

WA KUK WA JIMOR:
OUTRIGGER CANOES, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND MODERN LIFE
IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

MAY 2010

By

Rachel Leah Miller

Thesis Committee:

Terence Wesley-Smith, Chairperson

David Hanlon

Julie Walsh Kroeker

Keywords: Marshall Islands, canoe, social change, culture change, outrigger

Wa Kuk Wa Jijor:

Outrigger Canoes, Social Change, and Modern Life in the Marshall Islands

Copyright © 2010

By

RACHEL LEAH MILLER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: NAAN IN KAMMOLOL

This thesis project has been a labor of love (and sometimes a labor of hate), which could not have been completed without the guidance and support of almost too many people to name. I want to begin these words of thanks in typical Marshallese fashion: “*Jen kammooolol Anij kōn iien in ippān doon* – Let us give thanks to God for this time together.” These words may not mean exactly the same thing to me that they do to others, but I value the spirit of them nonetheless. I have been so fortunate to have spent three years of my life living in the Marshall Islands, and two more years thinking about, studying, and writing on the Marshalls. I still think of the Marshall Islands as home in many ways, and when people ask me what it is I love so much about the place, my answer is always the same: the people. The constant, unwavering love and kindness showed me by so many Marshallese people have made me the person I am today, and I am forever indebted to them for it.

First of all, I want to thank my committee members: David Hanlon, Julie Walsh Kroeker, and especially Terence Wesley-Smith, my committee chair, for the time and energy they spent reading my chapters, answering my emails, providing me with such wonderful comments, and supporting my work throughout the entire torturous process. Terence also deserves special thanks for showing me the amazing potential of this thesis topic, long ago when I was unable to see that potential myself. Best committee ever!

I would also like to thank Byron Bender for guiding me through my Marshallese study during my two years at UH, and for always being available to try to answer my random questions about the intricacies of Marshallese language. This thesis is truly founded upon my study of Marshallese, so Byron, your help has been invaluable.

A gigantic thank you is in order for all my friends and family who have listened to me complain and worry about this thesis for the past year. Mom and Dad, thank you for pushing me to complete this project when I didn't think I could, and for always telling me my chapters were great, even when they weren't. To my wonderful wonderful friends (you know who you are), also known as "my daily source of inspiration": thank you for being my own personal cheering squad. And to all my friends and family, thank you for putting up with my whining, complaining, doubting, and for never losing patience with me. I don't know where you found the strength to stick by me, but I am so thankful that you did. I couldn't have done it without you.

To the entire WAM team, especially Alson Kelen and Jessica Brandt, thank you for helping me throughout this entire thesis process – from answering my constant questions, to mailing me photo cd's, to always making time for me no matter what else was going on. This project is nothing if not a testament to the power of the WAM program to change lives. I hope this thesis demonstrates even further the importance of the work that you do. I am truly honored to have been a part of the WAM family for two amazing years.

This thesis could not have come into being without the interviews upon which it is based. Ejnar Aerōk, Chuji Chutaro, Tiem Clement, Alson Kelen, Mentil Laik, Newton Lajuon, Josepha Maddison, and the eighteen College of the Marshall Islands students: *juon kaṇṇoolol eḷap* to all of you for taking time out of your busy lives to talk to me about canoes. Your voices are the foundation upon which this thesis is built, and the glue that holds it together. I have tried my best to convey your thoughts and emotions as

accurately as possible throughout this thesis. If I have made any mistakes, please accept my sincere apologies.

To all those who I have not listed here by name: You know who you are, and you know how thankful I am for everything you do. I couldn't have done it without you, and this thesis would be a far poorer work without your help and support. This project truly has been a group effort, and I do not want to spend pages and pages here thanking all of you individually; instead, if I have done my job well, you will see yourself within the pages of the thesis itself, and know how invaluable your guidance has been.

Im āliktata ak jab diktata, n̄an aolep ri-Namdrik ro: kom eṇṇool tata kōn ami kar karuwaineneik eō n̄an āneo āneemi, kōjparok eō aolep iien, im jipaṇ eō ilo bwijin wāween ko. Mama im Baba im aolep ro jeiū im jatū, ij kaṇṇoolol kom kōn ami kar karuwaneneik eō n̄an ṇiweo iṇōmi, im iḡkwe eō einwōt n̄a moolin nukūmi. Kom eṇṇool tata kōn ami kar katakin eō Kajin Ṁajeḷ, Mantin Ṁajeḷ, im aurōkin baamle eo. Inaaj iḡkwe kom toon wōt aō mour.

ABSTRACT

In the Marshall Islands, the outrigger canoe has been at the heart of cultural life as well as practical survival for millennia. This thesis is an exploration of the state and shape of the canoe tradition for Marshallese people today, how and why it has changed over time, and how it articulates with broader Marshallese culture and modern way of life. The canoe is analyzed as a means of understanding broader issues of social change – the nature of modern social change; contemporary issues of identity; and culture change, loss, and revival. Using a methodology founded upon the centrality of Marshallese voices, both directly through interviews as well indirectly through proverbs, legends, and language, a new understanding of the canoe is explored as a way forward into a future shaped according to the terms and values of Marshallese people themselves: the canoe as a potential vehicle for purpose, identity, and pride.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements: Naan in Kam̄oolol.....	iii
Abstract.....	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
Notes on the Use of Marshallese Language.....	x
Preface.....	xii
Introduction: Tuwaak Bwe Eliṃaajṃoṃo.....	1
Jinoin Bwebwenato In – The Beginning of This Story.....	1
The Purpose of the Project.....	4
Statement of Significance.....	5
Methodology.....	14
A Note on Diaspora.....	20
Personal Experience and Positionality.....	22
Thesis Outline.....	26
Chapter One: Kwōtuḷom, Tuur Lṃmeto Ak Buruōn Armej Kwōban.....	31
Bwebwenato eo – The Story.....	31
Pedped eo – The Foundation.....	33
Chapter Two: Wa Kuk, Wa Jiṃor.....	54
Bwebwenato eo – The Story.....	54
Jitdaṃ Kapeel – An Introduction to the Marshallese Canoe.....	57
The Canoe in Bwebwenato, Part I - In the Beginning.....	58
The Canoe in Bwebwenato, Part II – The Canoe and the Sail.....	62
The Canoe in Kajin Ṃajeḷ.....	66
The Canoe in Jabōnkōnnaan.....	70
Kōñe Jubar.....	74
Ukot Bōkā.....	76
Chapter Three: Joiḷ eo Mour eo, Lāj eo Mej eo.....	79
Bwebwenato eo – The Story.....	79
Rethinking the Jabōnkōnnaan.....	82
A Brief Review of a History of Social Change in the Marshalls.....	85

The Development of a Democratic Mindset.....	91
Change and the Canoe.....	95
The Disparity and the Paradox of the Modern Canoe.....	102
Chapter Four: Waan Kōjipañ Kōj, Waan Kōkkure Kōj.....	106
Bwebwenato eo – The Story.....	106
“Canoe to Destroy Us”.....	109
The Paradox of Negative Understanding.....	112
The Paradox of Loss.....	116
Methods of Understanding the Paradox of Loss.....	121
Ukot Bōkā, Part II.....	125
Conclusion: Kwōjab Inojeiklōk Jen Wa Kein, Bwe Iaļan Mour Ko Kein.....	130
Jemlōkin Bwebwenato In – The Ending of This Story.....	130
Kōñe Jubar, Again.....	135
The Canoe Today.....	139
An Ending and a Beginning.....	141
Appendix A: Jabōnkōnnaan Table & Information.....	144
Appendix B: Thesis Research Guided Conversation Topics.....	150
Glossary of Marshallese Words: Ukok in Majeļ.....	152
Bibliography.....	154

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Oceania.....	6
Figure 2: Map of the Marshall Islands.....	7
Figure 3: Sketch of Marshallese canoes from Franz Hernalshausen's 1875-1880 Südsee-Erinnerungen voyage through Micronesia.....	10
Figure 4: The author with the Waan Aelōñ in Majel team.....	20
Figure 5: Satellite photo of Naṃdrik atoll.....	23
Figure 6: Map of Naṃdrik atoll.....	23
Figure 7: Comparison of characteristics of three atolls.....	25
Figure 8: Men building canoes together on Kwajalein atoll.....	36
Figure 9: Men sailing a canoe in Majuro lagoon.....	47
Figure 10: Preparing for a modern-day reenactment of the Jebrō race.....	64
Figure 11: Diagram of names of parts of canoe.....	68
Figure 12: Lashing the hull of a canoe in progress.....	71
Figure 13: Students at a mission school on Likiep atoll.....	88
Figure 14: <i>Walap</i> -style voyaging canoe with traditional mat sail.....	95
Figure 15: Sailing canoe with urban Kwajalein atoll in the background.....	98
Figure 16: Canoes deteriorating on an outer island, modern day.....	100
Figure 17: Seal of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.....	104
Figure 18: Young WAM canoebuilders sail the canoe they built as representatives of the Marshall Islands at the 2005 Festival of Canoes on Maui.....	118
Figure 19: Two photos of young women learning to build canoes with the WAM Program.....	123
Figure 20: The author's host family on Naṃdrik.....	134
Figure 21: Canoes in the 2001 Lutok Kōbban Alele race in Majuro lagoon.....	136
Figure 22: The view through the lens of the Marshallese canoe.....	143

NOTES ON THE USE OF MARSHALLESE LANGUAGE

The nature of my thesis project is such that I use a significant amount of Marshallese language throughout the thesis. As anyone who has studied the language will know, writing in Marshallese can be difficult because neither the alphabet nor the spelling system is fully standardized. I chose to use the “new” Marshallese alphabet as much as possible, which is exemplified in Abo et. al.’s *Marshallese English Dictionary* (1976) and *Marshallese Online Dictionary* (2009), as opposed to the “old” alphabet, which was introduced by the missionaries. The new alphabet is becoming increasingly common in everyday use, especially in school curricula and among children and young adults. I use it here because it is the language in which I learned to speak, read, and write Marshallese; I feel it is a much more accurate method of communicating the unique sounds of the Marshallese language; and I want to support the process of widespread adoption of this standard alphabet. I have done my best to follow the spellings set out in the dictionaries, but inevitably there will be errors in my use of the language. I take full responsibility for any and all errors in Marshallese spelling and language use in this thesis.

In the text of this thesis, Marshallese words are typed in a special font called TimesGKM, which can create all of the letters of the new alphabet. It looks slightly different from the Times New Roman in which the bulk of the thesis is typed, but it allows for greater accuracy in the spelling of Marshallese words. The only exception to the use of TimesGKM for Marshallese words is in the title of the thesis on the title page, which is typed solely in Times New Roman for accuracy in publication. Most Marshallese words in the text are typed in italics, with the exception of chapter and

section titles, proper nouns, and direct quotes from outside sources. The first time I use a Marshallese word it is followed by the English translation in parentheses; however when I use the word subsequently the English translation does not appear. Most Marshallese words can also be found in the Glossary of Marshallese Words: Ukok in Majeļ, or in Appendix A: Jabōnkōnnaan Table if the word is part of a longer phrase.

It has been a joy to study the Marshallese language as part of this thesis project. I feel extremely honored that I have had the opportunity to both learn the language while I was living in the Marshall Islands, as well as to continue to study it in this academic setting. I want to extend a sincere *koṇṇool tata* to everyone who has supported me in this endeavor. For more information about the Marshallese language, the following works have been extremely helpful for me: Abo et. al.'s *Marshallese English Dictionary* (1976) and *Marshallese Online Dictionary* (2009), Peter Rudiak-Gould's *WorldTeach Marshallese Language Manual* (2004), and Byron Bender's *Spoken Marshallese* (1969).

PREFACE

their boats are much better built than their houses, as if the life on the water meant much more to them than the life on the land.

- Kramer 1906, 66

Everything is different now...Language has changed, culture has changed, people have changed...Living has changed, way of living...everything has changed.
The ocean is still the same.

- Edna Peter Latak in Walsh 1995, 81

INTRODUCTION: TUWAAK BWE ELIMAAJNONO – GO INTO THE WATER, FOR THE SEAS ARE CHOPPY¹

Jinoi Bwebwenato In – The Beginning of This Story

We had been out on the lagoon all day. I was hot, sunburned, and tired; the edge of the hull had created what felt like a permanent bruise on my backside; but most of all, I was indescribably happy. It had started out as a simple fishing trip. “*Jen jambo Jadede in* – Let’s go out this Saturday,” my younger brothers and their friends had said to me. “*Kōmnaaj anan, im kwōmaroñ ekkatak eōnod in Majeļ* – We’ll paddle the canoe, and you can learn how to fish the Marshallese way.” And sure enough, when Saturday morning came around the boys were dismembering hermit crabs to use as bait, while I slathered sunscreen on myself. We paddled out, stopping for a few loops around a coral head before we reached the low reef marking the boundary between the “blue water” and the “black water” – the section of the lagoon that was so deep, the water descended seemingly forever into black nothingness. As we neared the reef our eyes were drawn to a huge creature swimming below us. It had the high fin and barrel chest of a large shark, but its body was spotted like brown fish scales. “*Pako ke ta men en* – Is that a shark or what?” the boys asked each other. I didn’t discover until a year later, while watching Animal Planet, that we had seen a tiger shark. We wiled away the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, hauling up many colorful fish from the depths of the black water, the boys pulling in the hand lines faster than the smaller reef sharks could chase the rapidly ascending fish. I became increasingly sunburned, and increasingly uncomfortable perched on the edge of the narrow hull of the canoe.

¹ See Appendix A for more information on this and all other Marshallese proverbs.

Finally, after running out of hermit crab parts with which to bait our hooks, we decided to call it a day. Although I had had a wonderful time learning to fish Marshallese-style, I was tired and sore and ready to be back on land. My brother's friend, one of my seventh-grade students, stood on the back of the hull and started to paddle us toward shore. About halfway back, however, we stopped abruptly. "*Jen r̄ollik!* – Let's flip!" my younger brother cried, and in an instant they were all perched on the edge of the hull or on top of the outrigger complex, waiting their turn to fling themselves into the water. "*Baj kwe!* – Your turn!" one boy called to me, after they had all completed their acrobatics and were floating in the water. Unsteadily, I climbed up onto the outrigger platform, secured my skirt tightly around my waist, and then launched into what I felt was a pretty good backflip. The boys exploded into gleeful laughter while I floated back to the canoe, surreptitiously checking to make sure my skirt was still on. "*Warrar, ripālle relukkuun jelā r̄ollik!* – Wow, white people really know how to flip!" the youngest boy exclaimed, as he climbed back onto the canoe and prepared for another flying leap.

We flipped and chased each other around the canoe, swimming until we were waterlogged and exhausted. Just as we prepared to climb aboard again, "*Kwōj ke tōmak n̄a ijelā turōn?* – Do you believe I'm good at diving?" one of the older boys asked. He beckoned us back into the water, and then without waiting for an answer he sucked in a huge breath of air and dove down, getting smaller and smaller below us until finally he disappeared into the turquoise depths. We bobbed around the canoe for a number of minutes, until, just when I was beginning to dread the increasing possibility that I would have to tell my host parents that one of the boys had drowned while showing off to me, he burst above the surface, gasping for breath with a triumphant grin on his face. He

pumped his fist into the air – in his hand was a clump of waterlogged sand, dredged from the bottom of the lagoon. All the boys laughed and high-fived each other, and suddenly no one wanted to go back just yet. We bobbed in the shade beneath the outrigger platform, the wooden slats throwing a latticework of shadow and golden sunlight onto the boys' faces. My youngest brother began telling a wildly improbable story about how he had encountered a demon woman one day in the jungle. He radiated such pride and excitement that the rest of us couldn't help but grin and nod along as the story continued to unfold. Just before he could finish the story, one of the older boys slipped silently beneath the surface of the water and tweaked one of his toes. He shrieked in fright, glaring angrily around him for the culprit, but when we dissolved into laughter he couldn't help but forget his embarrassment and join in our merriment.

It was almost sunset by the time we finally arrived back at the beach. I was uncomfortable and exhausted; my muscles were aching from holding on to the narrow hull of the canoe; but most of all, I was happier than I had been in a long time. That fishing trip was the most fun I had had since I arrived on Namdrik over a month before. For the first time, I felt like a part of something, like I actually mattered to these wonderful children who I was trying so desperately to get to know. The day was particularly special because it was so different from my normal pre-Marshall Islands life; never before had I spent hours on a narrow canoe surrounded by gleefully happy young boys, most of whom were barely big enough to lift a paddle. For that one day, the canoe was the center of our own personal universe – it belonged only to us, it enabled a cross-cultural adventure that was a new experience for everyone, and it brought us together as we crossed the boundary from strangers into friends. That was the first time I truly felt

the strength, the meaning, and the power that the canoe embodies in Marshallese life. *Wa kuk, wa jimor*.²

The Purpose of the Project

This thesis is an exploration of the state and shape of the Marshallese canoe tradition for Marshallese people today, how and why it has changed over time, and how it articulates with broader Marshallese culture and modern way of life.³ My years living in the Marshall Islands were filled with canoes, in a number of different circumstances, and I came to understand the canoe as an extremely meaningful and important aspect of Marshallese life. In this thesis I explore how Marshallese people themselves feel about their canoes and why. More specifically, I analyze the tradition of the canoe as a means of understanding broader issues of social change – the nature of modern social change; contemporary issues of identity; and culture change, loss, and revival. I argue that the rapid change of modern Marshallese culture and society is directly linked to changes in the status, practice, and meaning of the canoe in Marshallese life. I further assert that the changes in the canoe tradition are caused by as well as the cause of some of the current social issues in modern Marshallese life – that changes concerning the canoe are

² See the Appendix A for a full explanation of this and all other Marshallese proverbs and sayings.

³ In this thesis I use the terms such as “Marshallese culture,” “Marshallese life,” “Marshallese worldview,” “Marshallese society,” and “Marshallese identity” frequently. I want to clarify here that although I recognize that these terms seem broad and homogenizing in their scope, I do not use them to imply that the people who now refer to themselves as Marshallese are in any way homogeneous in nature or throughout history. There are of course many versions of what I refer to as Marshallese culture or life, which have changed across time and vary from person to person and from island to island. I use these terms to refer to common values, practices, and ways of understanding the self and the world, but it is important to recognize that there is no such thing as one single “Marshallese culture” or “Marshallese identity.” In using these broad terms, I am primarily referring to situationally-specific issues and circumstances related to the canoe, although for the sake of space I do not explicitly make this clarification every time I use one of the terms. I do examine many Marshallese proverbs in an effort to connect with specific instances or values that are relevant to this study, instead of focusing on only the problematic idea of a single monolithic Marshallese culture or identity. However, often times the use of the broad term is unavoidable, in which case I ask that the reader keep this important caveat in mind.

cyclically linked to myriad other social changes. Finally, I explore a new understanding of the canoe tradition as a way forward into a future shaped according to the terms and values of Marshallese people themselves: the canoe as a potential vehicle for purpose, identity, and pride. This new understanding can reinforce an innovative, creative path of positive, locally-based social change, unity, and empowerment. Some key research questions structuring this project are: what does the canoe tradition mean to Marshallese people today? How has this meaning changed throughout the post-contact past, and why? Is the canoe connected with other aspects of modern Marshallese life? Is there room for the tradition of the canoe in a rapidly changing Marshallese world? What do Marshallese people identify as the role of the canoe in the future?

Statement of Significance

The canoe has been described almost without exception as one of the most important aspects of Marshallese (and Pacific) culture and life. The earliest and most significant of these descriptions are Marshallese *jabōnkōnnaan* (proverbs), *bwebwenato* and *inoñ* (stories and legends), and *Kajin Majeļ* (Marshallese language). The creation of the first canoe and then the first sail is described in some of the most important Marshallese *bwebwenato*, and the canoe is present in some fashion in countless other legends and stories (Knight 1999, McArthur 1995, Kowata et. al. 1999, Stone et. al. 2000, Tobin 2002). There are also a significant number of *jabōnkōnnaan* relating to the canoe and activities associated with the canoe such as sailing, fishing, and food-gathering (Stone et. al. 2000). Even the names of the many parts of the canoe are highly symbolic of core Marshallese practices and values. I will discuss these legends, proverbs, and terms in more detail later in the thesis.

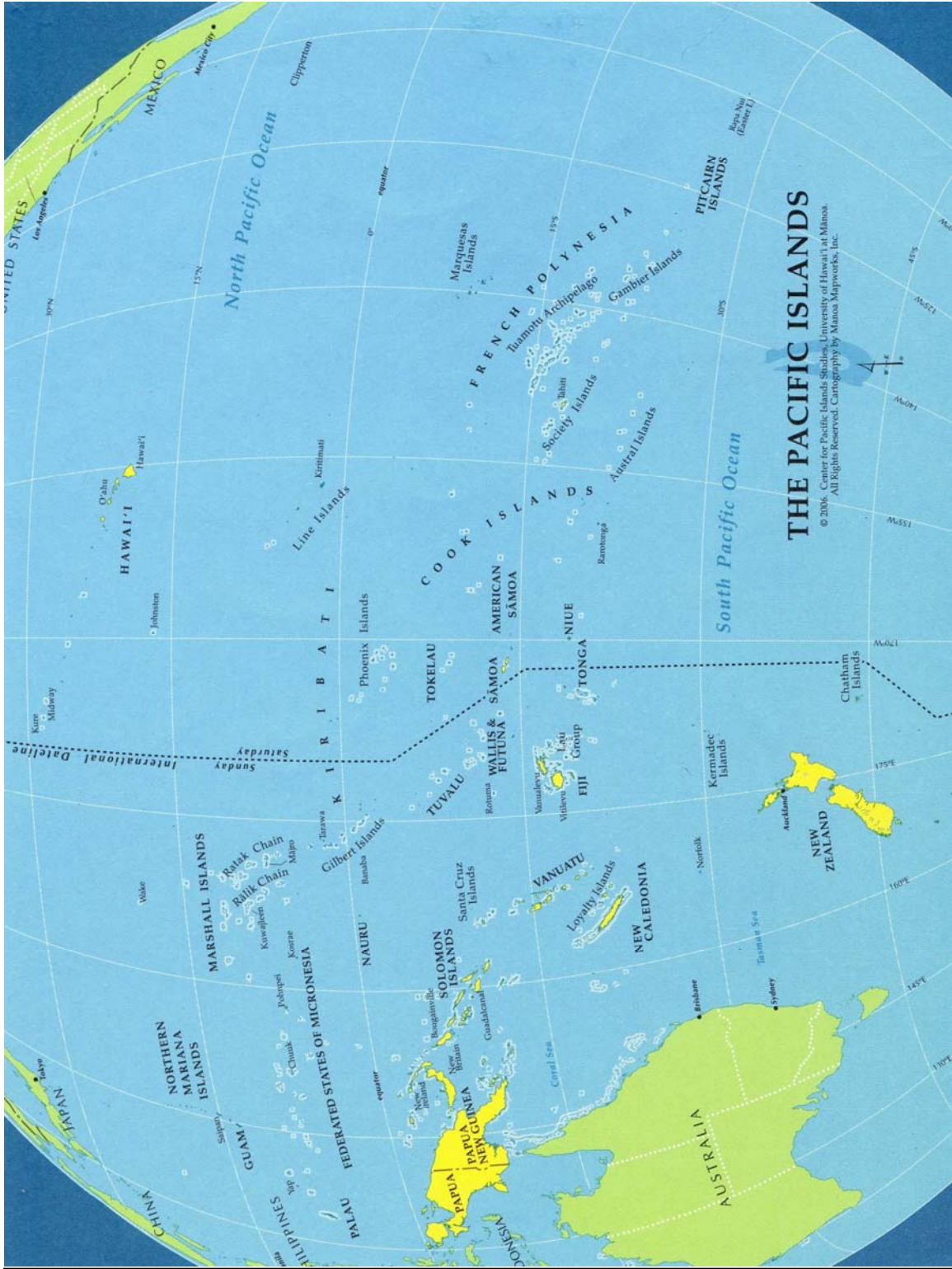


Figure 1: Map of Oceania (note the Marshall Islands at the bottom left)
 University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Center for Pacific Islands Studies (used with permission)



Figure 2: Map of the Marshall Islands
 Marshall Islands Visitors Authority, <http://www.visitmarshallislands.com/marshallislands.htm>,
 accessed 6 November 2009

The title of my thesis comes from one of the most well-known *jabōnkōnnaan*, found in the story called “Jinoiŋ ɭal In/The Beginning of this World” that describes the creation of the first canoe, as well as the creation of many other aspects of the

Marshallese world (Tobin 2002).⁴ According to the *bwebwenato*, many men tried to build the canoe and were unsuccessful; finally one man succeeded by using the discarded pieces of the previous failed canoes. All the other men felt great anger and jealousy at his success and separated from each other, which explains the origin of the *jowi* (matriclans) in Marshallese society. However, the first woman explained that it is bad to split up what had originally been together, and in actuality the canoe belongs to everyone because it was made from the efforts of everyone's past attempts. In her speech to reunite the men she says: "*Wa kuk, wa jimor. Waan kōjipañ kōj, waan kōkkure kōj. Waan jokkwier*" (paraphrasing Tobin 2002) – "Canoe to bring us together, canoe belonging to everyone. Canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us. Canoe to give meaning to our lives."⁵ She identifies the canoe as truly the heart and soul of Marshallese life. It is what will keep people together, what will allow continued existence, what will structure meaningful life, and if not utilized properly what may ultimately devastate Marshallese society. This *jabōnkōnnaan* is obviously highly charged with significance, and some parts of it are still well known today.

It is obvious from the sheer number of these important expressions of Marshallese culture, as well as the strong messages they convey regarding the canoe, that the canoe occupied, and still occupies in some way, a key position within the Marshallese

⁴ There is actually another, more well-known story describing the first canoe that is different from this version. See Kowata et. al. 1999 for the other version. I discuss the implications of the existence of multiple versions of this origin story in Chapter 2: Wa Kuk, Wa Jimor.

⁵ This translation is based on a compilation of Stone et al. 2000, Tobin 2002, and my own personal translation. In this thesis, I rely primarily on my own translations of Marshallese words and interviews I conducted in Marshallese. Although I am of course not a native Marshallese-language speaker, I learned the language in an immersion environment, and I am quite confident in my language abilities. Nevertheless, I always verify my translations with a native speaker if possible, and if not at least with the *Marshallese-Online Dictionary* (Abo et. al. 2009). The reality is that, like the existence of multiple versions of stories and legends, translation is an innately subjective practice, affected by the individual experiences of the translator as well as the language patterns and life history of the speaker or writer being translated. I will keep these issues in mind as I conduct the Marshallese translation required by this thesis.

worldview and the structure of Marshallese society. All of these expressions of values and right way of life have been evolving for millennia, as Marshallese culture has continued to adapt and transform since initial habitation of the atolls. The form the *jabōnkōnnaan* have taken today, and the prevalence of the canoe in many of them, is a clear sign of the importance of the canoe tradition even today in Marshallese life. I will explore these indigenous methods of expression in much greater detail throughout this thesis.

Since the time of the earliest European explorers, the canoe has been almost a universal in descriptions of Marshallese culture and life. One example is Hiram Paulding, First Lieutenant on the *Dolphin* during its search for mutineers from the whale ship *Globe* in 1825-6. Paulding's search brought him to Mili Atoll, known to him as the Mulgrave Islands, in the extreme southern part of the Ratak (Sunrise) Chain of what is now the Marshall Islands. His description of the canoes he sees there is glowing with admiration:

Their canoes display the greatest ingenuity, and I have no doubt, that in a civilized country, they would be ranked among the rarest specimens of human industry, unassisted but by the rudest of implements. The model is most singular, and differs from all that I have ever seen in use, either in the European or American world. Its construction is so remarkable, and in many respects inconvenient, that it seems improbable the model should have had its origin in any other cause than the want of suitable timber for a more perfect structure. (Paulding 1831, 177-8)

Practically every other visitor to the Marshalls since Paulding has commented on some aspect of the Marshallese canoe tradition. Almost all foreign travelers and later scholars focus on the same points: the advanced structure of the canoe, the rapid speed when sailing, and the expert navigational skills of Marshallese sailors (e.g., Alessio 1991,

Browning 1973, Finch 1893, Kotzebue 1821, Kramer 1906, Kramer 1938, Kurze 1887, Paulding 1831).



Figure 3: Sketch of Marshallese canoes from Franz Hernsheim's 1875-1880 *Südsee-Erinnerungen* voyage through Micronesia.
Image credit <http://www.schoefert.de/rka/inhalt/hernsheim/hernsheim.htm>, accessed 27 April 2010

A smaller number of these foreign writers have described the canoe as equally important, but instead symbolizing loss, signifying something lacking from modern Marshallese life. One example of this perspective is found in this quote from Nakano's *Broken Canoe*: "I am quite disgusted with the people of Bikini and Enewetok who allow their compensation money to sit in Hawaiian banks while just about everyone on Majuro is looking for backing for some scheme or another, harebrained or otherwise...What will they do with this money, these people who are forgetting how to build canoes?" (Nakano

1983, 140). I will explore this paradox of negative understanding regarding the canoe in more detail later in Chapter Four. Here, it is only necessary to note that while some foreigners do not see the canoe as vibrant and positive, they all focus on the canoe in some way, demonstrating its continued importance in foreign eyes as part of Marshallese identity.

Despite this lengthy and complex history of both indigenous and foreign recognition of the centrality of the canoe within Marshallese life, the canoe tradition was almost lost in the recent past, and even today canoes are still in widespread use in daily life on only two atolls – Nam̄drik and Ailuk. The vast majority of youth in the Marshalls cannot build or sail canoes, and most people today use motorboats instead of canoes for their food-gathering and transportation needs (personal observation). However, as the canoe has declined as a practical tool for everyday life in the Marshalls (as well as throughout the Pacific), simultaneously the canoe has increased in importance as a symbol of local identity (Genz 2008, also see Finney 2004). I call this phenomenon the ‘paradox of loss.’ The paradox is illustrated in the following quote from Cent Langdrik, a Marshallese man: “How do you know where you are going when you are sailing your canoe in a storm, and you can’t see in front of you? You look behind you” (quoted in Walsh 1995, ii). Langidrik expresses a vastly different understanding of the Marshallese world than Nakano, an understanding that is echoed in many of the Marshallese *jabōnkōnnaan* I will look at in more detail throughout this thesis. In his statement the canoe is understood to be at the center of life, not absent from it. He also makes a startlingly different kind of connection than that often made by foreigners between culture loss and canoes: he simultaneously links the canoe to present-day life, to a living

past, and to a future shaped by the history, ideas, and agency of Marshallese people themselves.

Embodied in this idea is the reality of the relationship between social change and the canoe tradition in the Marshalls, and in the Pacific more generally: while the canoe has declined significantly as an important sociocultural practice and as a practical aspect of modern life, it has simultaneously transformed into a powerful symbol for Marshallese (and Pacific) identity and meaning (Carucci 1995, Finney 2004, Genz 2008, Walsh Kroeker personal communication). Genz writes that, “A decline in voyaging throughout Oceania has threatened the survival of this specialized knowledge while maintaining its power and prestige. In fact, the voyaging canoe is now the greatest symbol of cultural revitalization and recovery in Oceania” (Genz 2008, 1). Although Genz is discussing voyaging in terms of indigenous navigation specifically, this conclusion is equally accurate in describing the canoe tradition as well (see Finney 2004). Except for Carucci’s work on the Enewetak canoe tradition (Carucci 1995), the specifics of this paradox of simultaneous practical decline and symbolic growth of the canoe are not well documented in regard to the Marshalls. In this thesis I hope to help clarify Marshallese understandings of this living process of social and cultural transformation.

