move to Ebeye are many and complex. One person told me, for example, that his parents, who are from Likiep, moved to Ebeye from Majuro after his mother had several miscarriages and one of their babies died. They thought Majuro was unlucky and moved to Ebeye hoping to start over.
⁴ JoAnn Wypijewski quotes former USAKA Host Nation Officer Maryanne Lane: “There are enough people out of work every day to keep that island [Ebeye] beautiful. They’re the laziest, most wasteful people” (Wypijewski 2001, 48).
crowded the island really is when they say the only private place to take a girl at night is the public outhouse area (Malone 1982, 27).

In 1992, Carol O'Connor gave the following description of her visit to Ebeye:

As we walked along the lagoon side of Ebeye, [my guides] frequently warned me to watch my step to avoid piles of human and animal filth. Shards of broken glass, old tires, malodorous mounds of plastic and dangerous-looking projections of rusted metal were some of the other hazards. The open-ocean side of the island was not much better. At low tide, the same unhygienic conditions prevailed. Even the changing tides were not enough to cleanse the blight. Inland, one's sensibilities were assaulted by the sight of ramshackle buildings crowded along hot dusty streets devoid of trees or other vegetation. Groups of children, noisy as birds, played in a barren wasteland next to a smoldering dump at one end of the island (O'Connor 1992, 48).

The reproduction of these kinds of images persists into the 21st century. In 2001, JoAnn Wypijewski called attention to Ebeye's sordid appearance by including a particularly provocative statement by Maryanne Lane, a former Army Host Nation Officer on Kwajalein who at one time "worked as a teacher on Ebeye":

"The first day, I decided to take a shortcut. I never did that again. Oh, the stench. I pass a window people are having intercourse. There's a baby in the mud. People are calling out "rubelle, rubelle" [sic]—it means people with clothing, the name they originally used for the missionaries. There's the stench, the noise, the children, the lack of anything for them to do" (Wypijewski 2001, 48).

While it may be true that the intent of reports like these is to situate Ebeye's problems within the larger context of colonialism and military imperialism—and, in some cases, to implicate the United States in these matters—they nevertheless expose people in ways that are often degrading and dehumanizing, meanwhile privileging Western conceptions of "progress" and so-called "underdevelopment."

Also characteristic of slum discourse are its continual comparisons of Ebeye to the richness and abundance of Kwajalein Island. Descriptions of this contrast abound as images of Ebeye—as-slum are set against images of Kwajalein, which is often dubbed as

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5 A more accurate definition of "rubelle" (ripaille) is "foreigner" or "American."
They call it the slum of the Pacific. Or the armpit. Sometimes it's simply the ghetto. This squalid 33-hectare island of plywood shanties and garbage called Ebeye is probably the worst example of the excesses of colonialism in the Pacific. Ebeye island and the United States Army missile range on nearby Kwajalein offer a crude contrast — after four decades of US control — between islander poverty and American affluence.

Figure 13: The "armpit" of the Pacific
Authors often portray Ebeye in a belittling and derogatory way (Robie 1985, 30).

the "country club" and the Pacific's "little paradise" (O'Connor 1992, 48; Rowa 2004) with its American-style houses, clean streets, restaurants and golf course, and the "quality of life of a small town in the Midwest" (Wypijewski 2001, 44). Giff Johnson summarized this contrast in a 1979 article:

Ebeye is the sixty-six acre island home of 8,000 Marshallese [now estimated at 13,000], many of whom work at the Kwajalein Missile Range. Most of the trees on Ebeye have been cut down. The dilapidated houses stand only a few feet apart. Thirteen people are apt to live in a one-room shack; some rooms sleep as many as forty at night. Trash litters the beaches on both sides of the narrow island; the ever-present smell of outhouses and burning garbage pervades the air. . . . Untreated raw sewage is dumped directly into the placid Ebeye lagoon; the bacteria count there has been 25,000 times higher than the safe level set by the U.S. Public Health Service and the World Health Organization.

Kwajalein, just four miles away, resembles a middle-class California neighborhood. The Americans who work for the U.S. Army live with their families in an exclusive air-conditioned community that includes a lush green golf course, tennis and basketball courts, baseball fields, swimming pools, and movies. All these amenities are free. Fine schools, good medical care . . . and modern shopping facilities with reasonable prices are part of the life for the 3,000 Americans on the 900-acre Kwajalein Island (Johnson 1979, 47).
Other authors similarly highlight the vast differences between the facilities and conditions on Ebeye and Kwajalein, often suggesting that rimaje| on Ebeye would give anything to live on Kwajalein instead:

> With Micronesia and America living next door to each other, the contrast between the two, between fat city and beantown, the pearly garrison town and the ramshackle labor camp, becomes more striking, and more disturbing. Add to this the fact that the residents of the one island are all statesiders, mostly white, and the residents of the labor camp are mostly Marshallese and brown, and the whole thing becomes uncomfortably metaphorical. Ebeye’s houses and cars, envy and ambitions, hopes and jealousies, are all tied to the carefully guarded, scrupulously maintained piece of real estate across the water (Kluge 1968, 34, emphasis added).

The idea that rimaje| on Ebeye dream of living on Kwajalein is laden with racist and colonial assumptions, as well as a sense of American superiority. Such statements assume that people move to and remain on Ebeye in order to be close to Kwajalein and all that it supposedly has to offer (other than jobs, that is). They also suggest that those rimaje| who work on Kwajalein do so not out of necessity, but rather as a way to access Kwajalein every day—to enjoy and partake in the kind of material life that is available there. Howard French summarizes these assumptions in the following statement:

> The lucky few on these islands commute daily by boat to the American bases on Kwajalein Island or other installations, at Roi-Namur (and Meek), for salaried jobs as cooks, maintenance workers and groundskeepers. Often, their spouses make the same commute to collect drinking water. They would gladly shop on the American-controlled islands, too . . . except that Marshallese are not allowed to . . . The others, though, mostly sit around all day, dreaming of another life (French 2001, emphasis added).

These kinds of statements carry with them deeply rooted assumptions about what it means to be a rimaje| living on Ebeye. Here, the details and complexities of peoples’ experiences do not matter all that much, as long as they support a grander narrative of American injustice. This is not to say the contrast between Ebeye and Kwajalein is not real. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, the Navy used this aesthetic contrast in 1950 as a justification for dividing rimaje| and Americans, and ultimately for confining them to two
separate communities. Authors like French, however, further exploit Ebeye as a backdrop for a larger commentary about American imperialism—that is, as an example of the vast disparities caused and perpetuated by American imperialism. For these authors, the Kwajalein–Ebeye paradox conveniently represents everything that is wrong with colonialism, development, and militarism: Kwajalein, on the one hand, embodies imperialist might and domination, whereas Ebeye represents development—gone-haywire—the trapped victim of apartheid-style colonial might (Johnson 1980, 1). Meanwhile, they fail to recognize that their own descriptions of Ebeye do little more than perpetuate a long history of imperialism of a different sort—that is, the subjugation of the indigenous human experience to Western colonial discourse (Smith 1999, 18–21).

![Figure 14: The "basic problem of identity"](image)

It is not uncommon for authors to portray Ebeye as "trapped" between two worlds and ringajel as passive and unresponsive to the supposed infiltration of the American way of life (Kluge 1968, 37).

Figure 14: The "basic problem of identity"

Slum discourse has many origins, features, and manifestations. I conclude this section with the one trend I consider most relevant to this discussion—that is, the tendency to describe Ebjä as a place where meaning and a sense of community are absent and Marshallese culture has all but disappeared. This trend carries with it many complex assumptions about people, development, and culture; in the case of Ebeye,
these presumptions lead observers to declare that the many and complex features of Marshallese culture have vanished from the island, and that, as Howard French has suggested, rimajel on Ebeye "mostly sit around all day, dreaming of [a] life" that no longer exists (French 2001).

While it does not speak to the Ebeye case specifically, John Anjain’s recent editorial to the Marshall Islands Journal boldly addresses the presumption that rimajel in general have "lost" their culture. Anjain’s remarks come in direct response to anthropologist Carmen Petrosian-Husa’s assertion that "if the loss of culture [could cause physical pain, the Marshallese would be screaming" (Carmen Petrosian-Husa, quoted in the Marshall Islands Journal 2006b). According to Petrosian-Husa, who is "recognized as an expert on Micronesian culture for her work in Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and particularly Yap":

"the culture is not as alive here [in the Marshall Islands] as it is in other parts of Micronesia . . . People are proud of their religious culture and they like to talk about the past 150 years, but they are not really proud of their own culture before the missionaries came" (ibid.).

These kinds of remarks typify ideas about so-called cultural loss in the Marshall Islands, and Petrosian-Husa in particular appears to subscribe to a very specific definition of culture—one that only recognizes the value of so-called "traditional" customs like ancient dances, songs, rituals, and the like. She "laments the fact that [Marshallese] traditions are slowly eroding," noting:

'I have only seen true Marshallese dances maybe three times . . . the Kabua family owns the Jobwa [sic] dance and only allows it to be performed rarely. So most people don't know their traditional dances' (ibid.).

6 John J. Anjain is the son of the late John M. Anjain, who was not only the mayor of Rongelap Atoll when the United States detonated its first bomb on Bikini in 1954—resulting in high levels of nuclear fallout in Rongelap and elsewhere—but also "an outspoken critic of US government secrecy and what he termed the use of islanders as "guinea pigs" by American government scientists" (Johnson 2004, 1).

7 According to Irooj Mañirhi Mike Kabua: "Three atolls are traditionally associated [with jebwa dancing], as the old saying goes, 'Ae dir Wotho, Ujae im Lae' [sic? See Appendix B for a full explanation]. . . The Jebwa chant was
Petrosian-Husa deplores the idea that rimajel only know about one of their "truly traditional" instruments—a drum seen in a picture on display at the Ajeje Museum in Majuro but no longer in use (ibid.). These are some of the criteria that Petrosian-Husa and others often use to judge the endurance and vitality of Marshallese culture today. Ironically, Petrosian-Husa misses the point completely when she complains that the Kabua family "owns" the jebwa dance and therefore dictates when it can be performed and by whom. It would appear that this in and of itself indicates the resilience of Marshallese respect for their chiefs and for the rules that direct dances and other sources of traditional knowledge.

While the same has been said of the Marshall Islands as a whole, it is often presumed that rimajel on Ebeye in particular have "lost" their culture in response to the island's recent colonial history and proximity to Kwajalein Island. In an article critiquing the Ebeye-Kwajalein relationship, for example, JoAnn Wypijewski notes of her experience on Ebeye:

I met old-timers who want their culture back, and teen-agers who wear Lakers jerseys and play basketball as if Michael Jordan inhabits even their night dreams. They don't know how to fish or sail, couldn't climb a coconut tree, and don't really care, because on Ebeye such skills are as nothing compared with the perfect jump shot (Wypijewski 2001, 50).

Wypijewski creates a particular kind of impression of Ebeye by contrasting it with what many might deem typical "traditional" (i.e., pre-contact) island life—one governed by fishing, climbing coconut trees, and so-called "culture," all of which are presumed to have since vanished on Ebeye in particular. Articles like Wypijewski's do little to explore the depth and variation of peoples' experiences on Ebjå, and instead use the island as a

composed to explain how valuable the sailing outrigger canoes were to the islands many centuries ago. It explains many customs, including fishing, sailing, gathering food, and paying special tribute to the iroij. Jebwa was created to entertain audiences and to help newcomers understand the culture and customs, but jebwa was not meant to be passed onto everyone; it was specifically made for a select group to understand it [sic]. Today, the jebwa chant is so cryptic that most Rimajel do not understand it. One has to understand fully the attributes of the culture and custom of the related islands and atolls in order to know it . . . . Jebwa truly belongs to the iroij and cannot be performed without authorization" (Kabua 2004, 26–27).
colorful and often shocking backdrop for a very pointed commentary about American militarism and imperialism.\(^8\)

Although the intent of such statements may be to condemn the effects of globalization in general and the American presence in the Marshall Islands more specifically, they nevertheless carry with them clear yet precarious assumptions about what it means to be a rimajel living on Ebeye. Wypijewski’s comments imply that Ebeye’s complexities and personalities do not matter all that much—as long as the author’s depiction supports a grander narrative of American injustice and resulting Marshallese suffering and cultural loss. These kinds of statements speak little to Ebeye’s rich history and culture, its deep and complex genealogies, or the spirit of community and cooperation and togetherness that contribute to its many achievements and triumphs.

I conclude this section with a poem by Luafata Simanu-Klutz, which clearly illustrates the elements of slum discourse discussed above. Simanu-Klutz’s approach to Ebeye mirrors that of so many authors who have attempted to interpret and define the island’s history and culture; while her intent may be to abhor the injustices done to rimajel by the United States, in the end her assumptions about the relationship between modernization and cultural loss blind her to the vast complexities of her subject(s). Much like Howard French, she ends with rimajel trapped as perpetual victims, devoid of culture and “dreaming of another life.”

**Kwajalein**

You were once the pride of a canoe tradition,
A barefoot world running natural with pigs and chickens
And swimming parallel to sharks and turtles.

You were once fertile soil of sustained subsistence
—copra, fish, and coconut crabs;
And lobsters played with your children in their water games
And once you were beaches of timelessness,

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\(^8\) While the goal of this project is not to critique globalization, the United States military, or the U.S. presence in the Marshall Islands, this is not to say that I disagree with Wypijewski’s critique of the American presence in Kwajalein Atoll.
Host to driftwood and mutant terns—
Records of hydrogeneration.

Now, distant arrows pierce your heart,
Shatter your corals into cinder-block runways—
Manicured lawns and golf greens.

Foreigners birdie and eagle and then ace—
A hole-in-one of missiled messages—
Bullseye from snow-capped mountains of northern climes.

Can you smell the ozone hole on your sands?
The UV beams stir a tuna melt in your deceptively clear waters,
While on your knees you can only mutter, "Our Father".

The nor'easterlies howl on your shores, Kwajalein.
The garbage-illumined beaches of Ebeye—
Silent and deadly.

Your ancestors' skulls dance
In the listless lolling of irradiated waves.

They say goodbye to your children
Leaving for the shanty towns of Honolulu
Where Big Sam keeps you forever
The Pacific beggar (Simanu-Klutz 2003, 176-177).

