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SPECIAL ISSUE
Explorations into Micronesian Mobility: Transforming Family and Home across Borders

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EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

We are delighted to present the 58th issue of Pacific Geographies. This is a special issue on mobilities in Micronesia prepared by Rebecca Hofmann (University College of Teacher Education Freiburg, Germany) and Dominik Schieder (University of Siegen, Germany).

Dr Rebecca Hofmann is an anthropologist with a large interest in mobility studies, including climate change induced mobility in the Pacific as much as refugee students in Germany. She teaches in the Department of Sociology of the University of Education, Freiburg, Germany. Dr Dominik Schieder works in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Siegen. He specializes in the anthropology and history of Fiji and Fiji Islander trans-border mobility with a focus on multi-ethnic sociality, institutional change, politics and sport. Since 2013, he serves as co-speaker of the German Anthropological Association's Oceania working group.

The German non-governmental and non-profit association Pacific Network, founded in 1988, has become co-publisher of Pacific Geographies this year. The Pacific Network has around 200 members in German speaking countries. For the purpose of promoting environmental, cultural, social-economic and political issues of the Pacific region more widely and to spread publications to a broader audience, the journal has joined forces with the Pacific Network.

Finally, we are proud that Pacific Geographies is celebrating its 30th birthday in 2022. We have come a long way since the first issue back in 1992 published at the Department of Geography of the Technical University of Aachen. We will continue to provide you with interesting insights from the Asia-Pacific region in the future.

The managing editors, Michael Waibel & Matthias Kowasch

Pacific Geographies

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COVER PICTURE

Traveling to Éét in Chuuk Lagoon, FSM 2011
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Explorations into Micronesian mobility: Transforming family and home across borders – an introduction

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Abstract: This article introduces a collection of essays on Micronesian mobility with a particular focus on family- and home-making discourses and practices. The special issue starts from the assumption that Oceania remains by and large invisible in the broader context of Mobility and Migration Studies despite observations that rural-urban, interisland and transborder mobility feature prominently in the lives of many Pacific Islanders and that existing transnational social fields take at times global scales beyond the Pacific. In this light, the special issue builds on ethnographic explorations and empirical case studies of Micronesian mobility and wishes to open the floor for a renewed discussion on its relevance both within scholarship on Oceania and mobility and migration research more generally.

Keywords: Micronesia, migration, mobility, transnationalism, family

Introduction

The following words by Josealyn Eria from Chuuk serve as a fitting starting point for our special issue on Micronesian mobility:

"The opportunities that migration has offered me have been vast and varied. I was able to get a college degree, see the world through different perspectives, and have the opportunity to choose what I want to do with my life. I've worked as a teacher, a social worker, a meat packer, a student advisor, a quality inspector, a research contributor, among many others. I am also a daughter, an aunt, a sister, a cousin, a helpful contributing member of my einang (clan) by always showing up for what my family needs. I am thousands of miles away from home, yet my culture and traditions follow me and have shaped how I live my life even while living abroad. I have a foot in both doors: while I navigate the modern world of corporate offices, making decisions that directly impact the output of a high profile company, I learn to take off that hat when I am in my cultural spaces, following traditions of humbleness, gender and age-stratified power. Living my life in both worlds means I have the opportunity to see both sides as I continue to navigate my place in them. My name is Josealyn Eria, I am Chuukese, I am a woman, and I am an expert navigator in living in two worlds." (Vignette courtesy of J. Eria, 17.05.2022)

Josealyn Eria's words vividly depict how 'culture' and 'tradition' remain present and meaningful for many Chuukese (and other) migrants in the context of transborder mobility, allowing persons like her to keep "a foot in both [and potentially many other] doors" within an ever-growing context of transnational social fields (cf. Go & Krause 2016; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). Indeed, the vignette provided above touches on themes which have been at the core of scholarship on transborder mobility and transnationalism – by now established fields of research in various academic disciplines (e.g., Dahinden 2009; Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013; Vertovec 2009) and which this special issue zooms into with a focus on Micronesian mobility.[1]

More particularly, the authors of this collection, all of whom relate to anthropology or neighbouring disciplines, follow, and scrutinise Micronesians along their ways of practicing 'family' and 'home' across geographical space. In doing so, they aim at contributing to a better understanding of Micronesian ways of belonging in the context of transborder mobility (cf. Hermann, Kempf & van Meijl 2014). The contributions indicate how transnational facets not only saturate the lives of many persons on the move but also those who remain. They highlight that mobility and placemaking, moving and staying are not antagonistic social processes but ultimately closely intertwined both in Oceania and beyond (Keck & Schieder 2015b: 115).

This special issue was born out of a continuing dialogue between the two guest editors on Pacific Islander mobility and two general observations: First, although research on Pacific Islander transborder mobility in its various facets is now firmly established within the narrow(er) field of Pacific Studies and related academic disciplines, especially anthropology and geography, (e.g., Hermann, Kempf & van Meijl 2014; Keck & Schieder 2015a; Lee & Francis 2009; Rensel & Howard 2012; Taylor & Lee 2017), Micronesian mobility remains to play a subordinate role in

the Anthropology of Oceania. In this light, Hanlon identified "Micronesia's current place within the field of Pacific studies as one of relative absence or, at best, minimal inclusion" (2009: 91). Indeed, there appears to be a bias towards Polynesia in anthropology and related disciplines to this day if the topic of mobility is concerned, albeit the existence of a small but growing body of literature engaging with transborder Micronesian mobility.[2]

Second, Oceania and Micronesia are by and large invisible in the wider context of Mobility and Migration Studies – for example they hardly, if at all, feature in related academic journals, edited volumes etc. in this field of research.