As reflected in the paradox of loss I describe above, I believe the tradition of the canoe presents the possibility of a more positive future for the Marshall Islands, one based on Marshallese practices and values. This view is echoed by many of the people I interviewed, as I will explore in more detail in the rest of this thesis. Practically, the canoe offers a local solution to pan-Micronesian issues related to western modernity, capitalism, and materialism, expressed in such problems as fuel shortages and the rising

cost of imported goods (Carucci 1995, 1997b; Lieber 1994; Marshall 2004). Although Marshallese people have struggled with self-sufficiency since they first settled the remote atolls and coral islands of what is now the Marshall Islands, a shift in lifestyle occurred under foreign colonialism making it more difficult for the newly-created political entities within Micronesia⁶ to become self-sufficient in a global, industrialized world. The forces of capitalism and development in particular caused this shift toward a more western (and so far unsustainable) lifestyle. The canoe offers a proven method of transportation and subsistence that does not rely on expensive and scarce imported fuel, in order to provide people with reliable transportation, and healthy, affordable local food. Socially as well, many people have identified in the canoe unique information rooted in the Marshallese past and relevant to a Marshallese and global future, that could potentially provide solutions to the complex social problems plaguing modern Marshallese society (Alessio 1991, Browning 1973, Genz 2008, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004; see also Diaz 1997, Finney 2004).

Rarely, however, has the canoe tradition⁷ been recognized by those in modern positions of influence as a vital aspect of Marshallese values and lifestyle. As the backbone of Marshallese culture, the tradition of the canoe is connected to practically every aspect of traditional Marshallese life (Kelen 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004).

How and why the canoe has changed over time is of crucial importance to a more general

⁶ For simplicity's sake, I use the common tripartite categorization of the Pacific into three regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. I do not necessarily believe that these divisions always have significant cultural or even historical merit, but as they are regularly used within academic discourse, I too employ them here.

⁷ I use the term "canoe tradition" to describe the canoe in its totality – including the sphere of knowledge and values surrounding the canoe, the physical acts of canoebuilding and sailing, the transmission of the canoe through the generations, etc. I do not use the word "tradition" in order to describe the canoe as "traditional" as opposed to "modern," or to link the canoe with any other aspect of western academic discourse. It is simply the best term I could find to encompass both the canoe itself and the vast body of knowledge and practice associated with it.

understanding of the nature of cultural life and social change in the Marshalls, as well as the rise of the social problems now so common throughout the Pacific. Despite this linkage, however, the recent past has been characterized almost solely by foreign development plans and the injection of huge sums of money directly into the Marshall Islands government, in an effort to combat the modern social ills now present in Marshallese society due to a history of rapid social change under colonialism. This method has had little or no short- or long-term positive effects for Marshallese people or society as a whole (see Gegeo 1994, Hou 1998). These methods of addressing presumed problems are ineffective and ignore the deeper cultural and social practices, such as the tradition of the canoe, that are so closely linked with the Marshallese beliefs and values that are still some of the foundations of modern life.

Methodology

The form of this thesis project first arose out of classroom discussions about the need to ‘decolonize’ scholarly research in the Pacific and in the field of Pacific Islands Studies more generally. The overall history of westerners in the Pacific has been riddled with relationships of inequality and exploitation. Foreigners conducting “research” on indigenous peoples has come to be a common and often unwelcome experience for many Islanders (see Genz 2008, Smith 1999). In order to rectify this historically exploitative relationship, many scholars argue that the answer is not to stop doing research, but to conduct that research in a more appropriate manner, including but certainly not limited to: conducted respectfully, for a greater locally-determined purpose, and not removed from the community, as often has been the case in the past (Smith 1999, Tengan 2005, Thaman 2003). Smith writes that these decolonized methods “tend to approach cultural

protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology” (Smith 1999, 15), and asserts the importance of “disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it” (Smith 1999, 15).

Specific to the Marshall Islands, Walsh has described how, similar to the political relationship between the US and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), anthropological research in the Marshalls has typically been self-serving and hypocritical (2001b). Anthropologists have required total openness and cooperation from their Marshallese participants, but have been unwilling to be honest themselves, or to reciprocate the time and effort received from their participants by volunteering in the local community or by providing some other kind of support in return. While this history does not delegitimize foreign research in the Marshalls, she argues, it does necessitate a paradigm shift toward methods similar to those developed by Smith: research must be beneficial, relevant, and meaningful for the local community; fieldwork must be made and displayed as collaborative and reciprocal; final results must be “accessible and meaningful to local communities” (Walsh 2001b, 8), providing opportunity for local comment and criticism; and most of all the research process must be publically recognized as collaborative and interactive, and open about researcher and institutional dependence upon those studied.

As I became more familiar with both the history of western research in the Pacific and the more inclusive, locally-relevant methodologies developed in order to combat that history, I became increasingly disenchanted with the traditional, hypothesis-driven research style that is still commonly used in the social sciences and humanities. Even if the research topic is one that is important to those being researched, it is still often

understood as an artificial, overly scientific way of learning about other people's thoughts and lives.

I know from personal experience that many people in the Marshall Islands care deeply about the canoe tradition – a crucial aspect of their unique culture and identity – and that they have complex understandings of its role in their own lives. Therefore, instead of starting with my own assumptions about and perspectives on the canoe and then searching for data to support them, I started with a question: what is the role of the canoe in modern Marshallese life, and how does that role articulate with the forces of social change Marshall Islanders are experiencing? This thesis is an exploration of that question, privileging the responses of Marshallese people as they explore their own lives. Instead of expounding yet another method for dealing with the country's overwhelming social problems like most foreign researchers do, in this thesis I try to present a different understanding of modern life and the challenges and pressures Marshallese people constantly experience. I attempt to provide a medium through which Marshallese people can express their own feelings and opinions about their own lives, specifically in relation to the tradition of the canoe, in order to change or improve things in ways that they believe are appropriate. Through this thesis I put forward a new perspective on the experiences of a marginalized people based on the voices of Marshallese people themselves. It is my hope that this effort will provide an example of the need for and relevance of local ideas (see Nabobo-Baba 2006) and the potential for positive social change based on local practices and values.

Therefore in order to give back to those Marshallese and others who share their thoughts and beliefs with me, and also to reach an audience outside of only the scholarly

community, I conducted this project “in such a way as to promote exchange, allowing the voice of either side [to] contradict or challenge the view of the other side – the point being that there really are not two sides, two opposing teams, especially in the Marshalls” (Walsh 1995, 3). Through this process I try to complicate the assumptions that people bring to their understanding of the Marshalls and the Pacific, and blur the often artificial boundaries of the insider/outsider, Westerner/Micronesian, traditional/modern categories that we so often utilize both consciously and unconsciously in our speech and scholarship.

I am aware of the complex “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973, 5) in which we are all entangled as humans and as historical, political, and social actors. I am also aware that as an American working in the Marshall Islands my very presence represents complicated relationships of which I can only see one side, and even that only imperfectly. I try my best to be actively conscious of this “baggage” that I bring with me, and perhaps even embrace these inescapable historical and personal power dynamics during my research: “The use of interviews to gain information about Marshallese culture is valid in that the interviews themselves serve as examples of Marshallese interaction with the Western world, personified in me” (Walsh 1995, 76). The history of Marshallese interaction with the western world, especially with the widespread, purposeful changes that were introduced into Marshallese life under the American administration, is an integral part of an exploration into the relationship between social change and the canoe tradition.

In keeping with the decolonizing methods described above, I structured the core of my research upon a foundation of interviews, informal conversations, observation,

participation, and my own lived experiences with Marshallese people in the Marshall Islands. As I describe above, I approached the topic as a question to be explored rather than a premise to be proven: although I do have my own ideas, any conclusions I reach must be based on interaction with Marshallese people themselves. The nature of the topic as I am approaching it is so specific, situational, and innately personal and cultural that I felt the most important research I could do would be to simply talk to people about their experiences with and feelings regarding the canoe tradition and social change, and how these two forces affect the shape of modern life. In this regard my project is informed by the methods of Nabobo-Baba (2006) in her work on indigenous epistemology and ways of knowing and learning in her home village of Vugalei, Viti Levu, Fiji. She structures her research around questioning and personal communication, and uses ethnography to document the information she receives.

In researching as well as organizing and actually writing the thesis, I used *jabōnkōnnaan*, *bwebwenato* and *inoñ*, and *Kajin Majeļ* to structure the research and writing processes, in order to attempt to organize the final product according to a Marshallese worldview instead of my own. I was inspired to explore this method after reading Monica LaBriola's 2006 thesis *Ien Ippān Doon: Celebrating Survival in an 'Atypical Marshallese Community.'* Throughout her thesis LaBriola uses *jabōnkōnnaan* about Ebeye Island to guide the flow and direction of her exploration of the Ebeye community. Through personal experience as well as scholarly research I know that the language used to name and describe the canoe is heavily symbolic, and embodies many of the values and understandings of Marshallese culture itself (Stone et. al. 2000; Waan Aelōñ in Majeļ 2004). By engaging with *jabōnkōnnaan*, *bwebwenato*, and *Kajin Majeļ* in

this way, I believe my research and writing is more accurate, locally relevant, and decolonizing. In order to use this project as a means to let Marshallese voices be heard in a wider sphere, structuring the work according to concrete expressions of a Marshallese worldview is much more appropriate and productive than trying to fit what Marshallese people have to say into my own invented frameworks.

I conducted the majority of the library research for this study in 2009 and completed the project in 2010. I carried out the field research component in July 2009 during a month I spent in Majuro specifically for that purpose. I interviewed a wide range of people, from college students to local elders to professionals to master canoebuilders, in order to get a variety of different perspectives about the canoe from people in many different walks of life. I had hoped to return to Namdrik atoll, where I spent my first year living in the Marshalls in 2005-06, but because of logistical difficulties I was unable to make the trip. The fact that I was unable to leave Majuro is a major limitation to this project. I tried to partially make up for it by interviewing people from outer islands who were only living on Majuro temporarily, but this cannot compensate for the greater depth the study would have gained from conducting research on an outer island as well. It is my hope that in the future, if I have the opportunity to expand this research into a larger project, I will be able to conduct a more thorough study by including outer island perspectives and experiences as well.



Figure 4: The author (second from left) with the Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) team, including thesis project participants Alson Kelen (far left), Mentil Laik (second from right), and Ejnar Aerök (far right).
Photo credit Waan Aelōñ in Majel

A Note on Diaspora

In this study, I focus solely on the Marshallese population living in the Marshall Islands. This is significant because there are now between 15,000 and 20,000 Marshallese living abroad, primarily in America, with the largest community in Springdale, Arkansas. This number has steadily increased over the years, and now approximately twenty-five percent of all Marshallese in the world live outside the Marshall Islands (Graham 2006). The scope of this thesis does not allow me to address the issues of identity and culture that the foreign-living Marshallese populations experience, which is unfortunate because their experiences and perspectives would be very interesting to include in a work such as this. It would be logical to assume that the Marshallese community in Springdale feels substantial pressure to define themselves against the difference in which they are

engulfed. That process of identity definition would be a very interesting counterpoint to the experiences of the Marshallese population within the Marshall Islands.

Identity formation in the Marshall Islands, which a century ago was a trans-atoll process, is now a trans-national process. Although Marshallese people (and Pacific Islanders in general) are now traveling to increasingly remote and foreign locations, Marshallese have always been a people who travel. Spread among almost three dozen atolls and coral islands containing only seventy square miles of land surrounded by close to a million square miles of ocean (Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands), ocean voyaging has always been an integral part of Marshallese consciousness. The canoe is obviously a natural symbol of this process, even though now most travel occurs by airplane rather than by boat. Canoes, and the ocean transport they provide, have always been used for the processes of exchange, reciprocity, and interdependence which characterize Pacific Islander existence (Hau'ofa 2008). Even today, Marshallese people who are moving to America receive parting gifts of miniature canoes – symbols of the journey they are about to undertake, which tie their future path to the history of travel upon which Marshallese history is founded (personal observation; Walsh Kroeker, personal communication).

It is a limitation of this thesis that I was not able to include the unique perspectives of Marshallese living abroad within the scope of my research. The experiences they could have shared about their efforts to maintain or even reshape their culture and identity within a foreign environment would probably have added another layer to the already complex story of the modern canoe. However, as I explain in the next section, I have far less personal connection to the Marshallese communities abroad than I

do to those within the Marshalls, so perhaps it is appropriate that this aspect of the story of the canoe must wait until another time.

Personal Experience and Positionality

The year I spent on Naṃdrik atoll in the Marshall Islands was the most challenging, and the most rewarding, year of my life. I was the only non-Marshallese person living in a community of approximately 900 people on the smallest inhabited atoll in the world, hundreds of miles away from the nearest city. The year provided me with an extensive introduction to Marshallese culture and life, and the circumstances of intense isolation forced me to learn to become a member of the community. I experienced learning a language through immersion, not formal schooling; I came to love my host family, and in turn they came to accept and love me; I went to every community event until people stopped treating me like a guest and started treating me (almost) like just another regular woman; in short, I worked very hard to discover what it means to be a *ri-Naṃdrik* (person of Naṃdrik), and moved significantly closer to becoming as much a part of the community as my ethnicity, my background, and my relatively short time there would allow. This process throughout the year changed me in ways that will be with me forever, and permanently impressed upon me how special Naṃdrik and the whole of the Marshall Islands are.

I was lucky to spend my volunteer year on one of only two atolls in the country where canoes are still used every day, and far outnumber motorboats. I was constantly surrounded by canoes during my year on Naṃdrik, from paddling across the lagoon to go

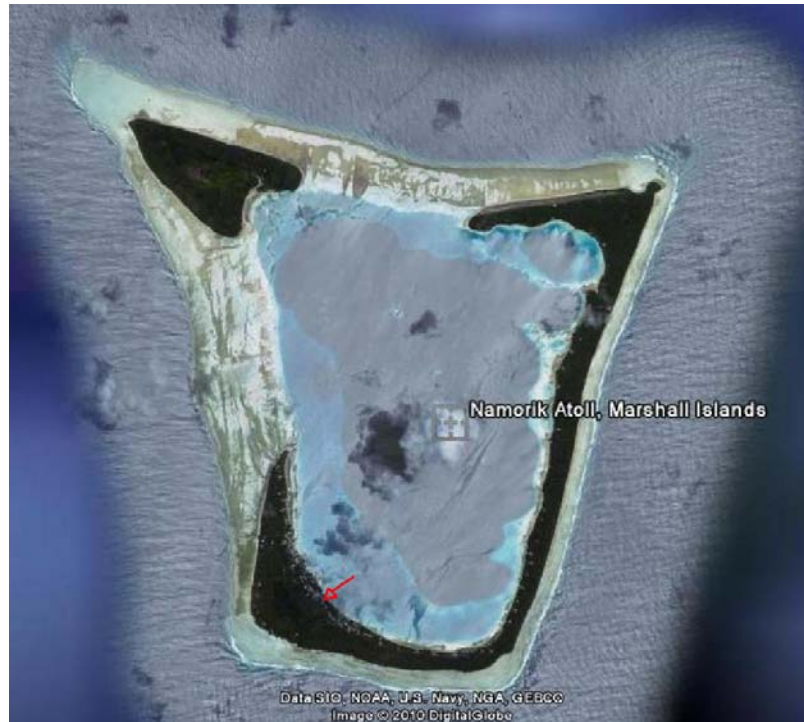


Figure 5: Satellite photo of Namorik atoll (approximate location of author's house marked by red arrow).
 Photo credit Google Earth, accessed 19 April 2010

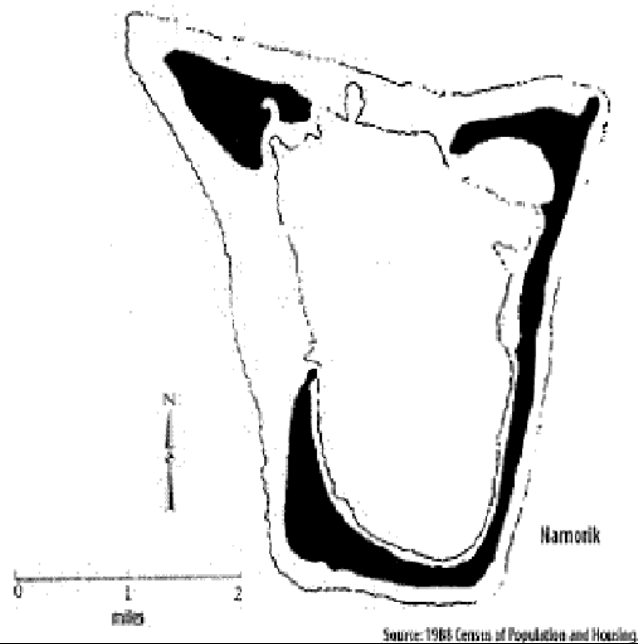


Figure 6: Map of Namorik atoll for comparison (note scale in miles in bottom left corner).
 Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands,
<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Indiv%20Atolls/Republic%20of%20the%20Marshall%20Islands%20-%20Namorik%20Atoll.htm>, accessed 19 April 2010

fishing with my younger siblings, to picnicking on the uninhabited islet with youth who sailed there instead of driving a motorboat, to watching my host father repair our family's small canoe in our backyard. From the very beginning I was struck by both the beauty and the practicality of the canoe, and like many other foreigners who spend time in the Marshall Islands (or elsewhere in Micronesia) I felt immediately certain that the canoe is truly one of the key aspects of Marshallese life and identity: it is something that helps to “distinguish them as a people” (Marshall 2004, 64-5). This feeling was further strengthened during my two years working at the non-profit youth vocational training organization Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) in Majuro, where I learned much more about the technical details surrounding the complex tradition of canoeing, sailing, and navigation. Additionally, I saw firsthand how Marshallese youth with no skills, no support network, and nothing to do could begin the transformation into happy, healthy, productive young men and women through WAM's distinctive training program based on the uniquely Marshallese tradition of canoe building and sailing.

I have come to realize, however, that my experiences in the Marshalls were somewhat unique in being permeated with canoes. If I had not lived on Nam̄drik and then worked at WAM, I would probably have a much different attitude regarding the continued importance of the canoe in modern Marshallese life, because I would not have experienced first-hand how much richer life is with the canoe in it. Many foreigners who, like me, have lived and worked in the Marshalls but, unlike me, did not work at WAM or live on Nam̄drik (or Ailuk, the other atoll where canoes are still prevalent), have never ridden on a canoe, and have never known anyone who can sail or build canoes. For these people, the canoe would not be a part of their Marshall Islands experience, and they

would have no reason to recognize in the canoe links to both a uniquely Marshallese past and a locally-relevant future. They would probably not be aware of the rise of the canoe as a symbol of meaning and identity even as it declines as a practical tool in everyday life, a phenomenon that is one of the driving factors behind this thesis. Not only am I quite unique among the many foreigners who have lived in the Marshall Islands in my experiences with the canoe, but this thesis is itself a product of those unique experiences. I consider myself truly fortunate that I had the opportunity to engage so actively and intensively with the Marshallese canoe tradition.

	Majuro Atoll (capital)	Kwajalein Atoll	Namdrik Atoll
Number of islets	64	93	2
Population	19,664	9,311	814
Land area	3.75 sq. mi.	6.33 sq. mi.	1.07 sq. mi.
Lagoon area	113.92 sq. mi.	839.3 sq. mi.	3.25 sq. mi.

Figure 7: Comparison of characteristics of three atolls
Statistics from Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands,
<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Geography.htm#indiv%20atoll>, accessed 14 April 2010

I initially felt uncomfortable switching from being an active participating member of the Marshall Islands community to being a more passive outsider researching the Marshall Islands community. As I describe above, the history of research in the Pacific, and even the term “research” itself, is generally not regarded very positively, especially by those being researched. It was difficult for me to position myself within the category of researcher, especially because many of the people who I was researching were friends, adopted family, people with whom I had a previous history and relationship. I was able to start to move past this issue by conducting my project according to decolonizing methodologies, as I explain above. I felt that if I could shape a research project that was both relevant to and meaningful for Marshallese people, the process would be less one-

way and potentially exploitative, and more reciprocal and valuable for both the researcher and those being researched.

However, it was not until I actually went back to the Marshalls and began my fieldwork that I was able to truly move past my initial uncertainty. I interviewed about two dozen Marshallese people, and every one of them was nothing but positive about my research and excited to participate in the project. While I may have had difficulty switching from ‘just Rachel’ to ‘Rachel the Researcher,’ they had no problem with the change at all, and in fact those who already knew me did not seem to think that there had even been a change. Unanimously, the people I interviewed expressed excitement that I was learning more about Marshallese culture, pride that their heritage would be explored in a foreign environment, and relief that at least some small part of their canoe tradition would be preserved for the future because I was writing about it. In retrospect, the fact that I was not totally able to accept the validity of my research on my own is perhaps appropriate; since the thesis as a whole is structured according to Marshallese perspectives and worldviews, my position within the thesis project should also be structured by those I researched.

Thesis Outline

Structurally, this thesis is composed of an Introduction, four theme-based chapters, and a Conclusion. I start each chapter with a relevant anecdote drawn from my time in the Marshall Islands. I came to know the Marshallese canoe through lived experience, and that background informed every aspect of this thesis project. My intent in sharing these anecdotes is to incorporate a connection to the canoe tradition that is not solely academic and detached, but also personal and active – to show the complex nature

of what the canoe has meant to me as part of my relationship with the Marshall Islands. In addition, it is important to show a more personal relationship with the canoe because it more closely mirrors the relationship most Marshallese people themselves have with their canoe tradition; very few people regularly think about the academic side of the canoe which is examined in this thesis due to its nature as a scholarly project.

I begin in Chapter One: Kwōtuļom, Tuur Lōmeto Ak Buruōn Armej Kwōban⁸ by reviewing the theoretical context through which the Marshallese canoe tradition can be understood. Concepts such as culture and social change have been explored in great depth by many scholars before me, and this project would not be complete without relating those theoretical perspectives to my own research. I first describe Clifford Geertz's conception of culture as "webs of significance" (1973, 5) in which we, as cultural actors, are all suspended. This understanding of culture is particularly relevant when considering the Marshallese canoe tradition, for reasons I will explore further in the following chapters. Next I describe a number of different theories of social change expounded by Ward Goodenough, David Hanlon (interpreting Marshall Sahlins), Francis Hezel, Michael Lieber, Mac Marshall, and Nicholas Thomas, and how these theories relate to the processes of social change I researched in the Marshalls. I then discuss in more detail the paradox of loss I introduce above, which I use as a specific case study of one way the conceptualization of the Marshallese canoe tradition has changed over time. Finally, I elaborate on the debates regarding cultural authenticity and the objectification of culture, especially the arguments of Margaret Jolly and Nicholas Thomas. This final theoretical

⁸ For the sake of space, I do not translate the Marshallese-language chapter titles here, although I do provide translations within each individual chapter. Translations of this and all other proverbs can also be found in Appendix A.

framework is especially important for when I explore the transformation of the canoe tradition from practical tool to symbol of identity and meaning in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Two: *Wa Kuk, Wa Jiṃor* I explore in more detail the idea that the canoe is the backbone of Marshallese culture. Geertz's "webs of significance" is especially relevant when understanding the canoe in this way. Although I would argue that it is indeed correct that the canoe is the backbone of Marshallese culture, there are a number of complications that must be taken into account. I rely on *jabōnkōnnaan* about the canoe strongly in this chapter to guide my exploration. Most *jabōnkōnnaan* support the view that the canoe is the heart of Marshallese culture. There are a few, however, that align the canoe with values that are quite different from those most highly respected in Marshallese culture. The modern culmination of these puzzling *jabōnkōnnaan* is the idea expressed by many people I interviewed that the canoe is almost "out of time" – that while the canoe is important today in some form, it is still a relic of the past and "we can't go back to how things were before." This linear conceptualization of time is typically a western understanding (and often divorces non-western peoples from their culture and pre-contact history), and is antithetical to a number of *jabōnkōnnaan* that highlight the cyclical character of both natural rhythms and human life. The rise of a linear understanding of time in relation to the canoe in Marshallese worldview is an important occurrence because it problematizes the simple "the canoe is the heart of Marshallese culture" perspective, and demonstrates the complicated positioning and role of the canoe today in the modern Marshall Islands.

In Chapter Three: *Joiḷ eo Mour eo, Lāj eo Mej eo*, I engage with processes of social change in the Marshalls more broadly. I again use *jabōnkōnnaan* to reveal how

core Marshallese values have changed over time, and how that change has impacted the canoe tradition. I discuss the specifics of the social change that has occurred since western contact, especially under the American-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) government of the mid-twentieth century. Throughout centuries of foreign contact, Marshallese people have typically valorized newness and things foreign over their own culture and traditions – a process that Nicholas Thomas calls “the inversion of tradition” (Thomas 1997, Genz 2008). Over a century of life under foreign colonization coupled with this valorization of the foreign “other” has led to the rapid westernization of many aspects of Marshallese life. I explore shifts within cultural values in more detail, especially the democratization of Marshallese life under the American administration. These changes have significantly impacted the canoe tradition, which like other spheres of important knowledge was traditionally characterized by hierarchy, chiefly control, and extremely limited knowledge sharing (Genz 2008, Tobin 2002, Walsh 2003).

Chapter Four: *Waan Kōjipañ Kōj, Waan Kōkkure Kōj* explores how these social trends and processes impact the future of the canoe tradition and Marshallese life. In the *jabōnkōnnaan* which is the title of this chapter, the canoe is identified as both a bringer of good fortune and a source of destruction if it is not engaged with correctly and respectfully. Every one of the people I interviewed echoed this ancient belief by saying that to lose the canoe tradition would be to lose what makes them Marshallese. The combination of the trend of increasing westernization with the desire to maintain a unique Marshallese identity has led to the modern transformation of the canoe from a practical tool to a symbol of meaning, identity, and pride. This transformation can be understood

as a way for the Marshallese people to become part of the modern (western) world while also retaining those traditions that make them who they are. In order to understand this process better I revisit the debates surrounding the process of objectification of culture, the issue of authenticity versus modernity, and the concept of purposeful cultural adaptation. I then attempt to understand this process of canoe transformation according to a Marshallese perspective, embodied in *jabōnkōnnaan* about the cyclical nature of both change and existence.

In the Conclusion: Kwōjab Inojeikļok Jen Wa Kein, Bwe Iaļan Mour Ko Kein I conclude my exploration by re-examining the primary arguments I have built throughout the thesis. First, I revisit the exploration of the rise of linear time and examine the possibility that the canoe could provide a foundation based in the Marshallese past of a strong, meaningful, thoroughly modern Marshallese present and future. Next, I step back to explore the larger issues of culture and social change more generally through the lens of the Marshallese canoe tradition which I have developed throughout the thesis. In many *jabōnkōnnaan*, the natural world and human life exist according to cyclical rhythms similar to the ocean tides. According to this perspective, culture too is fluid and alive, not static and unchanging. Change exists within a broader realm of shifting, adapting cultural meaning. The transformation of the canoe from practical tool to symbol of identity and meaning is therefore a locally-relevant process that can address uniquely Marshallese needs and issues today as well as the growth of a more western lifestyle as part of a global society. I end by examining the practical implications of my arguments on the future of the canoe tradition within modern Marshallese society.

**CHAPTER ONE: KWŌTUŁOM, TUUR LŌMETO AK BURUŌN ARMEJ
KWŌBAN - YOU CAN DIVE AND REACH THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN,
BUT YOU CANNOT REACH THE DEPTHS OF A PERSON'S HEART**

Bwebwenato eo – The Story

The boy was impossible. He had practically failed his interview, if such a thing was possible in an interview for a vocational training program for at-risk youth, but he was in every other respect the perfect candidate for the WAM program: he was an elementary school dropout, he spoke practically no English, he had never had a job, he had lived in the poorest section of Majuro for most of his life, and he claimed he got drunk at least three times a week. He was too shy to even talk to me, an American, even though I spoke Marshallese and had conducted most of the interviews with the other applicants, so Alson, my boss, conducted the interview himself. The boy's answers were never more than a few words long, and he spoke them toward the floor in a toneless mutter. I was totally unimpressed, but as it was WAM's mission to transform youth just like him into happy, confident, functioning members of society through vocational and life skills training, there was no question that he would be hired into the program.

On the first day of work he showed up an hour late, smelling of vodka and cigarettes, and on the second day he didn't show up at all. Finally on the third day he arrived on time and alert. He continued to make very positive progress as the six-month training continued. By the end of the program he had become the star trainee. He never missed a day of work, he was always on time, and his attitude was unflinchingly positive. He had even begun to greet me in the mornings when he came into the office to punch his timecard. In the beginning, he had been too shy to even look at me. But by the end of the six months, he would come into the office during his lunch break to chat with me about

our families and why I liked living in the Marshall Islands. His transformation was truly remarkable.

The morning of graduation day, he was one of the few trainees who arrived on time, and not hung over. It seems most of the male trainees had celebrated completing the program by getting completely drunk the night before. I was very disappointed in their behavior, and worried about the graduation ceremony that afternoon. He, however, had chosen not to drink. “Why didn’t you go out partying with the other boys last night?” I asked when he greeted me that morning. “I feel sort of *jook* – embarrassed for them,” he answered in Marshallese. “We have learned so much in the WAM program, so I don’t really want to drink anymore.” When I asked him to explain what he meant, his answer was so profound that I was stunned. “On the first day of the program, Alson told us that we were going to learn about Marshallese canoes, because if we learn about canoes we learn about our culture and our history as well, and also about the modern skills we need to live and work today, even though things are so different now than they were before the *ripālle* – foreigners came. When he first said that, I didn’t understand what he meant, and I thought what he was saying sounded stupid, like he was lying. But now I know that he was right. Learning about canoes helped me learn about myself, too. Now I feel like I know who I am, and what I am capable of. I know now that I can get a job, and take care of my family, and in the future I can teach my children about our culture and why it’s good to be Marshallese. And that’s why I don’t want to get drunk anymore.”

I had studied ‘culture’ during my entire undergraduate education. After receiving a Bachelor’s degree in Anthropology, I felt pretty confident that I had a general idea of what culture is, and why societies need culture in order to exist in the world. However, I

had never really understood what culture provides in an individual's life until I heard this remarkable boy describe his experience learning about canoes. The canoe is one of the primary foundations of Marshallese culture. Values, history, social norms, all are incorporated in some way into the canoe tradition. And in return, the canoe provides a concrete structure and specific meaning in the lives of those people living within that culture. By learning about the canoe, this boy also learned a sociocultural framework through which he could understand himself and his life as a Marshall Islander. And gaining that framework made him happier, more confident, and more in control of his own life.