As the process of political decolonization spreads across the Pacific region, so
 too have imaginings and representations of Oceania started to gradually shift. Linda
Tuhiwai Smith maintains that, much as indigenous Pacific Islanders have held physical
and cultural survival as priorities throughout 500 years of colonialism, so too should
survival be the “major priority” of indigenous Pacific research—that is, of the
re/imaginings and re/presentations of Oceania (Smith 1999, 107).

In this chapter, I have suggested that, much as Ebjā island in Kwajalein Atoll has
been deeply implicated in American colonial aspirations in the Marshall Islands and
Micronesia more generally over the past 60 odd years, so too have representations of
Ebeye been defined and constrained by colonial (mis)understandings of people, culture,
development, and change. The kinds of imagery presented in the previous section are
not uncommon, especially in relation to Oceania which is often envisioned as a pristine tropical “paradise” untouched by the so-called ravages of modernization.

Many the scholar, casual visitor, and volunteer traveling to Oceania expects and perhaps hopes to find thatched houses, spontaneous singing and dancing, and islanders in grass skirts preparing local foods with handmade utensils. The competing and equally stereotypical view is one of "modern" island societies with cars and running water, and where Spam is a staple food and culture and tradition have been obliterated by the acceleration of globalization. Both impressions are widely perpetuated by colonial literature and media grounded in Western theories and expectations about the Pacific, rather than in indigenous accounts or individual human experiences—thus presenting Western audiences with generalities, abstractions, and artificial Pacific entities rather than realistic portraits of Pacific societies (Said 1979, 154).

I admit that I myself embarked on my own journey to the Marshall Islands with a mixed set of standards and expectations about the people, the sights and sounds, and even the customs and culture I might encounter there. I have two particularly vivid yet distinct memories of myself envisioning what life would be like on Ebeye before I left for my two-year stint as a Jesuit Volunteer (JV), neither of which turned out to be quite what I would come to know. The day I heard from Jesuit Volunteers International (JVI) that I would be going to Ebeye, Marshall Islands for two years, I immediately rushed to the library to find a book—any book—that might help me come to a decision as to whether or not I should accept my placement. I remember sitting in a Thai restaurant on Church Street in San Francisco with my mom the night I got the exciting news, reading the following passage from the guidebook *Lonely Planet: Micronesia* out loud between nervous sips of Thai iced coffee:

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9 When I was an applicant for JVI, there was little or no choice in terms of placement. JVI staff placed applicants according to need, and based on their understanding of a potential volunteer's skills and compatibility with a particular site. Although initially I had my heart set on going to Latin America and specifically not Oceania, I had an almost immediate change of heart when I received word from JVI that I would go to Ebeye—since rejecting the placement have also meant giving up the chance to volunteer abroad with JVI, an opportunity I decided I did not want to give up.
Over 1300 Marshallese labourers work on Kwajalein and live on 78-acre (32-hectare) Ebeye Island, 3 miles (4.8km) to the north. They support close to 12,000 more relatives and friends in inadequate, overcrowded tenement conditions.

The contrasts between the two islands are startling. Workers are shuttled by boat between their meager homes and their affluent work sites. Marshallese are not allowed to shop at Kwajalein's fancy subsidized stores or swim in its "public" pools. One the other hand, Ebeye's inhabitants seem relatively contented...

Poor infrastructure remains one of Ebeye's greatest handicaps. Ebeye's desalinization plant has not worked for years, which forces residents to go to Kwajalein and haul water back, via the ferry, to Ebeye. Electricity too is spotty...

Needless to say, Ebeye is not a big tourist spot, but is a real eye-opener. The people are very friendly, especially the children (Galbraith et al 2000, 168).

I remember looking up at my mom after I finished reading the passage; she let out a nervous laugh and said something like, "Well, you have to decide what you want to do."

And while Galbraith's depiction of Ebeye left us both feeling a bit uneasy (to say the least), I did not let this or other descriptions I would come to read deter me from discovering the many sides of Ebeye that rarely make it into magazine articles or guide books.

My other memory is of a phone call I had with a former Ebeye JV who had just returned home from a trip back to Ebeye for her JV roommate's daughter's keemem (I would later find out that this same roommate's father-in-law was my husband's uncle). I had received word from the JVI office of my placement on a Friday, and had to make a decision by Monday. Accordingly, JVI had given me the woman's phone number and encouraged me to call her and listen to some of her personal experiences so I could make a more informed decision about whether or not to accept my placement. I remember lying in bed in my Oakland apartment ready to dial the phone with a shaky hand (after reading the Lonely Planet guide, I was nervous about what she might say).

The conversation started out something like this:

Monica: Hi. I got your phone number from JVI. I just received word of my placement on Ebeye, and they said I could call you to find out more about it.

Former JV (FJV): Oh, hi. Yes, well... You are going to love it!
I later received an email from another FJV expressing similar sentiments:

_Yokwe im aenemmon!_ [Hello and peace be with you!] Welcome to the best JV placement in the world. Ebeye is anxiously awaiting your arrival and you will be greeted with open arms... I want to say that you are coming to a wonderful place. I am leaving Ebeye with a greater sense of family and community than I thought possible. The Marshallese community is truly a family and, as I said before, you will be welcomed with open arms (FJV email message to author, 4 June 2001).

The same FJV also informed me that “customs are still held very strongly” on Ebeye, which took me by surprise, especially after what I had read in Galbraith’s so-called “guide” to Micronesia (ibid.).

Having received such positive feedback and descriptions from these two FJVs, my image of Ebeye changed almost immediately. My communication with them altered my perspective completely, leaving me with two competing impressions of what Ebeye might be like. When I found out about the resilience of “custom” (although at the time I had no idea what that meant other than that I should wear long skirts), and that we as JVs would be a welcome addition to the Queen of Peace community and well taken care of by members of the parish and in particular by the church choir and “youth” group, I began to visualize the island much differently. Despite what I had encountered in the _Lonely Planet_ guidebook, I began to picture myself attending Mass as a member of the choir, sitting on a bench at the back of a thatched church singing acoustic religious melodies with a cool tropical breeze blowing through my hair (I had no idea what the songs would sound like, so I envisaged something like the Solomon Islands songs I had once heard in the movie _The Thin Red Line_). These images came in stark contrast to what I had read in the _Lonely Planet_ guidebook, and it was with this contrasting (and yet equally erroneous) set of impressions that I, too, began to imagine the Marshall Islands, and Ebeye in particular, even before I had embarked on my journey so far from home.

When I lived on Ebjā as a teacher from August 2001 to May 2004, I continued to have mixed feelings about the extent to which the island had been “Americanized” and/or “lost” its _m̥antin m̥aʃei_ or Marshallese culture. Like the many authors who have
written about Ebeye, I often contemplated the so-called “authenticity” of Marshallese
culture on Ebeye—what with everyone watching American television, playing American
sports like basketball and volleyball, eating Western foods like canned meats, potato
salad and rice, and even speaking English in school. I’ll admit that I often asked myself
how people on Ebeye could be surrounded by so much American and Western “stuff”
and live so close to American Kwajalein and yet remain fundamentally rimajel.

Others have certainly wondered this as well, and are often not afraid to share
their opinions on the matter. On more than one occasion, for example, American visitors
made comments to me on the importance of television in Ebeye homes. Typical
outsiders take a quick tour of the island—which to a suburban American gaze may
indeed resemble something of a “slum” or a “ghetto”—and just as quickly assert how sad
they feel about the poverty, the harsh conditions, and the lack of any sign of so-called
“traditional” Marshallese life or customs. The same people often proceed to make
condescending side remarks like, “And yet everyone seems to have a television.”
Such comments deny rimajel the right to engage in modern human activities that are not
reserved exclusively for Westerners and/or the rich. They also fail to acknowledge the
complex set of circumstances that rimajel living in Kwajalein Atoll must face, and the
very rich culture and history that are present on Ebjä—despite the material goods people
there might aspire to own.

What’s more, such remarks overlook the fact that no culture is static or frozen in
time. Rather, culture is fluid and changes every day; people adjust and adapt it to meet
new needs and to assure their own survival in face of new or changing circumstances. It

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10 While these kinds of comments are patronizing at many levels, I’ll point out here that Ebeye serves as somewhat of
a receptacle for Kwajalein’s used and discarded goods. When Kwajalein personnel “PCS” (that’s military—speak for
Permanent Change of Station), they often hold patio sales as a way of downsizing before they leave the island.
Although rimajel cannot shop at Kwajalein stores (Macy’s and Macy’s West on Kwajalein and Gimbels on Roi-Namur)
or take new items purchased at these stores back to Ebeye or Ennibur/Santo, they can buy used items either at the
Bargain Bazaar (Kwajalein’s second-hand store), from patio sales, or directly from people they know. Badge workers
can also participate in bidding on U.S. Government property (i.e., used furniture) through Kwajalein’s Reutilization and
Disposal department for use on Ebeye. As such, despite Ebeye’s high prices and Kwajalein’s purchasing restrictions,
rimajel have opportunities to buy used goods for not much money (and folks on Kwajalein are able to get rid of stuff
they don’t want without having to pay disposal or shipping fees).
is for these reasons that, my own initial skepticism aside, I cannot help but think that there is something else happening on Ebja, something that defies the assumed linearism of "Westernization" that outsiders like Petrosian-Husa often identify as having "destroyed" culture there. It is this "something else" that I have tried to begin to capture and will discuss throughout the remainder of this paper. I do this by considering not the question, "What on Ebeye has been lost?" but instead, "What on Ebeye continues to endure?" I believe that possible answers to this question lie not in articles, reports, novels, or poems written by outsiders, but rather in the everyday events, stories, and experiences of ri-Ebja themselves. It is these experiences—and the insights contained therein—that can "ja" or potentially overturn more common perceptions of Ebeye, of ri-Ebja, and of Marshallese culture more generally. Ebja, *bwe en ja*! 
“I’ll never be able to finish all this,” I laughed as I looked down at my lap, where my plate sat, overflowing with food.

“You are not supposed to finish it,” my friend told me. “Just eat until you are full. Then after everyone gets their food, you can go and fill it up again and take the plate home with you. That is our custom. The family doesn’t want to be left with lots of food at the end of the keemem. They want us to enjoy it and take it home to share with our family members who didn’t attend. Tomorrow you won’t have to cook!”

As we began to eat, Tom came back on stage to announce that it was time for the entertainment portion of the evening to begin. By now, it was almost 10:30 pm.

“Several groups have prepared songs and dances for the birthday boy and his family.” He then turned and looked off stage and said into the microphone, “Can the first group please get ready? The first act will start in ten minutes.”

I brought my chair a little closer to my friend with the hope that we could continue the conversation we had started in the food line. But she seemed more interested in sitting quietly and looking around to see who was present at the keemem. As I sat eating a piece of roasted breadfruit, I felt someone approach us from behind. I turned my head and saw the face of an older man whom I did not recognize. My friend turned around, looked up, and smiled.

“O, īpke! Kwā itok ńāāt?!?” she said, obviously excited to see the familiar face. “When did you get here?” The two of them talked for a few minutes before she turned to introduce me to him. “This is my cousin,” she told me with a smile. “He lives in Hawai‘i and hasn’t been back to the island for a long time. My mother is younger than his father.”

I extended my hand to greet him. “Īpke,” I said, and he returned my greeting with a “Īpke” and a firm handshake.
Then my friend turned to where her granddaughter was sitting, and brought her around to meet her cousin. “Ehin ej leddik eo jib, nājin lio e rūttotata nejū,” she told her cousin. “This is my granddaughter, my oldest daughter’s daughter.”

The two of them continued talking in this way for several minutes until my friend’s cousin said it was time to return to his seat.

“Būbū, wōn eo?” my friend’s young granddaughter asked her inquisitively.

“Jimmaam eo,” she replied. “That’s your grandfather.” The girl looked over at the man for a minute, and then went back to eating preserved breadfruit bwiro from a little plastic baggie.

“It must be hard for children to keep track of all their relatives,” I said to my friend, partly joking.

“Aaet,” she replied. “Yes, especially these days. That’s one of the reasons parties like these are so fun and important for us rimajel. They give us a chance to see our relatives and get to know people we didn’t even know were members of our family or our clan—our jowi. If we see someone at a keemem or a funeral, we might ask, ‘Why is that person here?’ And then we find out they are also related in some way. In Marshallese we call it jitaam kapeel.”

“What is jitaam kapeel?” I asked her.

“Jitaam kapeel means something like learning about who your family members are—like learning about your family tree. But it also means learning about custom, about Marshallese culture, about our role and our place in our family and in our society. Jitaam kapeel can mean learning what it is to be a daughter or a brother, how to show respect to people who are older or from older generations, how to respect our Irooj, and much more. It also means teaching young people who their relatives are so they can know who they can and cannot marry or date—who can be koba and who cannot—according to our manit.

“Jitaam kapeel is kind of like what we have been doing here tonight. You have been asking me questions, and I have been trying to explain our customs and our
culture to you. If you were my own daughter, I would point out our relatives and explain how they are related to us, much as I have been doing with my granddaughter. Parties and especially funerals are the perfect opportunities to do this because there are so many people present and so much is going on. We tell our children about certain people and customs every day at home, but it is during large gatherings like these that we have the chance to actually see peoples’ faces and put many of our customs into practice.”

Tom came back on stage to announce the first performance. Before the music started, my friend leaned over and finished what she had been saying to me. “These are not things you can learn in a book,” she said. “You can only learn them by asking, seeing, and doing. That is our custom. These parties are times to ask, to listen, to see, and to do.”

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I laughed and cheered along with the rest of the crowd as my friend made her way up to the front of the gym with my amtnjo fan in one hand and a bottle of perfume in the other. She had her arms up in the air, and was dancing along to the beat of the music as she went, stopping every few feet to shake her hips a bit and smiling all the way. The crowd roared with laughter each time she paused to try out a new move.