Taking these insights as point of departure, the main aim of this special issue is a modest one: it wishes to contribute to make scholarship on contemporary Micronesia more visible and accessible to a broader audience within and beyond academia, showcasing works that in one way or the other ethnographically explore transborder mobility (Eria, Hofmann & Smith; Puas; Walda-Mandel this issue) and issues related to Micronesian mobility more broadly (Kuehling this issue).

More particularly, the contributions to this collection focus on dimensions of Micronesian family and home-making processes, i.e., the manifold ways in which Micronesians constitute being and belonging (cf. Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004) across borders.[3] Here, again the observation holds that although the nexus of family and mobility is by now a well explored topic of research in the social sciences and related disciplines, leading to various theoretical models that explore the ways in which family, kinship and mobility are intertwined and potentially (re-)shape each other (e.g., Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020a; Baldassar & Merla 2013; Boehm 2019; Bryceson 2019; Bryceson & Vuorela 2002; Carsten 2020), it is noteworthy that scholarship on island Oceania including Micronesia is by and large absent in this broader literature beyond the narrow(er) field of Pacific Studies. In our view this is an omission, given that the 'family' remains at the core of Pacific Islander sociality both within the islands and beyond (cf. Gershon 2007; Toren & Pauwels 2015). Moreover, we see great potential in Pacific scholarship to contribute to transborder studies on family and kinship more generally, given

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 1: Visiting family on Tóón, Chuuk, FSM 2011.

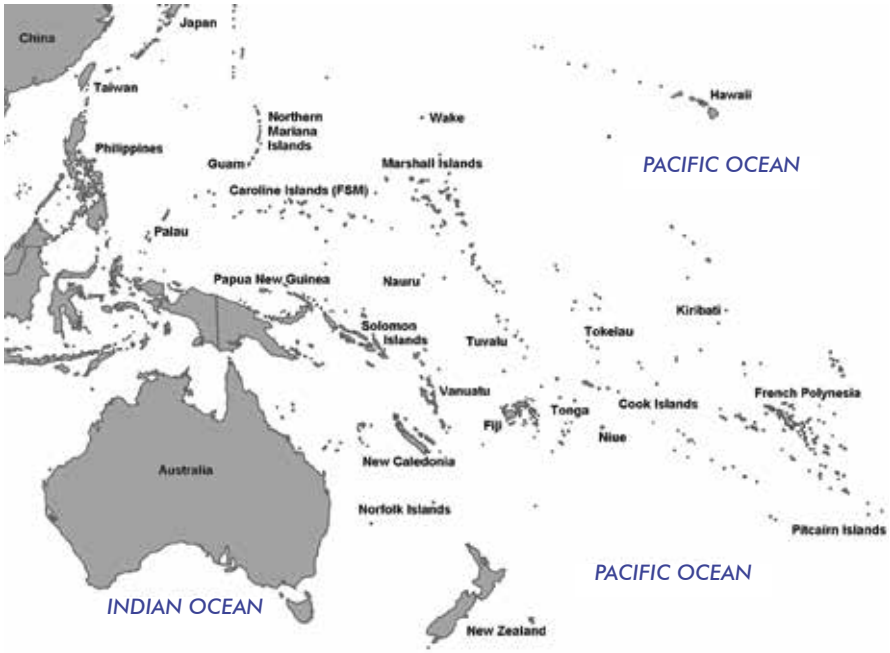
that Oceania is a region characterised historically of being in motion (cf. Hau'ofa 1994).

For example, a collection of articles, edited by Lee and Francis (2009; cf. Gershon 2007) reveals how transnational and diasporic social fields that span across island Oceania and beyond are structured by, as Lee fittingly put it, "reciprocity and gift-giving, kinship, identity, work and the ideal of a return 'home'" (2009a: 2). Drawing on these observations, this special issue contains ethnographically informed contributions that pick up on these themes and showcase Micronesian perspectives on 'family' and 'home' with a focus on transborder mobility (and Micronesian mobility more generally).

Micronesia

Micronesia is the European name for a variety of islands in the central and western Pacific, encompassing today's political entities of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Palau, the Common-wealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the unincorporated territory of Guam (US).

Especially with respect to emic Micronesian perspectives, it can be generally difficult to pinpoint what 'Micronesia' connotes. Ultimately, islanders have different names for themselves and their own ideas of being and belonging which are not so much bound to a national identity but



Source: Hofmann 2016: 18.

Figure 2: Map of Oceania.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 3: Food preparation for Micronesian cultural day in Chuuk, FSM 2012.

driven by their relationships to specific villages and islands from where they and their extended families and clans originate as well as to places and stories (re)telling their ancestry (see Kuehling this issue). Additionally, these islanders often differentiate themselves along various other boundaries, i.e. whether they live on low atolls or on high islands, or according to the order in which their ancestors arrived by canoe in those places now called 'home'. It is, however, interesting to note that 'Micronesians' often take on, and identify with the etic or outsider label of 'Micronesian' in the context of transborder migration, especially if family and wider kinship relations as well as discourses of home, being and belonging are concerned (cf. Petersen 2009); an approach which we follow in this special issue.[4]

The populations of the geographical area named Micronesia today, witnessed Spanish, German, Japanese and US-American colonial intruders, in the case of Kiribati also British, in the case of Nauru Australian. After World War II, which rampaged widely in Micronesian waters, islands, and air (Falgout, Poyer & Carucci 2008; Hofmann 2021), the larger part of Micronesia remained under US administration as the so-called US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, mandated by the UN in 1947. Indeed, up until 1951, the US Navy was in control before the US Department of the Interior took over.