Pedped eo – The Foundation

This preliminary chapter will provide a theoretical framework for the rest of the thesis. Even for an exploratory project such as mine, it is essential to position my research within a conceptual framework of culture and social change theory more broadly, as well as within the more limited framework of social change theory in the Marshall Islands. In later chapters I will explore specific details and examples from my research on the canoe tradition, but first it is important to take a step back and reflect on the nature of social change more generally. Without some sort of intellectual roadmap with which to structure the project, the details and examples will be baseless and lack coherence.

I begin by exploring Clifford Geertz's conceptualization of culture as "webs of significance," an understanding that I find highly relevant to the Marshallese canoe tradition. I then detail a number of different theories of social change, beginning more broadly with theories from throughout the Pacific, and ending with the theories of social

change specific to the Marshall Islands. Finally, I elaborate on the debates regarding cultural authenticity and the objectification of culture. This final theoretical framework is an especially important foundation for my exploration of the transformation of the canoe tradition from practical tool to symbol of identity and meaning. I end by concluding that, despite the necessity of creating a theoretical framework to underpin the thesis as a whole, no one theory can explain the complex processes of social change and cultural adaptation that Marshall Islanders have experienced and in some cases produced throughout their long and tumultuous history. Hence the title of this chapter: you can follow any number of theories to their full and logical conclusion, but none of those theories can provide an adequate understanding of the depth and complexity of human existence.

Because the heart of my thesis is an exploration of the aspects of Marshallese culture surrounding the canoe tradition, it is appropriate to begin my theoretical exploration with an inquiry into the nature of culture itself. Clifford Geertz is one of the most well-known anthropologists of all time, and the father of the field known as symbolic anthropology. He posited that culture is “an ensemble of texts” (1973, 452), composed of meaning transferred through symbolic communication, woven by actors as they communicate that meaning to one another within the specific context of their culture. More specifically, he says: “As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial uses, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described” (1973, 14). Unlike the positivist, scientific approaches that previously dominated the

evolving field of anthropology, Geertz understood culture as local, particular, and public: “culture consists of socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them or perceive insults and answer them” (1973, 12-3); therefore, culture is not “a psychological phenomenon, a characteristic of someone’s mind, personality, cognitive structure, or whatever” (1973, 13). He describes further: “Culture, this acted document, thus is public, like a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid. Though ideational, it does not exist in someone’s head; though unphysical, it is not an occult entity” (1973, 10). Put most simply, culture is the “webs of significance” (1973, 5), spun by people through their symbolic communication with each other, in which they themselves are suspended.

This idea of culture as text is especially pertinent when discussing the tradition of the Marshallese canoe. One informant I interviewed, Alson Kelen, described the canoe tradition as “the head of the octopus” (Kelen 2009). What he meant by this is that the canoe tradition is the core to which numerous other spheres of knowledge and activity are attached. The canoe is therefore a perfect example of these webs of significance from which culture is woven. For example, weather forecasting, fishing, sail weaving, chanting, and countless other fields are spheres of knowledge that are tied to the canoe, and therefore a change in one will impact all the others. Additionally, the structure of the social organizations through which these spheres are enacted – e.g., fishing teams, extended families building canoes together, women’s weaving clubs, men’s sailing groups⁹ – change when the canoe tradition itself is altered.

⁹ Carucci describes these groups, called *wa* in Enewetakese/Ūjelañ society, as sailing groups of men who worked together to build and maintain canoes, gather food with the canoes, and hold competitions to advertize the skills of the group members. Members also held use rights to small islands in Ūjelañ Atoll (Carucci 1995 and 1997b). However, I am not sure how common this kind of social group was throughout



Figure 8: Men building canoes together on Kwajalein atoll, 1948.
Photo credit *Life Magazine* December 1948,
<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/l?imgurl=52572bd57c9b03b7&q=marshall%20islands%20source:life&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmarshall%2Bislands%2Bsource:life%26start%3D54%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26ndsp%3D18%26tbs%3Disch:1>, accessed 18 January 2010

The canoe is a site around which much social interaction was centered, especially for men (Carucci 1995; Kelen, Lajuon, Maddison 2009). As community unity and extended family solidarity has decreased and individualism and the centrality of the nuclear family has increased, the canoe has ceased to be a social gathering space – meaning much less communal space devoted to male interaction and bonding (Carucci 1995; Kelen, Lajuon 2009). As these examples show, because of the nature of culture as woven webs of meaning, change is actually multidirectional, as Geertz explains: “to rework the pattern of social relationships is to rearrange the coordinates of the experienced world. Society’s forms are culture’s substance” (1973, 28). When viewing culture in this way, the most important questions we can ask are: What is being said

the rest of the Marshall Islands. In the *Marshallese Online Dictionary*, *wa* is defined only as “canoe; ship; boat; vehicle” (Abo et al. 2009: wa).

through the culture of the canoe? How can we read the canoe as a cultural text? What are the webs of significance that radiate outward from the canoe and in which the canoe is suspended? I have begun to introduce some of the answers to these crucial questions above. I will explore them further in the next chapter.

There are a number of important analytical approaches to the study of culture other than Geertz's culture as webs of significance, such as the idea of culture as contested terrain put forth by John and Jean Comoroff, and Renato Rosaldo. I am by no means arguing here that Geertz' understanding of culture is the only or the best conceptualization, just that I believe it is the most relevant to the topic of the tradition of the canoe as I am exploring it. Using this foundational conception of the nature of culture as a baseline, it is essential to examine some of the more relevant theories regarding social and cultural change. Because it is such a widespread and rapid phenomenon in the Pacific, much work has been done about the nature and process of social change in the region.

One of the earliest relevant theories is propounded by Ward Goodenough in his landmark 1963 study *Cooperation in Change*. Goodenough is a well-known Micronesianist who has conducted extensive research in Chuuk, one of the states in what is now the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Goodenough approaches the issues of purposeful cultural and social change from a practical perspective. Although his work has been challenged over the years, I believe his analysis of how the processes of change affect both a society and an individual is still very revealing, if a bit dated. He describes how,

“Identity is thus rooted in the social order. This is true both in the cognitive or substantive sense of who and what a person is and in the evaluative sense of how he is affectively regarded by his fellows and how he feels about himself. . . Any change that affects the existing social order or a person’s ability to conduct himself in accordance with it must also affect his identity and sense of worth. Social change is likely to involve the very core of being, affecting things that help to shape even the ‘innermost self.’”
(Goodenough 1963, 177)

This perceptive statement explains why social change can be so pervasive and so devastating within a society.¹⁰ If human identity is fundamentally shaped by the social order in which a person exists (the “webs of significance” in which a person is suspended), shifts in that system will have drastic consequences for personal and community life within the changing social order. New problems can arise for which there is no precedent or solution, such as the widespread social problems including alcoholism and suicide that are so common in the Marshall Islands and throughout the Pacific today (Gegeo 1994, Hezel 2001, Marshall 2004, see also Walsh 1995). Goodenough’s approach to culture as a knowable system is at this point somewhat old-fashioned in the anthropological world (Linnekin 1992), and somewhat at odds with Geertz’s understanding of culture as a particular system without universal laws. However, I believe his understanding of the human consequences of development and social and

¹⁰ In discussing the relationship between a cultural feature such as the canoe, and forces of social change which were primarily foreign-introduced, it is easy to assume that the relationship must be inherently bipolar: culture is good, social change is bad. However, in the Marshalls social change was of course experienced in significantly different ways by different island communities, social classes, and even individuals. For example, I describe in later chapters how chiefs were often quick to embrace the new methods of exerting control introduced by western colonizers, in order to increase their own power for their own ends. In another example, some social changes such as the modern inclusion of women within the transmission of the canoe tradition can be understood as positive because of the inclusionary, preservational nature of such changes. In short, I am not trying to imply in this thesis that the century of social change which the Marshall Islands has experienced has been solely negative, or solely positive. Social change has meant and continues to mean different things to different people, and what is most important is to examine the ways in which people have understood and engaged with the forces of change which have touched so many aspects of their lives.

cultural change are quite sophisticated, and not at all incompatible with how Geertz's "webs of significance" link all levels of human social existence together.

Carucci provides an excellent example of these human consequences of social change in his 1995 study of Enewetakese canoes, "Symbolic Imagery of Enewetak Sailing Canoes." He describes how daily life on Enewetak has changed drastically because most people now own outboard motorboats, rather than canoes. Dependence on this form of watercraft has changed eating habits, travel patterns, financial needs, leisure time, and even family structure. Broken down to its simplest form, preference for motorboats has meant that men spend much less time on "communal seafaring activities" (1995, 18), which previously occupied much if not most of their time. Because all of life is connected within the "webs of significance" that make up Marshallese culture, the most basic pattern of Enewetakese life has changed as a result of the loss of the canoe tradition. This is a clear example of how the introduction of a new factor (and subsequent removal of another factor) can change the way of life and the very structure of social organization in a community, ultimately altering the way people think about each other and themselves.

This point leads to a larger question: according to Goodenough's link between social order and identity, if the canoe is the "head of the octopus," what does it mean when the canoe tradition itself fundamentally alters? The logical answer would be that if a sphere of knowledge as central as the canoe changes, the consequent changes throughout much of Marshallese life would be immense, and ultimately people would come to understand themselves differently as a result. Many of my informants argued that this claim is exactly correct. In just one example, Kelen describes how in the past,

canoebuilding was a community effort in which everyone participated in some way. Today, however, canoebuilding is “just a job,” conducted usually by one person and potentially for pay. He argues that this change in the practice of building canoes is an indicator of how Marshallese values have become more focused on individualism and personal gain, rather than the community and mutual concern (Kelen 2009; see also Chapter 3). Both social organization and personal identity have changed for Marshall Islanders, as their culture and lifestyle have been increasingly westernized, in this specific case because of the introduction of western maritime technology.

Interesting counterpoints to the seemingly hopeless endpoint of Goodenough’s theoretical perspective are Michael Lieber’s and Mac Marshall’s theories on social change. Lieber’s comprehensive study of the interconnected development of the fishing tradition and broader way of life on Kapingamarangi Atoll in Pohnpei State, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) leads him to the conclusion that “a changing social order is shaped by unchanging premises about what it means to be a person, what it means for people to live together, what authority is and what its sources are, and what change and innovation mean to a Kapinga person” (Lieber 1994, 137). He makes the important point that a changing political or social environment “doesn’t cause anything; it is a set of conditions that a system must take account of... People are not billiard balls, and the communities they form are not mechanical devices” (Lieber 1994, 136). Islanders have agency in their interactions with foreigners (or other Islanders) and the newness they bring, and communities interact with the forces of social change in their own ways based on their own worldviews. This is an important concept to keep in mind, because it is often all too easy to slip back to the common hegemonic notion that foreign culture has

impacted Marshallese culture in such a way that all the future trajectories and workings of Marshallese life will be dictated solely by the foreign forces that have acted upon it. Theories such as Ward Goodenough's primarily support this "fatal impact" method of understanding change.

Similarly, in his study of migrant communities of people from Namoluk atoll in Chuuk State, FSM, and the relationships between the migrant communities and those back home, Marshall argues that the vast amounts of newness and change that have been experienced on Namoluk have been structured by older cultural understandings, therefore maintaining a baseline of *chon*-Namoluk (Namolukese) identity through which people experience and process forces of social change (Marshall 2004). He argues that the Namoluk community and identity both at home and in the growing populations abroad are "framed and defined" (Marshall 2004, 11) by some sort of link to the physical atoll – this is why *chon*-Namoluk continue to consider themselves such despite vast physical distances and social differences. This implies that despite social change, some form of in this case place-based identity will continue to exist; an important positive perspective among many others who take a more hopeless position regarding the inevitability of loss of culture and identity.

Based on my research, I argue that in the Marshall Islands, the canoe is one of the key elements in that baseline of culture and identity through which social changes are understood and processed. Even though the canoe is no longer the primary method of transportation or subsistence, even though most people today do not know how to build or sail canoes, and even though it is generally agreed that the canoe tradition must drastically change in order to continue to be relevant in the modern Marshall Islands,

every single person I interviewed claimed that the canoe is still one of the key aspects of Marshallese culture, and an irreplaceable symbol of Marshallese identity. Josepha Maddison explained that if the canoe tradition was lost there would be “something missing, a void in the culture...it’s not the Marshall Islands anymore. There’s no Marshall Islands without the canoe” (Maddison 2009). Kelen described how a canoe is not just a canoe – it is a link between people and other people, between people and their environment, and between people and the future: “That’s our life, that’s who we are” (Kelen 2009). Maddison also equated losing the canoe with “losing part of our identification” (Maddison 2009). Similar to Marshall’s place-based identity centered on Namoluk atoll, the canoe tradition perhaps provides some form of object-based identity through which Marshallese people are able to maintain their unique culture and lifestyle, as well as deal with the forces of newness and change that have been such an integral part of their lives for over a century.

In *Remaking Micronesia*, David Hanlon addresses this issue of the possibility of Islander agency within the seemingly all-encompassing forces of colonialism directly. Hanlon engages with Sahlins’ “develop-man” concept in order to understand the complexities of both social change and Islander response to and agency within that change. He writes that “Pacific peoples are neither awed nor overwhelmed by external systems beyond their control. Their response is rather to appropriate...Living in cultural systems still concerned with the relationships of kith and kin, Pacific peoples employ Western goods to aid in the fulfillment of the obligations these social arrangements entail” (Hanlon 1998, 12). However, he also recognizes that the argument of local resistance to development and change through cultural appropriation is not so simple,

because the different parties or even factions within the same party are rarely equal in wealth or power: “there is no simple story that is only about external efforts at domination and local means of resistance” (Hanlon 1998, 13).

This sentiment is echoed by Francis Hezel in his study of the history of Micronesia in the 20th century; despite the fact that “Micronesians showed a genius for appearing to comply with the demands of their foreign government while advancing their own agenda and pursuing their own aims” (Hezel 1995, xiv), the forces of colonialism were relentless, and due to their absolute newness were not totally comprehensible to Micronesians, which led to the gradual loss of power and identity: “Subjected to acculturative forces that they never really understood, Micronesians were forced to confront changes in their cultural landscape, and perhaps even in themselves, that they could not have anticipated” (Hezel 1995, xiv). Hezel is acknowledging here that the many social changes that were often forced upon Micronesian peoples under colonialism changed not only their ways of life, but through that their very identities as well, much as Goodenough predicted would be the result of social change.

Hezel further elaborates on this view in his 2001 work on Micronesian social change, *The New Shape of Old Island Cultures*. This is one of the few studies conducted solely on how the processes of social change have interacted with Micronesian cultures. After surveying many of the fundamental aspects of cultures across Micronesia – child-rearing, funereal rights, gender roles, traditional chiefs, and others – Hezel concludes that in spite of drastic change, the basic nature of many cultural features has remained relatively intact and has persisted through time: “Although the forms may have altered to some extent, the practice itself appears to be as strong as ever. All these examples

illustrate the adaptability of the island cultures” (Hezel 2001, 161). This is not to say that Micronesians have simply adapted new foreign practices and values to their own ways of life, for this would ignore the unequal power dynamic between Micronesians and their colonizers that I describe above. Instead, Hezel is quite realistic about the depth of social change that has already occurred throughout Micronesia over the past decades: “To create the seismic rumble that the islands have felt during the last few decades, a basic systemic change was probably required. This change would have been the shift toward a cash economy and all that it implies. The other forces, even if they were not the point of the drill against the rock, have undoubtedly widened and deepened the openings that the new cash economy created” (Hezel 2001, 160). However, despite the drastic social change toward what many (including perhaps Ward Goodenough) would see as the inevitable total loss of Micronesian cultures, fundamental changes to Micronesian lifestyles should not be understood as the loss of the “last line of defense against modern Western culture and all that it stands for” (Hezel 2001, 161). Rather,

Although the social change during this period has meant the loss of certain traditional features in the island societies, it has not unraveled them like a tapestry, leaving nothing but an armful of loose threads. Those same changes have added new elements to the cultures, altering the relationship of elements to one another in such a way as to create a new design, yet leaving many of the old themes in recognizable form. (Hezel 2001, 163-4)

Hezel describes the cultural groups within Micronesia as drastically transforming during a century of colonialism, but not having been altered beyond recognition. He argues that these cultures have lost much, and are not today what they were a hundred years ago. However, they have also not lost that which makes them unique, and many of the countless webs of meaning are still being woven by those who continue to suspend

themselves within them. I think most Marshallese people today would support this understanding of their own culture. This view takes into account the complexities and inequalities of colonial (and post-colonial) relationships, necessarily confusing the picture but providing a more realistic framework through which to understand processes of social change. Within this complex perspective, all of the previous theories I have discussed can be found: Geertz's culture as symbolic communication, which under colonialism is both within and between different peoples separated by inequalities of power and discrepancies of knowledge; Goodenough's linkage between shifting social realities and change in or loss of identity for those living within those realities; Lieber's and Marshall's social change processed through Islander modes of understanding; and Sahlin's appropriation of the foreign for Islander ends.

The previous theories of social change have been formulated in reference to the whole of the region we call Micronesia, and the many culture groups that exist within it. There are a few works, however, that examine the forces of social change within only the Marshall Islands, and what they show sets Marshallese culture slightly apart from some of the trends I have explored above. A perspective specific to the Marshall Islands is important, because while there have of course been similarities across Micronesia and the entire Pacific regarding Islander responses to the forces of change and westernization, there have also been stark differences. Micronesian societies' interactions with newness and change over the past century or more, as well as their unique cultures and worldviews through which they perhaps process some of that change, provide vastly different spheres of experience out of which the forms of modern societies have necessarily emerged.

Anthropologist Joe Genz presents a specifically Marshall Islands-based perspective on local responses to social and cultural change: “In contrast to the Carolinians, the Marshallese had a distinctive cultural response to the new, contested forms of knowledge brought by foreigners. In general, they valorized non-traditional knowledge and cultural practices. Several scholars have observed that Marshallese often reject, or act ambivalent toward, their cultural traditions, while valorizing the ‘other’” (Genz 2008, 73). Genz explains how in the Marshall Islands, “The lure of modern maritime technology, especially outboard motorboats and navigation instruments, similarly reflects a broader cultural valorization of non-traditional knowledge and practices that became magnified in the post-war era” (Genz 2008, 73-4), especially after witnessing the economic, military, and political power of United States during the end of World War II and particularly the period of nuclear testing.

This view concords with the work of Lawrence Carucci (1989, 2001), and Julie Walsh Kroeker (2003), both anthropologists with extensive experience in the Marshalls. Carucci, for example, describes how “the very sacredness of the most highly ranked paramount chiefs (*iroij lablab*) lies in their foreign character, the antithesis of local commoners in every respect. Foreigners of other sorts are treated with chiefly privilege, and their analogous position rests on characteristics they share with sacred chiefs and deities” (Carucci 1995, 23). According to this perspective, the process of “valorization of the other” which explains the rapid adoption of things new and foreign is not only understandable, but should be expected, according to Marshallese custom and the hierarchical chiefly system.

The trend toward “valorization of the other” is relatively obvious when looking at the form Marshallese culture has taken today, and the preferred way of life of its participants. In the case of western-style boats, for example, Genz is absolutely correct that motorboats have long been considered superior to Marshallese canoes. The canoe tradition almost disappeared completely in the twentieth century because of this preference (Alessio 1991, Kelen 2009, see also Marshall 2004). Only now, primarily because of today’s high fuel prices and irregular supply lines, are people starting to look at the canoe as a potentially useful tool again (Chutaro, Clement, Kelen, Lajuon, Leik, 2009).



Figure 9: Men sailing a canoe in Majuro lagoon, with contrasting yachts and shipping vessels in the background, 2002.

Photo credit Waan Aelōñ in Majel

In a different example, Carucci (2001) describes how in drawings of Marshall Islands life by early explorers, women are represented in knee-length skirts of woven mat, and men are drawn with their hair long. However, today Marshallese “tradition”

(which many of Carucci's informants lament is eroding) is that women wore skirts to their ankles and men had short hair, despite this opposing evidence. It seems that missionary- or European-introduced styles, based on Euro-Christian values regarding gender roles and norms, were adopted as "real" Marshallese tradition, supplanting the tradition that existed previously. Nicholas Thomas calls this process of objectification of one's own culture and subsequent valorization of the other "the inversion of tradition." Thomas argues that this is the primary form social change has taken throughout the Pacific: "the objectification of old ways, the inversion of tradition, may be almost a ubiquitous feature of ordinary change, and one that establishes how larger transformations arise from individual conflicts and individual biographies" (Thomas 1997, 208).

In some ways, the inversion of tradition argument does not accord with the important symbolic role I believe the canoe continues to play within Marshallese life. On the other hand, I do think it may be an appropriate method of understanding Marshallese-western interaction in some cases. I cannot speak to how accurate the framework of the inversion of tradition may be in describing the typical Marshallese response to newness, although both Carucci and Genz make compelling arguments as to how the process of valorization of the other explains at least some aspects of the history of Marshallese interaction with foreigners. As I am not a historian, the intricacies of how Thomas' understanding of cultural change is reflected in Marshallese history are outside of the scope of this thesis. Instead of privileging one theoretical perspective over another, however, in this chapter I am simply attempting to explicate some of the relevant historical, social, and cultural theories. As I discuss in more detail below, I do not believe

that any one theoretical perspective is adequate or appropriate to understand the complexity that is the Marshall Islands. Despite the fact that the inversion of tradition argument may run counter to some of the issues I am addressing in this thesis, it is important nevertheless to explore each of these viewpoints, and examine the new perspectives they bring to this particular topic.

Whether or not social change in the Pacific or in the Marshalls has been driven by the process of inversion of tradition, the debate regarding the objectification of culture and cultural authenticity is well-documented and relevant to an exploration of the Marshallese canoe tradition.¹¹ During my research, and especially while I was conducting interviews, I became aware of a phenomenon I am calling the “paradox of loss,” which I briefly discuss in the Introduction. As I note above, the canoe tradition was almost lost in the recent past, and even today canoes are still in widespread use in daily life on only two atolls. The vast majority of Marshall Islanders cannot build or sail canoes, and most people today use motorboats for all of their maritime needs (personal observation). However, as the canoe declines as a practical tool for everyday life, simultaneously the canoe has increased in importance as a symbol of Marshallese identity. This rise of the symbolic importance of the canoe is clearly visible in the brief quotes I provide above from Alson Kelen and Josepha Maddison, describing their belief that the canoe is a symbol of their unique cultural identity and what it means to be Marshallese. In these statements the canoe is understood to be at the center of life, not absent from it, despite the fact that most Marshall Islanders today have never even ridden on a canoe.

¹¹ Although in actuality this debate may say more about the western scholars doing the debating than it does about those they are studying.

Implied within the paradoxical decline of the practical importance and rise of the symbolic importance of the canoe tradition is the concept, also explored by Thomas, of the objectification of culture: that as Marshallese people have come to understand themselves and their culture differently through interaction with outsiders and other modernizing forces, their understanding of the importance and meaning of their culture in modern life has changed as well. Many people would claim that, at least on the surface, it seems like in this modern age of motorboats and airplanes, canoes are no longer important or even relevant as a meaningful aspect of everyday life (Browning 1973, Hezel 1995, McArthur 1995). They would argue that as Marshallese people change due to their changing lifestyle, they have become able to see their culture from the outside, and “objectify” it in order to invent new meaning and purpose for traditional practices, instead of just living it as they did before. In this case, because of this process of distancing and subsequent objectification, the canoe tradition has become a symbol of identity and meaning, rather than a practical and cultural way of life. I cannot speak to the accuracy of this perspective in regard to the Marshall Islands, but the potential result of this view is the creation of what I believe is an artificial dichotomy, “between true tradition and the invented artifact, between culture as a way of life as ‘simply living’ and culture as a reified symbol of a way of life, between tradition as inheritance from the ancestors and tradition as the manipulative rhetoric of contemporary politicians” (Jolly 1992, 49).

The processes of social change that I discuss above demonstrate that Pacific cultures and identities have indeed changed and continue to change, in large part because of interaction with “the West.” However, the way cultures change, and the way Islanders

interact with their changing cultures, tends to be much more important to foreign scholars than to Pacific Islanders themselves, as can be seen in the extant literature on the subject.¹² Jolly makes the important point that western scholars tend to focus on issues of cultural invention and inauthenticity “because they retain an exoticized and dehistoricized view of Pacific cultures” (Jolly 1992, 53), while “Pacific peoples are more accepting of both indigenous and exogenous elements as constituting *their* culture” (Jolly 1992, 53).

Here the concept of lack or loss becomes very important, because to claim that Islanders are consciously changing their cultures is to imply that therefore they are losing what their cultures used to be, the form of which is somehow more real or authentic. Jolly makes clear the hypocrisy of this widespread belief when she writes, “If they are no longer doing ‘it’ they are no longer themselves, whereas if colonizers are no longer doing what they were doing two centuries ago, this is a comforting instance of Western progress. Diversity and change in one case connote inauthenticity, in the other the hallmarks of true Western civilization” (Jolly 1992, 57). In addition, to argue that Islanders were unable to comprehend cultural difference before western colonialism is to ignore millennia of cross-cultural interaction, both cooperative and exploitative, between different Pacific peoples themselves (D’Arcy 2006, Hezel 1983, Jolly 1992, Rainbird 2004, Thomas 1997). This is not to downplay the vast social change initiated by the unprecedented newness and colonial exploitation brought by western explorers and then colonizers, but rather a reminder that Islanders have a dynamic past that stretches far before the coming of Europeans.

The scholarly discussion surrounding the objectification of culture aspect of sociocultural change has become more complex and sophisticated since the first debate

¹² For example, see the debate surrounding Hanson 1989.

about the “invention of tradition.” Many people now emphasize that it does not matter if the past practices being revitalized or reconceptualized today for modern reasons (such as political ideology or symbolic power) “are mythical or real, but whether they are being used to liberate or oppress, to recapture just rights or to deny them” (Jolly 1992, 62). I believe this perspective is much more productive, and recognizes the validity of Islander agency in shaping their futures. The Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) Program is a good example of the tradition of the canoe being reconceptualized into a tool for identity and empowerment, with positive results (Alessio 2006, Kelen 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004; personal observation). When discussing theory, it is easy to posit cultures as simply existing in their own bounded social spaces, easily altered or even dismantled by the introduction of new objects, beliefs, or practices. However, especially because this project is exploration-based and structured to privilege Marshallese perspectives, I believe that making this assumption about cultural change is a not only a mistake, but does an injustice to the people participating in those cultures. I have made an effort here to explicate multiple, complimentary, and sometimes contradictory theoretical perspectives, but also to show that any one theory cannot adequately illuminate the complexity of changing sociocultural existence in the Marshall Islands.

The reality is that the canoe tradition is no longer widely believed to be an important practical tool in Marshallese life today, and (as many of my informants made clear) it is unlikely that the canoe will ever replace the motorboat to become the key to survival that it used to be. Whatever form social change has taken, it has been and continues to be quite prevalent in the Marshalls, and much of the Marshallese world has changed as a result. That the canoe is evolving into a new vehicle for the Marshall Islands

– a vehicle of identity and pride rather than subsistence and transportation – must be seen as a positive development. In *Entangled Objects*, Thomas writes,

In some areas, entanglement with colonizing agents of various kinds has gone on for hundreds of years and has prompted a distinctive indigenous historical consciousness in which local customs and solidarity are explicitly contrasted with the inequality characteristic of relations with outsiders. But such contacts are not only historically crucial – they also energize a new way of thinking about material culture...objects are not what they are made to be but what they have become. (1991, 4)

According to this viewpoint, only through the process of objectification caused by foreign-introduced widespread social change can the canoe be transformed into a role that is meaningful and relevant for Marshall Islanders today. Previously, canoes were “made” to be vehicles and tools (and are still occasionally made for this reason now), but increasingly canoes “have become” symbols – of Marshallese-ness; of atoll identity; of status in an increasingly westernized, globalized world (see Carucci 1995, Genz 2008). The fact that the canoe tradition still retains such a crucial, albeit drastically different, role in modern Marshallese life is a clear signal that the canoe is indeed one of the foundations of Marshallese culture, and that (as some of the theorists above describe) Marshallese people are adapting their way of life to both be relevant in the modern world as well as to retain its unique structure, knowledge, and history, of which the canoe is a irreplaceable element. In the next chapter I examine more closely the meaning and significance of the canoe as the foundation of Marshallese culture.

CHAPTER TWO: WA KUK, WA JIMOR – CANOE TO BRING US TOGETHER, CANOE BELONGING TO EVERYONE

Bwebwenato eo – The Story

It was the first time I had seen my Marshallese host father Liton in over a year. I had arrived back in Majuro a few days previously, in order to conduct research for my thesis project about Marshallese canoes and social change. When I had stepped off the plane into the beating sun and took my first breath of salty, Marshall Islands air, I knew I had come home. It was like I was finally coming up for air after being underwater for far too long. Even better, I had almost immediately run into people on the street who told me that my host parents were currently on island, not on Namdrik, their home atoll, and that I should go visit them right away. I was feeling incredibly excited to see them, since we had been able to maintain very little communication because of the extremely poor mail system to the outer islands after I had left the country the previous year. I was also feeling something else, though, an emotion that I had not felt about my Marshallese family since I had first joined their household four years before. I was nervous. More specifically, I was nervous because I believed my relationship with my host parents was about to change. Liton is a master canoe builder, so naturally I was planning on interviewing him as part of my research. However, up until then I had been their daughter, a person they felt responsible to protect and care for. When I started my research and included my host parents in it, I believed that I would be changing the dynamic of that relationship, putting myself in the position of power and control.

My nervousness only increased as I rode in the taxi toward the house in Rita village where I knew they would be staying. What if they didn't feel comfortable being

researched? Would they feel like I was using them? What if I was wrong to include these people that I loved in my academic pursuits? How should I even begin to ask them if they wanted to participate? My fears and doubts were buzzing around in my brain like the relentless mosquitoes Namdrik atoll is famous for. As the taxi pulled up into the communal courtyard in front of the house, I tried to push the mosquitoes out of my mind. Most of all I just wanted to see my host parents again because I loved them, and had missed them. I was not going to let my worries about academic exploitation and relationships of inequality ruin this long-awaited reunion with my adopted family.

As soon as I walked in the door, I knew I had been worrying for nothing. My host parents were as happy to see me as I was to see them, and immediately started asking me questions about my life in Hawaii, how my school was going, and the health of my birth family back home in America. I was surprised to learn, before I had even told them, that they both assumed I had come back to do research for school. Liton even told me a story about another American they had known who had interviewed him many years ago about different types of Marshallese fishing techniques. I could literally feel myself relax as I realized that not only did they expect that I would want to talk to them for my project, but they actually brought up the topic themselves and then lectured me about who else I should speak to and how important it was for me to learn more about Marshallese culture. They clearly did not feel that this new dynamic was changing our relationship at all. They were still my parents, concerned first and foremost with guiding me and teaching me the right way to live. The fact that that guidance now included advice about conducting academic research in no way seemed to affect their parental feelings toward me.