My friend’s son was up on stage performing a dance number with some of his classmates, and she was heading straight for them. Once up on stage, she placed herself directly behind her son and began imitating his every move in a slightly exaggerated fashion. When the dancers reached one of the more complex portions of their dance number, my friend began to vigorously fan her son as the audience cheered her on. She then proceeded to spray each of the dancers with perfume. Throughout all this, the boys tried their best to keep straight faces and to go on dancing without interruption, but they found it increasingly difficult as one of the baby’s grandmothers joined my friend on stage with yet another bottle of perfume and a bag full of T-shirts, one of which she began to drape over each boy’s shoulders.
And then, just as quickly as she had gone up, my friend returned to her seat. She had a huge grin on her face and people were still laughing at her antics on stage. After she sat down, I noticed she was sweating from the heat, so I handed her a bottle of water and told her to keep the fan. As if nothing had happened, she turned her attention back to the stage. By then a group of young girls had started a hula dance. We heard laughter erupt on one side of the gym, and when we looked over to see what was going on, we saw another old woman making her way up to the stage.

After several more dance numbers, Tom returned to the stage to announce the last performance. I noticed the baby's relatives (many of whom had been serving food earlier in the evening) off to one side of the gym getting ready to make their entrance. They were all dressed in the matching clothes I had noticed earlier—the women in dresses and the men in aloha shirts and dark pants—and each was carrying a plastic shopping bag in one hand. The music started, and after a brief pause the dancers formed two lines and began to slowly parade up to the front of the gym to the rhythm of Marshallese electronic keyboard music. The baby's father led the men and the mother led the women with the baby in her arms.

This performance would be different from all the others. As soon as the two lines of dancers got to the front of the gym and began to dance, an old woman approached the baby's mother and started undressing the baby—right down to his diaper. The audience erupted in laughter and people began to clap and cheer. A minute later, the baby's grandmother appeared with a new outfit and helped the mother dress him. The baby and his mother then rejoined the dancers, but a few minutes later another woman went up, again stripped the baby down to his diaper, and took the clothes with her to her seat. By now, the audience was excited, and everyone was having a good time laughing and cheering.

I leaned over to my friend. “Why are they taking the baby's clothes?” I asked her.

“That is our custom,” she told me. “Some guests will even go up and take the jaki mat and blankets from where the baby and his family have been sitting tonight. And the
family must give them freely. You see, a *keemem* is about celebrating, which for us *rima/jer* means giving and sharing, and practicing our customs. These are some of the ways the family celebrates the life and well-being of their child."

By this time, the baby was in his diaper again, and would stay that way until the dancing was over, since it appeared the grandmother was out of new outfits. One of the father’s relatives then opened up his plastic bag, took out a T-shirt, and threw it into the audience. Several people jumped up and tried to catch the shirt, but it landed in the lap of an old man who was sitting close to us. Everyone’s attention went immediately back to the front of the room, because by that time all the dancers had opened up their bags and began throwing more things out into the audience. There were T-shirts, Marshallese-style "*nuknuk in Guam*" or "*Guam dresses*" as they are called, *jodi* flip-flops, sandals, and socks, and even a few packages of plastic cups and plates. Guests stood up to catch the items as they flew through the air, and children dove for the things that landed on the floor. My friend nudged me and pointed to the front of the gym, where I saw a woman run up and take the *jaki* mat from the floor. One person ran up and jokingly reached for the birthday banner, although he couldn’t reach it. Another woman went up and took the *jodi* sandals right off the baby’s mother’s feet, and held them up in triumph as she ran back toward her seat. The dancers and the audience all laughed and cheered as the woman hurriedly ducked into her seat, laughing but no longer wanting to be the center of attention.
CHAPTER 3: Approaching Ebeye: Ebjä, bwe en jä

Celebrating survival is a particular sort of approach. While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity (Smith 1999, 145).

Interdisciplinary fields like Pacific Islands Studies seek to decolonize and critically scrutinize "established modes of inquiry"—the very modes of inquiry that have painted a monolithic picture of places like Ebeye over time, focusing more on processes and institutions than on people and relationships (Wesley-Smith 1995, 129; Thaman 2003, 7–8). As a Master’s candidate in Pacific Islands Studies, I hope to use the remainder of this paper to continue to destabilize the narrative that continues to retell the story of Ebjä as one of progress and development gone haywire—much as I have already begun to do in the "Interludes" to these more standard academic chapters. With this, I hope to suggest the implementation of a localized "transdisciplinary" approach rooted in Marshallese voices, values, experiences, and epistemology (Jolly 2003), taking into consideration some of the ways in which particular elements of Marshallese epistemology and culture might shape how rimäjel experience and understand Ebeye today.

I suggest that the core values of genealogy and relatedness, as well as sharing and reciprocity, lead many rimäjel to regard Ebeye more in terms of their relationships and obligations to one another than vis-à-vis external aesthetic factors such as landscaping and building materials. I have begun to show this by exploring some of the manifestations of these values in peoples' survival strategies, as well as in special events such as keemem. In doing so, I show that rimäjel on Ebeye have managed to do much more than just survive or "get by." In fact, they have gradually built a community that is grounded firmly in fundamental aspects of Marshallese culture, not the least of which is
genealogy and respect for traditional hierarchy. They also regularly *celebrate* their own survival—their lives, their customs, their time together on Ebeye and on this earth—despite and perhaps in spite of the many injustices that imperialism and militarization have bestowed upon generations of rimajel on Ebeye and beyond.

Before exploring survival and celebrations more closely in Chapter 4 and in the remaining Interlude components, I will begin to survey elements of this so-called "transdisciplinary" approach. Whereas the term "interdisciplinary" suggests a mixture or mingling of already established disciplines and philosophies (and their colonial foundations and antagonisms toward other knowledge systems), *transdisciplinary* denotes instead a methodology that is beyond the disciplines and that can perhaps even affect change within and about the disciplines, their methods, and their underlying philosophies (Smith 1999, 65). By transposing methodologies based on Western ways of knowing with those rooted in indigenous Pacific epistemologies, values, and "contested accounts," I begin to address the possibility that "diverse elements of an Indigenous people's heritage can be [more] fully learned or understood . . . by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by th[o]se people themselves" (ibid., 33; Battiste 2005, 5). This approach allows me to look beyond disciplinary models and instead find guidance and inspiration in Pacific—and, more specifically, Marshallese—epistemology and culture. By grounding my argument in these kinds of "contested accounts," I hope to explore some of the many sides of Ebeye that, according to a Marshallese epistemological framework, are important and worth knowing (Smith 1999, 33).

Here I turn to elements of an approach Katerina Teaiwa and I began to tease out during a directed reading course at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in Fall 2005.¹ This approach explores the roles of indigenous Pacific epistemologies, ideologies, and cultural values—and more specifically concepts of genealogy and relatedness—in shaping peoples' outlooks, views, practices, and experiences. Because these

¹ I gratefully acknowledge Katerina for her time and patience as we grappled with issues of representation, genealogy, and epistemology over the course of that semester and into the next.
philosophies are of the Pacific (although certainly neither homogenous nor stagnant), they have the potential to not only help us to imagine the region in more local terms, but also to become a critical part of the decolonization of Pacific Studies research and scholarship (Thaman 2003, 2). It is my belief that, if indigenous epistemologies formed the core of Pacific research and scholarship, the result would be a fundamental transformation of fields like Pacific Studies. As such, the trans- in transdisciplinary signifies not the merger of disciplines or the incorporation of indigenous knowledge, but rather the displacement of Western disciplinary and cross-disciplinary (i.e., interdisciplinary) methods with approaches rooted in indigenous (and in this case, Marshallese) ways of knowing (ibid.).

The intent of this kind of approach is not to advance the scholarship or careers of outsiders like myself, but rather to contribute to the overall decolonization of academia and, perhaps more importantly, the empowerment of indigenous scholars who seek to explore their own cultures on their own terms. At the same time, however, I recognize that as an outsider who does not subscribe to the dominant discourse surrounding Oceania and the Marshall Islands and Ebjä more specifically, it is also important for me to work to demystify the presumptions and images set forth by imperial ideology and slum discourse, and to instead explore Ebeye on more local and personal terms. To this end, I strive to include local voices, perspectives, and experiences whenever possible and appropriate, and to ground my approach and interpretations in particular elements of Marshallese epistemology, ideology, and cultural values—in this way constructing a story that is more about Ebjä than about my preconceived notions of what Ebeye is or should be.

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2 As my first attempt at engaging with this approach, this thesis represents the beginning of a much larger project, which I hope to explore further as a PhD candidate in Pacific History.
Over the past two years I have struggled to find an approach that will allow me to begin to re/present Ebeye and the people who live there in a way that is loving and respectful and that more closely resembles how they might understand and experience life. In the process, I have come to the conclusion that no such approach exists; it is impossible to re/present people and experiences with words on paper or even with visual media like photos and videos. All re/presentations are limited and imperfect because people with limitations and imperfections develop and implement them. What’s more, the kinds of written representations that are required of graduate students in American universities diverge significantly from traditional Marshallese ways of knowing, understanding, and illustrating their pasts, presents, and futures.

In my search for a methodology that is more just, more respectful, and more “true,” I have not been able to escape the idea of “indigenous epistemology” and its potential roles in shaping the worldviews and experiences present in the Marshall Islands. Even within the scope of my own limited understanding of Ebeye, it has been clear to me from the beginning that Marshallese epistemology is unique and grounded in ideals fundamentally different from my own. While on Ebjä, I observed that rimajel place significant value on relationships and community, social rank and hierarchy, reciprocity and sharing, and peoples’ relationship to the land, for example. Together, the work of Pacific scholars like David Gegeo, Manulani Meyer, Mere Roberts (et al.), Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Tēvita O Ka‘ili, several Marshallese proverbs, expressions, and stories, as well as the interviews I gathered during my fieldwork on Ebeye in December

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3 Klaus Neumann notes that oral traditions represent "true constructions of the past, no matter whether they are factually correct reconstructions of the past" (Neumann 1992, 44). To this I add that Marshallese cultural practices represent embodied, yet still very "true," constructions of the Marshallese past, present, and future. In this sense, "truth" stems not from whether or not a story actually happened, but rather from the truth people find in its message and interpretation (Neumann 1992, 60–61).

4 While some of the ideas (and in particular the interviews) in this project were gathered during a month of fieldwork on Ebeye in December 2005-January 2006, many began to materialize during the three years I lived on Ebeye (which included one month on Majuro [Majro], one month on Jä, Aelóhlaplap, and an unfortunately short three days on Likiep, and over the past two years, which I have spent reading, writing, and reflecting as an MA student in the Pacific Islands Studies program at UH Mānoa.
2005 through January 2006, help shed light on the centrality of these and other values in Marshallese life and culture.

The significance of indigenous epistemology in Pacific Studies has received attention of late. Scholars like David Gegeo and Karen Watson Gegeo, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Manulani Meyer, Elise Huffer and Ropate Qalo, Mere Roberts, and others value the inclusion of Pacific epistemologies in the realm of Pacific research, scholarship, and education—which have traditionally been dominated by Western theories and philosophies with colonial origins. Moreover, what many of these authors refer to as uniquely Pacific “ways of doing, thinking, and being” must not only be included in the mix, but should actually form the core of Pacific Studies—guiding and affecting the ways in which Oceania is theorized, re/presented, and understood (Huffer and Qalo 2004, 89). While features of this uniquely (although certainly not homogenous) Pacific epistemology may include indigenous knowledge and wisdom, interdependence and service, and a deep-rooted connection to place and to the land, conceptions of genealogy seem to tie these unique and diverse cosmologies together—defining the lives and experiences of “Oceanic people” across cultural and linguistic boundaries (ibid., 93–94; Meyer 2001, 125, 128 & 134).5

Manulani Meyer explains that Hawaiians, for example, hold a “fundamentally different” epistemology from the dominant (i.e., western/haole) philosophy of knowing that has been imposed from the outside (Meyer 2001, 125). Hawaiian epistemology is not just unique in its values and beliefs, but it actually holds a distinctive philosophy of “how one knows” and “what is worth knowing” (ibid.). This epistemology goes beyond the level of opinions and beliefs. It is also a fundamental component of Hawaiian identity and culture—it reflects and is reflective of how people experience all facets of

5 It is important to note that, much like culture, epistemology and values are neither homogenous nor stagnant within or across cultural groups. In the Marshall Islands, for example, it may be impossible to distinguish elements of Christianity from so-called “Marshallese culture” or manim majej. For many sinajef today, these two philosophies go hand in hand, and any attempt to separate them out would recall the “chicken and egg” scenario (i.e., which came first: “Love one another” or “Help one another”)? Much as in other parts of the Pacific, Christianity and Christian values have been indigenized and have become essential components of many Pacific cultures and traditions.
life, such as education as family relationships. Hawaiians' "empirical relationship to
experience," or how they "see, hear, feel, taste, and smell the world," shapes what and
how they know: to be Hawaiian is to experience life in a uniquely Hawaiian way (ibid.).

One of the essential components of the Hawaiian experience is an emphasis on
interdependence and connectivity—that is, the positioning of the self within a greater
web or genealogy, relationships, and social obligations. Within Hawaiian epistemology,
people experience life not as disconnected individuals, but rather as "links in [a] chain of
cultural continuity" (Meyer 2001, 127). This unique sense of connectedness shapes the
ways in which Hawaiians practice, experience, and live their culture each day (ibid., 129).

Much like Hawaiians, a distinct epistemology also allows Māori of Aotearoa/New
Zealand to understand and experience the world and their place in it in unique ways.
Genealogy or whakapapa is the key feature of this epistemology or "mental construct"
(Roberts et al. 2005, 2). It is through whakapapa that Māori learn about their origins—
what a Western philosophy might refer to as their past, their history—as well as their
"location in time and space" in relation to other people, their environment, and the
spiritual world (ibid., 4). For Māori, whakapapa is the key to knowledge—"to 'know'
something is to be able to locate it within a whakapapa" (ibid.). Knowledge is the ability
to see and understand not just the details of seemingly distinct histories and origins,
but also the complex web of relationships that traverse and bring together various
elements of the material and spiritual worlds.

It is through this epistemology that Māori understand and experience the world
around them; it shapes their day-to-day activities and cultural practices. And while
genealogical details may differ among Māori tribes, "they all share the basic form of a
genealogical account rooted ultimately in a common origin" (ibid., 3). Whereas on the
surface genealogy appears to divide or distinguish tribes from one another, the
centrality of whakapapa as a way of knowing among all tribes brings them together at a
much deeper level—much as it connects people across Oceania, despite its diverse
manifestations and distinctive embodiment in the form of local epistemologies and cultural practices.