In 1986, when the US began with the termination of its administration in the region, the formation of states solidified according to regional-specific ideas of independency (cf. Hanlon 1998): While the Marianas became part of the US Commonwealth and Guam an unincorporated territory, three newly formed states – the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau – opted for free association (the former two in 1986, the latter in 1994), which these now sovereign states negotiated individually with the US government, regulated by individual Compacts through which the US provides financial assistance and visa waivers in exchange for certain defense rights. In short, in Micronesia, there remains an overwhelming American presence, politically and especially economically expressed in Compacts of Free Associations (COFA).

Expanding on this, Hanlon describes COFA as a form of agreements that created a "neocolonial future" compromising the autonomy of these new nations in return for US financial assistance (2009: 101). At the same time, this "neocolonial future" has also produced large Micronesian diasporas in the US. Hezel, for example, estimate that about every third citizen of the Federal State of Micronesia (FSM) lives in the US (Hezel 2013a: 4), with most Micronesians going abroad moving in with family and kin from previous migratory movements, making chain migration a prominent pattern in the Micronesian case. Hence, COFA with its visa and work allowances serves as vehicle for dynamic yet solid transborder family lives, leading, amongst other, to ongoing flows of (social) remittances (cf. Bertram 2006; Gershon 2007; Hezel 2013a; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011) and persons traversing national borders between the US and Micronesia as well as the expansion of the ever-growing field of "cyber-transnationalism" (Lee 2009b: 25) and a slowly but steadily solidification of Micronesian diasporic communities. In consequence, and with social media, other modern communication technologies, and the possibility of on-time money transfers bridging distances and time, it seems, the character of remittances also becomes altered. Hezel (2013a: 37) observes that remittances are sent rather "on demand" than on regular basis, which is congruent to what Eria, Hofmann and Smith explore in their paper (this issue) and which possibly could transform Micronesian sociality.

Yet, to this day, the Micronesian diaspora mainly remains firmly based in local ideas and values of what constitutes family and belonging, and the role mobility plays within, as migrant woman Josealyn from Chuuk states: "I am thousands of miles away from home, yet my culture and traditions follow me and have shaped how I live my life even while living abroad" (Vignette courtesy of J. Eria, 17.05.2022).

Family and Home in the (Historical) Context of (Trans-border) Micronesian Mobility

The following words by Petersen serve as a fitting starting point to this section. He explains that "Micronesians have forged systematic human relations within and between communities, ensuring that everyone works consistently at promoting the general welfare. Virtually everything a Micronesian possesses is shared with family and neighbours, and every family and community is connected by a web of strands to many other islands and communities. In this way, everyone is ensured of being cared for and protected when in need" (2009: 2).

Within Micronesian sociality, the 'family' holds particular relevance. In the vignette that introduces this collection of essays, Josealyn Eria addresses her 'culture' and 'tradition' as anchors to her life, specifying that she is "a daughter, an aunt, a sister, a cousin, a helpful contributing member of my einang (clan) by always showing up for what my family needs". Consequently, one fruitful way of exploring Micronesian mobility and sociality is to focus on the advantages and obligations that come along with being a family member. These are illustrated well by way of remittances

and the ways they are deliberately invoked by those who leave as well as by those who stay. Put differently, remittances are embedded in what anthropologist Mac Marshall identifies as a "general set of themes from which local social forms developed" (1999: 107) throughout Micronesia, namely in siblingship; kinship and descent; adoption, fosterage, and ritual kinship; and the nexus of kinship, land, and food. These themes are reflected in Josealyn's statement and are dealt with (in different ways) in the papers of this issue (mostly with, sometimes without a transnational perspective).

Generally, throughout Micronesia the women are the custodians of home, the rightful owners of their mothers' land, collectively maintaining it with their sisters before passing it on to their daughters. Matrilineal, landholding residential groups have been labelled (in academia) as lineages, which represents best what Micronesians mean when they talk about family: "When we talk about *ailang* [matrilineal clans], we should know all our clan members – even down to those living in the Central Carolines. All those people make up our families, not just a husband and wife and children" (Olopai 2005: 41). Matrilineages are constitutive segments of larger clans. Clan members might not necessarily know each other but recognise members of the same clan as kin (descending from one female, at times mythical ancestor). For example, once common clan-membership has been established, property rights can be consolidated. Historically, being able to establish clan-relations served as social insurances against temporary destructions common to the region (due to natural calamities such as typhoons, droughts, landslides, but also in the aftermath of war-raids), some of which became institutionalised lines of trade and support (see Alkire 1999; Lessa 1950).

The continued effect of this becomes, for example, evident in a conversation the corresponding author had with the late master navigator Manny Sikau about the endless repetition of clan allegiances and allotted hierarchies during his apprenticeship. He stressed how vital clan knowledge is because he could rely on the support among kin whether he purposely or accidentally landed on any island along his journeys. He joked how Micronesian navigators must be expert

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 4: Japanese artillery from World War II on Paata, Chuuk, FSM, 2012.

sociologists regarding the set-up of each island they come across and how puzzled he was at first about the many canoe journeys that are undertaken simply "to assure novel contact" (conversation with Manny Sikau, 21.07.2012; see Hofmann 2016: 166). Indeed, as Sa'ili Lilomaiava-Doktor attests elsewhere: "People share and re-establish social links by moving" (2009: 15). Expanding on this, she continues that social links can also be restrictive, because in the collective societies of Micronesia "kinship and other social connections define who travels, when, and where" (ibid. 16).