We chatted for a number of hours, until I had to leave for another meeting. Liton told me to come back in a few days, and in the meantime he was going to write down everything I needed to know about Marshallese canoes. And just as he promised, when I returned two days later he was waiting for me with a whole pile of materials he had prepared. When we had discussed my project a few days before I explained that while I was interested in learning the technical details about the canoe, I was most interested in hearing what people felt the role of the canoe was in modern Marshallese life. Therefore, when I saw what he had prepared for me, I was a little taken aback. It was a stack of half a dozen sheets of lined paper covered from top to bottom with writing, drawings, and diagrams. He had drawn pictures of a canoe from every possible angle, and then written the name of every part visible from that angle. He had described the different sides of the hull, and the different ways of measuring when constructing the canoe. He had drawn each strut from the outrigger complex individually, in painstaking detail. He even provided alternate names for those parts whose names changed depending on the size of the canoe. I had never seen such a comprehensive collection of technical visual information about the canoe before.

This, he told me, was what I needed to learn if I wanted to truly understand the canoe tradition, and its place in Marshallese life. Everything that the canoe means within Marshallese culture, he explained, is embodied in these parts that make up the canoe itself. Each part, each angle, each technique has a name, and in that name is a story, and in that story is the structure of what it means to be Marshallese.

Jitdam̄ Kapeel – An Introduction to the Marshallese Canoe

If you ask any Marshallese person what are the most important aspects of their culture, ninety-nine percent of the time they will say without hesitation “food preparation, house building, and the canoe” (e.g., Aerōk, Kelen, Laik 2009). Mentil Laik even described these three traditions as “*pedped, dilep ko an mannit kein ad*” – “the foundations, the backbones of our culture” (Laik 2009). Of the three, the canoe tradition is probably the most highly respected today, even though like the other two canoe building is now relatively rare, especially in the urban centers. In the documentary video *Waan Aelōñ in Majel Program: Canoes of the Marshall Islands*, narrator Alson Kelen states that “if land is the foundation of Marshallese identity, canoes are its heart and soul” (Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004). The belief that the canoe tradition is the heart or the backbone of Marshallese culture is also supported by information in *bwebwenato*, *jabōnkōnnaan*, and even *Kajin Majel* itself in how the parts of the canoe are named and how those names are used in everyday life.

In this chapter I will investigate all three of these modes of expression to explore the relationship between the canoe tradition and broader Marshallese culture. I approach the canoe as a text woven from Geertz’s “webs of significance” that compose Marshallese culture. The importance of legends and proverbs in creating and maintaining the social fabric of a people is widely documented, including specifically in reference to Marshallese *bwebwenato* and *jabōnkōnnaan*. Downing et. al. describe how in *bwebwenato*, “the action contained in all the tales reflected the value and belief system of the society. Rewards and punishments were given according to the society’s cultural rules” (Downing et. al. 1992, note 28). The messages in *jabōnkōnnaan* as well “are in fact

‘first principles.’ They justify certain values and solidify customs that bind the culture together” (Stone et. al. 2000, vi).

However, the role of the canoe in modern Marshallese life is not as simple as the “canoe is the heart of Marshallese culture” argument. Many people today believe the canoe is linked to a past way of life that no longer exists. Because of decades of social change, people are having trouble reconciling their respect for the canoe tradition (and Marshallese culture more broadly), which is associated with the backwardness of the past, with their increasingly westernized modern lifestyle. Paradoxically, almost all Marshallese people simultaneously believe that even though the canoe tradition is no longer relevant to their increasingly westernized way of life, it nevertheless must continue to exist in the future, because it is such a fundamental part of their unique identity. I conclude the chapter by investigating this paradox of understanding, and how *jabōnkōnnaan* and other aspects of Marshallese worldview can provide a framework through which to understand the complex positioning of the canoe in the modern Marshall Islands.

The Canoe in Bwebwenato, Part I - In the Beginning

I start my exploration of the linkage between the canoe and the heart of Marshallese culture at the beginning – the invention of the canoe. The most common version of the *bwebwenato* explaining the origin of the canoe starts in Bikini atoll. The man-gods Leoa (also spelled Lewa) and Țōmtal (also Lomtōl, or Lamedal) were sent to Bikini by Țowa, the creator of the world, “with the measurements for the outrigger canoe, which had been prepared in heaven. Without these measurements, a canoe cannot be

built” (Kowata et. al. 1999, 4). This first version of the outrigger was made from *kōŋo*¹³ wood, did not have sails, and did not require paddles because “the canoe was built with *ek* (fish) at the water line fore and aft, which cause the canoe to move swiftly through the water” (Kowata et. al. 1999, 5). After Leoa and Țōmtal taught the Bikinians how to make the canoe, they then loaded the first outrigger with all the human and animal inhabitants of the atoll and sailed to Aelōnlaplap atoll so that everyone could be tattooed by Lewōj and Lanej, two more man-gods sent by Țowa from heaven to introduce tattooing to the world. During the long voyage the *ek* were killed, forcing the people and animals on the canoe to invent the paddle and paddle the rest of the way.¹⁴ The sail was not invented until later, which I will explore in more detail below.

This most well-known version of the canoe origin *bwebwenato* is recorded, in slightly varied forms, in many of the published collections of Marshallese stories and legends. There is, however, one other very different canoe origin *bwebwenato* recorded only in Tobin’s 2002 collection *Stories from the Marshall Islands*. I introduce this story in the Introduction chapter, because it is also the source of the *jabōnkōnnaan* from which comes the title of my thesis. This very long story is called simply “The Beginning of this World / Jinoin Laḷ in,” and it explains the origins of not only the canoe but also the world, the sun, the modern human race, the tattoo, the coconut, the pandanus plant, the house, the *jowi* (matriclan) system, and other aspects of Marshallese life and culture. To quickly recap, in the story many of the first human men try individually to build a canoe, and they keep chopping down breadfruit trees to build it but are not successful in their

¹³ Sea Trumpet or Island Walnut in English. Family *Boraginaceae*, latin name *Cordia subcordata* (Abo et. al. 2009: *kōŋo*; Taafaki et. al. 2006, 153).

¹⁴ This story is a compilation from versions published in Downing et al. 1992, Kowata et. al. 1999, and Tobin 2002. See also Kramer and Nevermann 1938.

efforts. Finally only one man succeeds by forming the first canoe from the pieces of the failed ones the other men had previously discarded.¹⁵ The other men become jealous that he was successful where they were not, and in anger they decide to separate everyone from each other, which is the origin of the *jowi* system which continues to exist today. The first woman recognizes that it is bad to split up all the people that had originally been together, and so in order to placate the men's jealousy she explains that only certain people know certain things; not everyone knows everything.¹⁶ She says the canoe belongs to everyone because everyone started the work, and it was completed with the results of everyone's work put together. Finally, she recites the *jabōnkōnnaan* from which comes the title of my thesis in order to clarify the importance of the canoe in their collective lives – “*Wa kuk, wa jīnor. Waan kōjipañ kōj, waan kōkkure kōj. Waan jokkwier*” (paraphrasing Tobin 2002) – “Canoe to bring us together, canoe belonging to everyone. Canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us. Canoe to give meaning to our lives.”

Later in this lengthy story, the more common version of the origin of the canoe made by Leoa and Lōmtal on Bikini atoll is recounted as in actuality the origin of the second canoe, not the first. In fact, a number of more common versions of origin stories are included in the second half of “The Beginning of this World,” after a very different version of the story has been told in the first half, with the explanation that, like the two canoe stories, the more well-known story is actually explaining the origin of the second tattoo, or the second house, not the first. The story is effectively divided into two halves – the first half including totally unique origin stories that do not accord with more

¹⁵ This fact perhaps explains why the canoe hull is made from separate pieces lashed together, not one solid piece.

¹⁶ This system of particular knowledges belonging to particular families is how traditional Marshallese knowledge is held even today.

commonly-known ones, and the second half including many of the more commonly-known origin stories to explain the origin of the second item or practice instead of the first.

While I cannot know the exact reason for the existence of two versions of many important origin stories, having multiple versions impacts my project significantly. The first half of this story, which is so different from any other origin story I have read, is important to me because it is the only recorded *bwebwenato* I have found that explains the “*wa kuk wa jīnor*” proverb upon which my thesis is founded. Parts of this *jabōnkōnnaan* are still well-known among Marshallese speakers today, but where it first came from is never discussed, and as far as I know has never been studied. This single story is the only one I have found in which the *jabōnkōnnaan* appears at all, even though parts of it are still common in everyday life in the Marshall Islands today. Similarly, the still very common proverb “*jined ilo kobo, jemād im jemen ro jet*” is explained in the first half of this story as well. There is another well-known story that is used to explain this particular *jabōnkōnnaan*, however many people who hear this story (myself included) do not understand how it effectively explains the origin of the *jabōnkōnnaan*, “*jined ilo kōbo, jemād im jemen ro jet*”. Therefore, while the first half of the *bwebwenato* “The Beginning of this World” is perhaps not as valuable as other, more common *bwebwenato* in explaining the origin of things like the canoe or the coconut, it is very valuable in explaining the origin of a number of highly significant *jabōnkōnnaan* that, despite their continued importance today, are not explained elsewhere. Perhaps the best way to approach the existence of conflicting origin stories is as I have tried to do above: to focus on the information that can be gathered from each version and the differences between

them, rather than searching for the “true” or “accurate” version of the story which may not even exist, and which is not what is truly important anyway.

The Canoe in Bwebwenato, Part II – The Canoe and the Sail

One of the most well-known *bwebwenato* in the Marshall Islands today is the story of Jebrō, Lōktañūr, and the origin of the sail. Not only is it the most famous *bwebwenato* about the canoe, it is one of the most famous *bwebwenato* in general. Versions of this story have been recorded and re-recorded for over a century (e.g, Kramer and Nevermann 1906, McArthur 1995). There has even been one study conducted on how the telling of this one specific story has changed over time, and what that change says about how Marshallese social life has evolved (McArthur 1995). First, I will recount here an amalgamation of a number of these slightly different versions. I will then examine the story, common variations within it, and the significance of both the story and its variations for our understanding of the canoe tradition.

After Leoa and Țōmtal introduced the canoe to the people of Bikini and they all paddled to Aelōñlaplap atoll to be tattooed, the people of Aelōñlaplap then learn how to build canoes. There was a woman named Lōktañūr (also spelled Liktanūr or Loktanur) who had come from the sky and lived in a *kōñe*¹⁷ tree on Woja Island in Aelōñlaplap atoll, and had eleven sons.¹⁸ Her sons decide to have a canoe race from Woja Island in the west to Jeh Island in the east in order to determine who would be *Irooj* (chief). At this time there was no sail, so canoes were simply poled or paddled by hand. As the brothers

¹⁷ Ironwood in English. Family *Lythraceae*, latin name *Pemphis acidula* (Abo et. al. 2009: kōñe; Taafaki et. al. 2006, 142).

¹⁸ There is some amount of disagreement in the sources regarding the number of sons. In Downing et. al. (1992), for example, she only has five sons. I am using the number reported in Tobin (2002), because 1) his informant names all eleven sons, and 2) most of the names are verified in another version of the story told in Knight (1999). However, it is important to note that, as I discuss above, the study of stories and legends is not an exact science, and many of the details are simply impossible to know for sure.

prepare to begin the race, Lōktañūr appears with a large, bulky bundle and asks each son to take her and her bundle along on his canoe. She asks Tūmur (also spelled Timur), the oldest, first, but he knows her heavy bundle would weigh down his canoe and make him lose the race so he tells her to ask his next youngest brother Mejdikdik. She then asks Mejdikdik, but he tells her to ask his next youngest brother Mejļap. Each brother in turn rejects their mother, until finally she reaches Jebrq, the youngest. Jebrq is very obedient, and immediately agrees to take her aboard his canoe, even though he knows he will have no chance of winning the race. By this point all the other brothers have started paddling eastward toward Jeh, but Lōktañūr tells Jebrq not to worry, and begins unpacking her huge bundle. She removes from the bundle a woven sail, a mast, cleats and riggings, and other sailing gear that she has created. She teaches Jebrq the names of each part and how to attach them. He then launches the canoe and she shows him how to use the sail and how to *diak* (tack) in order to change direction.

Jebrq and his mother quickly overtake each of the brothers, one after the other, until they finally pass Tūmur, who is in the lead. When Tūmur sees the speed of Jebrq's new sailing canoe, he demands that Jebrq trade with him. Lōktañūr tells Jebrq that he should obey his elders and give his older brother the canoe, but to take the boom socket with him, so the canoe will be unable to *diak*. They trade canoes, and Jebrq and his mother begin paddling to Jeh. Tūmur speeds ahead in the sailing canoe, but when he tries to turn, the sail boom cannot attach to the other end of the canoe because the socket is missing, and the canoe drifts aimlessly in the wrong direction. Jebrq lands at Jeh first, where Lōktañūr bathes him and dresses him like an *Irooj*. Finally Tūmur reaches Jeh, still ahead of all of the rest of the brothers, but far behind Jebrq. He sees the smooth sand and

no one around and assumes that he has won the race. He begins proclaiming himself *Irooj*, when Jebrō appears in his finery and chants, “When Jebro rise at sunrise / he calm down upon water / he love everybody” (Knight 1999, 4). When Tūmur realizes Jebrō is the winner he swears that he will never look upon his brother’s face again, and in his anger and shame he churns up the water and wind.



Figure 10: Preparing for a modern-day reenactment of the Jebrō race, Aelōñlaplap atoll, 2003.
Photo credit *Waan Aelōñ in Majel*

Now Lōktañūr, Jebrō, and all his brothers are constellations in the night sky.

Tūmur and Jebrō are so far apart that they are never in the sky at the same time, and so to this day they have never looked upon each other’s faces again. When Tūmur is in the sky the weather is very windy and the seas are rough, the start of the bad time when fishing is impossible and people are very hungry. When Jebrō finally is refreshed and rises again it is the start of the good time, with no wind and plenty of food. Because of this, as well as because of his obedience and humility in the story, Jebrō is known as an *Irooj* of peace,

who loves all people. In English Jebr̄o is known as the Pleiades, and has been used by sailors throughout the world for centuries to guide their boats through the night.¹⁹

Today, the story of Jebr̄o and the sail is still very popular. Even though many young people no longer know the old stories, almost everyone still knows the story of Jebr̄o. Baby boys are often even named Jebr̄o, one of the few instances of repetition of personal names in the Marshall Islands (personal observation). Unlike the origin stories I discuss above, most of which have no clear moral message or lesson behind them, universally people identify the message of the story of Jebr̄o and Lōktañūr as the importance of humility and respect for one's elders, especially one's mother, above all else (e.g., Downing et. al. 1992, Tobin 2002). Respect for elders, especially elder women, is still considered a key value by many Marshallese people today, and is identified by most as one of the most important aspects of traditional Marshallese social structure.

It is stories such as this one that entwine the canoe tradition so tightly into the heart of Marshallese culture. In this story, one of the most important Marshallese values is tied to the invention of the sailing canoe. When Marshallese people think about why their culture is matrilineal and why they are supposed to respect their mothers above all others, they think of the story of Jebr̄o and Lōktañūr, and vice versa. Even though Marshallese culture has changed drastically and will continue to change into the future – including the potential erosion of the importance of matrilineal inheritance which was in the past the foundation of Marshallese social life – I believe that the persistence of this story is a sign that Marshallese people want to continue to hold on to their traditional values and their unique history. Because the canoe embodies so many of the core values

¹⁹ This story is a compilation from versions published in Carucci 1997b, Downing et al. 1992, Knight 1999, McArthur 1995, and Tobin 2002.

and beliefs that characterize Marshallese culture, its continued existence is one way to keep the culture alive. However, the story of Jebrō and Lōktañūr is only one example of the connections between the canoe tradition and wider Marshallese cultural values and practices. In the following sections, I will explore other examples in *jabōnkōnnaan* and *Kajin Majeļ* itself of the links between the canoe and Marshallese culture.

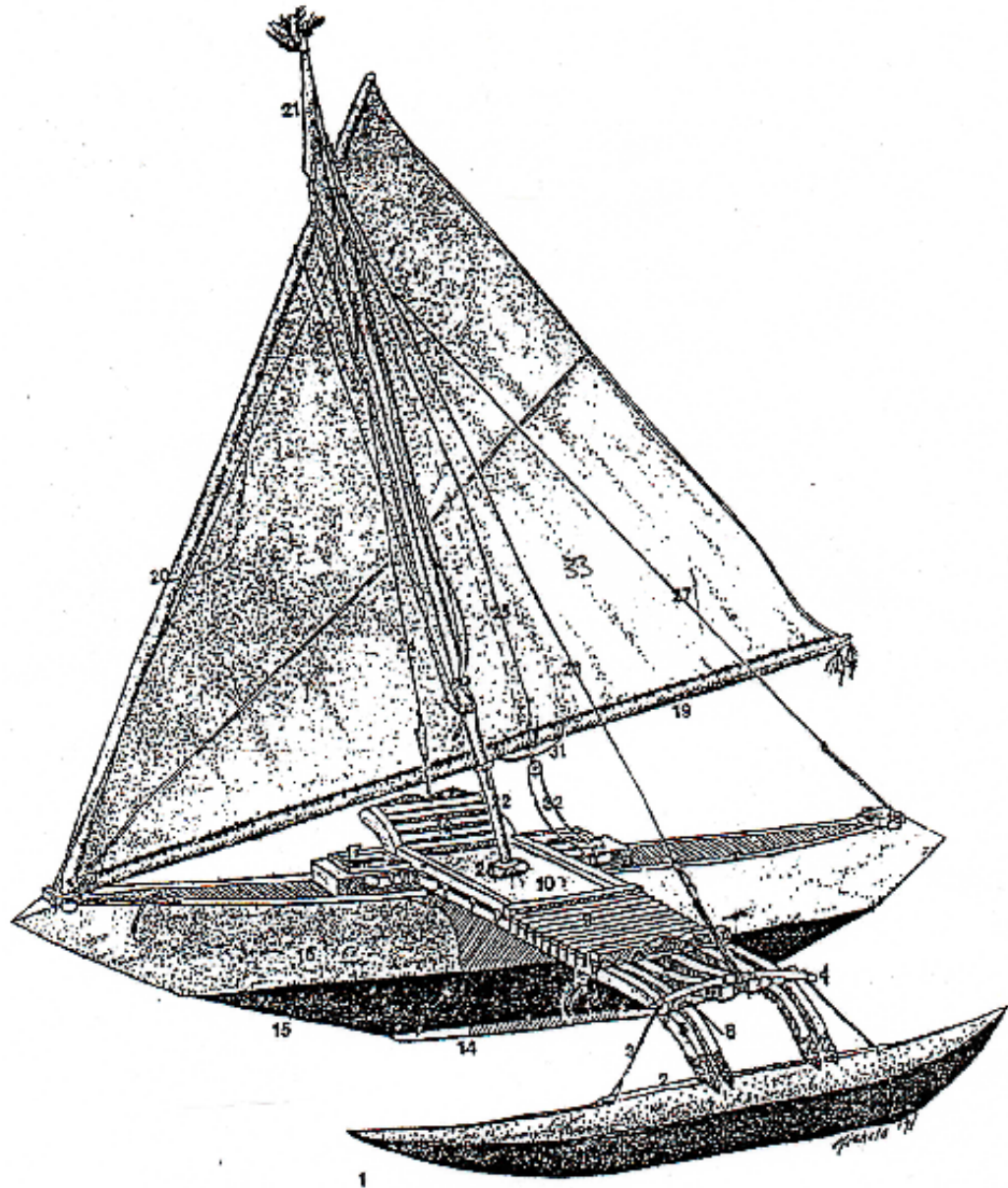
The Canoe in Kajin Majeļ

At its most fundamental level, *kajin wa* (canoe language) is imbued with symbolic meaning that links the canoe tradition with the most deeply-held Marshallese values and practices. Because the canoe was the foundational practice that supported subsistence in the harsh atoll environment, it is not surprising that the language used to describe the canoe reflects the structure of the social order in which it is embedded. For that reason, analysis of *kajin wa* leads to a deeper understanding of Marshallese culture as a whole.

The most basic example is the generic word for canoe itself: *wa*. Grammatically, *wa* can be shown to mean more than just ‘canoe.’ The stem *wa-* is also used as a possessive classifier for an entire class of objects which one can ride or drive in some way. For example, *waam wa* means ‘your canoe,’ while *waaō tūrak* means ‘my truck.’ Even farther departed from ‘canoe’ is the term *waan joñak*, which literally means ‘vehicle of measurement’ but is loosely translated as ‘example.’ Carucci discusses the significance of this term further: “Marshall Islanders measure human accomplishment with exemplary stories and parables known as *waanjonak*. (Literally, *waan-jonak* means ‘a vehicle’ or ‘a sailing-class thing’ with which ‘to measure’.) It is this unique semiotic positioning of sailing that allows it to serve as an appropriate analogy for the course of human life” (Carucci 1995, 21). *Wa* at its most basic level therefore means something

closer to ‘vessel,’ analogous to the vessels which carry blood in the human body and sustain life. Alson Kelen, one of my informants, in fact made this exact distinction: “*Wa* is the canoe, it’s the vessel, it’s the vessel of life. Because...that’s what transports needs from every direction. It’s like the vessel[s] in your body – without the vessel[s], no more blood” (Kelen 2009).

In the Marshallese language, the word *wa* links the canoe with the most basic means of sustaining human life. More specific terms for parts of the canoe explain certain aspects of that life from a uniquely Marshallese viewpoint. The three most overt examples are the terms *jouj*, *rojak kōrā* and *rojak ŋaan*, and *jinen wa*. The *jouj* is name for the lower part of the main hull of the canoe. *Jouj* also means ‘kindness.’ In an interview I conducted with three canoebuilders, I specifically asked if they believe there is a connection between the two meanings of *jouj*. This is one response: “*Ebōk eddoin aolep men ilo āne, ilo jinoin jekjek ļok nan ne ekeiļok ļojet*” (Aerōk 2009), which means “it [the *jouj*] carries the weight of everything else, from the time when they start carving the canoe until when the canoe is sailing in the ocean.” He explained further that the *jouj* is one of the first parts of the canoe that is built, it is used to do all the other measurements, and then the rest of the canoe is built on top of it. Once the canoe is completed, the *jouj* is the part of the hull that stays underwater and supports all the cargo and passengers so they stay safe (Aerōk 2009; Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004). Another canoebuilder added that the name *jouj* is taken from the *jabōnkōnnaan* “*jouj eo mour eo, ļāj eo mej eo,*” which means “kindness is life, hate is death” (Clement 2009). The underlying message of these explanations is that human life is not possible without kindness, and the proper expression of that kindness is demonstrated by the function of



- | | | |
|------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Kubaak | 12. Ron | 23. Boklop |
| 2. Ae | 13. Kilikili | 24. Toron |
| 3. Kabaj | 14. Mal | 25. Tiliej |
| 4. Jojo | 15. Jouj | 26. Tokubaak |
| 5. Apet | 16. Mej | 27. Jomur |
| 6. Kie | 17. Haj | 28. Maan |
| 7. Mweiur lon | 18. Dipakaak | 29. Jallikok/keplok |
| 8. Mweiur lal | 19. Rojak kora | 30. Kopalpel |
| 9. Kein-eoon-ere | 20. Rojak maan | 31. Iep-lik |
| 10. Ere | 21. Lot | 32. Toiep |
| 11. Kein maeron | 22. Kiju | 33. Ujele |

Figure 11: Diagram of names of parts of canoe.
 Image courtesy of Waan Aelōñ in Majel

the *jouj* of the canoe: selflessly taking responsibility for the health and safety of all others.

The other three part names are taken from the structure of the family – both marital relations and the relationship between a mother and her children. *Rojak* means ‘boom,’ and *rojak ṁaan* and *rojak kōrā* are the names of the upper and lower booms, respectively, which support the edges of the sail. Literally, *rojak ṁaan* means ‘male boom’ and *rojak kōrā* means ‘female boom.’ Ejnar Aerōk explained the meaning of these names by saying, “*Jerbal ippān doon bwe en marōn ṁaan wa e,*” which means “They work together so the boat can move forward” (Aerōk 2009). Just as a husband and wife must work together to have a happy and successful life, so are both booms necessary to support the sail that in turn propels the canoe (Aerōk 2009; Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004).

Lastly, *jinen wa* literally means ‘mother of the canoe.’ The term refers to a collection of three distinct canoe parts: the *iep* (line connecting the *rojak kōrā* to the hull [sheet in nautical terms]), the *lem* (bailer), and the *jebwe* (paddle or rudder) used to steer the boat. This collection of parts together is known as the ‘mother of the canoe’ because they are so vitally important in directing and steering the canoe. As Tiem Clement described, “*jebwe eo an juon baamle ej jinen,*” meaning “the mother is the rudder of the family” (Clement 2009). Just as children will be unsuccessful as adults if their mother does not raise them correctly, so the canoe will sail away and crash on the coral if the *jebwe* is not used to direct it (Clement 2009; Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004).

It is obvious that the terms used to name the parts of the canoe are linked to many other aspects of Marshallese culture and life in highly significant ways. The very language used to speak about the canoe expresses a multitude of additional messages

about right lifestyle, interpersonal relations, and other aspects of human social life. Tiem Clement came to this conclusion during our discussion of the language of the canoe: “*part kā an juon wa me raar bōke jen mannit im bwebwenato im baaṅle im bwijūm im nukun kein adeaṅ, eṅe emaroṅ bōkto-bōktak armej jen aelōṅ ṅan aelōṅ...ilo aolepān men kā kā ebar wōr bwebwenato*” (Clement 2009), which means “all the parts of the canoe were taken from culture and legend and family and lineage and kinship, so that it can carry people from island to island...In all of these parts there is a story.” The meanings embedded in the *kajin wa* allow people to use the canoe not only as a means of transportation “from island to island,” but also as a means of directing the course of their lives.

The Canoe in Jabōnkōnnaan²⁰

Like *bwebwenato*, *jabōnkōnnaan* are a very useful window into the structure of Marshallese culture. The literal translation of *jabōnkōnnaan* is “the edge of talking,” or in other words, “a way to express oneself indirectly” (Stone et. al. 2000, v). Canoes are very common in Marshallese *jabōnkōnnaan*, likely because activities related to the canoe were such a major part of daily life. In addition, as I have discussed above, the nature of the Marshallese canoe as a “vessel of life” lends itself to the metaphorical expression of deeper cultural understandings and values. There are a number of *jabōnkōnnaan* that refer directly to the canoe as the key to human life, some of which I have already referenced in previous chapters. The proverb from which comes the title of my thesis is the clearest example of this: “*Wa kuk, wa jimor. Waan kōjipaṅ kōj, Waan kōkkure kōj. Waan jokkwier*” (paraphrasing Tobin 2002) – “Canoe to bring us together, canoe belonging to

²⁰ Unless otherwise cited, all the *jabōnkōnnaan* in this section are sourced from Stone et. al. 2000. The translations are either my own or from the Stone collection. For more information, please see Appendix A.

everyone. Canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us. Canoe to give meaning to our lives.”

Although this *jabōnkōnnaan* is rarely recited in its entirety, the individual segments are also well-known and significant on their own. Another *jabōnkōnnaan* that explains the importance of the canoe tradition in human life is, “*Kwōjab inojeiklōk jāne wa kein, bwe iaḷan mour ko kein*” – “Don’t drift away from these canoes, for they are your path through life.”

There are many *jabōnkōnnaan* that, like the *Kajin Majeḷ* I discuss above, use the canoe tradition as a metaphor to inform about right way of life. “*Pao jān mar*” and “*kotkot mejen rom*” refer to the sudden changes or events that can occur while sailing and cause the boat to flip, thereby reminding people to always remain alert and do not take success for granted. “*Jen maan ibeb*” refers to the rhythm of the waves of which sailors must be aware when they are launching their canoe, thus informing people that there are forces of nature and other supernatural events that are beyond human control and must not be forgotten. “*Mōkajkaji, jaḷjaḷi, batbat*” describes how when you are hurrying and do not stop to check the outrigger lashings, they may come undone during the voyage and cause a longer delay than if you had stopped to check them in the beginning, thereby explaining that quality in one’s work is more important than speed (Stone et. al. 2000).



Figure 12: Lashing the hull of a canoe in progress.
Photo credit Waan Aelōñ in Majeḷ

Of course there are also many *jabōnkōnnaan* that are not about sailing. Many are about fishing or the environment, because these things were also very important parts of daily life and so could be used as easily understandable referents for passing on deeper messages (Stone et. al. 2000). There are also a good number of *jabōnkōnnaan* that more directly describe the right way to live, the best way to interact with others, and messages of a more clearly advisory nature. Unsurprisingly, most of these *jabōnkōnnaan* echo the deeper meanings of the names of the parts of the canoe which I discuss above. For example, “*jake jebōl eo*” (Stone et. al. 2000) which means “provide life to others,” extols the values of sharing and cooperation instead of self-interest and individualism. This is very similar to the way the *jouj* takes on the weight of the rest of the canoe and the passengers and cargo, demonstrating that the correct way to show kindness to others is through selflessness and cooperation. “*Jouj eo mour eo, lāj eo mej eo,*” which I discuss above, expresses essentially the same message. In another example, “*rie ŋe jeim,*” meaning “help your sibling,” promotes the unity that is necessary for life on a coral atoll. This is similar to the way a husband and wife must unite and work together in order to have a successful marriage, just as the *rojak ŋaan* and *rojak kōrā* work together to support the sail and power the canoe.

In my investigation of canoe-based *jabōnkōnnaan*, I was surprised to discover that there are a few that do not accord with the values of sharing, cooperation, unity, and kindness that are extolled in most other *jabōnkōnnaan* and *bwebwenato* and echoed in the meanings of many of the parts of the canoe. “*Inkan aodde*” refers to the fact that “just as each canoe creates it’s [sic.] own wake, so does each man cut his own life’s pattern that becomes a unique source of accomplishment and admiration” (Stone et. al. 2000, 2-3).

Similarly, “*ṛōṛṛaan ilo jimwin waan*,” which means “the man at the end/stem of his canoe,” also refers explicitly to individuality: “Only the canoe-builder may determine the angle of the stem of his canoe; one makes it more pointed, the other more rounded. One acts this way, the other another way, each according to his own ideas” (Stone et. al. 2000, 6). Finally, “*juunmeto*” is the title given to the most experienced navigator on a voyage. It is a term of great prestige, but it also entails the solitude and loneliness of leadership as he takes sole responsibility for the lives of the other sailors. Individualism, uniqueness, pride, solitude, and loneliness are values and emotions that are quite rare in what is typically extolled as correct Marshallese life, which is usually characterized by the emphasis on community and family I discuss above.

Despite the embeddedness of the more common values of kindness, sharing, and unity within the names and parts of the canoe, it seems that the canoe tradition may present something of a contradiction. These three *jabōnkōnnaan* are the only ones I have found that support uniqueness, pride, privacy, and other individualistic values, and all three *jabōnkōnnaan* use the canoe as a metaphor to present these values. It seems that some aspect of the canoe’s nature lends itself to principles and ideals that are counter to the values usually touted as true Marshallese-ness. Carucci provides a clue in his description of the simultaneously hierarchical and communal voyaging environment: “The captain, bailer, and weather specialist provide metaphors through which storytellers describe hierarchical relationships, while the coordinated effort that allows members of the crew to perform as one represents people’s interdependence in the voyage through life” (Carucci 1995, 25). This understanding effectively reconciles the discrepancy between the two sets of values that both seem to be embodied by the canoe. The canoe is

characterized by communal as well as individualistic values, but because it is such a complex and multi-faceted tradition both sets of values can exist within it without contradiction.²¹ This dual nature of the canoe may also help explain the contradictory status the canoe tradition holds in the minds of many Marshallese people today, as I shall explore further in the next section.