Genealogy is also a central feature of the epistemology of the Kwara’ae people of the Solomon Islands:

In Kwara’ae epistemology, genealogy is a primary *fuli* 'source' of knowledge, and also gives knowledge its *bibi* 'weight' . . . Each person’s understanding of where he or she belongs in the genealogical net is directly connected to the kinds of knowledge and social responsibilities he or she has. Genealogy thus becomes a framework for knowledge (Gegeo & Watson Gegeo 2001, 68-69).

David Gegeo and Karen Watson Gegeo make the important point that epistemology affects not just the ways in which people view the world and reflect upon or interpret their culture, but also how they construct formal (and informal) contexts or settings for this kind of reflection to take place. Certain characteristics of Kwara’ae epistemology, not least of which is a "concern for wholeness or completeness," have led (although not caused) members of the Kwara’ae Genealogy Project (KGP) to come together to reflect on and interpret their own cultural practices (ibid., 61-62). Their methods—which include *saefilongisi(a)* ("question[ing] [it] to pieces"); *didi sulu ru'anga* ("the chipping along a thing to produce a design"); and *manata kali ru'anga* ("thinking around a thing")—are rooted in Kwara’ae notions of genealogy, and as such form a framework for how the group comes together across clan boundaries to engage in the cultural practice of interpretation and reflection (ibid., 71-75). The KGP as such reflects a "mosaic of cultural knowledge that includes the whole person, family, kin group, and society" (ibid., 59).

Much like the cultural practices the KGP considers during its gatherings, the methods the group uses to engage in that reflection are also embedded in particular aspects of Kwara’ae epistemology. Similar to its process of reflection, the ways in which the KGP comes together to discuss and interpret "*fala fala*" also reflect and embody Kwara’ae epistemologies—as do other kinds of cultural practices, from the weaving of
baskets to elaborate birthday celebrations (ibid., 61). Kwara'ae epistemology provides the KGP with a framework for coming together and engaging in this level of interpretation in a particular way—that is, together as a community engaging, reflecting on, and practicing their culture.

Meyer, Roberts, Gegeo, and other scholars "affirm not only that indigenous epistemologies are alive and well, but also that they are relevant and useful to the societies and people to whom they belong" (Huffer and Qalo 2004, 88). Epistemologies shape how people think, what they think, as well as how they experience their everyday lives, their cultures, and their environments. And while epistemologies may shift over time and vary from culture to culture—a vitality and diversity that is apparent in the dynamic and ever-changing cultural practices of communities and cultures across the Pacific—notions of genealogy and social connectivity seem to connect "Oceanic people" and their ways of knowing and being across cultures and other, similarly fluid and changing, "boundaries" (Meyer 2001, 125).

With this in mind, I explore the possible connections between these authors' ideas and the information and knowledge I encountered during my fieldwork on Ebeye and extensive library research at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Hamilton Library Pacific Collection. I propose that, similar to Hawaiians, Māori, and Kwara‘ae, notions of genealogy and social connectedness and obligation likewise form an essential component of Marshallese epistemology and cultural values. These values not only inform how ri-Ebjā might experience life, but also how they celebrate their own survival and that of their culture during keemem and other events—all this in a place that is often assumed to have "lost" or rejected essential components of Marshallese culture or монтаж  мајэл.

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I’ll admit that two years ago I would have never imagined myself curled up in bed on a rainy day reading—enjoying—a book on methodology for the third time. I had no
idea that my experiences in Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa would lead me to re-conceptualize not just the Pacific region, but also how and why it has been portrayed and represented and by whom—as well as my own role in all of this as a white American women married to a Marshallese man and mother to a Marshallese child. But there I was, I’ll confess: a cup of coffee in one hand (typical) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* in the other. And I kept coming back to the same passage—that one project, that one approach that spoke so clearly to my own understanding of what this particular project could be: “Celebrating survival.”

Celebrating.

Survival.

For months, I have pondered these two terms and their connotation(s). What does it mean to “celebrate,” to “survive”? These words have left me stumped for weeks on end, as their meanings and implications run deep, characterizing the very essence of life on Ebeye—a place that exemplifies not just what it means to survive physically under difficult circumstances, but also the spectrum of what it can mean to survive as people and as a culture—even when others deem that culture either dead or transformed beyond recognition (see Petrosian-Husa comments, Chapter 2).

And what can it mean to “celebrate survival”? While Smith’s explanation seems clear enough (see page 77 above), I have nevertheless asked myself this a thousand times, wondering how to re/present the elements of the history, experiences, and culture of an island in a way that not only explodes the colonial assumptions and narrow vision embodied in and perpetuated by slum discourse, but that also “celebrate[s] . . . resistances at an ordinary human level” and meanwhile affirms the identities of indigenous Marshallese women and men (Smith 1999, 145).

So I decided to start with the basics: the definitions of the words themselves. For as long as I can remember, teachers have encouraged me to *define my terms*; they claim (and as a teacher I have insisted upon this myself) that in order to grasp the multi-layered meanings of particular concepts I must first know what they mean and how to
apply them in real life. With this in mind, I found that the word "celebrate" has several meanings and applications. The first refers to a special occasion marked by joyful festivities—in other words, a party with a purpose. In Marshallese, this kind of event is

**Definition:**

"Celebrate"

The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition

most commonly referred to as a keemem, a *kanjo*, or even a *bade* (from the English "party"). While the word keemem usually refers to a child's first birthday party, it can also be used more generically to describe a feast, a banquet, or other kind of celebration such as an anniversary party (Abo et al. 1976, 139). The word *kanjo*, on the other hand, refers more specifically to Marshallese-style parties, with the expression *kanjojo rimajel* meaning something like "Marshallese are always having parties" (ibid., 130). And while "always" might be a bit of an exaggeration (although only a bit!), I certainly found the keemem on Ebeye welcome occasions to see familiar faces, make new friends, and learn about how different people are related and connected to one another through bloodlines, marriage, adoption, and the like. I also found that they offer valuable opportunities to learn about Marshallese culture and the role of Marshallese social hierarchy in determining how individuals, families, and social classes relate to one
another within and across generations, ich I have tried to demonstrate over the course of this thesis with my own fictionalized narrative account of a keemem on Ebeye.

The second definition is somewhat harder to explain, as the word “celebrate” in terms of a religious ceremony or a Catholic Mass does not translate literally into Marshallese. In Marshallese, the priest does not “celebrate Mass,” for example, but instead *ej komman jae*—he “does” or “makes” Mass. At first glance, this meaning of the word celebrate in English does not appear to explain the idea of “celebrating survival” in the Marshallese context or within the scheme of this project. The significance of this definition will become clearer, however, when I discuss “survival” and its significance to the project more in depth in the next section.

The third meaning of celebrate—while it also may not translate directly into Marshallese—does offer some immediate insight into Smith’s “celebrating survival” approach as I see it. Here the word celebrate means “to extol,” “to praise publicly,” and “to honor,” all of which make up one of the essential goals of this project: to honor the Ebjä community and the resilience of its many and overlapping genealogies, customs, and values. As I stated in the introduction, I want to affirm that there is more to Ebeye than its “slum of the Pacific” reputation may suggest. To this end, I propose that “Marshallese-style parties” as they are celebrated on Ebjä in and of themselves *nebar* or honor Marshallese culture or *manta* *maje* much as I wish to celebrate it here.

The “celebrating” part seems clear enough: I use an account of an actual (although fictionalized) celebration (i.e., party) as a metaphor to celebrate (i.e., honor) the strength of culture and relationships on Ebeye much as these celebrations do in real life. But where does the “survival” part come in? According to the definitions listed in Figure 16, to “survive” means “to remain alive or in existence,” “to outlive” someone or something, or “to live or persist through.” All three definitions imply a negative situation or circumstance that people (for example) have managed to overcome. To survive in this sense is thus to live in spite of difficulties or harsh conditions.
sur vive (sar-vi v) v. -vived, -viv- ing, -vives. -intr. To remain alive or in existence. -tr. 1. To live longer than; outlive: survived her husband by five years. 2. To live or persist through: plants surviving a frost. [ME surviven < Norman Fr. survivre < OFr. survivre < LLat. supervivere: Lat. super-, over + Lat. vivere, to live.] -sur- vi vor n.
sur viv al (sar-vi val) n. 1. a. The act or process of surviving. b. The fact of having survived. 2. Something, as an ancient custom or belief, that has survived. -modifier: survival techniques

Figure 16: Definition: "Survival"
The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition

Most would agree that rimajel, and in particular many of those living on Ebjä, have done exactly that: survived. They are survivors in that they have lived through centuries of colonialism, war, nuclear testing, and the effects of exposure to radiation, displacement, American militarism in Kwajalein Atoll (Kuwajleen), and—according to many standards—poverty. Although rimajel working on Kwajalein earn the highest salaries and thus the largest proportion of tax dollars for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Ebeye residents nevertheless continue to face hardships as the result of relatively low government investment in public services and infrastructure and high prices for basic goods. Yet despite almost overwhelming odds, rimajel on Ebjä have endured—they remain alive and continue to persist through. I would add, moreover, that ri–Ebjä have done much more than just survive in the sense of “getting by.” In fact, they have built a new vibrant Marshallese community that continues to cherish, take pride in, and honor fundamental Marshallese values, customs, and traditions as exemplified in


7 According to the Marshall Islands Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office, prices for basic goods on Ebeye cost 30 percent more than on Majuro, the country’s capital (Marshall Islands Journal 2005c, 2). Electricity, on the other hand, costs almost twice as much on Ebeye (25 cents per kilowatt hour) as on Majuro (17 cents per kilowatt hour) (Marshall Islands Journal 2006a, 6). It is worth noting, however, that Ebeye Public Service employees earn a cost of living differential, which I myself received when I was a teacher at Ebeye Public School from 2003–2004.
particular *jabōnkōnnaan in majel* (Marshallese expressions or sayings) such as *jake jebōl eo* (literally "provide life to others"), *"kandikdik kōn ipkwe"* (literally "share whatever small food you have with love"), *"jede ak eo"* (literally "point to the frigate bird"), and *"jouj eo, mour eo, lāj eo mij eo"* (literally "kindness brings life, hatred brings death")—each of which I discuss more in depth in Chapter 4.8

This brings us to survival: the act or fact of staying alive, of persisting, of persevering despite hardship and adversity. Certainly, rimajel on Ebeye have done all of these—they are survivors, and this project indeed celebrates their will and persistence when it comes to making life work on an island that many consider uninhabitable. But given that "survival" also refers to "something, as an ancient custom or belief, that has survived," a thing that persists through, remains alive, and will perhaps even outlive the very circumstances that have jeopardized its resilience, I seek to uncover what else these definitions might bring to a discussion about celebrations and "celebrating survival" on Ebjā. In other words, how do ri–Ebjā carry out or achieve—i.e., *celebrate* (Figure 15, definition 2)—the survival of some of the very beliefs and customs that make them rimajel in spite of their long history of interaction with foreign cultures like the United States? In what ways do they draw on their customs, their *manit*, to make life possible and even satisfying on Ebeye under what many people consider extreme and difficult circumstances?

In conjunction with the party narrative I have constructed throughout this paper, the last chapter aims to "celebrate survival" on Ebeye, Marshall Islands. I show that, despite the island's history of development and modernization, the pervasiveness of "Western" material culture on the island, the chronically negative image perpetuated by "slum discourse" and its subscribers, and even the distortion of traditional Marshallese social hierarchy by colonial administrations, key aspects of māntin majel are thriving on Ebjā—although perhaps not in some of the ways we might expect. This culture, and the

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8 See Appendix B for a full explanation of these and other Marshallese proverbs and sayings (Abo et al. 1976, 113; Bender 1968, 185; Stone et al. 2000, 53, 64, 67).
core values that have come to sustain it, has contributed to the physical survival of people and communities all around the Marshall Islands over centuries, and continues to do so on Ebjä even today.
INTERLUDE: Pija ko

Figure 17: Amimano
Marshallese handicrafts and pillowcases on display at the entrance to a keemem. The family hosting the party offers these and other kinds of gifts to special guests, however it is also customary for guests and family members to run up and help themselves to whatever they want, especially once the dancing and joking around have begun. Honolulu, July 2006 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

Figure 18: Naan in karawanene
This Master of Ceremonies welcomes guests gathered for the annual Ebeye Queen of Peace Parish Christmas Party. It is the role of the emcee to keep the party running smoothly—from lining people up to get their plates to introducing different song and dance numbers during the entertainment portion of the evening. The emcee also often provides commentary and comic relief during lulls in the festivities. Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)
Figure 19: *lien köttar*
Guests gather and anxiously wait for a party to start. It is not uncommon for parties to start two to three hours after the specified start time, as some guests arrive “late”—having spent all day preparing food and decorating. Parties do not start without the presence of traditional leaders (or their appointed representative), who are often extremely busy with other engagements, especially during the holidays. *Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)*

Figure 20: *Mohna ko*
Parties are opportunities to prepare special local dishes, including *peru*—a dish made of pandanus pulp and juice, grated coconut, and arrowroot or tapioca starch.