The contributions to this special issue address the above by specifically focusing on lineage membership as matrix within which the disposal over land and political titles, but also over money and even children and personal prestige are organised. For example, while this set-up bestows the individual with a sense of personal identity and belonging, the urge to fit in and to serve one's family also leads to felt and exerted pressures by family members, be they at the home islands or someplace else (see Eria, Hofmann, Smith or Puas, this issue). This resonates also in co-author Josealyn Eria's opening vignette in musing how "[t]he opportunities that migration has offered me have been vast and varied". Scrutinizing remittances from this angle, Hezel summarises in his book "Making sense of Micronesia" (2013: 26) that "[i]ndeed, all that any islander had ever become would have stemmed from this social identity, and so group maintenance was always to be preferred to individual achievement". As such, remitting must be seen as an act of reciprocity, maintaining the remitters rights back home (access to landholdings and titles, etc.) ceded to them by blood and genealogy, upheld

Source: J. Eria.

Figure 5: Family gathering in Guam.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 6: Departure from gathering, Chuuk FSM, 2012.

and continuously claimed in their name by their kin during their own absence. The remitter, on the other hand, can gain social position as the money pays off socio-cultural debts or allows for extra contributions for Churches, family festivities, etc. and mobilities therefore become „determined by events and situations at home" (Peter 2000: 255; cf. Eria, Hofmann, Smith; Walda-Mandel, this issue).

Clan-membership – as a "person's passport" (Hezel 2013b: 27) – hence, allows clan- and family networks to secure survival in the islands, and enables movement beyond. Indeed, mobility has been the prerequisite for the settlement of Micronesia and continues to be central to literally almost all Micronesian families, although it has been of a dynamic nature, witnessing challenges, confinements, alterations, and expansions, starting from colonial curtailment of customary navigation routes to economically and politically motivated relocations of islanders masked as disaster help (Marshall 1979); from the seizure of whole islands for nuclear and other weapon tests (DeLoughrey 2013) to a fleet of young islanders leaving to become educated in US colleges in the 1960s and 70s when US federal education grants were opened to Micronesians (Hezel 1979).[5]

Building on the historically grown framework of movement between the islands, the US, and beyond, several contributions highlight changes in Micronesian sociality in the context of transborder mobility. For instance, while family (and wider kinship) networks remain integral socio-spatial units that enable, guide and sustain Micronesian mobility to date, findings by Eria, Hofmann & Smith (this issue) and Walda-Mandel (this issue), indicate that core discourses and practices of the ways Micronesian engage with and embody mobility, namely the element of 'planned return', loses some of its priority for people off island as migration leads them further away from their home islands, and as more time passes by with people not returning. Some migrants even "seem to have found 'a home away from home'" (Walda-Mandel 2016: 189).

Developments like these could potentially have far-reaching consequences leading, for example, to the isolation of women from their families especially in the context of domestic abuse and family violence, or to the discontinuation of remittances. More generally, returnees might find it increasingly difficult to reconcile their experiences abroad (individualism, outspokenness, etc.) with the communal norms and values at the core of Micronesian sociality. As such, some Micronesians see in migration no longer an inherent part of their cultural being, but a threat to it; one that is counteracted by sending back children or young adults to have them "educated" the proper Micronesian way as part of what Lee termed "involuntary transnationalism" (2009b: 28).

Put differently, in the Micronesian context, where belonging (so far) is much connected to the ownership and usage of land (see Eria, Hofmann & Smith this issue and Kuehling this issue), mobility potentially influences the ways 'family' is constituted and might even transform expectations, norms and practices of home-making in destination places as well as migratory decisions in the first place. Whether (or not) this can be attributed to a (historically-)growing embeddedness of Pacific Islanders into diasporic contexts or to threatening scenarios of climate change and environmental hazards and their impact on island societies, remains to be explored and examined more deeply elsewhere.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 7: Wedding on Éét, Chuuk FSM.

Overview of contributions

The contributions to this special issue expand on the existing body on scholarship on transborder Micronesian mobility. Consequently, they engage in various ways with the nexus of mobility and family as well as space and place-making discourses and practices which often take the shape of preserving, maintaining

or (re)creating 'home' while navigating transnational social fields.

In their paper, Eria, Hofmann and Smith explore at the one side the imaginaries that migrant women construct in the diaspora and how they make meaning of, experience and embody their roles as Chuukese people, family members, women and migrants in this transnational context. On the other side, they talk about how migrants continue to impact the lives of those who stay behind, for example, by conditions they attach to their remittances. Their findings thus provide a salient example of the ways in which new meanings of lineage land, family obligations, and gender are produced, contested, and stratified across transnational boundaries. Consequently, the authors explore the ways in which absent islanders are present back home, and how those who stayed are present abroad.

In similar vein, and based on her multi-sited ethnography, Stephanie Walda-Mandel's contribution explores discourses and practices of 'home' among Sonsorolese transnationals in the context of migration. Building on ethnographic research in Oceania and the US, she describes how migration impacts on Sonsorolese cultural identity and language. Expanding on this she reveals the transnational social networks which lie at the heart of many Sonsorolese families and communities and the ways the diasporic lifeworlds of many of these islanders who originate from a remote area even by Micronesian standards relate to cultural identity and heritage. Here, the author vividly depicts how projects that aim at the revitalisation of 'culture' (as source of belonging and identity) remain meaningful to many Sonsorolese abroad.

Indigenous scholar Joakim Peter states that being lost, i.e. not knowing the names of places (of origin) and thus being unable to make a connection to land and kin, ranges as one of the biggest fears amongst Micronesians. In her paper, Susanne Kuehling elaborates how names place Carolinians into a social position (as part of their lineage line) within their physical surroundings and structure movement. As "invisible belongings", Kuehling argues, the knowledge of names – along with associated history, property rights, titles, and codes of conduct – allows Carolinians to re-create family ties and to re-build place a-new or somewhere else, for example in the diaspora.