Kōne Jubar

There are a number of *jabōnkōnnaan* about the importance of a good beginning, and a strong foundation, for the future success of a person or an endeavor. “*Kōne jubar*,” meaning “strongly rooted as ironwood” (Stone et. al. 2000, 59), uses the deep roots of the *kōne* tree which penetrate into the underlying coral as a metaphor for the “very strong footings of a beginning” (Stone et. al. 2000, 60). “*Liok tūt bok*” conveys a similar message using the metaphor of the pandanus tree rooting deeply through the sandy soil. “*Ek mouj jab meļokļok kilōne eo an*” translates literally as “the Pacific Longnose Parrotfish does not forget its surge channel” (Stone et. al. 2000, 45), meaning that wherever they are in the world, people must always remember their home island and culture. The underlying meaning of all three of these *jabōnkōnnaan* is that the past – one’s history and heritage – is a very important part of the present as well as the future. This idea is also embodied in the structure of the canoe tradition, which as I discussed above is linked through history and language with the roots of Marshallese culture and the foundations of Marshallese life.

However, despite its proclaimed cultural importance, and in spite of its obviously extensive roots within broader Marshallese culture and life, the canoe tradition is also

²¹ Special thanks to Dr. Julie Walsh Kroeker for helping me frame and clarify this argument.

commonly understood today as part of a past which is now gone. A good number of the people I interviewed said that they believed the old place of the canoe in everyday life is gone forever, part of a past which is no longer relevant to the modern Marshall Islands. For example, during a discussion of what he believes should be the future of the canoe tradition, Newton Lajuon said “we’re not going to expect everyone to paddle canoes around, we’re done with that” (Lajuon 2009). In much of the literature as well, scholars declare that the canoe tradition is doomed to disappear as the Marshallese people move farther and farther away from their roots: “By the end of the twentieth century, sailing canoes will, in all likelihood, also disappear. Even now, they are but an ephemeral outline of their earlier form. The last traditional seaworthy canoes were constructed on Ujelang in 1976 and 1977...It is unlikely another one will ever be built” (Carucci 1995, 17).

Implied in this conceptualization of the canoe tradition today is a very western understanding of time as a linear stream, leading only in one direction, constantly divorcing the present from the past. Chuji Chutaro expressed this exact understanding when he described how the canoe used to be the most important part of life in the past, and how he believes it could be again today, “if we return to it” (Chutaro 2009). According to this view, while the canoe was indeed the foundation of Marshallese life in the past, that past has been left behind in the unidirectional movement of the nation toward the future, calling the existence of the canoe tradition in the present day into question.

Paradoxically, these same people who identified the canoe tradition with a now-gone past also stated that they believe the canoe should be an important part of life in the future. Unanimously, every person I interviewed said that the canoe tradition must not

disappear from Marshallese culture, or the foundation of their identity would disappear as well. This seemingly contradictory understanding problematizes the simple “canoe is the heart of Marshallese culture” argument I have been exploring throughout this chapter. If the canoe tradition is the backbone of Marshallese culture, how could people believe it is no longer relevant to their modern lives, but also believe that it should continue to exist in the future? The reality is that even though the canoe is inexorably linked in a myriad of elegant and diverse ways with Marshallese values and way of life, if people forget those linkages the canoe will be lost, and will take a significant part of the culture with it. Throughout the recent past, the trend has pointed toward the loss of the canoe tradition, because in truth it is no longer an important practical tool in modern Marshallese life. Why, then, do people still argue that the canoe tradition must not be lost, even as they argue it is not an important part of their lives anymore? How can we understand this seeming discrepancy?

Ukot Bōkā

In keeping with the methodology of my thesis project, I searched for the answer to this puzzle within the Marshallese worldview, specifically through the *jabōnkōnnaan* as well as *Kajin Majeļ* more generally. I discovered two *jabōnkōnnaan* that are relevant to a Marshallese understanding of time and the past. “*Ukot bōkā*” is a well-known expression that means literally “change the tide.” It implies that like the cyclical pattern of the tides, one must return the kindness one receives in life in an ongoing pattern of giving and receiving. A similar but less well-known *jabōnkōnnaan* is “*ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā,*” which means “the tide always goes out and comes in.” Both of these *jabōnkōnnaan* express an understanding of time, like tides, as cyclical, not linear. In the

immediate present things do change, but in the greater scheme of things they also stay the same. Finally, Alson Kelen recited for me a *jabōnkōnnaan* that directly links the canoe tradition with the cyclical nature of time and tide: “*Bwine boñin no lik, woran boñin māāl iar*” – “count the rhythm of the waves breaking on the oceanside reef, it should be the same as the rhythm of the adzes chopping on the lagoonside” (Kelen 2009). Just like the never-ending cycle of waves crashing on the reef, once a new canoe is started the work should never stop until it is fully completed.

This innately Marshallese understanding of time, and by extension the rhythm of existence, provides a unique framework through which to comprehend the paradoxical understanding many Marshallese people hold of the role of the canoe in their lives and the future. The canoe tradition is of course changing over time, because like the tides nothing ever stays exactly the same. But like the greater ocean of which the tides are a part, nothing ever really changes, and the canoe tradition will continue to exist in some form in whatever future the Marshallese people choose to create for themselves.

According to this perspective, the canoe will continue to exist and be an important part of life, even though over time its meaning and context will continue to change.

Unlike within the constraints of linear time, according to this cyclical understanding the canoe does not have to be only what it was a century ago – a practical tool to sustain everyday life. The canoe can, and will, continue to exist and provide meaning in people’s lives as it evolves and changes in concert with Marshallese life, which is evolving and changing around it. This explains why the canoe tradition seems to be continuing into the future as an important symbol of identity and meaning even though it is widely understood to no longer be a practical tool in everyday life as it once was. As

their way of life changes due to the constant pressures of social change, people are adapting the canoe tradition so that it will continue to be meaningful within the new and modern circumstances. In the next chapter I will explore in more depth the specific ways the canoe tradition has changed throughout the past, and how those changes are linked to the broader patterns of social change that have been and continue to be powerful forces in modern Marshallese life.

CHAPTER THREE: JOIJ EO MOUR EO, LĀJ EO MEJ EO – KINDNESS IS LIFE, HATE IS DEATH

Bwebwenato eo – The Story

The first interview I conducted as part of my field research was actually a mass interview with a mixed group of students from both beginning and advanced classes at the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI). I had already introduced myself and explained about my project on canoes, and how I wanted to have a conversation with them about their understandings of the canoe tradition as young Marshall Islanders. Now the classroom was full of whispering Marshallese youths. I had just passed out a handout showing a drawing of a canoe, with blank spaces for the students to fill in the names of all the various parts. Most of the students had taken one look at the paper and panicked – “what if we don’t know any of the names?” they cried. “It’s ok,” I assured them. “This is not a test. I just want to learn how much you know about the canoe.” I was using the handout to gauge the extent of college-age Marshallese youths’ knowledge of basic information surrounding the canoe. Upon hearing this they relaxed a little, enough to begin teasing each other about how little they knew.

Once the students had spent some time filling in all the names of the parts that they could, they started to get restless. As I was collecting the completed papers, one of the students asked why I wanted them to write their names on it. One of the teachers, a woman from Canada, joked that I wanted them to write their names so I could print their answers in the local newspaper. Everyone laughed, and an especially well-spoken young student named Sulitha remarked, “I would be ashamed.” She grinned devilishly and continued: “I don’t need to worry about the canoe because we got planes.” Instantly my

interest was piqued. Why would she say that? I wondered to myself. She was clearly making a joke, but what was the underlying understanding of modernity versus tradition that structured her statement?

When I approached the girl a moment later to collect her paper she sighed, “Oh god, it’s so embarrassing.” Seizing upon an opportunity, the teacher asked, “But why is it embarrassing?” Sulitha responded, “Because I don’t know much about canoes.” “Do you feel like you should know?” I asked. “Well, I guess so, yeah” she answered. Her face slowly transformed from silly and joking to more serious, even slightly sad. She explained further that she was actually raised more in the Gilbertese and Tuvaluan culture of some of her extended family, and that was why she didn’t know much about Marshallese canoes. Only now, as she was becoming an adult, was she learning more about Marshallese culture, even though she was born and raised in the Marshall Islands. “So did you learn about canoes in Gilbertese or Tuvaluan culture?” I asked. She looked down unhappily, and then slowly back up at me. “Unfortunately, no.”

As more students shared their stories and their experiences with canoes during the rest of the interview, it became clear that very few of them knew anything about canoes at all. I was shocked to discover that not one of them knew how to build or sail a canoe. Of the eighteen students in the class, less than half had ever even ridden on a canoe. The reasons were all the same: “I don’t know anyone that could teach me.” “My dad says canoes are not important anymore.” “I don’t have time to learn about canoes and also go to school and help take care of my family.” “You don’t make money by sailing canoes; you make money by working at a real job.” I was truly stunned by these responses. Later that night, as I was reviewing the interview recording and materials, I began to wonder if

my experience with canoes in the Marshalls was truly out of the ordinary. I lived on Namdrik, where canoes are still used every day, and children grow up riding on and then sailing canoes since before they can walk. I then moved to Majuro and worked at the only formal canoe-based organization in the country, surrounded by experts and masters. Is my perspective on canoes totally unrealistic for the reality of the canoe tradition in the Marshalls today? Is the reality that canoebuilding really is a skill with no future? By this point I was questioning whether there was any merit to my thesis project at all.

After I finished reviewing the interview recording, I read through the students' answers on the fill-in-the-blanks canoe parts handout. I was surprised to discover that every single student correctly identified the *kubaak* (outrigger). Some of them only filled in that one line, but they all got it right. Many of the students were also able to identify at least a few other key parts: well over a majority of the students correctly named one or both of the *rojak maan* and *rojak kōrā*; seven knew the name of the *jojo* (outrigger spar); and six accurately identified the *jouj*. For a group of youths who had never learned to build or sail a canoe – half of whom had never even ridden on a canoe – they were surprisingly knowledgeable about the language of the canoe. I realized that even though most young people today know virtually nothing about the practicalities of building and sailing canoes, the canoe tradition itself is far from dead in the minds of most Marshall Islanders. Instead, the canoe is still very much present in the songs and proverbs that young people all over the country still learn, and most of all in the language that is still widely spoken. Even if the canoe itself might not be especially important or relevant today, the knowledge and understandings it embodies are still very much alive.

Rethinking the *Jabōnkōnnaan*

In the previous chapter, I explored the meaning of the canoe within broader Marshallese culture. I concluded that although *jabōnkōnnaan*, *bwebwenato*, and *Kajin Majeļ* all position the canoe as the heart of Marshallese culture and the embodiment of key traditional values and practices, due to extensive social change the canoe tradition has come to occupy a different role today. Even though most Marshallese people would still point to the canoe as the core of their unique culture and identity, they also often link the canoe to a past way of life that they feel is no longer relevant to the modern Marshall Islands. In this chapter, I will explore the processes through which this paradoxically changing understanding of the importance of the canoe tradition has come to be. I focus primarily on the forces of purposeful social change Marshall Islanders experienced during the American administration, and the impacts these forces had (and continue to have) on the role of the canoe in modern Marshallese life. I conclude the chapter by revisiting the “inversion of tradition” argument that I discussed in Chapter 1. I contrast this approach with the method of understanding culture and history put forth in *jabōnkōnnaan*, as well as with the more recent transformation of the canoe into a vehicle of symbolic meaning, in order to better understand the multiple and often conflicting ways in which Marshallese people have attempted to understand themselves, their culture, and their place in the world.

As I explored in the previous chapter, the key Marshallese values that are central in most *jabōnkōnnaan* are kindness, sharing, and unity. Love and care for one another and the maintenance of the family and the community emerge as common themes in many *jabōnkōnnaan* and *bwebwenato*. There are also many other *jabōnkōnnaan* that instead of

emphasizing these positive values, deride oppositional negative values, especially greed, self-interest, and lack of forethought. “*Jepelpel mej*” – “separation is death” describes quite bluntly how when war or other violence or disaster breaks up a community, the resulting lack of family bonds and social cohesion can only lead to death (Stone et. al. 2000). The *jabōnkōnnaan* from which comes the title of this chapter: “*jouj eo mour eo, lāj eo mej eo,*” which means literally “kindness is life, hate is death,” is an explicit example of the high value placed on love and kindness toward others, and the correspondingly low value placed on hate and cruelty (ibid.). Violent or antisocial emotions and behaviors are quite literally equated with disaster and death, an attitude that makes sense in fragile atoll communities for whom survival truly was dependent on cooperation and sharing of extremely limited resources.

There is a separate set of *jabōnkōnnaan* that also negate individuality, greed, and self-interest, but through the use of specifically animal-based metaphors. “*Būruōn kidiaj*” refers to the alleged propensity of the giant grouper to eat anything it finds, and is a phrase that is used to describe a person who is extremely selfish or greedy (National Biodiversity Team of the RMI 2000). Similarly, “*būruōn kūro*” describes the swim bladder of the deep-water grouper, which often pops out of its mouth like a second throat/heart²² when it is brought to the surface. In English, the phrase would refer to a person who is “double-hearted, traitorous, disloyal” (National Biodiversity Team of the RMI 2000, 77). “*Eļtak in maj*” means “an eel turning up and back” (Stone et. al. 2000, 45), but more generally describes how, like the flexible and unpredictable eel, a person

²² In the Marshallese language, the term ‘throat’ is used where in English we would say ‘heart.’ For example, *erup būruōn* – ‘broken throated’ means the same as ‘broken hearted’ in English. *Epen būruōn* – ‘hard throated’ is equivalent to ‘hard hearted’ or ‘mean, spiteful, selfish’ in English (Rudiak-Gould 2004). This reference to the throat of the grouper follows the same pattern.

can quickly turn against you or betray you for their own gain. Finally, “*mejen bale*” means “the eyes of the flounder,” which are both on one side of the fish’s body and seem to be focused on only a narrow range of sight. This phrase refers to a person who is overly nice to some people but completely ignores others, and is therefore obviously thinking only about their own self-interest and not the good of all (Stone et. al. 2000).

As I conducted my interviews about the canoe tradition, I discovered that some people have begun relating modern Marshallese culture, and by association the canoe tradition, with just those values and emotions that are considered negative in the conceptualization that emerges out of the *jabōnkōnnaan*. For example, Alson Kelen described how for the most part today, canoebuilding is considered just a job, while in the past it was a unified community effort. He claimed that now people will not contribute and help in the building unless they know they will get some personal benefit out of it. This change in the practice of building canoes, he argued, is actually one of the signs of how overall Marshallese culture itself has also changed to include individualism and personal gain (Kelen 2009).

A number of my informants explained how in the past half century there has been a gradual social movement away from the cultural emphasis on family and community and toward individuality and personal accumulation, a view that is shared by some outside scholars conducting research throughout the region as well (e.g., see Hezel 2001). Those values that were understood as negative, such as selfishness and greed, are more acceptable now because of the sweeping social changes that have so transformed modern Marshallese life. Changes in how canoes are built and used today, and how the knowledge of the canoe is passed on (or not passed on), reflect this social movement

toward individualism. In the following sections I explore in more detail the broad forces of social change that have been enacted and engaged with throughout Marshallese history, as well as the more specific impacts those changes have had on the shape of the canoe tradition over time.

A Brief Review of a History of Social Change in the Marshalls

Social and cultural change has been an everpresent force in Marshallese life since first contact with Europeans, and most likely to a lesser degree even before that (Rainbird 2004, Thomas 1997). However, it is generally agreed that the American colonial period represented the time of the most intense and purposeful social change in the history of what is now the Marshall Islands (Hanlon 1998, Kiste & Marshall 1999, Mason 1971, Walsh 1995). The history of colonialism in the Marshalls has been documented extensively in other places (e.g., see Hezel 1983, 1995; Peattie 1988), so for the sake of this study I will simply outline the basic information about the more than a century of colonial rule experienced by the Marshall Islanders.

In 1885, Germany declared itself the colonial ruler of the Marshall Islands, although diverse European and American traders, businessmen, missionaries, and other travelers had also been visiting the area for at least a century previously. The German administration was mainly interested in maximizing profits from commerce in the Marshalls, which consisted primarily of copra production. By the turn of the century, life had already changed for the Marshallese population in significant ways: in the southern atolls especially, where evangelism and colonialism were the most intense, Christianity was widespread, European-style clothing was increasingly common, many people could read and write, and formal education was firmly entrenched (Hezel 1995). Although in

many ways the pre-contact social order and chiefly hierarchy was still the norm, foreign-style commerce and interaction with colonial rulers was bringing the god-like *Irooj* into the secular world of business, and changing the way *Irooj* and *kajoor* (commoners) understood and interacted with each other (Carucci 1997a, Petrosian-Husa 2005, Walsh 2003).

Japan took over control of what eventually became the League of Nations Class C Mandate of Micronesia at the end of World War I in 1914. The Japanese colonial administration was significantly more intensive than earlier German rule, although maximizing commercial profit was important under the new regime as well. Public works programs, a public education system, and efforts at economic development were undertaken by the Japanese administration, all of which were “aimed at ‘placing a permanent Japanese imprint’ on the islands” (Hezel 1995, 153) and paving the way for a prolonged and prosperous Japanese colonial era (Hezel 1995, Peattie 1988). Unlike Germany, one of Japan’s goals was to “civilize” the inhabitants of its colony, a mission which was primarily undertaken through efforts in education and religion. In addition, the Japanese attempted to alter the local political system in order to make it more compatible with the shape of the colonial government in the region, an effort which contributed to the erosion of traditional chiefly authority (Peattie 1988). Hezel describes the attitude toward the indigenous political systems taken by the different colonizing powers in Micronesia:

the Spanish more or less ignored the local chiefs and their domain, while the Germans had tried to use them but limit their authority where it might interfere with development aims. The Japanese government... would add, discard, and amalgamate as necessary to fashion a political structure that would bend to their will and cooperate actively in their civilizing mission. (Hezel 1995, 169; see also Peattie 1988, 68)

In fact, the democratization process which I describe in more detail below in regard to the American colonial regime actually truly began to some extent with the Japanese:

From the Micronesian perspective, more important was the distinction that soon arose between village chiefs, who came from traditional royal lineages or were chosen by their communities, and 'government office chiefs,' who might have no legitimacy in a traditional sense, but were appointed by the branch government because they were believed to be more amenable to direction by the Japanese. (Peattie 1988, 76)

The repercussions of this new distinction between *Irooj* authority and non-chiefly indigenous authority were intensified further during the American era, and continue today. Also similarly to the Americans after them, the Japanese approached their empire with the belief that even the small Micronesian nations should be guided along the western path of progress and modernity, toward eventual self-government and freedom such as that enjoyed by Japan (Peattie 1988).

Life changed much more drastically under the Japanese than under the Germans in the Marshalls, as young people learned the Japanese language in school and the population was expected to adopt many other Japanese cultural traits and practices. Marshallese life was regulated like never before: "Micronesian peoples, unaccustomed to directives, instruction, or restraints other than those imposed by their own cultural

traditions, were now subject to an array of instructions and prohibitions that compelled conformity to Japanese values and customs and rooted out practices judged to be uncivilized” (Peattie 1988). In addition, Japanese commercial development brought Marshallese into the cash economy – raising the standard of living, broadening people’s horizons, and eroding economic and material self-sufficiency (Peattie 1988). Japanese migration to the mandate alone was a significant force of social change, as by the beginning of the Second World War Japanese settlers outnumbered Islanders in many parts of Micronesia (Hezel 1995). Nevertheless, both Hezel (1995) and Peattie (1988) describe how the majority of Marshallese not living on the few urban atolls continued to live primarily off the land, only playing minor or fringe roles in the frenzy of economic and political development going on around them. Social change in the Marshall Islands continued and increased under Japanese rule, but the most drastic period of change was yet to come.



Figure 13: Students at a mission school on Likiep atoll, 1948.
Photo credit Life Magazine December 1948,
<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/l?imgurl=026dd852de692a00&q=marshall%20islands%20source:life&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmarshall%2Bislands%2Bsource:life%26start%3D18%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26ndsp%3D18%26tbs%3Disch:1>, accessed 27 April 2010

After World War II, in 1945, America was awarded control over the former Japanese mandate of Micronesia. While the formal status of the region was debated for a

number of years, by 1947 it was decided that the Micronesian islands were to be known as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), a United Nations strategic trusteeship administered by the US. From 1945 until 1951, the US Navy administered the TTPI, until, under pressure to institute a civilian government, President Truman gave control over the region to the Department of the Interior. The 1950s are generally known as a decade of benign neglect:

As long as its strategic interests were met, the United States had no other major concern with the area. While some improvements in health and education occurred and the foundations of district legislatures were laid, the miniscule budgets available precluded any significant economic development. The USTTPI administration was little more than a caretaker operation, and plans for the future were nonexistent or vague at best. (Kiste & Marshall 1999, 38)

In the Marshalls especially benign neglect is not totally accurate, because the 1950s is also when the era of nuclear testing occurred. However, outside of that one extremely active program, Marshallese people were more or less left to their own devices during this period, except when they were being relocated or evacuated.

All that changed in 1961, following an extremely negative report from a UN Visiting Mission to the TTPI, which dubbed the region the “Rust Territory” (Kiste & Marshall 1999). The Kennedy government responded to the international criticism by doubling the annual TTPI budget and launching an intensive Americanization program, which many scholars today point to as the origins of the state of severe social, political, and economic dependency from which the region has not yet been able to extricate itself. Under President Johnson’s “Great Society” in the second half of the 1960s, the explosion of income and federal programs in the region continued:

Many of the programs were inappropriate for small island communities and proved corrosive to Micronesian cultures and societies. An American-style educational system became the trust territory's largest industry. Government bureaucracy grew by leaps and bounds. Urbanization proceeded at a rapid pace as islanders abandoned their home communities for urban areas where they sought employment, education, entertainment, medical care, and other fruits of Uncle Sam's apparent largesse. (Kiste & Marshall 1999, 40)

The 1960s is the decade when the modern shape of the Marshall Islands began to truly take form. Government jobs accounted for the vast majority of all employment and salaries, American-style education and health programs expanded rapidly, the population of the urban centers exploded as people moved from outer islands, and the current social ills plaguing especially the urban population – poverty, overcrowding, underemployment, domestic violence, suicide, and so on – began to take shape.

In a later declassified document called the Solomon Report created in 1963, it was stated that the ultimate goal of all American development in the TTPI and dealings with Micronesians should be the cultivation of a permanent relationship of political affiliation with the US, through which the US could maintain its crucial strategic presence in the region. In order to accomplish this, traditional ways of life had to be disturbed or destroyed to make room for more American ideas and practices (Hanlon 1998). In *Remaking Micronesia*, Hanlon describes the totalizing nature of the American administration in Micronesia:

Much of what was targeted for development could be construed as economic in character but, in truth, the rhetoric of economic development targeted almost every aspect or facet of life in the islands...Development was not only about generating increased income and revenues through commercial activity; it involved creating a way of life that covered educational, governmental, political, religious, and social considerations as well. (Hanlon 1998, 94)

Because of its all-important strategic interest and more pervasive reach, the American colonial period in the Marshalls, which formally continued until the signing of the first Compact of Free Association in 1986, represented the most rapid and extensive period of social change in the history of the nation. Hezel argues that wage employment and the cash economy, two phenomena that were not fully integrated until well into the American era, have done more to change the shape of the region than any other force from the previous century of colonization (Hezel 1995, 2001). In respect to the culture and general way of life of Marshall Islanders, the social problems and relationships of dependency that have arisen out of the process of Americanization are still extremely serious issues today. In respect to the canoe tradition, however, just as important as these social issues is the democratization of Marshallese life, which is the subject of the next section.

The Development of a Democratic Mindset

In pre-contact times, the political system in the Marshalls was one of strict hierarchy. *Irooj* were considered similar to gods, and held direct or indirect control over most aspects of commoners' lives (Carucci 1997a). Similarly, important spheres of knowledge such as navigation, weather forecasting, and canoebuilding were held only by individual families or *bwij* (lineages), and the use and dissemination of that knowledge

was strictly regulated by the *Irooj* (Genz 2008). For example, Tobin describes how only a small number of men in a few *bwij* knew how to make canoes, and how to do the canoe-specific method of measurement using folded pandanus leaves. The skilled men who led the canoe building for the *Irooj* received gifts known as *erentōp* for their services, but never received land. The regular workers who did the majority of the building received nothing, only food while they were working (Tobin 2002, 388). Canoebuilding was a vitally important sphere of knowledge, upon which the survival of the atoll communities depended, and therefore like other specialized spheres of knowledge its application and transmission was highly regulated by the *Irooj*.

With the coming of foreign colonialism, the Marshallese population was exposed to new ways of holding political power and controlling and disseminating knowledge. In the Marshalls, the arrival of guns caused one of the most drastic changes to the chiefly system, because it allowed the *Irooj* to extend their power to encompass many atolls or even whole atoll chains for the first time in history. Typically, the *Irooj* were quick to capitalizing upon new methods of political rule for their own benefit or to expand their own control (Carucci 1997a, see also Petrosian-Husa 2005). As I note above, the German, Japanese, and American administrations all had different methods of dealing with the chiefly system, which like the introduction of western weaponry had drastic impacts on the inherent limitations and flexibility of that system: “Contact with the West not only elevated high chiefs, it ‘fossilized’ and extended their positions of power by eliminating the death sentence for evil leaders, by giving them Western-style ‘ownership’ of the land, and by placing them in intermediary missions in the developing copra trade” (Carucci 1997a, 203). Colonial leaders, including Americans, usually did not do away

with the chiefs entirely, but instead they used them, often as intermediaries, to legitimate their foreign colonial rule, and in the process they altered the chiefly system as they saw fit (Carucci 1997a, Hezel 1995, Walsh 2003).

These changes to the *Irooj* system were the precursors to the purposeful democratization of Marshallese life under American colonialism. Beginning in the immediate post-WWII period, the Navy administration “attempted to introduce the beginnings of democratic institutions at the community level (locally elected councils and magistrates), and made modest attempts to initiate universal systems of health care and education. They simply assumed that the introduction of American-style institutions was desirable” (Kiste & Marshall 1999, 18). Democratization only expanded during the Kennedy era of the 1960s, when “[t]he United States saw itself as having a humanitarian mission...to save the world for democracy” (Hezel 1995, 299) by sharing the American way of life with underdeveloped parts of the world, including of course the TTPI.

Finally, in 1965, under growing pressure to bring Micronesians into government positions, the TTPI government formed the Congress of Micronesia. The Congress grew out of “American notions about democracy and self-government” (Kiste & Marshall 1999, 40) and was modeled after the United States Congress, in order to give Micronesian political leaders the opportunity to advise the policy of the TTPI administration. Such a pan-Micronesian, democratic-style method of political leadership was totally unprecedented, and eventually became the training ground for some of the most influential indigenous political leaders in Micronesia, as well as the forum for the discussion of controversial subjects such as self-governance and even independence (Hanlon 1998).

The development of a more democratic political system has of course had ramifications within the broader social systems of the region as well. In the Marshalls, this democratization process has been unnatural in many ways, as it goes against the history of hierarchy which shaped people's access to knowledge and the overall structure of their lives. In the political realm, issues have arisen as commoners have become important political figures despite their non-chiefly background, thus challenging the importance of the *Irooj* class. Simultaneously, many of the major modern-era politicians continue to be from chiefly families, voted into office by the many *kajoor* who continue to support the *Irooj*. These complex articulations between a more locally-based chiefly political system, and the national government's more western-style democratic system, continue to cause regional and class tensions. Within the political sphere, the process of democratization is certainly continuing in the Marshalls, but its chiefly counterpart is continuing as well.

For the purpose of this thesis, however, the most relevant aspect of the democratization process is how it has changed the way people view their right to knowledge. Despite the continuance of the indigenous political system, today expected equality of access to goods, services, and information has become more widespread. The modern approach to knowledge about the canoe tradition is a perfect example of this. Without exception, all of the people I interviewed said they thought all Marshallese people should learn how to build and sail canoes as part of their shared heritage. This democratic attitude is drastically different from the traditional hierarchical method of holding and transmitting knowledge I discuss above, and reflects an awareness of the extended boundaries of nation and culture that is thoroughly modern, as opposed to the

family and atoll affiliations that were prevalent in earlier national and cultural rhetoric (for example see Mason 1971).²³ The breakdown of locally-based identities and the desire instead for a pan-Marshallese identity is part and parcel of the process of democratization of the Marshall Islands government and way of life, and necessarily has far-reaching consequences for the structure of Marshallese culture, including the structure of the tradition of the canoe.

Change and the Canoe



Figure 14: *Walap*-style voyaging canoe with traditional mat sail, possibly Joachim DeBrum standing in front, circa the turn of the twentieth century. *Photo credit Herman Stolpe, Bishop Museum, photo purchased by author*

²³ Special thanks to Dr. Julie Walsh Kroeker for helping me formulate and then articulate this argument.

The sweeping social changes occasioned by the forces of westernization, Americanization, and democratization I discuss above form the background to the myriad specific ways that everyday Marshallese life altered during over a century of colonialism. The evolution of the canoe tradition over time is just one example of how these forces impacted key aspects of life on the atolls. Under both the German and Japanese regimes in Micronesia, inter-island voyaging was banned by the colonial administration, for reasons of cost, safety, and commerce (Genz 2008, Hezel 1995). In the Marshalls, canoe voyages had been a regular part of life. To forbid the option to travel from island to island was to drastically alter the fundamental pattern of life that had structured existence for centuries, if not millennia.

In addition, the Marshallese trend toward “valorization of the other” which I discussed in Chapter 1 led the *Irooj* to purposefully adopt many of the new European goods and practices, especially western-style boats, in an effort to increase their own power and prestige:

The *iroij* displayed their power by purchasing schooners from German and British trading companies, as these vessels carried a perceived prestige. The transition from traditional canoes to European-style schooners was rapid. Marshallese mariners readily adopted or adapted Western boat construction and design. Nearly all the *iroij* owned European-style vessels by 1910 (Spennemann 2005:33). The chiefs’ perceived prestige of Western maritime technology contributed strongly to the collapse of the social infrastructure behind canoe voyaging. The lack of chiefly motivation and support threatened the technical skills and knowledge, the building and maintenance of canoes, the community support and the transmission of knowledge. (Genz 2008, 72)

Between the government halting long-distance voyaging, and commoners emulating the chiefs' preference for European-style sailboats, the canoe tradition had become an increasingly less important aspect of daily life in the Marshalls by the mid-1900s.

Despite this trend toward sedentism and western maritime technology, however, oral histories collected from and about the WWII era demonstrate that the canoe tradition was still a central part of everyday life for most Marshallese at that time (see Carucci 1989, 1995, 2001). Carucci relates how on Enewetak, the Japanese military used Marshallese canoes, which were commonly more than thirty meters long at the time, to transport soldiers between islets (Carucci 1989). His informants describe how the need to use Marshallese canoes showed how “damaged” (Carucci 1989, 79) the Japanese were compared to the Americans, who had no need for any Marshallese products or labor. Thomas' “inversion of tradition” is clear in this negation of Marshallese culture in favor of, in this case, the power and prestige seemingly inherent in an American way of life.