Although *peru* is traditionally wrapped in breadfruit leaves, it is not uncommon to see it served in small plastic baggies like the ones pictured. *Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)*
Macaroni and potato salads and Asian-style noodles are common party foods, often served alongside "traditional" Marshallese dishes like jukjuk (pounded banana rolled in shredded coconut) and raij bobo or rice balls (rice cooked in coconut milk and rolled in shredded coconut). Although some might regard the presence of Western and Asian foods as an indication of "cultural loss," a similarly diverse spread at an American party might be considered "eclectic." Ebeye, December 2005

*Figure 21: "Mōhā in ṭajel"*

Figure 22: *lien keemem* Rimajel consider the first birthday the most significant and celebrate accordingly. While some commemorate the day with small private keemem in their homes, others invite their extended families, friends, and neighbors for the special event. Here, two families hold a joint keemem, hosting not just their families and friends, but also the entire Queen of Peace Parish community. Ebeye, 2001

*Figure 22: *lien keemem*

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1 Although most would argue that rice is not a "traditional" Marshallese food, it is now practically unheard of to eat a meal in the Marshall Islands without rice.
Figure 23: "Clowning" around
A girl performs a hula-style dance during the entertainment portion of this party. A woman comes up to imitate her dance moves in jest. This kind of "clowning" is common at parties, especially during dance numbers, when members of the audience (usually older women) come up to mock performers by pretending to dance, fanning them, and even spraying them with perfume or cologne. Ebeye, date unknown (Photographer unknown)

Figure 24: lien ippān doon
These teachers and staff enjoy themselves as others entertain them with karaoke singing at the annual Queen of Peace Elementary School staff Christmas party. Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

2 "Clowning" in the Marshall Islands is similar to the style of Rotuman "clowning" described by Vilsoni Hereniko in Woven Gods: Female Clowns and Power in Rotuma (1995).
The night before a birthday, it is customary for people who are related or connected to the person's family to show up at their house in groups to sing and jidlap (present gifts—usually dollar bills). The family in turn offers each group snacks, drinks, and sometimes gifts as a way of saying thank you for coming. Here, a group of students and their teacher sing Happy Birthday to a classmate. Ebeye, 2001 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

This family enjoys eating together after singing to one of their family members the night before his birthday. Ebeye, 2004 (Photo by John deBruin)
Figure 27:  Iien jiñap
This teacher gets a big surprise as the Queen of Peace Parish community lines up to sing Happy Birthday and jiñap. This practice is often accompanied by the song “Iien Emjan,” which emphasizes the joy people feel at having the opportunity to spend time together during these kinds of special events. Ebeye, January 2002 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

Figure 28: Bar Iien jiñap
Queen of Peace parishioners line up to jiñap on yet another special occasion. Ebeye, August 2001 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)
The Queen of Peace youth group entertains Christmas party guests with a dance similar to those performed by the Protestant jepta or Christmas songfest groups. Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

A group performs a dance at a Queen of Peace parish party. Ebeye, date unknown (Photo by Monica LaBriola)
At this graduation party, members of a Queen of Peace High School graduating class sings a farewell song to one of their teachers after presenting him with gifts during the jilap procession—during which everyone had an opportunity to iŋkiŋkwe or shake his hand and bid him farewell. Ebeye, May 2002 (Photo by Monica LaBriola)

Several people on Ebeye make their living or have second jobs making elaborate cakes for birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions. According to Western-style economic indicators, these people would be considered "unemployed," although they certainly don’t spend their days “sitting around all day” (see French 2001). Ebeye, December 2005 (Photo by Monica LaBriola, cake by Wanda Korok).
Figure 33: *lien mōhā keek*
Guests at this party will take home huge pieces of this cake made in honor of the Queen of Peace High School graduating class of 2002. Ebeye, May 2002
(Photo by Brian Green, cake by Wanda Korok).

Figure 34: *Bar lien mōhā keek*
This couple celebrates a birthday and their anniversary at a dance competition practice with St. Mark rosary group (Queen of Peace).
Ebeye, December 2005
(Photo by Monica LaBriola)
CHAPTER 4: SURVIVING: Jake jeböl eo

I might want to put it this way . . . a famous saying, an American saying [goes]: "Never judge a book by the cover it looks." Basically it [means] don't look at Ebeye structurally—I mean, don't look at it and [say], "It's so small and overpopulated." Well, that's true. But have you really gone deep to see how people get involved, [to] see how people mingle with each other—how they live (Timōj interview, 4 January 2006)?

In this chapter, I explore various themes of survival and some of the strategies rimaje] on Ebeye have employed over time not only to get by, but also to build an Ebjä community that has grown into much more than just a Kwajalein labor camp. Throughout this discussion, I focus in particular on the importance of jibañ doon and kōjparok doon—that is, helping and taking care of relatives, extended family members, friends, and even neighbors through socially established patterns of reciprocity and respect. I do this by considering how several important jabōnkōnnaan in maje](Marshallese sayings, expressions, or proverbs) are personified today in the Ebjä context; these include kandikdik kōn ipkwe ("share whatever small food you have with love"), jede ak eo ("point to the frigate bird"), jeplap dejelok, ("people shy away from one who has too much"), and jouj eo, mour eo, lāj eo mij eo ("kindness brings life, hatred brings death") (Abo et al., 1976, 113; Bender 1969, 185; Stone et al., 2000, 53, 64, 67).

These are among the many components of Marshallese culture that have developed over thousands of years to help assure the survival of individuals and communities on small atoll islets with environments and circumstances similarly arduous (although no doubt completely different from) to Ebeye's situation today. Using these expressions and the values they convey I show that, contrary to the impression set forth by slum discourse, which often blames Ebeye's problems on the Marshallese "extended family system" and all that it entails, this and other social systems—together

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1 As I already mentioned in the Acknowledgements, I have given all my informants aliases in order to avoid confusion or misidentification.
with expectations such as generosity, respect, and obligation inherent therein—actually facilitate life on Ebjä, making the island not only habitable, but also rich and vibrant in Marshallese culture and traditions (Malone 1976, 27). I ground this discussion in the Marshallese concept of *jitdam kapeel*, a proverb that translates as “studying genealogy assures wisdom,” underlining the importance of not just knowing about, but also understanding, respecting, and abiding by, these familial and social relationships and obligations.

The Marshallese expression *jitdam kapeel* translates as “seeking knowledge guarantees wisdom (a proverb),” and helps explain significant components of a unique (although not homogenous) way of knowing and being in the world (Abo et al., 109). This expression, this concept, is particularly significant to this discussion because it helps to reveal a side of Ebeye that is important and truly worth knowing—in other words, the genealogies, relationships, and obligations which sustain and are maintained by rimajej living there. Much as the multileveled social and interpersonal connections I have encountered and experienced on Ebeye have overturned my own preconceived impressions of and assumptions about life in the so-called “slum of the Pacific,” so too does an approach that focuses on these relationships and connections—these genealogies—“jä” or potentially topple typical representations of Ebjä, the Marshall Islands, and beyond. Furthermore, I argue that a closer consideration of these kinds of indigenous values and ways of knowing and relating to one another likewise has the potential to transform—and as such contribute to the decolonization of—academic fields like Pacific Studies by transposing indigenous knowledges as the objects of academic observation and theorizing to the subjects of Pacific education and learning (Thaman 2003, 3).

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2 *Jitdam kapeel* is also the motto of the College of the Marshall Islands.
Methodologically, this chapter highlights some of the conversations I had with people during fieldwork interviews I conducted on Ebeye in December 2005 and January 2006. Two major themes arose from these discussions. First, I talked with each person about the apparent contrast between the experiences that I and many other Jesuit Volunteers and others I know have had on Ebeye with various families, groups, and communities, as well as with its rich culture, and the picture of Ebeye set forth in the popular press and perpetrated by authors of so-called "slum discourse." I asked them to consider these contrasting images and experiences, and to then describe Ebeye from their own perspective. From this emerged ideas, images, and memories that closely resembled the Ebjä I came to know and love during my three years living there (as well as a good deal of resentment toward the image of Ebeye set forth by the media).

Next, we moved on to jitdam kapeel and keemem and the potential links between the two—however, the extent to which we discussed these (and other) topics varied from interview to interview, as I generally encouraged the conversations to wander freely as bwebwenato (talking story) rather than adhering to a structured interview format. To this end, I asked people to describe their understanding of jitdam kapeel, its multiple meanings, roles, and functions in Marshallese culture and society, as well as how it plays out within the context of keemem or large celebrations on Ebeye. The general consensus here was that jitdam kapeel is a way of learning about the relationships that exist between and among individuals and communities, as well as an important medium and means through which rimajel come to understand, respect, and honor those relationships and the very history and culture they embody.

In this sense, I suggest that jitdam kapeel represents a significant component of Marshallese epistemology in that it not only embodies and reflects a unique way of knowing, but also functions to prioritize the kinds of information that rimajel consider truly worth knowing and therefore worthy of transmission vis-à-vis oral and other kinds of traditions (Meyer 2001, 125). In the next section, I explore some of the features and
functions of *jitdam* kapeel as explained to me by informants. Throughout this discussion, I highlight some of the ways in which this and other components of Marshallese culture and epistemology lead many ri-Ebjä to base their understanding and experience of Ebeye more on their relationships with and obligations to one another than on Western standards of modernization and development.

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The simplest explanation of the Marshallese word *jitdam* is to “study one’s genealogy”—that is, to learn about and study family trees, family origins, and family histories. Timøj, a young public service administrator and native to Kwajalein Atoll, gave me the following explanation:

*jitdam* [is] when you sit down with your parents—or grandparents mostly—and just go over the family tree or the family root[s] (Timøj interview, 4 January 2006).

Alice, who also talked to me in Chapter 2 about why people move to and stay on Ebeye, explains further:

*jitdam, āinwōt* . . . rej itōn bōk an doon mejeje ak jelā kōn baamle ko aer. Reitōn . . .

*jitdam* . . . [is] when people exchange knowledge about their families. They . . . teach each other about genealogy . . . They teach each other about where their clans come from. They study their genealogy (Alice interview, 5 January 2006).

In this sense, the meaning of *jitdam* by itself is fairly clear: to study or learn one’s genealogy and family origins. Most of my informants agreed that, in the Marshallese tradition, *jitdam* is an activity or process that happens orally via *bwebwenato* (stories)

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3 Most of my informants agreed that *jitdam* kapeel takes place to a large extent not just during *keemem* but also during funerals. Funerals, however, are out of the scope of this project and thus remain open to investigation at another time.

4 Now a public servant, Timøj is also a former high school teacher. His family is among those relocated to Ebeye from the Kwajalein Atoll Mid-Corridor region.
and other kinds of traditions (see Chapter 1), and in community or in the company of
other people—in particular with grandparents or elders. Rimajel highly value and respect
these relationships and this process of learning and communicating family and clan
origins and connections; my own friends and family often reflect fondly on times they
have spent together with their grandparents learning not just about their ancestors, but
also about how different families are connected to each other through marriage,
adoption, and other kinds of associations such as jowi (clans) or bwij (matrilines).

Figure 35: Family ties
I, too, have fond memories of jitdam—that is, of sitting and
learning about the genealogy of the deBrum and Capelle
lines with my own parents-in-law, Joachim and Teresa
(Capelle) deBrum (Photo by John deBrum).

In addition to the study of genealogy, jitdam also has another, more general,
definition: "to seek knowledge" or "to inquire of an authority" (Abo 1976, 109). Medri, a
retired elementary school teacher and Kwajalein Atoll a/ap, told me this:

Kwōj, etan, kajitōk kōn aolep kain. Manit im kajitōk kōn mantin majej, ta ko mejeje in
naan ko ilo kajin majej ko. Nē elap am kajitōk, kio kwōnaaj . . . mejeje im jelā. Ainwēt
emman bwe ajri jidik ro ren jelā mantin majej.

[It means] you ask about all kinds of things. Customs and Marshallese traditions, [and]
how to say things in Marshallese. If you ask a lot of questions, you will . . . understand
and you will "know." It's good because [in this way even] young children can learn and
know Marshallese ways (Medri interview, 4 January 2006).
Here, Medri explains that *jitdam* has a broader connotation, referring not just to studying genealogy in the usual sense of the word—that is, lineage or lines of descent—but also to the process of learning about what it means to be a part of Marshallese culture and participate in Marshallese traditions and cultural practices. When you *jitdam*, you gain knowledge about *aolep kain* or “all kinds” of things related to *manit* and *mantin rājej*. In this way *jitdam* is one of the important ways people learn about what it means to be rōajel—from their history and ancestors to their language, customs, and social structures. And while it is important to note that this is a process that involves asking others to explain all aspects of *mantin rājej*, it appears that particular attention is given to family histories and how people are connected to each other across families, clans, and matrilines—suggesting that in the Marshallese tradition this kind of information and knowledge are noteworthy priorities.

Medri comments happily that, through this oral process of knowledge transmission, everyone, including young children (as well as others who may not be able to read or write), has the opportunity to learn and, as such, to know or become wise. Whereas *jitdam* refers to a process of gaining a particular kind of knowledge, *kapeel*—the other element of this important expression and process—describes someone who is skillful, clever, wise, or astute (Abo et al., 132). As Timōj explained, “*kapeel* means clever, intelligent” (Timōj interview, 4 January 2006). Jacob, an educator and prominent member of the Ebeye community (and native to Kwajalein Atoll), indicates that *kapeel* is equal to knowledge itself (Jacob interview, 4 January 2006). The expression *jitdam* *kapeel* thus works to describe not just an important Marshallese process and tradition of learning, but also embodies an essential Marshallese value—the idea that, above all else, participation in this oral process of gaining particular kinds of information makes a person clever, astute, and wise.

In this sense, the tradition of *jitdam kapeel* conveys the idea that coming to know and understand Marshallese culture and traditions and peoples’ relationships and obligations to one another is not just about listening and learning, but is also deeply
associated with wisdom and intelligence. Those who are *jitdam*—that is, those who
know and understand *mantin majej* and their place in it, and who see and understand
*kadkad* (genealogy) or how people are connected to one another and to the land—are
considered truly clever and wise:

> You have to deeply know your identity in order for you to become clever. I mean,
> that's basically what *jitdam kapeel* means. *Jitdam, Jitdam kapeel* (Timôj
> interview, 4 January 2006).

Unlike Western culture, which places value on the ability to memorize and process facts,
dates, and theories vis-à-vis written material and writing, for *rimaje* knowledge stems
from an oral process of coming to understand familial and social relationships—that is,
the spaces and obligations that lie between and among people, connecting them to one
another through time and space (Ka'ili 2005, 89–90). Those who have mastered these
connections "know their identity" and are thus considered smart, wise, or
knowledgeable:

> *Jitdam* is to know who [belongs to] what "blood"... And *kapeel* is, it's knowledge...
> Once you know everyone, then you know your place. You know what you're supposed
to do. What you're supposed to not do. When you take action, when you don't speak
... If you know where you come from, you're smart, or you're full of knowledge (Jacob
interview, 4 January 2006).

As such, *jitdam kapeel* takes on a meaning that is much deeper and more significant
than just the act of acquiring information. It also refers to a deep understanding of
one's place in society vis-à-vis these relationships and obligations, as well as knowing
how to act accordingly in any given situation. Those who deeply know their identity—
that is, their place in society in terms of their age and gender, and as well as their place
in and the rank of their family, *jowi*, and *bwij*—are considered truly smart or wise. While
considering the complexity of this process, Bita, a highly respected Catholic prayer-
leader originally from Jaluit Atoll, spoke of *jitdam kapeel* in this way:
The saying jitdam kapeel is very "nwila"—very deep. You might think it only has to do with knowing about our family or our islands, our land. But it's also so much more than that (Bita interview, 5 January 2006).