In his research note, indigenous scholar Gonzaga Puas from the Mortlock Islands in Chuuk State, FSM, delves into how adoption in his home community is understood to function as social glue in otherwise transforming realities characterised by transnational mobility. With adoption, he picks up an important aspect of Micronesian (and other Pacific) family practices, however one that is not easily transferred across (legal) jurisdictions as he illustrates. The insights of his autoethnographic research note will be a fruitful contribution to the broader academic discussion on adoption and care in transnational settings.

Acknowledgments

Our profound thanks go to Michael Waibel und Matthias Kowasch for the opportunity to put together this special issue and for their collegial cooperation, as well as to the reviewers of the individual papers – and, of course, to the contributors themselves!

Endnotes

[1] For our discussion, 'mobility' serves as an umbrella term that incorporates various forms of movement including migration. Consequently, 'transborder mobility' particularly relates to the manifold ways in which persons (along with visible and invisible belongings) cross national borders.

[2] See Keck & Schieder 2015b for an overview. For Micronesia, a whole number of studies exist that, congruent with our argument in this introduction, emphasise that mobility has a strong home-based aspect coming to the fore, for example, in remitting behaviour, but also in (not always voluntary) return mobility. Earlier work thereby focuses on the impact of migration on cultural identity and social relations (amongst others, Flinn 1982 and 1994; Marshall 1975), with plenty of intriguing examples for the complexities and realities of Micronesian transnationalism that can be found in the numerous articles published – and often also written – by Francis X. Hezel for the Micronesian Seminar (http://micsem.org/publications/articles/). In recent years, there is an observable increase in studies rich with ethnography that cover mobility and relations between home-islands and new places (e.g. Bautista 2010, 2015; Hezel 2013a; Hofmann 2015; Marshall 2004; Peter 2000), while others focus more on the lives of Micronesian migrants abroad (Falgout 2012; Grieco 2003; Smith 2019) or on new aspects to Micronesian mobility such as climate change (Hermann & Kempf 2019; Hofmann 2016; cf. Eria, Hofmann, Smith and Walda-Mandel, this issue) to name but a few.

[3] Ethnographic and theoretical explorations of place and place-making remain central to anthropological (and other social scientific) research. An excellent overview of anthropological analysis of place-making with a particular focus on Oceania, highlighting its dynamic nature and interrelatedness with mobility, is offered by Kempf, van Meijl and Hermann elsewhere (2014: 5-10). Similarly, 'kinship' has been at the core of the anthropological endeavor from its outset. While the study of kinship gradually declined from the 1980s onwards, amongst other because of its Eurocentric and structural functionalist connotations (cf. Carsten 2010: 2), there is a renewed interest in the subject more recently (cf. Bamford 2019), evident, for example, in the growing body of literature on kinship and family in the context of mobility and migration. In this collection we have opted to particularly focus on (doing or making) 'family' as just one of many ways kinship materialises. Being aware of the limitations of the conceptual framework of 'family', we follow its wider use in migration studies (cf. Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020b: 303) and acknowledge that in Micronesian societies, family is never restricted to immediate kin, but follows the 'classificatory' system in which collateral kin (i.e., children of ego's mother's sisters) are categorised the same way as lineal kin (i.e., sisters and brothers) (cf. Puas this issue).

[4] See Hanlon 1999 and Petersen 2009 for critiques of the concept of Micronesia.

[5] While the Compacts had facilitated frequent mobility between the US and the islands since their instalments in the 1980s onward, this transborder mobility has come to an abrupt halt with the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, the government of the Federated States of Micronesia closed its borders completely, leaving many FSM citizens stranded while visiting US

family, or who otherwise had planned to return. Only in late 2021 did they begin allowing citizens to return, and only with a full two-week quarantine (personal information by J. Eria, June 2022; https://fm.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/, 08.08.2022).

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Micronesian conceptions of home and gender in Chuuk and the US: Between the presence of absent islanders and island imaginaries abroad

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Abstract: Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), represents a space altered by transnational migration, reshaping the social lives of both those who enact their mobility and those who stay. While transnationalism has been explored in-depth from the perspective of those abroad, little work has juxtaposed them with how migration reshapes life back "home." Considering the presence of absent islanders for those who remain in Chuuk and the idealized imagery of those same islands by women living in the US, this paper explores how conceptions of those "home" and "abroad" belong to a liminal and transformational space. Migrants and the families left behind negotiate land tenure, family relationships and obligations, gender norms, and Chuukese identity from differing and fluid perspectives. This manuscript explores how contemporary forms of gendered Chuukese social life are both shifting and reinforced in this transnational context.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Gender, Family-making, Place-making, Remittances

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Introduction

The setting is the airport on the island of Wééné, Chuuk. The air is filled with mourning and excitement as the flight from Hawai`i brings back the body of a deceased Chuukese woman, accompanied by a dozen family members who will be reunited with their extended family for the first time in years. The plane is arriving within the hour by way of the United Airlines Island Hopper flight. Walking through the small parking lot next to the airport, you can see the crowd of people waiting for the plane. Some of the women are dressed in matching uniforms: white funeral dresses which represent the closest family members of the deceased. Everyone is adorned with mwárámwár[1] [floral head covering or necklaces] and sweat towels, the smell of these delicious flowers and perspiration combining to create a sweetness in the air as people socialize in the hot outdoor waiting area.

The deceased had not returned in over two decades. She was originally convinced to move briefly to help

Source: J. Eria.