Other stories also confirm the continued presence of canoes during the war years: on Ūjelañ atoll in the 1940s, people used only canoes to gather food from uninhabited islets (Carucci 2001); and my informant Chuji Chutaro, who was born before WWII, described how immediately after the war there were no motorboats on his home atoll of Mili, and canoes were used for all fishing and transportation needs (Chutaro 2009). The reality of life at the time was such that while the many of the *Irooj* were able to create a more western way of life for themselves because of their increasing wealth through involvement in foreign business and colonial politics, *kajoor*, who were the vast majority of the population, did not have access to the sailboats and other prestige goods their *Irooj*

so coveted, and so through necessity continued to live a much more traditional way of life.



Figure 15: Sailing canoe with urbanized Kwajalein atoll in the background, 1948.
Photo credit Life Magazine December 1948,
<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/l?imgurl=26a29efd40fd1296&q=marshall%20islands%20source:life&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmarshall%2Bislands%2Bsource:life%26start%3D144%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26ndsp%3D18%26tbs%3Disch:1>, accessed 18 January 2010

Extremely drastic changes to the canoe tradition occurred during the American TTPI administration, especially from the 1960s-80s. The boom of American development in the region that began in the sixties permitted commoners to begin to participate more fully in the growing cash economy. Regular access to cash allowed the routine use of American goods that have become such an integral part of Marshallese life today: white rice, canned meat, radios, lighters, clothing, school supplies, and most importantly motorboats. Although Marshallese canoes are truly wonders of engineering, and represent links to the heart of Marshallese culture, the outward efficiency and productivity of fuel-powered motorboats was hard to deny: “Although Micronesian sailing canoes amazed the

first Europeans who saw them with their speed, motorboats are faster still. Islanders correctly saw them as the wave of the future” (Marshall 2004, 64).

Kelen describes how in the sixties and the following decades, gas prices were extremely low, meaning the price of imported fiberglass motorboats was also very low (Kelen 2009). Following in the footsteps of the *Irooj*, common people were so impressed by the convenience and speed of motorboats that they often chose them over canoes. In an age of a growing cash economy, motorboats were believed to be more effective than canoes for fishing because they were not dependent on the wind and therefore more profitable. The consequences of the preference for motorboats were dramatic: Carucci describes how on Enewetak by the 1970s canoes were usually no more than ten meters long and were considered too small to be reliable in the open ocean, and how on Ūjelañ the last traditional seaworthy canoes were built in 1976 and 1977, but by 1983 only one of those four was still usable (Carucci 1995).

By the 1990s, the canoe tradition was almost extinct. Josepha Maddison, Deputy Director of the Marshall Islands Historic Preservation Office, claimed that the canoe would have disappeared had it not been for the efforts of the Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) program (Maddison 2009). Dennis Alessio, the founder of the WAM program, wrote in the 1990s that canoebuilding had declined in favor of motorboats because “traditional canoes are connected with the ‘old ways’ and do not fit into the set of ‘modern’ westernized ideas and role models presented to the people of the Marshall Islands” (Alessio 1991, 1). As the need for formal education and wage employment has evolved from a novelty into a necessity, many aspects of the “old ways” were discarded as youth increasingly pursued more “modern” pursuits.

The college students I interviewed described how between school and work and caring for their families, more modern, western activities take up practically all their time, and canoes are most definitely not considered a modern activity. One student articulated the situation most clearly when he said of canoes: “then it was a priority, today it’s a pastime” (College of the Marshall Islands students 2009). Echoing this sentiment, Josepha Maddison claimed that, like most young people today, her grandchildren are more interested in technology than tradition because they have been too exposed to the west and pop culture; they would rather “spend their time on the computer – the life of the *ripālle*” (foreigner [usually American], white person), than learn the old skills (Maddison 2009). The college students went on to explain how the division between traditional and modern is ingrained in Marshallese youth today even through their schooling, because the Ministry of Education consistently chooses to build computer labs rather than canoe houses (College of the Marshall Islands students 2009).



Figure 16: Canoes deteriorating on an outer island, modern day.
Left – an unused canoe has had the outrigger complex detached from the hull.
Above – the remains of an abandoned *kubaak*.
Photo credit Darren Nakata

Today, the canoe tradition is making something of a resurgence in Marshallese life, although the altered form it has taken is of course a product of the changing times. With the rapidly increasing cost of living, and the growing incidence of social problems and identity loss especially among youth, people are beginning to reconsider the relevance of culture and the “old ways” in their everyday lives. Unanimously, every person I interviewed stated that they wanted to know how to build and sail canoes so they could gain some degree of independence from high fuel costs, imported food, and other negative aspects of a cash-based economy. The most common discourse is one of practicality and rising costs, which is understandable in these difficult economic times – as Chuji Chutaro put it, “you don’t pay for the wind” (Chutaro 2009).

However, after more than a century of social change, the shape of the modern canoe tradition continues to evolve along with the rest of Marshallese life. Alson Kelen stated it most succinctly when he explained that the difference between canoebuilding in the past and today is that in the past building a canoe was a community effort, involving much more than just the physical building, but today “it’s just a job” (Kelen 2009). The canoe today has not disappeared, but like much of Marshallese culture the canoe tradition is now often characterized by the preference for things modern, the emphasis on self-interest, and the prevalence of western-style individuality – all of the values that are so stigmatized in the *jabōnkōnnaan* I examined earlier. Some of the consequences of these changes to the canoe tradition and to Marshallese culture more broadly are the loss of identity and other serious social problems I discuss above – a cyclical pattern of change and loss that so far has proved difficult to break out of.

The Disparity and the Paradox of the Modern Canoe

As the canoe tradition has changed over time along with modern Marshallese culture and life, some of the values the canoe embodies have come to be quite different from those expressed in the *jabōnkōnnaan* and *bwebwenato* I explored in previous chapters. As I discuss above and in the previous chapter, the common themes in the *jabōnkōnnaan* are primarily love, unity, family, and community. Individualism and self-interest are actively discouraged in a number of *jabōnkōnnaan*, often using the metaphor of animal behavior to disassociate these negative values from human existence. To close this chapter, I will discuss one final pair of *jabōnkōnnaan* that are indicative of a Marshallese approach to the issues of change, tradition, and heritage that I explore in this chapter.

“*Ekmouj jab meļokļok kilōne eo an*” – “the Pacific Longnose Parrotfish does not forget its surge channel” refers to the tendency of this specific type of fish to always exit through the same channel it used to enter the reef shallows. Just like the parrotfish, “[a] person will always remember his home island and Marshallese customs, no matter where he might wander” (Stone et. al. 2000, 45). The second *jabōnkōnnaan*, “*jab kōrkōr ioon kūro, bwe kūro wōt laļ*” – “don’t paddle over there for groupers, for there are still groupers below you,” describes a similar approach to culture and heritage: “A person should not go and seek his fortune elsewhere – but should stay and work near home. Value what one has – don’t forsake what one has in order to pursue risky prospects” (Stone et. al. 2000, 46-7). The underlying message of both these proverbs is that one should value one’s own tradition and way of life, and not abandon one’s culture in pursuit of new or different things.

This indigenous Marshallese approach to tradition and cultural heritage is at odds with the trend toward the inversion of tradition that seems to be so prevalent in the past century of history in the Marshalls. The examples are rife throughout history of Marshallese valorization of the new and foreign over things traditional and Marshallese, particularly in the chiefly preference for the prestige of European-style boats, and then the almost wholesale abandonment of canoes for the speed and control motorboats represented for the common people. The modern-day effects of this trend are clear in the changes the canoe tradition has undergone: canoebuilding was almost a lost art, and today very few youth are learning to build or sail canoes; canoes are usually thought of as part of the pre-contact past, and not considered relevant to the fast-paced modern world; when people do engage with the canoe tradition, they often do it on the same individualistic, possessive, accumulative terms they would use to engage with a car or a house; to list just a few examples. Many of the values that are so stigmatized in the animal-metaphor *jabōnkōnnaan* – self-interest, greed, selfishness, and so on – have come to be associated with the modern canoe tradition.

Despite this history of valorization of the other, however, I discovered in my research that core elements of the canoe tradition are still present in the Marshallese worldview today. I learned in my group interview with the college students that very few youth today know anything specific about canoes or have any practical experience with the canoe tradition, but most do know the basic, foundational terms and concepts through their knowledge of *Kajin Majeļ* and the broader cultural values they learned through *bwebwenato* and *jabōnkōnnaan* while growing up. Similarly, the symbol or slogan of practically every organization or event in the Marshalls, including the Republic of the

Marshall Islands national seal and motto, are based on the nation’s seafaring heritage (Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, personal observation). Although the canoe itself as well as the way people usually interact with the canoe may have been altered by the forces of intense social change the nation has undergone, the idea of the canoe tradition, and the principles behind it, are such a foundational part of the Marshallese understanding of the world that they have not yet been lost. The canoe tradition is encoded in the very language itself, as I demonstrated in the examples of the previous chapter, and until the time when (and if) the Marshallese language disappears, the canoe will live on as the often tacit backbone of Marshallese culture.



Figure 17: Seal of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, motto “Jepilpilin Ke Ejukaan.”
Image credit Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands,
<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/index.htm>, accessed 6 November 2009

Today, people’s attitude toward their cultural heritage seems to be changing. Up until the very recent past, the inversion of tradition/valorization of the other was the common Marshallese approach to understanding their own culture, including canoes. In the present, the preservational approach encapsulated in the *jabōnkōnnaan* is just beginning to become more common again. This is primarily because of the negative associations people are beginning to make between a modern, western lifestyle, and the social ills that are so prevalent in the modern Marshall Islands. The canoe represents a

practical escape from the rhetoric of dependency and deficiency in which the nation has been mired for so long. In addition, as people learn more about the wider world around them, they are coming to realize that, in addition to the potential practicality of canoeing and other traditional practices, their culture is the heritage that makes them who they are: it is “a thing that help[s] to distinguish them as a people” (Marshall 2004, 64-5), or as Alson Kelen stated, “that’s our life, that’s who we are” (Kelen 2009). This newly rediscovered respect for tradition and things Marshallese is contributing to the growth of the canoe as a symbol of identity and pride, not backwardness and ancient history. It is the canoe’s place in this new search for locally-based identity and meaning to which I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: WAAN KŌJIPAÑ KŌJ, WAAN KŌKKURE KŌJ – CANOE TO HELP US, CANOE TO DESTROY US

Bwebwenato eo – The Story

“*Kōjjeel naaj jerakrōk iliju jibboñ ke?* – The three of us are going sailing tomorrow morning, right?” I asked Rambo as I prepared to leave work for the day. For what seemed like the hundredth time since I met him a few months before at the start of the current Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) training cycle, I suppressed a giggle as I thought about his name. Rambo. It wasn’t his real name of course, but it was a childhood nickname that had unfortunately (in my opinion) stuck. His real name was Libokmeto. An old, beautiful Marshallese name, steeped in history, but he preferred Rambo. Oh well, I thought to myself, also for the hundredth time. Whatever makes him happy.

Rambo grinned at me, but shook his head. “*Ikōnan kadek boñnin* – I want to get drunk tonight,” he answered. He gazed at me nervously as I considered my response. Drinking oneself into a stupor is a common activity for young Marshallese men, an activity which never seemed to end well but which they greatly looked forward to nonetheless. “*Eñmanļok kiki boñnin innem iliju jerakrōk* – It would be better to sleep tonight and then sail tomorrow” I responded. “*Jerakrōk elimo, ak ñe kwōj kadekdek, kwōj kōkkure mour eo am, im kab mour eo an baamle eo am* – Sailing is fun, but when you get drunk all the time, you mess up your life, and the life of your family.” He considered this a moment. “*Ekwe, ejimwe. Jenaaj jerakrōk iliju jibboñ, inaaj kōttar amiro itok* – Ok, that’s true. We’ll go sailing tomorrow morning, I will wait for you to show up,” he proclaimed with a smile. We said goodbye and I went home for the evening.

The next morning, just as he had promised, Rambo was waiting at the WAM canoe house, clearly not drunk, and excited to go out on the water. I was pleasantly surprised. We quickly prepared the canoe, and he and another trainee named Patrick carried it down to the water's edge. They were both experienced sailors, and were obviously comfortable around the canoe. I climbed aboard, and then we were off. There was a good wind, and we immediately sped out of the cove and into the lagoon. Since there were only the two young men and myself on the canoe, they were occupied with steering and manning the sail, both of which were difficult tasks because of the strong wind. I sat on the platform between the hull and the outrigger struts and chatted with them as we skimmed along. We were all enjoying the speed, so the boys decided to test their sailing skills a bit. Rambo tightened up the sail in order to catch more wind. Our speed increased even more, and very slowly the outrigger began to lift out of the water. "*Rachel e, keiwōj jidik* – Rachel, move out a little bit," Rambo told me. I scooted closer to the outrigger, and it sank back to the water level again.

The boys glanced at each other, and then back at me. "*Eṇṇan ke ippām?* – Is it ok with you?" Patrick asked me with a smile. "*Eṇṇan!* – It's ok!" I responded. Rambo tightened the sail even more, and the outrigger again rose up, this time to a 45 degree angle with the water. I clamored out almost to the end of the struts and then clung like a crab, waiting to see what would happen next. The outrigger began to sink, but suddenly a gust of wind hit the canoe and the outrigger shot into the air. For a second I hung motionless on the struts, looking down on the boys and the sail, now almost directly below me. Then, as if on instinct, I leapt out onto the outrigger itself, throwing my full weight against the force of the wind in the sail. For a long moment we held the position,

with me leaning out from the outrigger, seeming to fly through the air, and the boys frantically trying to keep the canoe on course and upright from the hull below me. Very slowly, the outrigger began to sink again. The boys called my name and I climbed back onto the struts, and then, when the outrigger seemed as though it would crash down with such force that it would sink, I leapt onto the hull itself. The outrigger's downward speed slowed, and it landed with only a small splash on the blue water of the lagoon.

For a few seconds we could only stare at each other, and then, as if on cue, all three of us burst out laughing. My heart was still pounding, but the boys were as cool as could be, giggling from the excitement of our risky maneuver. In unison, they both turned to me and started shouting their amazement at how I handled myself out on the outrigger. “*Einwōt kwe ŋoolin ri-jerakrōk!* – It’s like you’re a real sailor!” Rambo cried with a grin. “*Ejimwe am kar ba inne - jerakrōk elimo* – What you said yesterday was right – sailing is fun.” I grinned back at him. I felt joy expanding in my chest, quickening my breathing and my heart rate. I had never enjoyed sailing as much as I just did, I realized, because I had never before been such an active participant. I had ridden on canoes dozens of times before, but always someone else had done all the work. This was the first time I had been part of the process of sailing – it was exciting, exhilarating, enlivening. Finally I understood why the WAM trainees seemed so transformed after their six months of sailing; for the first time, I knew firsthand that I was participating in something greater than myself. Together, we had manipulated the wind around us and the vessel beneath us – for that brief moment, all our other cares and worries disappeared, and we were truly part of the canoe.

“Canoe to Destroy Us”

In the previous chapter, I explored how the forces of historical and modern social change have drastically westernized Marshallese life. As a result, many people have come to believe that the core Marshallese cultural values of kindness, generosity, unity, family, and community are being supplanted by the individualistic, possessive, self-interested values of western culture. I demonstrated that due to its close ties to the heart of Marshallese culture, the canoe tradition is similarly changing to reflect the altered structure of modern Marshallese life. For example, Carucci describes how,

Old men warmly reminisce about the days when they would gather to plait sennit, chant, and recount stories. Now they no longer need the support of others to dismantle and reassemble recaulked canoes, nor do men rush to the water's edge to assist in bringing launches up on shore. This process, *aarik*, was always reciprocated with part of one's catch, and it involved men in solidarity-building exchanges that are remembered fondly by older residents. Today, the members of a crew beach their own lightweight craft. (Carucci 1995, 18-9)

Similarly, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Alson Kelen explained that in the past, if a community member was working on a canoe, everyone in the area would come join in the effort. Today, however, on the rare occasion that a canoe is being built, people do not help out unless they know it will result in some personal gain. Kelen argued that the rise of this attitude of “I don't sweat for free” (Kelen 2009) regarding the practice of building canoes shows how the culture as a whole has changed. In this chapter, I will explore how these social trends and processes impact the potential future of the canoe tradition, the place of the canoe in changing Marshallese culture, and the future of Marshallese life more broadly. I place particular emphasis on a more Marshallese perspective regarding the changes the canoe tradition is undergoing, which I

determine through the analysis of *jabōnkōnnaan* and interviews with Marshallese informants.

In the *jabōnkōnnaan* which is the title of this chapter – “*waan kōjipañ kōj, waan kōkkure kōj*” – the canoe is identified as both a bearer of good fortune and a source of destruction if it is not engaged with correctly and respectfully. “*Waan kōjipañ kōj*” means literally “canoe to help us,” and “*waan kōkkure kōj*” means “canoe to harm/destroy us” (Stone et. al. 2000, Tobin 2002). In the ancient past this was certainly true. Without the canoe, life in the harsh atoll environment was simply not possible, as people relied heavily on the canoe as the foundation of their subsistence lifestyle (ibid.). Today, however, the canoe is rarely present at all in the vast majority of people’s lives: people buy most of their food in stores; fishing almost always occurs from motorboats (when it occurs at all); and people usually use motorboats, cars, and planes for their transportation needs (personal observation). Nevertheless, in my research I learned that this *jabōnkōnnaan* is just as relevant today as it was centuries ago, only in a different form. Every one of the people I interviewed said that to lose the canoe tradition would be to lose what makes them Marshallese. Therefore, instead of causing literal destruction and death, the canoe today could cause the breakdown of people’s most fundamental identity as Marshall Islanders if it is not engaged with correctly and respectfully, which in these modern circumstances means if it is no longer considered relevant to the Marshallese world.

This belief in the continued importance of the canoe may seem incompatible with the forces of westernization and the alteration of Marshallese culture that continue to occur into the present day. However, in my research I discovered that, in order to deal

with seemingly contradictory values and ways of life, Marshall Islanders have begun to purposefully adapt the canoe tradition to fit the circumstances of modern life: the combination of the trend of continued westernization with the increasing desire to maintain a unique Marshallese identity has led to the modern transformation of the canoe from a practical tool into a symbol of meaning, identity, and pride. This process of transformation is definitely in the early stages of development, but it can be understood as a way for the Marshallese people to continue to become part of the modern (western) world while also retaining those traditions that make them who they are. The growth of the canoe as a symbolic medium has actually been occurring throughout the Pacific for multiple decades (for example, see Finney 2004 regarding the Polynesian Voyaging Society in Hawai'i). I believe, however, that in the Marshalls the transformation of the understanding of the canoe from a practical tool into a symbol of identity did not begin to occur until recently as a result of the tendency toward the valorization of the other that has been so common throughout Marshall Islands history (Carucci 1989, 1997b; Genz 2008; see Chapter 3).

The modern canoe tradition seems to be rife with these kinds of paradoxes and contradictions. In the following sections, I will examine these contradictions and paradoxes in an effort to determine what they say about the canoe tradition itself. I will then return to the debate surrounding the process of objectification of culture, the issue of authenticity versus modernity, and the idea of purposeful cultural adaptation which I introduced in Chapter One. I will explore these debates here specifically as they relate to the modern transformation of the canoe tradition in the Marshall Islands. Finally, I will then attempt to understand this process of transformation and identity formation

according to a Marshallese perspective, embodied in *jabōnkōnnaan* about the cyclical nature of both change and existence.

The Paradox of Negative Understanding

Many chapters ago, in the Introduction, I introduced two different paradoxes in regard to the Marshallese canoe tradition, to which I will now return here. Both paradoxes represent very different ways of understanding the process of change that the canoe tradition is undergoing. The first I called the ‘paradox of negative understanding,’ and it is by far the more common of the two. By paradox of negative understanding, I mean the way in which many foreign visitors to and scholars of the Marshall Islands focus particularly on the canoe as a symbol of the loss of unique Marshallese culture and identity.

The most drastically negative example of this phenomenon is reflected in a quote I also included in the Introduction: “I am quite disgusted with the people of Bikini and Enewetok who allow their compensation money to sit in Hawaiian banks while just about everyone on Majuro is looking for backing for some scheme or another, harebrained or otherwise...What will they do with this money, these people who are forgetting how to build canoes?” (Nakano 1983, 140). Nakano makes a direct connection between the increasing influence of western values and the cash economy in Marshallese life, and the simultaneous decrease in the importance and knowledge of canoes, and therefore the assumed loss of culture in general. In her 1973 *Micronesian Reporter* article on Marshallese voyaging, Mary Browning makes a similar connection: “Now, you might stand for days on the lagoon-side beach of Kwajalein islet at the southern tip of the atoll and not see even a small outrigger, for Kwajalein is a United States missile test site to

which the necessities of life are hurried by a constant stream of planes and refrigerated ships. There is no need for outrigger canoes here” (1973, 26).

Both of these examples are at this point relatively out of date, but the paradox of negative understanding has continued, in perhaps slightly more politically correct terms, until the present day. For example, in his study of Marshall Islands social narrative and oral tradition, Phillip Henry McArthur claims that in the story of Jebrō and Lōktañūr which I discussed in Chapter Two, the origin of the sail “retains very little significance in a modern world where inter-island travel is dominated by motorboats and airplanes” (McArthur 1995, 28). He makes this claim despite the fact that the origin of the sail is tied to the origin of practices and values such as matrilineal descent and respect for elders that are at the heart of a Marshallese worldview. In dismissing elements of the canoe tradition as no longer relevant to the modern Marshallese world, McArthur is implying that the foreign, western elements of modern life have become the dominant culture and value system, relegating the canoe and other indigenous practices to the realm of obscurity.

There are at least two modern scholars who have already identified in some way the occurrence and significance of this paradox. Taking a more historical perspective, Carucci describes how “there has been a radical reduction in canoe use since the beginning of the U.S administration after World War II. This is particularly ironic since the canoe, to a greater degree, perhaps, than any other object, provided a core representation of island life for American visitors to the region after the war” (Carucci 1995, 31). His point underscores exactly the connection I have drawn between the canoe tradition and what foreigners increasingly perceived as the (eroding) heart of Marshallese

life and identity. Walsh goes even a step further when she describes outrigger canoes as “exotic elements of the Western myth of Paradise” (Walsh 1995, 2). While I hope I have shown that the canoe is in fact much more than just an element of the foreign perception of exotic island life, this statement identifies what I believe is the true significance of this paradox.

In the Introduction, I focused on this paradox of negative understanding as evidence that, even if the attention given to the canoe tradition is negative, the canoe is present in some way in almost all foreign accounts of the Marshall Islands throughout history, demonstrating its key place in Marshallese culture and its continued importance in Marshallese identity, at least as seen through foreign eyes. However, at this point in my exploration there is a deeper argument to be drawn from this paradox, one which is underscored by Walsh’s quote above. Returning to the title *jabōnkōnnaan* of this chapter, foreigners tend to focus on the canoe as the *kōkkure* (harm/destroy) aspect of the *jabōnkōnnaan* rather than the *kōjipañ* (help/benefit) aspect. I believe this is because, unless they are interested in going beyond the typically superficial foreign understanding of Marshallese culture, most westerners are unable or unwilling to understand the import of the deeper changes the canoe tradition is undergoing. Jolly describes how westerners are more often attracted to the loss that cultural change entails, “because they retain an exoticized and dehistoricized view of Pacific cultures” (Jolly 1992, 53). Because of this, westerners typically focus on the concepts of loss and lack, as I have described above, rather than recognizing the need for and potential benefits of cultural change in a rapidly evolving non-western country that is trying to participate in the global socioeconomic community.

This western, academic fixation on loss and lack in regard to Islander culture is actually common throughout research on the Pacific, and in fact seems to characterize much of the social science approach to issues of change and modernization in the "developing" world in general (Hanlon, personal communication). In his study on development in the Solomon Islands, Gegeo describes how the normal modernization argument is that "underdevelopment is due to Third World people's lack of managerial skills and motivation, isolation from national and international markets, and adherence to cultural norms that countervail business development" (Gegeo 1994, 2). Implicit in this argument is that Third World countries cannot develop without following the model of western countries, and that therefore "the main obstacle impeding rural development has been the lack of, and inefficient use of economic resources, as well as the unavailability of necessary development ingredients at the rural areas" (Hou 1998, 3). The common thread running throughout this mode of discourse is that non-western peoples lack something crucial, without which they cannot hope to succeed in the "modern" world.

However, when non-western people do manage to succeed in the modern world, often the most common response from the west is not support of their achievement, but disappointment in the inevitable loss of "tradition" and culture that is assumed must be the result of successful modernization. The paradox of negative understanding is in essence a no-win situation for those being judged, and an always-win situation for those doing the judging. Therefore, I believe that the paradox of negative understanding is a fundamentally foreign way of understanding the process of modernization and culture change in the Pacific in general, and the evolving canoe tradition in the Marshalls in particular. I will return to this idea in the following sections. The next paradox I will

describe represents a much more Marshallese way of understanding the changes undergone by the canoe as well as overall Marshallese life.

The Paradox of Loss

I coined the term ‘the paradox of loss’ to refer to the fact that as the canoe has declined as a practical tool for everyday life in the Marshalls (as well as throughout the Pacific), simultaneously the canoe has increased in importance as a symbol of local identity and meaning (Genz 2008). This phenomenon perhaps officially started in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the growth of the Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) youth training program in the Marshalls (Alessio 2006). As I described in the previous chapter, the trend after WWII was toward motorboats and away from outrigger canoes, which like many other “traditional” aspects of Marshallese culture came to represent backwardness and ancient history when compared with the unparalleled modernity and power inherent in western goods and practices (Alessio 1991, Carucci 1989). Because the canoe is so closely tied to a Marshallese way of life, its decrease in importance has had serious social and cultural effects. Writing in the early 1990s when the canoe tradition was in imminent danger of extinction, Alessio explains how due to the loss of the canoe tradition resulting from the rapid modernization and westernization of the Marshall Islands, “the identity of the youth, especially the young males, have [sic.] taken an inferior role in the face of this westernization” (Alessio 1991, 33).

As this trend of modernization continued and increased throughout the nineties, the alienation of youth, and urban youth in particular, from their culture continued to contribute to the growth of myriad social problems, which have continued into the present day (Hezel 2001, Walsh 1995). Recently, however, some Marshallese people

seem to be deciding that the decades of pressure they have felt to adopt western goods and practices have brought them very little long-term benefits. In addition to being unable to pass on many aspects of their culture to their children, today most ordinary people are still poverty-stricken, many are unemployed, and practically all struggle to make ends meet (Walsh 1995; personal observation).

Seemingly as a result, many Marshallese people are now expressing an interest in reviving their traditions and indigenous practices, and replacing some of the western elements of their lifestyle with Marshallese ones. A number of the people I interviewed claimed that they wanted to move back out to the outer islands to experience a more Marshallese-style way of life not dependent on foreign goods and services, and all conveyed their belief that it is time for Marshallese people to re-embrace their cultural heritage. Even the college students I interviewed, who represent the young, well-educated, most modernity-savvy portion of the population, said that they want to learn more about the canoe tradition because they believe there is value in both learning about and preserving their culture. The WAM program, which is a youth training program that reconnects Marshallese youth with their cultural heritage in a modern vocational setting, is more respected and popular today than it has ever been, with youth from all walks of life applying to participate in the unique training programs (Kelen 2009).



Figure 18: Young WAM canoebuilders sail the canoe they built as representatives of the Marshall Islands at the 2005 Festival of Canoes on Maui.
Photo credit Waan Aelōñ in Majel

While a few of the people I interviewed argued that the canoe could be an effective economical part of a modern Marshallese lifestyle (Chutarō 2009, Laik 2009), most instead claimed that the canoe needs to be revitalized as a cultural foundation and a core of local identity in a tumultuous and difficult time, when people are most in need of something of their own of which to be proud (Aerōk 2009, Kelen 2009, Lajuon 2009, Maddison 2009). Newton Lajuon articulated this view extremely clearly in our interview. He explained how the canoe has indeed changed from a mode of transportation and subsistence into a symbol of identity for Marshallese and Pacific people. He reiterated that, “it’s now a symbol, a sign of prestige and identity” (Lajuon 2009), in a time when using solely the canoe to get around is no longer realistic. He said he believes this change

in the canoe tradition has occurred because people's way of life has changed, from a subsistence economy to a more modern, western lifestyle through formal wage employment. Using canoes today, he argued, is therefore a way of holding on to the culture within the changed circumstances of the modern Marshallese world. Finally, when I asked him what he thinks will be the role of the canoe in the future, he responded,

What I would like is for the canoe to be, remain part of Marshallese culture, part of how people see the Marshall Islands. Not a motorboat, not a bicycle or a scooter, but a canoe. That is my number one wish is that it becomes a symbol, something that you see a canoe, and you say 'ok, that's not a Palauan canoe, that's not a canoe from New Guinea, that's a Marshallese canoe'. So having canoes be part and remain part of Marshallese culture tomorrow, in the future, gives us an identity that people from outside will know us by, and that we can be really proud of...It should remain a vital art and a symbol that will always be ours.
(Lajuon 2009)

In one of the few studies conducted on the state of the modern canoe tradition in the Marshalls, Carucci describes a more local example of this process, in regard to the canoe tradition on Enewetak atoll. Because of the atoll's significant distance from the majority of the atolls in the Marshall Islands, Enewetakese have long been known as skilled mariners. As I have discussed previously, Carucci claims that today the canoe as a practical tool has essentially disappeared from Enewetakese life. However, most people there still talk about canoes as if they were an active part of existence on the atoll, a discursive practice which "allows Enewetak people to transcend the constraints of time and to draw on the symbolic potency of Enewetak canoes to make empowered statements about atoll identity" (Carucci 1995, 28). He further explains:

the most critical features of Enewetak canoes relate to their expression of atollwide identity. Enewetak people have always considered themselves the most skilled canoe builders in the region. They use their ability to represent themselves as superior to Marshall Islanders...Canoes thus become a signifier that codes superior Enewetak abilities in the face of their negatively constructed backwoods image in the Marshall Islands. (Carucci 1995, 29)

This is the only example in the academic literature of the process of the paradox of loss that I have found. Genz (2008) does discuss the paradox, but referring primarily to the sphere of Marshallese navigation. Nevertheless, the people I interviewed almost unanimously confirmed the idea of the paradox of loss, and its value for potential improvement of the quality of modern Marshallese life.

In his documentary about the place of the canoe in the modern Micronesian societies of Guam and Polowat, Vince Diaz describes the canoe as, “the foundation of our heritage...a metaphor for a history of island, and islander travel” (Diaz 1997). The canoe and canoe travel, he argues, is what makes Islanders who they are and what sets them apart from other peoples. In the Marshall Islands today, people are beginning to support this view: the canoe is just beginning to become a modern symbol of identity, meaning, and pride. Paradoxically, this development is arising out of long-term trends of social change toward a western lifestyle and away from the practicality of a more Marshallese lifestyle. Most people would argue that “we can’t go back to how we were before,” but the paradox of loss is a way to maintain the meaning of the canoe tradition in the radically changed modern world. Reshaping the canoe tradition as a symbol of identity and meaning is a positive way for Marshallese people to become part of the modern global community but also retain what makes them special, a tradition which has been the key to their lives for millennia.