Jitdam kapeel is about much more than just the fact of knowing how people are related to one another. It is also a way of knowing—a Marshallese tradition that serves not only to transmit specific and valued information and history, but also to show people what in life is important and worth knowing (Meyer 2001, 125). In this sense, it is no accident that in the tradition of jitdam kapeel knowledge, skill, and wisdom are associated with genealogy in particular. Indeed, it is these very genealogies—these relationships between and among individuals and communities—that have been deemed valuable and worthy of transmission through oral traditions by generations of rimajel. The process of jitdam kapeel therefore both reflects and embodies the centrality of these genealogies in Marshallese epistemology, offering its practitioners not just a glimpse into the Marshallese past, but also a vision and understanding of Marshallese culture and identity in the present.

I have noted that it is a common assumption that imperialism and globalization have affected the loss of culture and customs in the Marshall Islands—and on the islands of Ebeye and Majuro in particular. In the case of Ebeye, anthropologist William Alexander summarized this presumption in a 1979 Petition to the United Nations Trusteeship Council:

Customs of sharing are not adhered to as much on Ebeye as in the outer islands. It is such customs which have enabled these people to survive for centuries . . . Ebeye is not a community in the sense of being a unified group of people, as each of the outer islands is. With 7500 people, the traditional communal feasts and rituals which served to promote unity have proven inadequate, so there is no sense of loyalty, of consequence (Alexander 1979, 5–6).
Contrary to this view, many of the people I interviewed suggested that Marshallese cultural and customs are particularly strong on Ebeye. Timøj noted, for example:

"[On Ebeye,) we value traditional ways of living, also custom, so dearly, that I think they’re really a part of our daily lives—the customary beliefs, [that is] (Timøj interview, 4 January 2006).

Most people agreed that sharing and respect for chiefs and elders in particular—two key features of Marshallese culture that serve to honor the very genealogies and familial and social relationships and obligations that connect people to one another—are not only prevalent on Ebeye, but also highly relevant to the lives of ri-Ebjä today. In this section, I explore these contrasting views of “Marshallese culture” on Ebeye and beyond and suggest that, while today its fundamental attributes may not always manifest in ways that outsiders like Alexander might expect (i.e., within the context of a so-called "traditional" feast), Marshallese culture is no less potent on Ebeye, for example, than it is anywhere else in the Marshall Islands—or across the Pacific for that matter. As Timøj suggests, on Ebeye  mantin majej is very much a part of peoples’ everyday lives and, as I have tried to show throughout this paper, is particularly notable during keemem and other types of special events.

_mantin majej_ on Ebeye and elsewhere is not defined solely by particular dances, instruments, foods, or modes of feasting (although these are certainly important), nor is it set in stone with only one set of possible meanings, practices, or applications. Instead, as John Anjain suggests in response to anthropologist Carmen Petrosian-Husa’s recent comments about cultural loss in the Marshall Islands, Marshallese culture is more a way of life and of living, of embracing and honoring what in life is considered important:

Culture is many things, culture is everything, culture is the way we dress, the way we carry our heads, the way we walk, the way we act, and the way we treat our neighbors . . . Marshallese people have embraced the importance of family life, the role of the church in their communities, lending a hand for those who are in need, respect with honor and dignity of their elderly . . . to me, that is a true culture. It has been our way of life since the beginning of time, and it will remain that way to the end. Just because
we don't dance the traditional dances and beat the drums night after night, doesn't mean we have lost touch with our culture . . .
Petrosian–Husa has . . . left with me a bitter and misleading conclusion of the Marshallese culture. I can assure you that she . . . failed to understand the cultural values that [comprise] ideas about what in life seems important. I can guarantee her that we are not, and we will not be screaming, because we have not lost the TRUE MEANING of our culture (Anjain 2006, 12, emphasis in the original).

With this Anjain implies that, rather than external attributes like the clothing they wear or the kinds of foods they eat, Marshallese culture today is more a reflection of (and reflected in) what people consider important or worth knowing. In other words, mantin majej is defined by peoples’ relationships, their deeds, and the manifestation of respect in their everyday lives.⁵

![Figure 36: Definition: “Culture”](image)


In the Marshall Islands and certainly elsewhere, culture is much more than ancient customs or “traditional” dances as suggested by Petrosian–Husa and others. Instead, it comprises everything that makes Marshallese society unique and distinctive, from customs and cultural practices to actions, behaviors, and ways of knowing and being. To this end, Anjain notes that, while many rimajel no longer engage in some of the so-called “traditional” dances and other customs that outsiders might expect and even hope to find in the heart of Micronesia, they nevertheless remain rimajel—and so defined not just by their dancing and feasting, but more importantly by the way they treat each other and the importance they place on their relationships with and

⁵ The long-standing prevalence of Christianity also surely plays a role in all this, however this topic remains out of the scope of this paper.
responsibilities to one another. Marshallese culture in this sense is about jitdam kapeel—that is, knowing, respecting, and honoring the multiple and overlapping familial and social genealogies and responsibilities that bind people together. For those I spoke to, this means helping one another, sharing, respecting elders and chiefs, and honoring and embracing the importance of the extended family and all the obligations it entails.

Most of my informants agreed that these values and practices remain strong on Ebeye, where people are very close to one another not just physically as a result of population density, but also emotionally and spiritually. This closeness, they suggest—combined with Ebeye’s difficult environment and circumstances—has resulted in a particularly strong sense of Marshallese culture on the island, which manifests in the ways people interact and treat one another in their daily lives. It is the continuation of this and other important aspects of Marshallese culture on Ebeye that I have tried to highlight in the narrative interlude sections of this paper, and that I explore further in the final section of this chapter. And while the intent of this particular project is not to measure or judge the extent to which rimajel on Ebeye have “lost” or “retained” their culture and customs, I do want to suggest and as such celebrate the idea that, as John Anjain implies, rimajel have their own particular (although certainly varying) views on what it means to be rimajel today. Although this may be true for rimajel throughout the Marshall Islands and in the diaspora, here I begin to consider particular manifestations of this perspective on Ebeye in particular.

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Throughout my fieldwork interviews, I proposed the idea that Ebjä has been Americanized or “lost” its culture or manit as a result of its history of colonialism, modernization, and the proximity and seeming pervasiveness of the Regan Test Site (RTS) and United States Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA). Many of the people I spoke with were surprised even at the suggestion, asserting instead that mantin majej or Marshallese culture on Ebeye remains particularly strong and even central to peoples’
everyday lives. Most agreed that, in order to ensure survival over the past 60 odd years, ri-Ebjä have retained and adapted crucial aspects of their culture which they continue to practice today. The predominant theme that arose during most of these conversations was the extent to which people on Ebeye work together, help and support each other, share with one another in times of need, and respect their chiefs and their elders.
Consider, for example, the conversation I had with Jacob, who spent most of his life in the United States until recently moving back to Ebeye:

Jacob: *Kandikdik kôn ìgwe*. It means we have little food, but we share, out of love . . .
Even though we're not that rich—or, we're poor—[on Ebeye] nobody's really hungry because everybody shares.

Monica: There are people [on Ebeye] who are less fortunate, I think, than others?
Jacob: Oh yes, lots.

Monica: Are they able to ask for help?
Jacob: They ask or they just . . . oh, [actually], *we just share*.

Monica: So people just share?
Jacob: Yes. And we say life in Majuro is harder even though it's cheaper, it's true, because you're on your own. Even if you live with relatives and the neighborhood . . . you don't share like you do here [on Ebeye].

Monica: So [on Majuro] everybody's expected to just make [his or her] own way?
Jacob: Yes.

Monica: Why do you think it's not like that here [on Ebeye]? Because here is just as . . . money is just as important as it is in Majuro.
Jacob: Yes, it's the same.

Monica: But somehow it's just . . .
Jacob: Yes, it's different.

Monica: Maybe it has to do with being . . .?
Jacob: [It's] because we're so close [to one another].

Monica: Everybody is so [physically] close that you cannot turn away from . . .?

Jacob: We work, and we live, and we . . . go to church and . . . You are just so used to [being so close together] that [other people] become part of you. [On] Majuro . . . when you go [somewhere you can say], "Oh okay, I have to go now." And then you just officially say good-bye.

Monica: So you think Ebeye is really special?

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6 It is quite common for ri-Ebjä to compare Ebeye to Majuro, which they see as highly *pâllele* or Americanized.
Jacob: Really unique in that. Yes.

Monica: So in a way, it seems like—even though people always talk about how [people on Ebeye are] so Americanized—it seems like in that one respect...

Jacob: We are?

Monica: That’s what [some] people say.

Jacob: Oh yeah?

Monica: Well they assume that because [Ebeye is] next to Kwaj, it must be Americanized.?

Jacob: But people on Ebeye say Majuro [is] more [Americanized], yeah?

Monica: [Yes.] I’m just saying [that some] Americans who look from the outside...

Jacob: Because [Kwajalein is] next door?

Monica: …[often] assume: “Well it’s next to Kwaj and people work on Kwaj, so they must be Americanized.” But it seems like what you’re saying is it’s almost more . . . [people on Ebeye] are almost practicing Marshallese culture more than...

Jacob: Yes, and we’re more sophisticated as far as American culture, because we’re next door. I’ve seen that many times.

Monica: What do you mean?

Jacob: What do I mean?

Monica: You mean [that] you kind of know how to deal with [American culture]?

Jacob: Yes, like socializing, social things, like that.

Monica: But it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re adopting [American ways]?

Jacob: No.

Monica: You just kind of know how to . . . deal with it and then come home?

Jacob: Yes.

Monica: It’s interesting what you are saying. It sounds like it is almost “more Marshallese” [on Ebeye] than other places [in the Marshall Islands]. I mean that certain aspect of Marshallese culture—sharing, looking out for your neighbors—is almost [stronger] here than . . . everywhere [else]?

Jacob: Yes . . . [And] I think we celebrate more here. Not just for birthdays, but every day, just by being near one another, and being present [to one another] (Jacob interview, 4 January 2006).

According to Jacob, the centrality of relationships—and in particular family ties, as well as sharing, cooperation, and togetherness—are crucial components of Marshallese cultural, and remain especially strong on Ebeye. He notes that the

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7 "Kwaj" is a short name for Kwajalein Island, used mostly by Americans (whereas rimajej are more likely to say Kuwajleen or Kwajalein).
expression *kandik dik kōn i9kwe* says a lot about Marshallese culture and people: it means that even if you have only a tiny piece of food, you still share it with others, and you do so with love. Similar to Jacob, Rojita—a former school principal and a well-respected educator on Ebeye (and whose family is also native to Kwajalein Atoll)—explained that this value is still adhered to on an everyday basis on Ebeye in particular:

Here [on Ebeye] . . . everybody helps out. They help each other out . . . We could go next door and [say,] "Can we have some rice?" if we ran out of rice or something. And just to go and fill up . . . water. We can go easily anywhere and [say], "Can you give me some [of that thing there]?" But [on] Majuro, you cannot. If you [run] out of rice, you wait until you get rice. You cannot go to your neighbors and ask. People here have got spirit, togetherness, cooperation (Rojita interview, 30 December 2005).

The act of sharing, of taking care of those around you even when what you have is small, is a central feature of Marshallese culture—and of life and survival on Ebjä. Alfred Capelle explains that the Marshallese expression *jeplap dejjei9ok*, which translates as "people shy away from one who has too much," also means "too big a share slips through the fingers" (Bender 1969, 185; Alfred Capelle, email correspondence via Byron Bender, 18 June 2006). "The expression strongly advises against biting off more than one can chew. [Marshallese] culture . . . calls for sharing. To hoard or to take more than one’s proper share is frowned upon so much that it could also be considered taboo" (Alfred Capelle, email correspondence via Byron Bender, 18 June 2006). The expression *jake jebo/eo*, which translates literally as “pass the molded arrowroot starch,” and as an idiom means "be considerate of others" or "provide life to others," also emphasizes the importance of providing for and helping others by sharing and distributing resources in order to ensure survival (Abo et al., 1976, 83; Stone et al. 2000, 64). *Jake jebo* "is a highly desirable trait taught to [Marshallese] children from a young age" (Stone et al. 2000, 64).8 Both Jacob and Rojita indicate that, on Ebeye, *jaketo-jaketak* or sharing (literally “passing something around”) is a part of people’s everyday lives so much so

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8 As an American, I have always been amazed at the extent to which Marshallese children willingly share with one another in terms of food, treats, toys, and other things.
that those who are less fortunate often don't even have to ask for help because people just share (Jacob interview, 4 January 2006).

Perhaps it is with this in mind that Jacob is able to say with confidence that people on Ebeye have not been “Americanized” or lost their culture. The fact that many ri-Ebja speak English, play basketball, wear American-style clothing, and eat canned foods imported from the United States and elsewhere does not seem to be of great concern to him because they also continue to practice core Marshallese values such as jaketo-jaketak or sharing. In fact, he and others were surprised even at the suggestion that people on Ebeye are “Westernized.” Although I did not ask them specifically, I presume that this element of surprise derives from what may be a wholly different understanding of what it means to be "rimajel," “American,” and/or “Americanized.” Jacob notes, for example, that many ri-Ebja regard those on Majuro as highly “Americanized” or ppällele not because they dress differently or eat different foods but rather because Majuro rimajel are not “present” to one another and do not help each other out in the same ways as those on Ebeye. While many people on Majuro would likely dispute this claim, I only wish to make the point here that Jacob’s perception of what it means to be Westernized or Americanized is based more on how people treat one another than on external factors like clothing and other material culture. To this end, even the Majuro–based Marshall Islands Journal notes the “difference” between Ebeye and Majuro in this sense (Figure 37).

In addition to sharing, life on Ebeye also involves working together and helping each one another in order to get things done. Rojita remarks that ri-Ebja are particularly welcoming and kind and that, as a result, no visitor to Ebeye is considered a stranger for long. Instead they are welcomed in as family:

jouj eo mour eo [means] when you’re really kind to people, they’re kind to you. People [on Ebeye] have got spirit, togetherness, and cooperation. Even though [Ebeye] is [structurally] not a really good place to be, the spirit makes people come together and work together. Even if people are not from here, they are considered like family. [We] would... help out... that person... So I think that’s the different thing about [people on Ebeye]. We don’t look at you as a stranger... Being together, working
In this part of our conversation, Rojita brought up two Marshallese sayings. The first was *jouj eo mour eo*, which translates literally as “kindness, life,” and is short for the expression *jouj eo, mour eo, lāj eo mij eo* (“kindness brings life, hatred brings death”).