Figure 1: Arrival of coffin at the Chuuk International Airport.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 2: Mourning the deceased in her maternal home in Chuuk Lagoon.

raise her grandchildren, but ultimately stayed longer to access better healthcare in Hawai`i as she aged. While she could not pass on in the land she called home, she knew her family would bury her there, laying claim and connecting one last time to the familial property. Waiting with everyone else, Mary[2], a close relative of the deceased, explained why it was so important for the families to fly them home:

"We connect very much with our land. Even if we migrate to the States, we never stop thinking about our land. We want to return. We want to have a place to stay when we sometimes visit. And we want our bodies to be with our families."

People in Chuuk, especially women, feel related not only to kin but also to their lineage land. This relation is traditionally invoked and made permanent through the life cycle between the burial of a newborn's placenta, an islander's burial upon death, and all the food that has grown in the soil mingling with familial materiality in between.

At the same time and with often a large proportion of family and kin living in the US, some Chuukese migrants have started questioning the embeddedness of "home" in land. Sitting on a bench at the airport that same day, Mary admitted to entertaining the thought of being buried in her migratory home of Hawai`i. She reflected on the high expense of funerals. Indeed, the family spent around US $10,000 to transfer the body back to Chuuk on this day, not including the food and drink to be provided for their extended kin before, during, and after the funeral. She speculated how she could spare her children the costs of transferring her body, and also considered that, with most of her children living in Hawai`i, she would have the assurance that they would care for her grave. Additionally, Mary knew that the bodies of the deceased, and the land more broadly, are increasingly underwater due to climate change, shifting the reality of these connections in Chuuk. Her idea to be buried abroad is so outside of the norm, however, that Mary shared this thought in confidence; not ready to disclose it to her children until her decision is made. In particular, she fears the loss of connection to lineage land, and what that means for her children's connection and identity as Chuukese people.

This tension of bodily connections between kin and land, paired with the mobility that has taken Chuukese people further and further away from it is a part of life in Chuuk and the diaspora. Transnational Chuukese women like Mary must negotiate living in transnational spaces, and the impact of their movement in everyone's lives, both home and away. Following the narratives of women like Mary, we consider women's agency (or lack thereof) and motivation to be home or away, and how they make meaning of, experience and embody their roles as Chuukese people, family members, and women in this transnational context.

Transforming Micronesian Politics and Migration: A Historical Overview

Chuuk is one state of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), a nation formed after United States (US) administration as post WWII "trust territories." It is the most populated state of the FSM, divided into five regions with 23 inhabited island units. The high volcanic central islands of Chuuk lagoon dominate politically and economically; many Chuukese from all over the state migrate there, especially to the municipal island of Wééné, for education, work, and health care (Bautista 2010; Marshall 2004). Yet, for many, Wééné is also just a stepping-stone to Guam, Hawai`i, or the mainland US. Micronesian mobility outside of the islands-based nation is primarily through the Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the US, an agreement ratified in 1986 that allows COFA-country citizens to travel, live, and work visa-free in the US with a unique status called nonimmigrant. This post-colonial agreement facilitated the end of the "trust territory" period, but allowed for continued military control of the region by the US in exchange for economic development in the islands. The agreement has been critiqued by several scholars, who noted the intentional dependency it created to maintain long-term military control of this region (see, for example: Hanlon 1998; Lutz 1986). The poor socioeconomic situation in the FSM is often ascribed to the agreement, and migration today is necessary for those who want to obtain adequate health care, higher education, and jobs that pay enough to support food, technology and other needs that cannot be drawn from the land (Bautista 2010; Hezel 2013; Marshall 2004). COFA citizens began moving into the US rapidly after this agreement was enacted. Over the last nearly four decades, Micronesian communities have formed throughout the US, steadily expanding through chain migration. As these networks became more deeply embedded in the US, a tension grew between migrants' transnational identities and connections to their home islands.

Indigenous scholars Gonzaga Puas (2021) and Joakim Peter (2000) argued that Micronesians (and Chuukese in particular) have always enacted mobility through the einang (clan) system. Mobility was the way through which people maintained connections between islands and kin. These interconnections have economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural elements, facilitating survival through elaborate exchange and support systems shaped by hierarchies of clan membership, age, and gender.

What changed in these practices were the post-colonial circumstances that facilitated moving (Peter 2000), the global reach of that system, and the ways in which climate change may further shift these patterns (Puas 2021).

Considering the transnational space between Chuuk and the US, we explore how the presence of absent islanders for those in Chuuk and the idealized imagery of those same islands by women living abroad, create a liminal space in which these women imagine and dream of the others' lives. Drawing from the collective findings of over two years of ethnographic research and over one hundred interviews both in Chuuk and abroad, as well as personal experiences, we identified three ways in which mobility shapes discourses between those at home and those abroad. First, it does so by engaging and transforming connections to lineage land; second, it impacts familial obligations, and third, mobility renegotiates discourses of gender, family relationships and Chuukese identities.

1. Transforming familial connections to land

Chuuk has a matrilineal clan-based system in which land is of significant importance and, historically, was predominately passed through the women (Kim 2020). The women with power were eldest females, but only privately, as they worked with their eldest brother who made public decisions for the family. Hierarchies by birth order, generation, and gender shaped connections to the land and social life. Women historically enhanced their status, or power, by having children to inherit the land and grow the clan. Scholars have argued that this importance of reproduction and responsibility for the family made women less able to leave Chuuk, for they were expected to stay near the land they and their children inherited. Men alternatively could go farther to fish and trade because their ties are through the kinship system more than the land itself (Bautista 2010; Kim 2020). This dual and gendered relationship of homemaking, however, is transforming. As patriarchal values associated with colonizer values (e.g., Christianity and the US empire) were infused and combined with long-standing traditions in Chuuk, men in many islands and villages began to take leadership roles as guardians of the land. While this may have removed some of women's power, this also contributed to women's mobility, allowing them to take up new possibilities of education or work abroad. Women now migrate as often as men.