Methods of Understanding the Paradox of Loss

When discussing the modern reshaping of cultural forms, or the revitalization of traditional culture, a number of theoretical debates are invoked which must be examined in light of the specific details of the canoe tradition I am exploring here. I introduced some of these debates in Chapter One when I discussed Thomas' "objectification of culture," which he argues occurs when the change resulting from contact with vastly different (usually western) ways of life causes Islanders to become alienated from their indigenous culture, and therefore able to perceive it from the outside looking in, and potentially change it accordingly (Thomas 1997). Any discussion of indigenous alienation from traditional culture and objectification of culture for modern ends brings up issues of "authenticity" if people are purposefully changing their culture to fit into more modern circumstances, as I am arguing is occurring in the Marshalls. The long-standing authentic versus modern debate challenges whether or not cultures can be called "authentic" or "real" if it is known that they have been changed, through foreign contact or especially through purposeful adaptation.

In what I believe is the most productive perspective on the issue, Jolly argues that this debate causes an artificial distinction that in truth has little relevance in the lives of those Islanders who are living within and attempting to maintain some form of their culture in a changing world (Jolly 1992). Instead, she argues that what is most important is the effect of these changes upon those who are living through them – "whether they are being used to liberate or oppress, to recapture just rights or to deny them" (Jolly 1992,

62).²⁴ Echoing this argument, I believe that when discussing the changing shape of the modern Marshallese canoe tradition, the most important point is that the way the canoe tradition is being changed improves modern Marshallese life, as I am arguing it does by providing a locally-based and locally-relevant symbol of identity, meaning, and pride.

There are many examples of the purposeful adaptations currently being made to the canoe tradition that I – and those people I interviewed – would argue improve the lives of modern Marshall Islanders. The WAM training program is perhaps the most extraordinary example of this process. WAM uses the sphere of the canoe as a medium through which to teach young Marshall Islanders skills that will help them live more productive lives today. In order to do this, not only does WAM train youth in the ancient skills and knowledge associated with the canoe, but they also provide modern-world relevance for those skills. Youth are taught to make canoes out of plywood and fiberglass as well as carved breadfruit; modern power tools are used so that the youth will be prepared for a wide variety of in-demand vocational jobs; and through the traditional methods of measurement and design, youth are trained in the fundamentals of geometry and other academic skills. This method of combining the old with the new allows young people to connect with their cultural heritage while simultaneously preparing them for jobs and life in the cash economy-based world of the modern Marshall Islands (Alessio 2006, personal observation).

Another slightly more controversial example of the purposeful adaptation of the modern canoe tradition is the inclusion of girls in all aspects of the canoe building and sailing process. WAM has been recruiting girls to participate in their training programs

²⁴ Please see Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of the anthropological debates regarding authenticity, loss, and the objectification of culture.

since the organization's inception over a decade ago, but still some elders do not accept this approach to canoebuilding, which in most (but not all) respects was a male realm (Carucci 1995, Kelen 2009, Lajuon 2009). Newton Lajuon commented on the changing role of the woman in canoebuilding: "We have to change, we can't stay where we were. If we're going to develop, and progress, we have to change. Part of this change is to accept that this is no longer a boy's or men's tradition, that a girl has just as much right...times are changing, and this is a good change" (Lajuon 2009). He explained that



Figure 19: Two photos of young women learning to build canoes with the WAM program.
Photo credit WAM Program

in his opinion the benefits of this change are numerous: for example, in a family it is more economically viable for both the wife and the husband to use canoes to go fishing, and the wife will also be empowered by her ability to actively contribute to the welfare of the family. Josepha Maddison is a living example of a woman who learned canoeing and fishing from her grandfather as a child, because there were no boys of the correct age in her family. As a result, today she is a very strong supporter of inclusionary changes such as teaching girls canoebuilding. She explained how this cultural change is "for the best" because if you teach girls, "it's guaranteed that they're going to pass it on" (Maddison 2009) and help maintain the tradition for the future.

The final example of the ways the canoe tradition is being changed was actually discussed at length in Chapter Three – the democratization of the canoe tradition. As I discussed previously, in the past important knowledge in the Marshalls was held only by individual families or *bwij*, and highly regulated by the *Irooj*. Every person I interviewed claimed that they think all people today should learn about the Marshallese canoe tradition, because it is one of the most important parts of their cultural heritage. This call for democratic access to the knowledge of the canoe is a drastic departure from the shape of the canoe tradition in the past. However, I think almost all Marshallese people today would argue that this is another good change (personal observation). Even though the way people learn about and interact with the canoe will be different as a result of making the canoe more widely accessible, extensive dispersion of the knowledge is one of the most reliable methods of preserving the canoe tradition itself for the future. In contrast, the Marshallese navigation system has not been democratized in the same way as the canoe, and consequently there are less than a dozen master navigators today, and the sphere of knowledge is in imminent danger of extinction (Genz 2008; personal observation). One of the college students I interviewed actually made this very connection when he explained that canoe building is an integral and ancient part of Marshallese culture that should not be lost, as he believes navigation has been (College of the Marshall Islands students 2009).

While important and illuminating when applied to the Marshallese canoe tradition, these scholarly debates about the objectification of culture, authenticity and modernity, and purposeful cultural adaptation are not the only ways to understand the process of change that the canoe is currently undergoing. The paradox of loss certainly

reflects a Marshallese understanding of the modern shape of their culture, as I learned through interviews with a wide variety of people. However, because of its connections to western academia and theory, the formal paradox can only represent part of a Marshallese understanding of cultural change. There are a number of other ways to access different, more inherently Marshallese perspectives on this crucially important topic, particularly through an examination of the *jabōnkōnnaan* relevant to the issue. It is to these additional perspectives which I turn in the next section.

Ukot Bōkā, Part II

The *jabōnkōnnaan* from which comes the title of this chapter demonstrates that the “paradox of loss” trend of change impacting the canoe tradition can in fact be understood through a Marshallese lens, as I discussed in the beginning of this chapter. “*Waan kōjipān kōj, waan kōkkure kōj* – canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us” reveals that the process of change the canoe tradition is currently undergoing is in accord with an indigenous Marshallese method of interacting with the canoe. In the past, the canoe was the key to life in the Marshalls because it was the foundation upon which the subsistence economy, transportation, and many aspects of the culture were based. This *jabōnkōnnaan* warns that if the vitally important canoe was not treated with respect and care, it could be the downfall of the atoll communities through loss of both subsistence capability and cultural structure.

The effort today to revitalize the canoe tradition in modern life by transforming it from a practical tool into a symbol of identity and meaning can be understood as a uniquely Marshallese method of following this ancient advice. In these changed circumstances in which the canoe is no longer the all-important key to subsistence life on

these remote atolls, treating the canoe with the proper respect no longer means utilizing it in a responsible and cautionary manner, as is urged in other voyaging-related *jabōnkōnnaan*. Instead, respecting the canoe tradition today means finding a place and shape for it that is relevant to the modern Marshall Islands, so that the canoe can continue to exist as an important aspect of Marshallese life, and not fade into obscurity. Similarly, the loss of the canoe tradition today would not mean literal death and destruction, but, as practically all my informants described, it would mean the loss of the core of their identity as Marshallese.

The application of this *jabōnkōnnaan* is one way of understanding the specifics of the modern transformation of the canoe through a Marshallese perspective. Another method which takes into account all of the broader patterns of social change over a century or more is to return to the “*ukot bōkā*” argument I discussed in Chapter Two. “*Ukot bōkā* – change the tide,” and its sister *jabōnkōnnaan*, “*ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā* – the tide always goes out and comes in,” use the metaphor of the tide to describe the cyclical rhythm of human life. Like the ceaseless crashing of the waves on the reef, present circumstances do change and life does alter over time. In the long run, however, like the never-ending cyclical pattern of the repeating tide of which the waves are just a part, life continues on, nature continues to exist, and short-term changes are subsumed within the unstoppable cycle of being. In the context of the canoe, over time the canoe will change and evolve along with the rest of life and culture in the Marshall Islands. But like the tide which always recedes and then returns to the shore, over and over, the canoe tradition will always continue to exist in some form, because it is an inherent part of what it means to be Marshallese.

This cyclical perspective explains the multiple paradoxes which seem to characterize the canoe tradition. In Chapter Two, I discussed how the idea of the disappearance of the canoe was incomprehensible for every one of the people I interviewed, even though most of them have no real interaction with the canoe in any aspect of their lives today. The canoe tradition may have literally almost disappeared in the 1990s, but its modern revitalization demonstrates that despite short-term change and even loss, the canoe as a key part of Marshallese identity is not in danger of extinction. The changes the canoe has undergone and continues to undergo are simply part of this larger cyclical process of sociocultural change and continuance – the details of the canoe tradition and its place in modern life may be changing, but the importance of the place of the canoe in modern life is remaining constant.

As I discuss in the previous chapter, the historic trend toward valorization of the other has led to the canoe being understood by many Marshallese in the same individualistic, possessive terms as other modern goods such as cars and electronics. The more western form into which social change has been pushing the canoe is negative, harmful, and unsustainable in the long term, similar to the overall form of the western-style modern lifestyle so common in the Marshalls today. Even though its role is no longer primarily related to subsistence activities as it was in the past, the return of the canoe as a vehicle of meaning and a symbolic part of life must be understood as just that – a return. For millennia, the canoe was the backbone of Marshallese culture and life. Processes of social change have of course influenced the canoe tradition, especially when western ways of life were being most readily embraced in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, the current evolution of the canoe tradition into a symbol of meaning, identity, and pride

represents Marshallese attempts to reclaim their unique history and heritage, and to reassert their ability and their right to guide the course of their lives and their nation. The cycle of short-term change and long-term stability is continuing, and the modern transformation of the canoe tradition can be understood as evidence of the continued relevance of this uniquely Marshallese viewpoint.

I want to conclude this chapter with two very telling quotes. The first is from Edna Peter Latak, describing her perspective on the changing way of life in the Marshall Islands: “Everything is different now...Language has changed, culture has changed, people have changed...Living has changed, way of living...everything has changed. The ocean is still the same” (quoted in Walsh 1995, 81). In this statement describing the difficulty of tumultuous modern life, Latak expresses exactly the same cyclical understanding of time and existence that I am arguing also structures the shape of the modern canoe tradition. Many changes have occurred and many continue to occur which erode important values and practices upon which Marshallese life was based for millennia. However, the ocean, the most basic feature of life in this atoll nation since it was first inhabited thousands of years ago, remains constant. The never-ending tides, the natural embodiment of the cyclical pattern of human existence, are in truth nothing but the extension of the rhythm of the greater ocean.

As can be seen from the centrality of the canoe within Marshallese culture, Marshallese people are above all else a water people: they are “born to rhythm of wave that tumble on this reef” (Knight 1999, 109; see also Kramer 1906). Despite the chaos and rapid social change of a century of colonialism, despite an increasingly westernized modern lifestyle in which tradition and culture were devalued for decades, “the ocean is

still the same” (Latak in Walsh 1995, 81). For a fundamentally water-based people, canoes are the physical link between humans and the ever-present ocean to which they have been inseparably tied for countless generations. It is thus fitting to end with Alson Kelen’s description of the canoe, now and forever, as “the vehicle of life for the water people” (Kelen 2009).

**CONCLUSION: KWŌJAB INOJEIKĻŌK JEN WA KEIN, BWE IAĻAN MOUR
KO KEIN – DO NOT DRIFT AWAY FROM THESE CANOES, FOR THEY
ARE YOUR PATH THROUGH LIFE**

JemĻokin Bwebwenato In – The Ending of This Story²⁵

We had been back from our fishing trip for about an hour. After calling over some young men to help us beach the canoe – a few tiny boys and myself were unsurprisingly not nearly strong enough to carry the canoe a number of yards up the sand – I had taken a bucket shower and eaten dinner. My host mother Clera was astounded that I had been out on the canoe for so long without coming home to eat. “*Kwōnaaj mej!* – You could have died!” she had called to me when she saw us nearing the beach after our full-day fishing trip. In a huff, she had immediately brought me my customary dinner of white rice and a whole raw reef fish marinated in lime juice as soon as I finished showering, and then she proceeded to scold me for my irresponsibility for a solid ten minutes while I ate. Since at that time I had only been living on Naṃdrik atoll for a little over a month, I was not yet fluent enough in Marshallese to understand all of her rapid rant, but I could understand enough to determine that she was not at all happy with me for staying out on the water all day.

Finally, as I was finishing eating, Clera concluded her tirade. Once she got the scolding out of her system she was back to her normal friendly self, laughing with me as she collected the yellow plastic Tupperware container that had been designated as my plate. As she walked back toward the cookhouse, I heard the familiar patter of little feet running across the coral backyard. OJ and Ajlok, two of my younger host brothers

²⁵ This is a continuation of the story with which I started the thesis in the Introduction. It picks up where that story left off – after returning from the fishing trip. This second half of the story is actually an amalgamation of several different instances, which for the sake of brevity I compile here into one singular occurrence.

bounded into my little hut, carrying their textbooks in preparation for what had become our nighttime study routine. “*Kwōmaroñ ke jipañ kōmiro kōmman amiro homework in math?* – Can you help us with our math homework?” they asked in chorus, and then plunked down without waiting for an answer and opened up their books. We spent about half an hour slowly working through their homework problems, and by the time we reached the last one they seemed to have mastered the basic concept behind the assignment. Gleefully they put their books aside and looked at me expectantly. Laughing, I pulled a stack of colorful magazines out of the huge plastic container that served as my dresser and set them between us. One of the boys snatched the top magazine from the pile, and began flipping through the pages. The other brother looked over his shoulder as he inspected each picture, occasionally stopping to ask me a question about what was going on in a particularly exciting scene.

We had just finished looking through the first magazine and were moving on to the second when we heard loud footsteps crunching toward my little hut. They continued on toward the lagoon, and then abruptly stopped. A moment of silence, and then: “*Ah! Lōmāro itok! Bar kwe li-Rachel!* – Hey! Come here boys! You too, Rachel!” My host father Liton’s voice boomed through the thatch walls of my house, and immediately the boys were up on their feet and scurrying through the door, with me close behind. We found Liton unpacking a toolbox beside the canoe we had beached a few hours ago. The boys perched themselves on one of the outrigger struts and watched him begin sanding a soft spot on the hull. “*Komiro alwōj aō kōmmane wa in, bwe komin jelā kilen kōmmane wa ko waamiro ñe emōj amiro rūttoļok. Rachel e, kwōn bar alwōj im ekkatak kōn waan Majeļ ko* – You two watch me fixing this canoe, so you’ll know how to repair your own canoes when you grow up. Rachel, you watch too and learn about Marshallese canoes,”

he said to us. The boys climbed down from the outrigger strut and watched intently as Liton continued sanding.

Once the paint was completely sanded away, he pulled out a battery-powered electric saw and carefully cut around the edges of the soft spot until he was able to remove it entirely, leaving an oval-shaped hole in the hull about the size of a golf ball. He passed the piece of wood he had removed to the boys and told them to squeeze the center so they could learn what rotten wood felt like. He then had each of them run a finger around the edge of the hole in the hull, making sure they both agreed that the wood felt solid all the way around. Next, he took a small block of wood out of the toolbox and measured it against the hole. Using the multipurpose knife he always carried with him, he carefully whittled away the edges of the block, testing it frequently against the hole, until it was the perfect size to fit snugly inside. He pulled it out again and had the boys, one at a time, insert and then remove the wooden plug from the hole. He then put it back into the hole and took a small tube of quick-dry epoxy out of the toolbox. He passed the tube to one of the boys and instructed him to squeeze it very gently around the rim of the plug, until it was entirely surrounded by a thick rope of epoxy. He took the tube back from the first boy and gave it to the second, and had him repeat the procedure on the inside of the hull.

Finally, Liton removed a flat-bladed scraping tool from the box and demonstrated how to scrape it along the rope of epoxy in order to fill in all of the little cracks between the plug and the hull, and remove the excess. After giving each of the boys a turn at smoothing the epoxy on both sides of the hull, he produced a hand plane and began running it over the patched area, slicing off paper-thin strips of newly-patched wood. One

by one, he handed the plane to each of the boys, showing them how to secure it in their hands while pushing it along the surface of the wood. His work-hardened hands completely engulfed their tiny ones, but I could see that he was being very careful to allow the boys enough freedom to hold the plane themselves, guiding their hands just enough the support the heavy plane and aid their fingers into the right position. When both sides of the hull were level and smooth, he packed everything back into the toolbox and rose to his feet. “*Iliju, kōjeañ naaj kamōje wa in, ak kiiō ejañin lukkuun mōrā. Jej aikuj kōttar* – Tomorrow, we will finish the canoe, but for now it’s not yet dry. We have to wait,” Liton said with a smile. “*Elukkuun enūman amiro jibañ eō!* – You two did a great job helping me!” The boys beamed with pride as they walked sleepily toward the main house, calling good night to me over their shoulders.

Liton turned back to me and sat down again on the canoe, beckoning me to come sit next to him. Abruptly, his face became serious. “*Ijelā kwōkōnan ekkatak mantin Majeļ* – I know you want to learn about Marshallese culture,” he began. “*Ekwe, jekjek wa elukkuun aurōk ilo mantin Majeļ. Jej ba einwōt dilep eo an mannit kein ad* – Well, building canoes is a very important part of Marshallese culture. We say that it’s the backbone of our culture.” I was startled to hear him describe Marshallese culture using the inclusive “we” – “*ad*,” instead of the exclusive “we” – “*am*.” By using the inclusive “we” he was intentionally including me in his description of “our culture.” He continued: “*Ak ilo tōrein ilo aelōn kein, eiiet likao rekōṇaan jelā jekjek wa im jerakrōk. Ij katakin ļaddrik jiddik ran nejū kōn jekjek wa, im aolep men ko bwinin riMajeļ, bwe ren jab jako* – But now throughout our islands, very few young men care to know how to build and sail canoes. I am teaching my small sons about canoebuilding, and all aspects of our

Marshallese heritage, so these things won't disappear." He gazed at me for a moment as I processed what he said, and then smiled again. "*Koṃṃool kōn am bar ekkatak* – Thank you for learning as well." And then, with a gentle "goodnight" he was gone, striding back to the main house. Still thinking about what he said, I slipped absentmindedly back into my little hut and lay down on my woven mat to go to sleep. That night I dreamed about canoes. *Wa kuk, wa jīṃor.*

Figure 20: The author's host family on Namdrik.
Right – Baba Liton and Tirja in front of my house
Below – OJ (Joe) and Ajlok *kadkad waini* (cut copra)
Bottom – Mama Clera, Paul, Tolili, Tade
Photo credits Darren Nakata (bottom), author



Kōne Jubar, Again

In Chapter Two I introduced the *jabōnkōnnaan* “*kōne jubar*,” meaning “strongly rooted as ironwood” (Stone et. al. 2000, 59). This *jabōnkōnnaan* uses the *kōne* tree, whose deep roots penetrate through the sand into the underlying coral, as a metaphor for the firm foundation of knowledge and history upon which people should base their lives. The message that emerges out of the structure of Marshallese language and culture is that the past – one’s history and heritage – is an essential part of the present as well as the future. Contradictions have arisen when foreign values and practices became more common, and when people were encouraged to embrace newness and things foreign over their own cultural heritage. The impact this social change has had on the canoe tradition is to relegate it to a past time which is considered far removed from today’s reality. Most of the people I interviewed demonstrated just this association when they argued that the days of using canoes all the time are gone, no longer part of the modern Marshallese world. However, after decades of poverty and hardship arising out of a primarily western lifestyle, many people now seem to want to embrace the modern incarnation of the way of life encapsulated in “*kōne jubar*.”

A strong foundation is indeed essential for a successful life, and as a number of my informants explained, the modern canoe tradition can provide that foundation without just “going back to how we were before.” I demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three that the changes the canoe tradition has undergone are comprehensive and drastic. The canoe today does not mean the same thing it did a century ago, nor should it. Even though the canoe was the foundation of the subsistence economy in the past, it no longer fulfills that role, and realistically it probably never will again. As Newton Lajuon said, “we’re not

going to expect everyone to paddle canoes around, we're done with that" (Lajuon 2009). Like any aspect of culture or life, the canoe must adapt and evolve along with its sociocultural environment. In Chapter Four I argued that the primary value of the canoe today is its potential to provide a foundation of meaning and identity in an extremely tumultuous time, as people struggle to deal with the impact that decades of intense social change has had on the shape of modern Marshallese life. In an era when a strong, stable foundation is difficult to find, the role of today's canoe tradition could be vitally important to the maintenance of Marshallese culture and the sustainability of Marshallese life.



Figure 21: Canoes in the 2001 Lutok Kōbban Alele race held in Majuro lagoon. Today the races are hugely popular, and, as the only interaction with canoes many young people have, are potentially very influential in the way young people understand the canoe tradition.
Photo credit Waan Aelōñ in Majel

This crucial role that the canoe can play today perhaps confirms that the movement from the canoe as practical tool to the canoe as symbol of identity and meaning is the method that best addresses both unique Marshallese needs and strengths

today, as well as the inevitable growth of a western lifestyle as part of a global society. In fact, the canoe's transformation into a symbol of meaning and pride is actually part of a larger movement toward embracing an active role for culture within many aspects of Marshallese life. For example, for a number of years there has been an effort undertaken to "Majolize" or "Marshallese" the national school curriculum, in order to introduce aspects of Marshallese culture such as canoeing and food preparation into the formal schooling system. This movement is still in progress today, but it is a subject of increasing interest both within the educational administration and without (Walsh Kroeker, personal communication).

The argument that there is an important place for culture in modern life is supported by other examples from throughout the Pacific, where people are realizing that the cultural foundations upon which life had been based for countless generations are still relevant in a modern world characterized by social change and westernization. In his exploration of the fishing tradition on Kapingamarangi Atoll, Lieber describes how, after feeling increasingly alienated from their identity and unhappy with a western lifestyle, Kapinga people began to return to the aspects of their own culture that were still relevant to their modern world. When it was obvious that foreign ways of living were not working, and were resulting in nothing but unhappiness and loss, Kapinga people began to "look inward to their past as a model for living together" (Lieber 1994, 183).

Similarly, Gegeo describes how in the Solomon Islands, foreign development projects were known for being unsuccessful once the initial foreign influence driving the project disappeared. Instead of trying to mold an indigenous lifestyle into the western rubric of success and progress, he argues that "indigenous experience, understanding,

knowledge, and ways of knowing must be incorporated in rural development discourse and practice if rural development is to successfully meet local needs” (Gegeo 1994, ix; see also Hou 1998); if this locally-relevant method is not incorporated the project will simply be irrelevant to the local way of life and will have no reason for continued existence. These examples are similar to the role the canoe is beginning to play in the Marshalls, because it represents a structural approach to modern life that is founded in the Marshallese cultural heritage itself.

The metaphor I have been using to understand the transition the canoe tradition has undergone, and the place of the canoe in Marshallese life today, is that of the tide. Embodied in such *jabōnkōnnaan* as “*ukot bōkā*” and “*ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā*,” the pattern that frames both of these related proverbs is cyclical; like the ever-changing tides, the canoe tradition will constantly evolve and change along with its broader environment, but like the ceaselessness of the tidal rhythm, the importance and relevance of the canoe will remain a constant, because it is truly the heart of what it means to be Marshallese. This is why today people are beginning to embrace the canoe tradition as a symbol of meaning and identity, rather than reject it as a relic from a backward past. In today’s world of motorboats, technology, and the cash economy, the symbol that the canoe represents provides a link between the western-style lives most Marshallese people lead today, and their unique identity and cultural heritage that could provide a stable and meaningful foundation upon which to base their lives.

It is productive to take an even broader view using the lens of the canoe tradition as a symbol of meaning which I have tried to develop in this thesis. According to this perspective and its place within the cyclical, tidal flow of time which I have argued

emerges out of a Marshallese worldview, culture as a whole should be fluid and alive, not static and unchanging. Like the canoe, culture can be understood as a natural rhythm, like the tides – perpetually changing but also remaining the same. The social change which has characterized Marshallese life for decades exists within a broader realm of constantly shifting, adapting cultural meaning. The dichotomy between “authentic” and “invented/modern” upon which so much scholarly debate has centered is not relevant within this rubric of understanding; culture is that which is lived and meaningful to its participants in spite of, or perhaps because of, constant change, and changes exist within the broader realm of cultural meaning. Geertz elucidates this relationship between change and culture further:

it is through the flow of behavior – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation. They find it as well, of course, in various sorts of artifacts, and various states of consciousness; but these draw their meaning from the role they play...in an ongoing pattern of life, not from any intrinsic relationships they bear to one another. (Geertz 1973, 17)

Context and action, not material object, creates meaning. The canoe is meaningful today precisely because of its ability to change. The transformation of the canoe from practical tool to symbol of identity and meaning is therefore a locally-relevant process that can address uniquely Marshallese needs and issues as well as the growth of a more western lifestyle as part of a global society.

The Canoe Today

Unanimously, every person I interviewed claimed that they believe the canoe tradition must continue to exist, in spite of all of the changes it has undergone and the issues it embodies today. As I have argued throughout this thesis, I believe the best role

for the canoe to play for the future of the Marshall Islands is as a symbol of identity and meaning for the Marshallese people. In their interviews, Ejnar Aerōk, Tiem Clement, Alson Kelen, Mentil Laik, Newton Lajuon, and the college students all agreed that this potential role is one of the main reasons the canoe must remain a part of Marshallese culture. Therefore the final question is: how can the canoe tradition practically realize this role?

The most basic answer to this question is that those people with the knowledge must continue to pass it down to their children, so that they can pass it on to their children, and so on. However, this traditional method of knowledge transmission is no longer enough to ensure the survival of the canoe tradition (Alessio 1991), even if more people are beginning to agree on the continued importance of the canoe today. Because of urbanization, western-style education, and the influx of modern technology, the basic structure of Marshallese life has changed enough that it is no longer solely an oral society, and children especially are accustomed to diverse means of acquiring knowledge. Realistically, the method of transmitting knowledge of the canoe to the younger generation must take a different, more modernly-relevant form.

The Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM) training organization represents one such form that has been highly successful in teaching the skills and knowledge of the canoe to a diverse range of Marshallese youth. However, I learned during my research that in spite of their interest in learning about their culture and canoes, many youth know very little about the WAM program, or how to access the knowledge the program offers (College of the Marshall Islands students 2009). Therefore for a program like WAM to be effective in spreading knowledge of the canoe tradition to a large number of youth, it must include

significant amounts of public outreach and advertizing, both of which cost money which non-profit organizations like WAM often do not have.

An option that I believe would more effectively reach large enough numbers of children to reintroduce the canoe as an important part of Marshallese life is including a canoebuilding curriculum within the formal school system. Newton Lajuon and the college students I interviewed said that they believe this would be one of the most effective ways of keeping the canoe tradition alive and impressing its importance upon the younger generation. Of course, unless educators were able to incorporate a hands-on component into the curriculum, learning about canoes in a detached school setting would certainly change the way people engage with the canoe tradition. However, because of the importance of formal education in the Marshall Islands today, I also believe this would probably be the most effective and modernly-relevant method of transmitting knowledge of the canoe to the youth of tomorrow.

An Ending and a Beginning

The goal of this thesis has been to explore the tradition of the Marshallese canoe, examine the role it plays in modern Marshallese life, and investigate the relationship between the canoe and broader forces of social change in the Marshall Islands. I have done this by engaging with the thoughts and opinions of Marshallese people I interviewed, and by placing their reflections within a structure of historical trends, academic discourses, and my own personal experiences, all relating to the canoe tradition. In an effort to allow a Marshallese worldview to frame all aspects of the organization of this thesis, I structured the work first according to the *jabōnkōnnaan* relating to the canoe tradition (of which there are many), and then according to those

jabōnkōnnan that address the topics and issues that arise out of the initial canoe-based framing. In addition, I have relied heavily on the anthropological work of Clifford Geertz, particularly his concept of “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973) within which people suspend themselves and which structure the shape of culture and society. Finally, I have attempted to maintain the spirit of this thesis as an exploration, using interrelated themes and ideas to guide the flow of the work, rather than as a hypothesis-driven study designed to prove my own opinions about the canoe.

It is my hope that this thesis might serve as the beginning of a much longer discussion – within the Marshall Islands and beyond – about the nature and potential of the canoe tradition today. The Marshallese canoe is such a rich body of knowledge and meaning, and a work of this type can only just scratch the surface of all that could be said. I have presented my own ideas in this thesis, as well as the ideas of others, but I believe the questions this work raises and the issues it discusses have much greater importance in and of themselves than do the conclusions which I present. Ultimately, all I can do is share my own interpretation of a unique tradition at a unique moment in time. What will happen to the canoe in the future will depend solely on how and why Marshallese people choose (or choose not) to engage with this aspect of their culture. Based on my own experience, as well as the ideas others shared with me, I sincerely believe that there is a very important place for the canoe in the future of the Marshall Islands. Only time will tell, however, whether our opinions will accord with the future path of the canoe.

“Wa kuk, wa jūnor. Waan kōjipañ kōj, Waan kōkkure kōj. Waan jokkwier” – “Canoe to bring us together, canoe belonging to everyone. Canoe to help us, canoe to destroy us.