Here Rojita implies that this particular feature of *manit*—this *jouj* or kindness—has made life on Ebeye “stable.” With this, she connects Marshallese values and culture with survival itself. Rojita then immediately cites the expression *kajoor wōt wōr*. When I later asked Jacob to clarify the meaning of this expression via email, he sent me this reply, in which he also links *manit*/*jajej* with physical survival:

*Kajoor wōt wōr* literally translates, “Mighty/powerful the many/much.” Or, “The mighty are the many.” I think the phrase is the short form for this line: *Rekajoor wōt, kōn wōt aer lāh* (“They are powerful and mighty because there are many of them”). It’s similar to “Together We Stand, Divided We Fall.” On the other hand, *wōr* is sort of the punch line of the phrase . . . and is there . . . to bring out the goodness and fortune of being “available,” or sort of to say, “Yes, there are,” as opposed to the opposite (“Sorry, but we have none”). Recall that Marshall Islanders are historically atoll dwellers—they learned to live with extreme circumstances and extremely limited resources for survival . . . the open ocean was there for them to learn to be part of it and live off it. [Marshallese] thus are known to be the best navigators and deep-sea canoe builders in the world. What you and I see as this mass ocean was a highway full of street signs to them in the old days. And in order to survive in those days, everyone had to [pool] resources and manpower. The more [people], the better chances of survival . . . We need to “have” to survive. *Wōr. Wōr wōr*—“many always”—let there always be availability/many/much (Jacob email correspondence, March 16, 2006).

It could thus be argued that the value placed on sharing and working together in Marshallese society developed out of necessity, as a direct result of resource shortages and difficult living conditions. On Ebeye, where extreme circumstances continue to threaten survival, people have perhaps adhered more strictly to the very cultural values and practices that have helped sustain them over centuries. According to many of my informants, this *wōr*—this availability, if you will—is one of the essential components of

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9 According to Abo et al., *or* or *wōr* means, “be; there is; there are; have; exist,” while *wōr* means, “only; still; just; mere” (Abo et al. 1976, 231 & 284).
The Marshall Islands Journal, published in Majuro, notes the apparent “difference” between Majuro and Ebeye, noting that the sense of community, togetherness, as well as custom and respect for chiefs is much stronger on Ebeye than on Majuro and even some outer islands (Johnson 2006d, 18).
mántin májel. Jacob explains that, by coming together and working together, ri-Ebjá have effectively assured their own strength and survival as individuals, families, and communities.

In addition to this availability, this willingness to share and help out, respect for elders and chiefs also plays a crucial role in peoples’ physical survival on Ebeye—and at the same time serves as an indication of the vitality of mántin májel today. As I have indicated in previous chapters, Marshallese is a stratified society with lroojjapjap or paramount chiefs resting at the top of the social hierarchy, and kajoor or commoners (commonly referred to as rije rjeryal or “workers” today) at the bottom. As primary landowners, lroojj ultimately have the power to determine who can live on and reap the benefits from their land, and also have access to and distribute resources to others at their will. On Ebeye, this circumstance is particularly precarious, as peoples’ survival and well-being are also closely linked to Kwajalein land payments, the distribution of which is ultimately determined by the lroojj.10

This being said, it is my experience that ri-Ebjá are proud of the extent to which they have upheld particular features of Marshallese culture, not the least of which is the level of respect they hold for their chiefs. Nena associates the persistence of mánit with respect for lroojj and other traditional leaders—that is, for the protocol surrounding Marshallese rank and hierarchy—which, she emphasizes, is particularly strong on Ebeye:

10 In the Marshall Islands, the relationship between chiefs and commoners is traditionally reciprocal. Chiefs reward loyalty and hard work with kindness and distribution of resources and vice versa. Today, the prevalence of money and the monetary economy in the Marshall Islands, and especially on Ebeye, has changed the face of this distribution process. For those Ebeye residents who have land rights throughout Kwajalein Atoll, for example, hard work, loyalty, and respect for chiefs may be linked to annual Kwajalein land payments amounting to approximately $9 million, the distribution of which typically follows “flexible, traditional” arrangements “rather than Western legal prescriptions” (Julie Walsh Kroeker, personal communication, 3 July 2006). In other words, the distribution of these payments is not prescribed by law, but rather is solely at the discretion of those in positions of traditional authority. As such, after distributing their own families’ share, lroojj decide how much money to give to aap, who then decide how much to give to the other members of their own bwij or matriline, etc. In “Imagining the Marshalls: Chiefs, Tradition, and the State on the Fringes of U.S. Empire,” Walsh shows that chiefs of earlier times similarly used resource and land distributions to reward faithful subjects and to punish those who were disloyal (Walsh 2003, 126). And while the relationship between respect for lroojj and the distribution of essential resources clearly did not arise only in response to Kwajalein land payments, it is nevertheless important to note that the level of respect garnered by Kwajalein Atoll traditional leaders on Ebeye (and beyond) may be as closely linked to land payments as it is to a widespread reverence for Marshallese “custom.” See Walsh (2003) for a more in depth explanation of the complexities of social hierarchy, chiefly authority, and resource distribution in the Marshall Islands.
Monica: It seems like people [on Ebeye] are still following certain customs.

Nena: Yes. We still look for our Irooj and traditional leaders to be the heads. And whenever there’s keemem also, we always inform them. We don’t just give them an invitation. We want them to be aware [even] before we give out invitations.

Monica: Oh, you let them know first?

Nena: Ihha. (Yes.) Even the mej (death), we also inform them. Like, they don’t just hear from people. We will tell them and then . . . it’s like, elukkuun strong manit, ke? (Our manit is very strong.) [So strong] that we know we have to inform them.

Medri agrees that, on Ebeye, mabant maje is embodied not only in peoples’ closeness to one another and eagerness to work together, but also in particular manifestations of respect for traditional leadership:

Much like the other values I have mentioned, rimaje convey the importance of respecting Irooj to children beginning at a very young age using jabönkönnaan in maje (sayings or proverbs), bwebwenato (stories), and other oral traditions. Jede ak eo (“Point to the frigate bird”) is an expression that “reveals the level of respect [rimaje] hold for
The symbol for the Iroo is the ak (the frigate bird), which does not dive into the water for food as the other birds do, but rather catches its food in midair as it is dropped by others" (Stone et al. 2000, 53).

As I noted earlier in this chapter, jitdam kapeel—that is, the process of communicating history and the significance of relationships and obligations—is about much more than simply learning family lineages and genealogies (although that is certainly part of it). It is also about knowing and understanding the values, relationships, and obligations that hold Marshallese society together and thus ensure the continued survival of individuals and communities. Significantly, it is not much different for ri-Ebjā today: values like sharing, working together, and respecting and honoring the relationships and obligations that bind people together as families and as a society continue to affect peoples’ survival on Ebeye much as it has assured survival across the Marshall Islands for thousands of years. As a process of teaching and learning—of communicating history, relationships, values, and obligations—jitdam kapeel thus not only helps preserve cultural memory, but also conveys, honors, and thus celebrates the very values that are not just worth knowing, but are also essential for the survival of individuals, families, and communities on this tiny island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean (Meyer 2001, 125).

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John Anjain concludes his editorial to the Marshall Islands Journal saying he is sorry that anthropologist Carmen Petrosian-Husa left the Marshall Islands empty handed—that she did not find what she was looking for in terms of "culture" and "tradition" during her three years there:

I am sorry that [Ms. Petrosian-Husa’s] expectations of the Marshallese culture did not come to reality. I am sorry that she did not come in contact with a Marshallese characteristic with an extension of the ears, and the pierced lobes that stretch over the head. I am sorry that she did not see the BIG TATTOOING of heavy vertical bars running from armpit to armpit on every Marshallese she encountered . . . Marshallese
culture, like all other cultures, evolves. My view is that perhaps Petrovian-Husa refused to see the culture; and therefore, refused to understand it (Anjain 2006, 12).

For Anjain, visitors like Petrovian-Husa often leave the Marshall Islands empty handed because they are unable to accept people and customs without nostalgia for the past—to let go of their own preconceptions and constructions of the way things were (Neumann 1992, 120-121). He suggests that, if visitors (including so-called “experts” in the field) instead allowed themselves to arrive with open minds and a willingness to accept and respect rimajel and their customs for who and what they are today—rather trying to fit them into a particular definition of so-called “culture”—we might instead leave the islands with full hands and hearts, and perhaps even with a splinter of knowledge about Marshallese culture and people.

In this chapter and throughout the narrative “interlude” portions of this thesis I have showed that, on Ebeye in particular, survival and mantin mjef are intimately linked. Not only have fundamental aspects of Marshallese culture on Ebjä survived despite a long history of colonialism and injustice in the Marshall Islands, but mantin mjef also continues to assure the survival of the Ebjä community even today. More significantly, perhaps, I have showed that—much like rimajel across the Marshall Islands and beyond—ri-Ebjä practice, reproduce, and celebrate this tradition of culture and survival not just in formal settings such as keemem, but also in their everyday lives and in the stories they tell.

Kajoor wôt wôr.

Let there always be availability/many/much.
INTERLUDE: lien jiñap

As we stood in line together, my friend pulled a dollar bill from her purse and handed it to me.

"Ej emman wôt," I told her. "It's okay, I have one."

"Ainwôt juon," she said. "Never mind, just take this one." By now, I had learned it would be rude to refuse this kind of offer, so I took the dollar bill from my friend's hand, even though I had been hoping to share one with her this time.

As we stood in the long line, which by this time stretched all the way around the gym, the band concluded a local rendition of "Happy Birthday" and transitioned into one of my favorites:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{lien emman, } & \quad \text{This wonderful moment,} \\
\text{joj ej ilo doon.} & \quad \text{as we see each other here.} \\
A' \text{ etto ad jab} & \quad \text{It has been such a long time} \\
\text{itwale' tok eok.} & \quad \text{since you have gathered together with us.} \\
\text{Kwon ijjet tok} & \quad \text{Come and sit here.} \\
\text{ijo 'jo iturū ilo} & \quad \text{next to me,} \\
\text{mool in am mool.} & \quad \text{and bring with you all} \\
& \quad \text{that you are and} \\
& \quad \text{all the truth that you hold.\textsuperscript{2}}
\end{align*}
\]

"This song represents what I was telling you about earlier," my friend began. "It is all about 'lien emman, 'that wonderful moment when families, clans, and communities come together during parties, sometimes meeting each other for the very first time.

\textsuperscript{1} Actual spelling unknown ("itwale").

\textsuperscript{2} Thank you to Maryia deBrum and John deBrum for their help with the transcription and translation of this song.
"Iien ippâ̱n doon," she continued. “This time we spend together is precious because it gives us an opportunity to work together, to get to know each other better, and to learn about and celebrate our families, our customs, our history. Ekar ñan jabô̱ nkônnaan ej ba, ‘Aman akâ eo.’ This saying means that times like these are not just meant for remembering important events like the birth of a baby or the life of someone who has died. They also represent new beginnings, new opportunities. These moments, these iien ippâ̱n doon, are important because they represent the coming together of many generations of people, as well as their stories, their memories, and their knowledge of our history and of our ñanit. These events give everyone a chance to learn a little bit more about ñantin majeż and what it means to be rimajeż. On nights like these we ask, we listen, we see, and we do. This is how we learn. This is how we know. This is how we celebrate.”

My friend nudged me forward, as I had fallen behind a bit in line. As we approached the front of the gym, I took out my dollar. As I shook Christopher’s tiny hand, I dropped the dollar on the pile of money and gifts that had accumulated on the floor next to the family.

“Happy Birthday,” I said as I pinched his cheeks.

“Happy Birthday im jeraammon ilo raan in am,” I heard my friend say as I turned to head back to my seat. “Happy Birthday and congratulations on your special day.”
CONCLUSION: Re/presenting Ebeye: Amān akā eo

"Traditions reveal that Aman aka eo is to reap the results of yesterday’s hard work. It is also a point in time to enjoy, celebrate, and remember the establishment of a beginning. Furthermore, it is essentially the celebrated remembrance of a significant event; thus, the creation of a significant event" (Stone et al. 2000, 62).

The goal of this thesis has been to celebrate survival on Ebjā, Marshall Islands, and to begin to address the disconnect that exists between typical representations of Ebeye in the media and the personal experiences that I and so many other people have had not just “getting by” on Ebeye, but also enjoying and celebrating life there on a daily basis. I have done this by assembling and interpreting multiple overlapping representations of and reflections on Ebeye—from those grounded in so-called “slum discourse,” to some of the thoughts and reflections of the people I interviewed during my fieldwork, as well as my own creative interpretation and expression of experiences and memories I have of special events on Ebeye.

In order to assemble this story, I have looked in particular to the work of Pacific scholars like Vilsoni Hereniko, Klaus Neumann, and others who encourage integrated approaches to (hi)storytelling—approaches that purposefully deviate from the conventional linear narrative and include subjective and even fictional articulations of history and events to create “true constructions” of the past and present (Hereniko 1995, 8; Neumann 1992, 42–49). By including Marshallese oral traditions and proverbs, the reflections, opinions, and experiences of my informants, as well as my own fictionalized account of an Ebeye keemem—which, although perhaps not completely factual, does represent true expressions of peoples’ understandings of and experiences on Ebjā—I have begun to “move toward the truth of things” in terms of Ebeye’s past, present, and future (Neumann 1992, 121). Throughout this paper, I have also looked to Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Manulani Meyer in particular for inspiration in creating a story.
of a place that truly is worth knowing, meanwhile honoring and celebrating a way of life and knowing in this place my family calls home.