Chuukese women's relationship to land is multi-layered, and both physical and meta-physical in many ways, yet their increased mobility demanded these land connections to be extended far past the physical space. For those abroad, the land inhabited their minds if not their physical being. As one middle-aged Chuukese woman, Rayna, explained:

"You can take this person as far away as you can from her place, but this place will always remain in the heart. (…) You cannot get rid of that."

Yet, with each generation, it seems, the importance of lineage land slowly erodes, not merely physically due to climate change, but above all symbolically, due to migration, along with the position of women as guardians of the land; Mary revealed this erosion in her consideration to be buried in Hawai`i. Similarly, Stacy, a young Chuukese woman living in Oregon shared her perspective, reflecting on the generational differences of connection to ancestral lands. She shared how she and her cousins of the same generation live and work abroad, with little to no thought of their ancestral lands, and indeed minimal consideration of whether or not they will ever return and live on those lands. Yet, her elders continue to hold on to them, stressing the importance of having a land for which to return. In their absence, extended family members are appointed stewards of the land by elders. In some families, this creates generational tensions. For example, Rosalie and her mother, middle and elder-aged Chuukese women, respectively, had different ideas about the importance of land to their family's future. Rosalie lives in Hawai`i and regularly tries to convince her eighty-year-old mother to join her there. Yet her mother refuses to leave the land to which she is connected in Chuuk. While Rosalie understands this tie to the land, she admits to no longer educating her own daughters about the connection:

"My mum is 80, so now I'm stepping in as the guardian of the land. But I'm 60 – how many more years do I have? And my daughters are all US citizen, thus they cannot sufficiently take care of it!"

Source: J. Eria.

Figure 3: Encroaching seas in Chuuk Lagoon.

In considering her daughters' lack of bond to the land, Rosalie also appealed to the legal differentiation between FSM and US citizens.

Many family members abroad are US citizens, raised in Hawai`i, Guam, and mainland US. Because the FSM constitution does not recognize dual citizenship, the legal rights to the lands may be taken away from this younger US-born generation. Culturally, however, titles originate in blood lines; that is in lineages and not in the place of birth. At the moment, the lands are recognized by others to belong to particular families because the elders, parents and grandparents who were born and raised in Chuuk are still alive and able to exert ownership. But with entire branches of families living abroad, the generation born outside of Chuuk may encounter legal deprivation of their ancestral lands.

Those who stay are expected to care for the land, even if they are in another part of Chuuk. Kathy, a Chuukese woman in her thirties, lives with her husband and family in Fááyichuuk, the western part of the lagoon. Whenever possible, she visits her home village in Nómwoneyas, the eastern part. Yet, going there does not only serve her own longing of feeling wholesome, but is a mandate given to her by her mother who lives in Hawai`i, the eldest woman in the family and as such, the actual owner of the land: "My mom sometimes asks me

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 4: Empty houses on Paata, in Chuuk Lagoon.

on the phone to go to my village and pick breadfruit, you know, so that people see that we are still using the land." When she visits the village, she airs her mother's house, has a look at the garden, and has her children harvest some taro. By being present, she reclaims her family's tenure of the land, protects it, reconnects with her ancestry, reassures her own idea of self and belonging. But it is not the land full of relatives her more distant kin imagine. She explains:

"I only feel home on Chuuk on these islands, in my village. My heart feels at home only here. I wanna live in my village. (…) When I'm in my village and see the many empty places there, I become very sad. It hurts me to see them empty. Only my mum's cousin is there to take care of the place. When all my family left, he suggested to live there and to take care of it. But he's not immediate kin. Still, that was a good idea, because people in my village are crazy. You know, whenever there is land that is empty, other villagers would come and claim it for themselves. When my youngest aunty once came back from the States and when she started to clean out the house, the villagers came and hurled rocks at the house! One day, I wanna live on our land, but that's just another dream, maybe one day…."

Thus, gendered connections to land are shifting, allowing women to be more mobile, and as a result, "home" is a space conceptualized by those abroad, or even in different Chuukese islands in very different ways than it was experienced by those who remain. Differences between those abroad and those in Chuuk also lie in their conceptions of obligations to each other.

2. Transnational Reciprocity

Remittances are substantial to Chuuk's economy and the presence of absent islanders is felt most keenly when families in Chuuk are economically dependent on money and/or goods sent from overseas. On the remitters' side, obtaining education and work abroad can seemingly give women more power than traditionally relegated "at home," yet the reality is that tradition still dictates their movement, as their parents, uncles, or spouses decide when and where women should migrate, and when they should return. Migration motivations are thus in the interest of helping the entire family, not just the woman's economic, health or educational opportunities. As Stacey, a young woman in Oregon explained:

"Leaving Chuuk is really about bettering the entire clan. Not yourself. So, the ones who stay behind expect things to get better for them once a relative leaves Chuuk, gets a job abroad. The whole purpose of leaving Chuuk is to better the circumstances of your family in Chuuk. There is also a modern saying among Chuukese "nuwen staen won kei fénú nge eseor imwan Chuuk" (putting on airs abroad when they don't have a house in Chuuk). The expectation is that when you leave Chuuk, your life abroad is supposed to finance the betterment of your family's life in Chuuk, so you need to get a job to build a family home in Chuuk, not abroad. You need to get a job to perhaps build a business in Chuuk, not abroad. If you can do both, that's absolutely amazing. But if you neglect Chuuk and focus only on your life abroad, you'll not be seen as a respectable contributing member of your family."