Canoe to give meaning to our lives.” There is such power present in the Marshallese canoe tradition, such beauty, and such meaning. It is truly something special, something which sets Marshallese culture and people apart. As Alson Kelen so poetically said: to lose the canoe “would be a huge cut into our life today, and it would be a huge shame” (Kelen 2009). My connection with the canoe has changed my life, and I hope I have been able to convey at least a little of what the canoe means to me in the course of this thesis. It is my hope that the ending of this thesis will in truth be only the beginning of a story of the modern Marshallese canoe – a beginning founded in the meaning embedded in the past, the potential inherent in the present, and the promise present in the future. *Wa kuk, wa jīmor.*



Figure 22: The view through the lens of the Marshallese canoe.
Photo credit Joe Genz, courtesy of Waan Aelōñ in Majel

APPENDIX A: JABŌNKŌNNAAN TABLE & INFORMATION

Jabōnkōnnaan	Translation (source text, dictionary, and my own)	Meaning	About canoes?	Source & Page (see key below)
Amān akā eo	Amān = use/spend/ consume	Reap the results of yesterday's hard work, point of time to remember and celebrate establishment of new beginning.	No Well- known	JIM 62
An biliñliñ koba kōṃṃan lōmeto, im bar bok ko reddik kōṃṃan āne eo	Drops together make the ocean, and grains of sand together make an island	Save what you have/earn, every little bit counts.	No/Ocean	NBR 60 JIM 38
Bōtōktōk ej kūr	Blood is calling	Importance of and responsibility to family.	No Well- known	JIM 24
Buu j toon āne eo	Knot the island rope	When newcomers arrived they would throw a rope from the canoe to someone on the beach who would tie a knot as a symbol of friendship.	Yes	JIM 2
Bwil kōmakwōjkwōj		Chanted by observers of canoe race, symbolizes the strengthened friendship within the community caused by the race.	Yes	JIM 2
E kōmour ṃōkaj lōmeto	The sea produces life quickly/without warning	The sea produces life quickly and silently, and can also bring the enemy in the same way. Anything can happen.	No/Ocean	JIM 38
Ekmou j jab meļōkļōk kilōñe eo an (see kōñe jubar)	The Pacific Longnose Parrotfish doesn't forget its surge channel	A person will always remember their home island and Marshallese culture, no matter where they are.	No	NBR 44 JIM 45
Eoñōd im jab kunbut	Fish but let the baby fish mature before you catch it	Environmental conservation, planning for the future.	No	JIM 12
Ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā (see Jen ṃaan ibeb)	The tide is always going out and coming in	Nature continues on steadily and endlessly.	No/Ocean	JIM 39
Inkan aodde (see ṃōṃaan ilo jimwin waan)	From: enkan = decoration of aode = wake of a canoe. Literally: something that has fallen from a canoe underway.	Just as each canoe creates its own wake, so does each individual person create their own life path and accomplishments. “Traditionally, one canoe wins the race by balancing wind and wave to such position that the other canoe must cross its wake.”	Yes	JIM 2-3
Iru j in jebarbar	Excited like/To awaken a reef crab	Confused, pointless response of someone who is caught off guard. Expression of war.	No Well- known	NBR 34 JIM 46

Jab ālkwōj pein ak	Ālkwōj = to bend, to break Don't break the wing of the frigate bird	If a chief gives you something, always accept it even if you don't need/want it.	No Well-known	NBR 74 JIM 54 Knight 100
Jab kōmaat lōjet (see Jab kōrkōr ion kūro...)	Don't empty the sea	Land the fish you have before trying to catch more.	No/Ocean	JIM 12
Jab kōrkōr ioon kūro, bwe kūro wōt la (see jab kōmaat lōjet)	Don't paddle over groupers, for there are groupers below	Value what you have, don't leave home, don't give everything up to pursue risky endeavors.	No Well-known	NBR 103 JIM 46
Jabuken wa jittok	Carefreeness of the approaching canoe	If a canoe full of food is expected soon, you can eat and enjoy all the other food because more is coming.	Yes/No	JIM 16
Jake jebōl eo (see kandikdik in/kōn iōkwe)	Provide life to others	People must share and help each other in order to survive.	No Well-known	JIM 64
Jedre ak eo	Observe the frigatebird from a distance	Keep respectful of the chief. Don't let the frigate feathers on the top of the mast touch the water.	No Well-known	NBR 25 JIM 53
Jen ŋaan ibeb (see Ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā)	Ibeb = series of 3-6 predominant waves over the reef	Sailors must take ibeb into account when launching a canoe. "the tide must recede before it again swells upon the shore." Natural rhythm of tides and time.	Yes/Ocean	JIM 3
Jepelpel in ke eju kāān	Jepel = separate, apart Kāān = stand of trees	Ties of unity and family across vast distances between islands, due to master sailing/navigating ability. Motto of national government.	No/Yes Well-known	JIM 66
Jepelpel mej	Separation is death	Cards say it's referring to consequences of war: unity of a community is shattered beyond repair. More generally: separation/non-unity is death.	No	JIM 32
Jibba añ ban drebit raj	The blenny will never strike the whale	Commoners should not question the chief, because nothing will be accomplished.	No	NBR 30 JIM 47
Jined ilo kōbo, jemād im jemen ro jet (see kōrā im an kōl)	Our mother forever, our father and the fathers of others	Land and identity is passed through the mother, so the matrilineal bond is eternal and unbreakable, unlike the bond with the father's family.	No Well-known	JIM 24
Jitdaṃ kapeel	Jitdaṃ = seek knowledge Kapeel = wisdom	Seeking knowledge guarantees wisdom	No Well-known	JIM 67
Jouj eo mour eo, lāj eo mej eo	Kindness is life, cruelty is death	You must always be kind and share, so that in bad times there will always be someone to help you.	No Well-known	JIM 67
Jojo kōjparoke	Protect the flying fish	If you're not careful in storing the flying fish it could escape again. "one must exercise care and	No Well-known	JIM 12

		consideration in one's endeavor's" [sic]		
Juum ettōr	Stand and run	Pronouncement from mother to daughter passing on the responsibility for continuing the lineage, symbolized by the dekā-in-nin.	No	Jim 25
Juumemej	Stand awake/Stand in remembrance	Helmsman during long voyage. Challenged leaders "to exercise their authority as seriously as though such ocean conditions prevailed."	Yes Well-known	JIM 4
Juunmeto		Title of most experienced navigator, selected as leader of expedition. Absolute boss during trip, but "his command was a lonely one, for he alone was responsible for the lives of all his fellow seafarers"	Yes Well-known	JIM 3
Kandikdik in/kōn iōkwe (see jake jebōl eo)	Share whatever small food you have with love	Importance of sharing, thinking of others.	No Well-known	JIM 17
Kījen kweet, drekā	Octopus' food is rock	Being determined, never giving up, regardless of the consequences.	No/Yes Well-known	NBR 41 JIM 48
Kijñeñe wōt kōñe	As rigid as kōñe (ironwood)	Completely inflexible; person that is impossible to change, has no shame, stubborn.	No	NBR 84 JIM 59
Kōñe jubar (see ekmouj jab meļōkļōk kilōñe eo an)	The kōñe (ironwood) roots through reef rock/Strongly rooted as kōñe	Something that has a firm foundation/beginning will remain so forever	No Well-known	NBR 84 JIM 59
Kōrā im an kōl (see jined ilo kōbo...)	Kōl = technique, way or manner or doing something	All women have a unique talent and creativity that is bestowed at birth.	No	MIJ 10/2/09, pg. 5
Kōtkōt mejen rom (see pao jān mar)	Rom=wink, blink Kōtkōt = kind of bird	When the outrigger is out of the water, things can go wrong very quickly and unexpectedly. "Things happen quickly, watch out."	Yes	JIM 4
Kwōjab aniet lōjet ļapļap	Don't confine the wide ocean	The sea has a surplus of fish [the accurateness of this meaning is questionable]	No/Ocean	JIM 39
Kwōjab inojeikļōk jāne wa kein, bwe iaļan mour ko kein	Don't drift away from these canoes, for these are your path through life	Don't take things for granted. Immense importance of canoes.	Yes	JIM 5
Kwōtuļom, tuur lōmeto ak bōruōn armej kwōban	Tuur = dive down You can dive and reach the bottom of the ocean, but you can't reach the depths of a person's heart.	We enter and understand the sea, but not the heart of human beings.	No/Ocean	JIM 39
Likūti ko mejān wa,	Take on the habits	Sailors' lives depend on their	Yes	JIM 5

wajuļok ko mejān āne (see lōb eo dein)	of the canoe eye, cast those of land from you	ability to assume the duties of an ocean lifestyle and leave their land-based habits behind.		
Liok tūt bok	Pandanus roots grab deep through sand to hold firmly	See kōñe jubar.	No	JIM 60
Lōb eo dein (see likūti ko mejān wa...)	There is the grave	Said by sailors to show they are calm in the face of the danger the ocean represents.	No/Ocean	JIM 5
Mōkajkaji, jaljaļi, batbat	Speed it up, unsnarl it, slow it down	When you're hurrying and don't stop to check the outrigger lashings, they will come untied and cause a worse delay than if you had fixed it before.	Yes	JIM 6
Mōmaān ilo jimwin waan (see inkan aodde)	Man at the stem of his canoe	Each canoe-builder shapes the stem of his canoe differently, just as each individual behaves differently according to their own ideas.	Yes	JIM 6
Mōttan kijēn bako	Leftovers of the shark's food	Something very rare, a rare opportunity, unexpected gift. Something is better than nothing.	No	NBR 28 JIM 49
Pao jān mar (see kōtkōt mejēn rom)	Appearance from the bush	Strong wind that can appear unexpectedly and damage the canoe and sailors if they aren't prepared.	Yes	JIM 7
Rie ņe jeim	Help your sibling	On atoll communities everyone must work together to survive and maintain unity.	No	JIM 28
Tuwaak bwe eliṃaajñoṃo	Go into the water for the seas are choppy	Face your challenges	No/Ocean Well-known	
Ukot bōkā	Change the tide	Pay back kindness that was shown to you. Especially children should help their parents when they get old.	No/Ocean Well-known	NBR 111 JIM 41
Wa kaiur	The canoe making us hurry		Yes	JIM 7
Wa kuk wa jīṃor	Canoe bringing everyone together/ everyone's canoe, canoe together	Everyone was needed to build and maintain a canoe, and it was necessary for everyone's survival, so it belonged to everyone, and brought/kept people together	Yes Well-known	JIM 9 Tobin 15/29
Waan jōkkwier	Canoe and our constant labor/to give meaning to our lives	Hard to translate 'jōkkwier'	Yes	JIM 8 Tobin 15/29
Waan keemem	Canoe to remember	Canoes were so important that even when they were old they were never destroyed, they were saved and memorialized. Keepsake, remembrance.	Yes	JIM 8
Waan kōjipañ kōj	The canoe to make us fortunate	Canoes were used for all aspects of life, and life couldn't exist without canoes	Yes	JIM 7 Tobin 15/29

Waan kōjipaṅ kōj, waan kōkkure kōj	Canoe to make us fortunate, canoe to destroy us	The canoe is so important, but if not cared for and used properly it can result in harm and destruction.	Yes	JIM 9 Tobin 15/29
---------------------------------------	---	--	-----	-------------------------

Source Key (see Bibliography for more detailed source information)

JIM = *Jabōṅkoṅnaan in M̄ajel; wisdom from the past: a collection of Marshallese proverbs, wise sayings & beliefs*, 2000.

Knight = *A History of the Marshall Islands*, 1999.

MIJ = *Marshall Islands Journal*, Caroline Yacoe, 2 October 2009.

NBR = *The Marshall Islands – Living Atolls Amidst the Living Sea: The National Biodiversity Report of the Marshall Islands*, 2000.

Tobin = *Stories From the Marshall Islands / Bwebwenato Jān Aelōñ Kein*, 2002.

Relevant Themes in Jabōṅkoṅnaan

- Canoe as heart/backbone of Marshallese life and culture.
 - Kwōjab inojeiklōk jāne wa kein, bwe iaḷan mour ko kein
 - Waan kōjipaṅ kōj (+ waan kōkkure kōj)
 - Wa kuk wa jīmōr
 - Waan keemem
 - Waan jokkwier
 - Jepelpel in ke eju kān
- Use of canoeing metaphors to describe life's trials and tribulations.
 - Pao jān mar
 - Kōtkōt mejen rom
 - Jen ṃaan ibeb
 - Mōkajkaji, jaḷjaḷi, batbat
- Use of canoeing metaphors to describe human nature and behavior.
 - Mōṃaan ilo jimwin waan
 - Inkan aodde
- Use of animal analogies to describe human behavior, especially proper behavior toward the chief.
 - Jedre ak eo
 - Jab ālkwōj pein ak
 - Jibbaḷaṅ ban drebit raj
 - see also Iruj in jebarbar; Jab kōrkōr ioon kūro, bwe kūro wōt laḷ; Jojo kōjparoke; Kijen kweet, drekā
 - less common/relevant: Būruōn kidiaj (NBR 35); Ikaarar (NBR 43, JIM 45); Latilbako (NBR 68, JIM 49); Būruōn kūro (NBR 77, JIM 44); Julul in boṅ (NBR 81, JIM 47); Kiki in jipinin (NBR 82, JIM 48); Eḷtak in maj (JIM 45); Jer in bali (JIM 47); Laburburu mour (JIM 49); Mejen bale (JIM 50)
- Strong foundation of Marshallese culture supports and accompanies a person throughout their entire life.
 - Kōṅe jubar

- Ekmouj jab meļokļok kilōne eo an
- Liok tūt bok
- Amān akā eo
- Use of ocean metaphors: especially emphasis on natural cycles, ocean as vast/necessary/challenging resource and part of life.
 - An biliñliñ koba kōmman lōmeto, im bar bok ko reddik kōmman āne eo
 - E kōmour mōkaj lōmeto
 - Ewōr tarlik tarar in bōkā
 - Jab kōmaat lōjet
 - Jen maan ibeb
 - Kwōjab aniet lōjet ļapļap
 - Kwōtuļom, tuur lōmeto ak bōruōn armej kwōban
 - Lōb eo dein
 - Tuwaak bwe eliņaajņoņo
 - Ukot bōkā
- Just as the canoe is life but also death, the ocean too is also life as well as death. Ties to risks and responsibilities of right leadership.
 - Juumemej
 - Juunmeto
 - Lōb eo dein
 - Likūti ko mejān wa, wajuļok ko mejān āne
 - Waan kōjipaņ kōj, waan kōkkure kōj
 - E kōmour mōkaj lōmeto
- Descriptions of important values and right way of life: almost all are about kindness, sharing, and importance of unity.
 - Amān akā eo
 - Jake jebōl eo
 - Jitdaņ kapeel
 - Jouj eo mour eo, lāj eo mej eo
 - Kandikdik in/kōn iķkwe
 - Tuwaak bwe eliņaajņoņo
 - Ukot bōkā
 - Rie ņe jeim
 - Jepelpel mej
- Women, especially mothers and daughters.
 - Juum ettōr
 - Kōrā im an kōl
 - Jined ilo kōbo, jemād im jemen ro jet
 - see also Bōtōktōk ej kūr; Rie ņe jeim

APPENDIX B: THESIS RESEARCH GUIDED CONVERSATION TOPICS

This is the interview format I used while conducting my field research in Majuro, Marshall Islands during the summer of 2009. As the title implies, I structured the interviews more as conversations, allowing the interviewee and the subject matter to guide the course of the interview, in order to privilege the voice of the interviewee and his or her perspectives on the topic. Usually I did not discuss every question listed here, rather only those that seemed relevant in regard to the course of that particular interview.

- General background of informant: date of birth, place of birth, home island(s), jowi, married, children, grandchildren, schooling, job

- Experience with canoes: Did you grow up around canoes? Know how to build or sail? If yes, learned where and from whom? You or anyone in family own a canoe now or in past? Know anything about navigation? What is the meaning/value of the canoe to you? Is the canoe part of your identity as a Marshallese person? Do you think other people feel similarly?

- Canoes and Marshallese culture in past: Do you know any bwebwenato or inoñ about canoes, i.e. story of Etao and ironwood canoe? Do you know any roro, or about canoe roro? Is the canoe an important part of Marshallese culture? Why or why not? Who invented the canoe/sail/navigation? Are Marshallese canoes different from canoes in other parts of Micronesia? Why and how? Before foreigners came, how important was the canoe? What was it used for? Were there rules around it (who could build, sail, etc.)?

- Canoes in modern Marshalls: is it good to keep using canoes now? Why or why not? Are motorboats better than canoes? How important are canoes in today's world? Does the canoe mean something different today than before the introduction of foreign boats? Is there a place for the canoe in the modern Marshalls? If yes, what is it; if no, why not?

- Gender and Canoes: do many women know how to build or sail canoes? Is it good for women to learn? Before foreigners came, were women more involved with canoes?

- Social change and canoes: do many people still know how to build/sail canoes today? Why or why not? Are young people still learning how to build and sail? Why or why not? Do you think youth should learn? If everyone stops making/using canoes, how will that change Marshallese culture? Do you think Marshallese culture is changing? Does that affect canoe tradition?

- The canoe and the future: does the canoe have anything to offer the future of the Marshall Islands/Marshallese people/Marshallese culture? Is the continued existence of the canoe tradition important for the future? What do you think Marshallese life will be like in the future? How will culture be different? Will people still know about canoes?

- Key research concerns: what does the canoe tradition mean to Marshallese people today? How has it changed in the past, and why? Is the canoe connected with other aspects of modern Marshallese life? Is there room for the tradition of the canoe in a rapidly changing Marshallese world? What do Marshallese people identify as the role of the canoe in the future? How does this compare to my views on all of these subjects, and if it differs, why?

GLOSSARY OF MARSHALLESE WORDS: UKOK IN MAJEL

Marshallese word	English meaning	Location in thesis	Source
Bwebwenato	talk; conversation; story; history; article; episode; lore; myth; tale.	Introduction	Abo et. al. 2009
Bwij	lineage; crowd; family; tribe. Also canoe part, two pieces of ironwood support that attach the kie to the outrigger.	Chapter 3	Abo et. al. 2009
Diak	tack, change sail from one end of canoe to the other to tack.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009
Ek	fish.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009
Erentōp	“Something (in other words, a gift) to put your shavings from the canoe in (a reward for canoe building).”	Chapter 3	Tobin 2002, 388
Iep	sheet, nautical. Also basket.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Inqñ	legend; folkloristic story; fiction; lore; myth; day-dream.	Introduction	Abo et. al. 2009
Irooj (alt. spelling Iroj)	chief; king.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009
Jabōnkōnnaan	proverb; saying.	Introduction	Abo et. al. 2009
Jebwe	oar; paddle; rudder; steering wheel.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Jinen wa	Mother of the canoe. [Jinen = mother; aunt; older sister; female cousin. wa = canoe; ship; boat; vehicle.]	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Jojo	canoe part, outrigger spar; canoe part, ties between spar and outrigger. Also a fish, flying fish, family Exocoetidae.	Chapter 3	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Jouj	canoe part, bottom part of canoe. Also kind; kindhearted; kindness; benevolence; benign; charity; favor; grace.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Jowi	matrilineal kin; clan; race.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009
Kadkad waini	Cut copra	Conclusion	Abo et. al. 2009
Kajin Majel	Marshallese language. [Kajin = language; dialect; construct	Introduction	Abo et. al. 2009

	form of kaj. Maje! = Marshall Islands.]		
Kajin wa	Canoe language. [Kajin = language; dialect; construct form of kaj. wa = canoe; ship; boat; vehicle.]	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009
Kajoor	common people; commoner.	Chapter 3	Abo et. al. 2009
Kōjipaṅ (alt. spelling kōjbaṅ, kōjban)	Thing to help. [Kō-, from ka- = causative prefix. Jipaṅ = help; aid; benefit; pension.]	Chapter 4	Abo et. al. 2009
Kḡkkure	to destroy; spoil; injure; demolish; ruin.	Chapter 4	Abo et. al. 2009
Kōṅe	a plant, Pemphis acidula Forst; a small, sclerophyllous-leaved shrub with scaly black branches and small white flowers, growing on the hottest open sandy beaches. Also known as ironwood.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Taafaki et. al. 2006
Kōṅo	a plant, Cordia subcordata Lam. (Boraginaceae); a handsome large tree with subcordate, light green leaves and tubular orange flowers. Also known as sea trumpet and island walnut.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Taafaki et. al. 2006
Kubaak	outrigger; partner of opposite sex.	Chapter 3	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Lem	bailer.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Ripālle	Foreigner, American, white person. [Ri- = person from; person who pālle = westernized.]	Chapter 3	Abo et. al. 2009
Rojak kōrā	Boom, literally female boom. [Rojak = spar of sail; boom; gaff. kōrā = woman; female; effeminate; lady.]	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Rojak ṁaan	Gaff, literally male boom. [Rojak = spar of sail; boom; gaff. ṁaan, from ṁōṁaan = man; male; wife's brother.]	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009, Waan Aelōñ in Majel 2004
Roro	chant; shout rhythmically while doing a job requiring team work, as carrying a canoe.	Appendix B	Abo et. al. 2009
Wa	canoe; ship; boat; vehicle.	Chapter 2	Abo et. al. 2009

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abo, Takaji, Byron W. Bender, Alfred Capelle and Tony deBrum

1976 *Marshallese-English Dictionary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

2009 *Marshallese Online Dictionary*. Revised ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. <http://www.trussel2.com/MOD/>

Aerōk, Ejnar

2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 15 July. Recording in author's files.

Alessio, Dennis

1991 *Traditional and Contemporary Measuring, Lashing and Construction Techniques of the Outrigger Canoes of Ailuk Atoll*. Waan Aelon Kein Project Report No. 5. Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands: Waan Aelon Kein, Alele Museum.

2006 "Waan Aelon in Majel: Cultural Development in the Marshall Islands." *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*. 5 (½), November: 605-12.

Bender, Byron W.

1969 *Spoken Marshallese: An Intensive Language Course with Grammatical Notes and Glossary*. PALI Language Texts: Micronesia. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press.

Browning, Mary A.

1973 "Walab Im Medo: Canoes & Navigation in the Marshalls." *Micronesian Reporter*, XXI (1), First quarter: 25-31.

Carucci, Laurence Marshall.

1989 "The Source of the Force in Marshallese Cosmology." In *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II*, edited by Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey M. White, 73-96. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, no. 8. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies and University of Hawai'i Press.

1995 "Symbolic Imagery of Enewetak Sailing Canoes." In *Seafaring in the Contemporary Pacific Islands: Studies in Continuity and Change*, edited by Richard Feinberg, 16-33. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

1997a "Irooj Ro Ad: Measures of Chiefly Ideology and Practice in the Marshall Islands." In *Chiefs Today: Traditional Pacific Leadership and the Postcolonial State*, edited by Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom, 197-210. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- 1997b *Nuclear Nativity: Rituals of Renewal and Empowerment in the Marshall Islands*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
- 2001 "Elision or Decision: Lived History and the Contextual Grounding of the Constructed Past." In *Cultural Memory: Reconfiguring History and Identity in the Postcolonial Pacific*, edited by Jeannette Marie Mageo, 81-101. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chutaro, Chuji

- 2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 9 July. Recording in author's files.

Clement, Tiem

- 2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 15 July. Recording in author's files.

College of the Marshall Islands students

- 2009 Video-recorded group interview with 19 College of the Marshall Islands students. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 6 July. Recording in author's files.

D'Arcy, Paul

- 2006 *The People of the Sea: Environment, Identity and History in Oceania*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Diaz, Vicente M.

- 1997 *Sacred vessels: navigating tradition and identity in Micronesia*. VHS, 1/2 in, color with b/w sequences, 28 min. Distributed by Moving Islands Production, GMF, Guam.

Downing, Jane, Dirk H. R. Spenneman, and Margaret Bennett, editors

- 1992 *Bwebwenatoon Etto: A Collection of Marshallese Legends and Traditions*. Illustrated by Amram Enos and Paul Kingsbury. Marshall Islands Culture and History; Series E: Legends, Chants and Proverbs; No. 1. Majuro, Marshall Islands: Republic of the Marshall Islands, Alele Museum & National Archives, Historic Preservation Office, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Services.

Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

- 2005 RMI Embassy to the US, Washington, D.C.
<http://www.rmiembassyus.org/index.htm> [accessed 6 November 2009]

Finch, O.

1893 *Ethnologische Erfahrungen und Belegstücke aus der Südsee*. Wien. Translation no. 1031. In Mason 1947, reproduced 1986. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

Finney, Ben

2004 "Playing with Canoes." In *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories: Essays in Honor of Robert C. Kiste*, edited by Brij V. Lal, 290-308. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Geertz, Clifford

1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gegeo, David Welchman

1994 Kastom and Bisnis: Towards Integrating Cultural Knowledge into Rural Development in the Solomon Islands. PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i.

Genz, Joseph H.

2008 Marshallese Navigation and Voyaging: Re-Learning and Reviving Indigenous Knowledge of the Ocean. PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i.

Goodenough, Ward

1963 *Cooperation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Graham, Ben

2006 "Marshallese Out-Migration Intensifies," Pacific Islands Report. http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2006/November/graham_report.pdf [accessed 23 April 2010].

Hanlon, David

1998 *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over Development in a Pacific Territory, 1944-1982*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hau'ofa, Epele

2008 "Our Sea of Islands." In *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*: 27-40. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hernsheim, Franz

1883 *Südsee-Erinnerungen (1875-1880) Von Franz Hernsheim*. Mit einem einleitenden vorwort, von dr. Otto Finsch. Berlin: A. Hofmann & Comp.

Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

Hezel, Francis X.

- 1983 *The First Taint of Civilization: A History of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in Pre-Colonial Days, 1521-1885*. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, no. 1. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 1995 *Strangers In Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, no. 13. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2001 *The New Shape of Old Island Cultures: A Half Century of Social Change in Micronesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hou, Tony

- 1998 "Development and Culture: A Solomon Islands Case Study." Applied Research Working Paper No. 1. Honiara, Solomon Islands: Solomon Islands College of Higher Education.

Jolly, Margaret

- 1992 "Specters of Inauthenticity." *The Contemporary Pacific* 4 (1): 49-72.

Kelen, Alson

- 2009 Video-taped interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 22 July. Recording in author's files.

Kiste, Robert C. and Mac Marshall, editors

- 1999 *American Anthropology in Micronesia: An Assessment*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Knight, Gerald

- 1999 *A History of the Marshall Islands*. Originally published as *Man This Reef*. Republic of the Marshall Islands: Micronitor News and Printing Company.

Kotzebue, Otto von

- 1821 *Entdeckungs-Reise in die Süd-See und nach der Berings-Strasse zur Erforschung einer nordöstlichen Durchfahrt, unternommen in den Jahren 1815-1818, auf Kosten Sr. Erlaucht des Herrn Reichs-Kanzlers Grafen Rumanzoff auf dem Schiffe Rurick*. Translated by H. E. Llyod. 3 vols. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, London. 3 vols. English translation: H. E. Lloyd, Translator. *A Voyage of Discovery, into the South Seas and Beering's Straits, for the Purpose of Exploring a North-East Passage, Undertaken in the Years 1815- 1818, at the Expense of His Highness the Chancellor of the Empire, Count Romanzoff, in the Ship Rurick, under the Command of the Lieutenant in the Russian Imperial Navy,*

Otto von Kotzebue. 3 vols. London: Longman, 1821. Reprint. Amsterdam: N. Israel and New York: Da Capo, 1967.

Kowata, Kinuko, Terry Mote, Donna K. Stone, and Bernice Joash, editors

1999 *Inoñ in Majōļ: A Collection of Marshallese Folktales*. Illustrated by Paul Kingsbury, Amram Enos, and Donna K. Stone. Majuro, Marshall Islands: Alele Museum, Library & National Archives.

Kramer, Augustin and Hans Nevermann

1906. *Hawaii, Ostmikronesien und Samoa, Meine Zweite Südsee-reise (1897-1899) zum Studium der Atolle und ihrer Bewohner*. Verlag von Strecker & Schröder, Stuttgart. Translation no. 1033. In Mason 1947, reproduced 1986. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

1938. *Ralik-Ratak* (Marshall-Inseln). In *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition, 1908-1910 II. Ethnographie, B: Mikronesien*, edited by G. Thilenius. Friedrichsen & de Gruyter, Hamburg.

Kurze, G.

1887. *Mikronesien und die Mission daselbst*. Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift, XIV, 64-80, 123-128. Translation no. 1039. In Mason 1947, reproduced 1986. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

LaBriola, Monica

2006 *Iien Ippan Doon: Celebrating Survival in an 'Atypical Marshallese Community'*. MA thesis, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Laik, Mentil

2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 15 July. Recording in author's files.

Lajuon, Newton

2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 21 July. Recording in author's files.

Lieber, Michael D.

1994 *More Than a Living: Fishing and the Social Order on a Polynesian Atoll*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Linnekin, Jocelyn

1992 "On the Theory and Politics of Cultural Construction in the Pacific." *Oceania* 62 (4): 249-63.

Maddison, Josepha

2009 Video-recorded interview. Majuro, Marshall Islands, 24 July. Recording in author's files.

Marshall, Mac

2004 *Namoluk Beyond the Reef: The Transformation of a Micronesian Community*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Mason, Leonard

1971 *The Many Faces of Micronesia*. Pre-publication draft. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

McArthur, Phillip Henry

1995 *The Social Life of Narrative: Marshall Islands*. PhD dissertation, Indiana University.

Nabobo-Baba, Unaisi

2006 *Knowing & Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach*. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, Institute of Pacific Studies Press.

Nakano, Ann

1983 *Broken Canoe: Conversations and Observations in Micronesia*. New York: University of Queensland Press.

National Biodiversity Team of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

2000 *The Marshall Islands – Living Atolls Amidst the Living Sea: The National Biodiversity Report of the Marshall Islands*. United Nations Development Programme. RMI Biodiversity Project. Santa Clarita, California: St. Hildegard Publishing Company.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

1999 *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd.

United States

1963 *Report by the United States Government Survey Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* ("Solomon Report"). Summary and 2 vols. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i, Hamilton Library, Hawaiian and Pacific Collection.

Stone, Donna K., Kinuko Kowata, and Bernice Joash, editors

2000 *Jabōnkōnnaan in Majeļ: Wisdom From the Past: A Collection of Marshallese Proverbs, Wise Sayings & Beliefs*. Illustrated by Paul Kingsbury et al. Majuro, Marshall Islands: Alele Museum, Library & National Archives.

Paulding, Hiram

1831 *Journal of a cruise of the United States schooner Dolphin, Among the Islands of the Pacific Ocean; and a Visit to the Mulgrave Islands, In Pursuit of the Mutineers of the Whale Ship Globe*. New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1831. Reprint. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1970.

Peattie, Mark R.

1988 *Nan'yō: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1885-1945*. Pacific Islands Monograph Series, no. 4. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Petrosian-Husa, Carmen C. H.

2005 *The De Brum Photo Collection – Memento Mori*. Alele Report 2005/01. Majuro Atoll, Republic of the Marshall Islands: Historic Preservation Office.

Rainbird, Paul

2004 *The Archaeology of Micronesia*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Rudiak-Gould, Peter

2004 *WorldTeach Marshallese Language Manual*. Also known as *Practical Marshallese*. Self-published.

Taafaki, Irene J., Maria Kabua Fowler, and Randolph R. Thaman, editors

2006 *Traditional Medicine of the Marshall Islands: The Women, the Plants, the Treatments*. IPS Publications. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Tengan, Ty Kawika

2005 "Unsettling Ethnography: Tales of an 'Oiwī in the Anthropological Slot." *Anthropological Forum* 15 (3): 247-56.

Thaman, Konai Helu

2003 "Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education." *The Contemporary Pacific* 15 (1): 1-17.

Thomas, Nicholas

1991 *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

1997 *In Oceania: Visions, Artifacts, Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tobin, Jack A.

2002 *Stories From the Marshall Islands / Bwebwenato Jān Aelōñ Kein*. PALI Language Texts: Micronesia. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Waan Aelōñ in Majel

2004 *Waan Aelōñ in Majel Program: Canoes of the Marshall Islands*. DVD. Distributed by Mission Pacific Production, Majuro, Marshall Islands.

Walsh, Julianne M.

1995 Looking Back: Expressions of Marshallese Identity. MA thesis, Louisiana State University.

2003 Imagining the Marshalls: Chiefs, Tradition, and the State on the Fringes of U.S. Empire. PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Walsh, Julie

2001b Exposure and Disclosure: Public A(nthro)pologies. In *Public Anthropology: The Graduate Journal*. Edited at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. <http://www.publicanthropology.org/Journals/Grad-j/Hawaii/Walsh.htm> [accessed 29 May 2009]

Yacoe, Caroline

2009 "Mat Sells For Record \$750." *Marshall Islands Journal*, October 2.