I recognize that by presenting Ebeye in this way, I may have glossed over some of the critical challenges that the island and ri-Ebjä have struggled with for years and continue to face today. Some might say I have created an impression of Ebeye that is overly rosy and optimistic—that is too forgiving of Ebeye’s many downfalls and defeats. As I stated in the introduction, however, those kinds of Ebeye stories are widely available in books, newspapers, and magazines, and will continue to be told by those who go to Ebeye anticipating scenes of hardship and despair. As Medri pointed out, outsiders often go to Ebeye expecting it to be dirty and, as a result, that is what they find ("Kônkê āinwôt... rej kônaan wôt bwe en etoon Ebeye, kananaik Ebeye"). As she reminded me, however, Ebeye is also a good place, where people are friendly and close to one another ("Ak Ebeye juon jikin eo enmiş. Armej repaake doon"); those who approach Ebeye with this in mind leave with neither empty hands nor empty hearts.

On this note, I end with a segment of a conversation I had with Jacob about what makes Ebeye so unique—the side of Ebjä that I have tried to capture, honor, and celebrate here.

Monica: So if there were one thing you would want people to know about Ebeye, what would it be?
Jacob: One thing about Ebeye that’s different, definitely, is that “community-ness.”
Monica: Where do you think that comes from?
Jacob: [It’s] because we’re close, we live so close to one another, we see each other every day... And you just know them.
Monica: So it’s more necessary to work together and...
Jacob: Yeah, and you just know them...
Monica: ...because you’re so [close together]?
Jacob: Sometimes I drive taxi, and people just jump in... There will be three ladies, and they just... They don’t say “Hello,” they say things like, “Wördrî<Expression of amazement]! And then? What happened?”
Monica: Oh, like they’re [just picking up the conversation where they left off]?
Jacob: It seems like, you know, you disconnect, and then you come back maybe days later.

Monica: And you just catch up where you [left off].

Jacob: Or at my coffee shop, or that store. You could just leave. You talk story, and then you just all of a sudden... you’re just gone [and the conversation is over]. And you don’t feel offended.

Monica: Because you know that you’ll...

Jacob: Yeah, and then we see [each other in the] next three days, and it’s like... It’s like one family in one huge place.

Monica: So you know even if you get up and walk away, that connection is still there, and you can just start it up again any time?

Jacob: That connection is always there, yeah. And even people in Majuro especially, they notice. When we go as a group, they always see this togetherness, this oneness, and it’s not pretentious or anything.

Monica: In the articles [about Ebeye) they usually talk about how [having] so many people in a small place... They always focus on the worst part, saying that it’s bad.

Jacob: Yeah.

Monica: But you’re kind of saying that it has benefits, too?

Jacob: You feel at home. You feel like you’re in a huge family.

Together with many other conversations and experiences, Jacob’s comments in particular have helped me see and understand that—much as Jack Tobin stated in his 1954 report—Ebeye is, indeed, “atypical.” Not so, however, because it is one of Micronesia’s most overpopulated, urbanized, and misdeveloped coral islets (although this may be true in certain respects), but rather because, in just over 60 years, people on Ebeye have taken a situation wrought with devastation and injustice—circumstances that so many others across the globe have fought wars over—and have not only survived, but have also come out celebrating. They have built a village that is not just distinctive in its appearance, standard of living, and colonial status, but that is also unique in its commitment to the spirit and resilience of fundamental components of mantin maje]. As such, ri–Ebja have built much more than just a “Marshallese village”; rather, they have constructed a vibrant Marshallese community that is resilient and determined to survive as just that. And it is by practicing (i.e., celebrating) mantin maje] that ri–Ebja continue to assure not just their own survival as human beings, but also the endurance of the
very customs and traditions that have sustained them both physically and culturally "since the beginning of time" (Anjain 2006, 12).
As I gathered up my things, I looked around and noticed that most of the people had already left. One of the baby's aunties was walking around with a container full of leftover rice, spooning it onto peoples' plates. Several other women were scattered around the room distributing salads, meat, and drinks. Some of the younger girls were already busy picking up trash and sweeping the floor, while the men took down tables and chairs, helped the band disassemble their equipment, and began loading empty containers and coolers into the back of several pick-up trucks. Baby Christopher was fast asleep in his father's arms.

"Etal wôt," my friend told me as she gathered up her things. "You go ahead. I am going to stay here for a while to help clean up. And here, you take this T-shirt. It's your size."

"Effab!" I exclaimed. "You keep it. Won't it fit someone in your family?"

"Ainwôt juon," she said. "Never mind. You just take it."

"Ekwe, kompoomool," I told her once again. "Thank you."

"My son is going to walk you home," she told me. "It's too late for you to walk by yourself."

"Are you sure I shouldn't stay and help out?" I asked.


"Ekwe, good night," I told my friend. "Im kompoomool kôn am kar jîtdame é. Thank you for teaching me so many things."

"Kôn jouj," she said with a smile. "You're welcome, with pleasure."

By the time my friend's son and I started to walk toward my house, it was almost two o'clock in the morning. The streets were quiet and only a few people were out. The heat had subsided and a cool breeze was blowing.

"Good night," a man said as we passed him on the sidewalk.
“Good night,” we responded in unison.

My friend’s son looked up at the sky and smiled. “Enaaj wöt,” he said. “It’s going to rain. Tomorrow will be another day of celebrating, as the rain fills our catchments with fresh water. Everyone will be busy cleaning up and doing their laundry.”

“Emman,” I said as we approached my front door. “That’s good. Ekwe, kommoł bwe kwar änintok eō ṇan mweo imō. Thank you for walking me home.”

“Kōn joi,” he said walking down the stairs.

As I shut the front door, I heard tiny drops of rain begin to fall one by one on the tin roof. By the time I closed my eyes to fall asleep, it was pouring.
### APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF MARSHALLESE WORDS: *Ukok in mejel*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marshallese word</th>
<th>Alternate spelling</th>
<th>English meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaet</td>
<td>Aet</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aenōnman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alap</td>
<td>Alab</td>
<td>Landowner; land manager; lineage head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amōj</td>
<td></td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baamlē</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bade</td>
<td></td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bata</td>
<td>Bada</td>
<td>Catholic priest, Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beet</td>
<td>Biit</td>
<td>Dance performed by songfest groups, usually at Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bōbū</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grandma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwebwenato</td>
<td></td>
<td>To talk story, chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amimōnō</td>
<td></td>
<td>Handicraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwîj</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lineage, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwîdâk</td>
<td>Bwîrâk</td>
<td>Child of an chiefly father and a commoner mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebûia</td>
<td>Epia, Epîa, Ebîje, Ebîje</td>
<td>Ebeye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekatak</td>
<td></td>
<td>To learn, practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ien</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time, moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iqkwe</td>
<td>Yokwe, iakwe</td>
<td>Hello, Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ippān doon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irînâ</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irooi</td>
<td>Iroj</td>
<td>Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irooijaplap</td>
<td>Iroojaplap</td>
<td>Paramount chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabōnkōnnaan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Saying, proverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaketo-jaketak</td>
<td></td>
<td>To share, distribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaki</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mat woven from dried pandanus leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jambo</td>
<td></td>
<td>To visit around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jar</td>
<td></td>
<td>To pray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Já</td>
<td>Ja</td>
<td>Windward overlay of sail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jepáta</td>
<td>Jepâta</td>
<td>Songfest group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jibâni</td>
<td>Jiban, jipan</td>
<td>To help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiñap</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Laying gifts under a Christmas tree (at a Christmas song fest)” (Abo et al. 1976, 109); also refers to the practice of lining up at a party and presenting the honoree with gifts (usually a dollar bill) while singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiñdam</td>
<td></td>
<td>To seek knowledge; to study one’s genealogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jouj</td>
<td>Jouj</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jowîi</td>
<td>Jowi</td>
<td>Clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadkad</td>
<td></td>
<td>Genealogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 This glossary has been adapted from Abo et al. (1976) and my own knowledge of the Marshallese language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kajin majel</th>
<th>The Marshallese language; to speak Marshallese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kajoor</td>
<td>Kajur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamōjo</td>
<td>A typical Marshallese party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapeel</td>
<td>Skillful; clever; craft; knack; wise; astute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Köppojak</td>
<td>To get ready, to prepare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karuwanene</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keek</td>
<td>Cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keemem</td>
<td>Kemmem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K6000iak</td>
<td>To get ready, to prepare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karuanene</td>
<td>Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keemem</td>
<td>A party; usually a child's first birthday party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimej</td>
<td>Coconut fronds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Köpparok</td>
<td>To take care of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kōkketaak</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurijmoj</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwaileen</td>
<td>Kwajalein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lerooj</td>
<td>Leroij</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lerooj</td>
<td>Female chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mājro</td>
<td>Majuro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeJaJ</td>
<td>Playground for demons; not habitable by people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mour</td>
<td>Life; to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manit</td>
<td>Custom, behavior, conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantin majel</td>
<td>Marshallese ways/traditions; Marshallese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>custom/culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mōnā</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebar</td>
<td>To honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pija</td>
<td>Picture, photograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rālik</td>
<td>Rālik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratak</td>
<td>Ra/adk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rijerbal</td>
<td>Dri-jerbal, Ri-jerbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rīmajel</td>
<td>Dri-majel, Dri-majol, Ri-majel, Ri-Majol, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rīpalle</td>
<td>Dri-belle, Ri-belle, Rupelle, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripalle</td>
<td>Foreigner; American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ut</td>
<td>Flower, floral wreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wāto</td>
<td>Weto, wato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wöḷ̊r</td>
<td>Be; there is; there are; have; exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wöt</td>
<td>Only; still; just; mere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: MARSHALLESE EXPRESSIONS AND PROVERBS: 

1. *Ae dir* (or ‘dik’)* Wóttò, Wújæ im Læ*: Alfred Capelle provided the following explanation of this expression: ‘I believe it’s ‘Ae dik Wóttò, [Wújæ im Læ.’ Ae dik means small sea currents and probably is one way for traditional Marshallese navigators of old to note their location when they observe the movements of ‘ae dik’ as their canoes passed through it. ‘Ae dik’ could be the type of current that’s observable when sailing near these atolls” (Kabua 2004, 26; Alfred Capelle, email correspondence via Byron Bender, 18 June 2006).

2. *Aman aká eo*: “Traditions reveal that Aman aka eo is to reap the results of yesterday’s hard work. It is also a point in time to enjoy, celebrate, and remember the establishment of a beginning. Furthermore, it is essentially the celebrated remembrance of a significant event; thus, the creation of a significant event” (Stone et al. 2000, 62).


4. *Ebjà, bwe en jà*: Literally ‘Approaching Ebeye, it will jibe’ (the sail will swing toward the outrigger, across the wind, a potentially dangerous situation that can cause a canoe to capsize)” (Julie Walsh Kroecker, personal communication, 25 May 2006; Lindborg 2001, 1).

5. *Edik ak ejatdik*: “Small but mighty” (Bender 1969, 228).


7. *Eor kotan arri*: “‘There is space between the fingers.’ Friends warn anyone who is so generous that he keeps nothing for himself and even starves that he should limit his generosity. In his defense, he will state that nature did not make the fingers grow together, but provided spaces, so that whatever is in the hand can fall out” (Stone et al. 2000, 64).

8. *Jake Jebol eo*: “‘Provide life to others.’ Literally the word ‘Jake’ means to provide, and ‘Jebol’ is the final medicine given to a dying person in order to stave off death. Combining and pounding small amount of all traditional medicines that are then wrapped in a bundle of coconut cloth and applied to the body make it [sic]. In order to survive in our world providing for and helping others is essential and ‘Jaake Jebol’ is a highly desirable trait taught to children from a young age” (ibid.).

9. *Jede ak eo*: “‘Point to the frigate bird’ is a saying that reveals the level of respect islanders hold for their Irooj. The symbol for the Irooj is the ak (the frigate bird), which does not dive into the water for food as the other birds but rather catches its food in mid air as it is dropped by others. Ak feathers were traditionally displayed at the top of every canoe mast. The sail of the outrigger canoe is so delicately balanced against the direction of the wind; a sailor who was not watchful could find the sail mast and all quickly falling if he allowed the wind to catch its backside. It this happened he would suffer a great disgrace if he let the feathers touch the water in the process [sic]” (ibid., 53).
10. *Jepjap dejejop:* "People shy away from one who has too much" (Bender 1969, 185). "Too big a share slips through the fingers. The expression strongly advises against biting off more than one can chew. The island culture . . . calls for sharing. To hoard or to take more than one's proper share is frowned upon so much that it could also be considered taboo" (Alfred Capelle, email correspondence via Byron Bender, 18 June 2006).

11. *Jibbajan jap depet raj:* "'The blenny can never slap the whale.' The blenny is one of the smallest and most inshore of all fishes. It can never get close to the open ocean whale much less affect it or alter its course [sic]. A commoner should never question a person of higher position because he will not accomplish anything." (Stone et al. 2000, 47).


13. *Jouj eo, mour eo, laj eo mij eo:* "'Kindness brings life, hate brings death.' From a very young age a child is taught to be kind to everyone and to always share whatever he/she has, especially food that is necessary for life. If one is kind to others, then in turn they will be kind to you. In times of need, there is always someone to turn to for help or support" (Stone et al. 2000, 67).

14. *Juumemmej:* "'Stand awake.' Marshallese use this in circumstances requiring concentration, alertness and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. Traditionally it was used to describe the circumstance of the helmsman on a long ocean voyage. The helmsman had to keep his eyes on the riggings, the stars, the wave patterns, and the weather signs while others slept in relative comfort. But the broader meaning of the term challenged those in a position of leadership to exercise their authority as seriously as though such ocean conditions prevailed" (ibid., 4).

15. *Kajoor wöt wör:* Literally "The more, the stronger" or "The mighty are the many" (May be short for *Rekajoor wöt, kön wöt aer lön:* Literally "They are powerful and mighty because there are many of them") (Rojita interview, 30 December 2005; Jacob interview, 4 January 2006).

16. *Kandikik kön ipkwe:* "Share whatever small food you have with love" (Abo et al. 1976, 113).

17. *Raan in mej ej raan in lolo mejan armej:* Literally "A day of death is a day for seeing peoples' faces." (Tim6j interview, 4 January 2006; Jacob interview, 4 January 2006).

18. *Rie ne jeim:* "To assist and help (rie) your brother (jeim) in all matters of endeavor in order to assure the success of whatever task is undertaken. In small isolated islands and atolls, brothers, families and communities must work together for the common good of all to ensure that unity and harmony can be maintained" (Stone et al. 2000, 28).
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