The pressure for those abroad is to make enough to live modestly and send money, maintaining lineage ties and obligations. Stacey emphasizes:

"There is also a sense of shame. The cultural roots of familial ties and "togetherness" teach us that when one person succeeds in a family – in this case, having a job abroad and sending remittances – then that whole family should at least have the means to buy things with money. The goal for many of us (abroad) who send remittances is to ensure that no shame comes to our families, for them to be found lacking in the basic necessities of modern life, because since we are out here, there is no reason that family back home should be suffering financially. Everyone eats a piece of the pie, as culture has taught us. Shame in Chuuk is extremely family-encompassing."

While those at home visualize a "rich and easy world out there" in the US (Hofmann 2016: 175), the reality is that those remitting often work two jobs to make ends meet while dreaming of the easy world back home. Some women who travel abroad for education give up on their own dreams, working for the benefit of other family members and financing their education instead. Rents are high in those host communities, and houses are often crowded; confrontations with landlords and neighbours about the number of residents are common.

Moreover, in host communities – especially those with a larger proportion of COFA migrants – anti-immigrant rhetoric is often focused on them. In Guam and Hawai`i, for example, Chuukese migrants are perceived by the local community in racist, gendered ways. Chuukese women are described as backwards with their ethnic skirts, visible combs, and large families, which is in turn associated with dependence on social services (Bautista 2010; Smith and Castañeda 2021). Men alternatively are stereotyped as violent people who overuse alcohol (e.g. Marshall 2004; Smith and Castañeda 2021). This rhetoric mirrors anti-immigrant sentiment toward migrant groups throughout the US, and impacts the ways in which Chuukese migrants access and experience the education and economic systems in their host communities (Smith and Castañeda 2021). Yet, such difficulties for the individual are generally subsumed under the collective good in the

"transnational moral economy of kin" (Levitt & Jaworski 2007: 137, cf. Hofmann 2016: 177).

In this scenario, lineage land and the kin who remain became all the more vivid reminders of identity and connection for those who are abroad. Many women abroad loved to sit with other family members and reminisce about the better life in Chuuk, where one can live off the land, enjoy each other's company, and do not have to overwork to survive like in the US. While some did not see themselves going back, others spoke of their dreams to retire in Chuuk on their land after they successfully fixed up their family home (sending money regularly to do so). But in their dreams, Chuuk was full of people of all generations, supporting each other and enjoying the everyday life they remembered as youth, when only the privileged were leaving. They envisioned a dozen female relatives sitting around each night talking story, making food, and watching the little ones. In missing this imaginary, migrant women tried to re-enact home life abroad through family gatherings, church events, and food.

Yet, Chuuk is not what is in their imagination anymore when they long for home. The women who return regularly can sometimes recognize that their view of Chuuk is romanticized, but those who have not returned for years have a harder time imagining the now increasing struggles that inspired their movement in the first place. In fact, passing through any village in Chuuk outside of Wééné means walking – not by lively familial gatherings – but instead empty houses on compounds cared for by a few remaining relatives waiting for their family members to return; whether in life or death. Since there are not always youth to harvest taro, breadfruit, coconuts, and other important sustenance, or enough time or motivation to prepare local meals, those back home rely on remittances from migrants. Further, with the encroaching sea impacting crops like taro patches, there is not always enough to harvest. They use remittances to buy rice, canned meat, phone loads, and gas stoves to maintain ease of everyday living. Still, given the imagined realities of "home," some of those abroad are resentful of the hard work they put in to support so many family members, as Stacey describes:

"There is ALWAYS something that we are sending money home for. It could be something as small(ish) as a new bathroom/outhouse to something big like renovating our family meeting house (uut), or even money for new tires or assistance in buying a new car. This is in addition to the almost monthly contributions for funerals of distant relatives. For the most part, the elders discuss it, then we are told what the plan is, how much each of us is supposed to contribute. In that, we have no power. I mean...we always do have power and a choice to say no or reject whatever plan is revealed, but being a Chuukese means respecting the elders' decisions, regardless of the impacts to your own personal life. In this way we (the younger generation specifically) prove that we are respectful of our culture and cinching those ties by participating in that reciprocal interaction. We send assistance, and those who stay will continue to recognize that we are family. It sounds kind of uncouth to say that, but that's really what it is, it's in those deeds that you show that you care."

Source: J. Eria.

Figure 5: Chuukese family gathering in Iowa, US.

As such, remittances are power-relations – structured along age and gender hierarchies and as Stacey indicates, working in both ways to sustain family relations. People abroad send money home, but often have conditions for how it is spent (e.g. building a house or church to keep and create place and social position for their return). People back home meanwhile safeguard their place and property for when they return, sometimes accusing them of being chóón-Merika, for not respecting the gender and age power structures, or sending sufficient money back home to support family. Mobility thus creates a friction between what it means to support and be supported by family, with differing ideas for those at home and abroad. In spite of these tensions, relationships must be upheld.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 6: Chuukese gathering in a church in Guam.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 7: Young man in his family's taro patch on a visit to his home island.

3. Transforming gender and family relationships

Following these mobility traditions throughout the US, young women are sent out of Chuuk regularly to assist new mothers and elderly family members, while also attending the better schools these new locations provide. Yet, these women often do not make the decision themselves, but comply with collective family decisions, reflecting aged and gender-stratified obligations. Kathy explained how she had to go to California for school:

"[M]y cousin who's at this school in L.A. [Los Angeles, US] called and told my mum that this is a good school for me, so my mum sent me there. The very first nights, I cried. I would call her, saying that I wanna go back, but she would say to stay in L.A. That it is always hard in the beginning but then will get better."

Similarly, toddlers are often sent back to Chuuk or with a family member in a different part of the US to be raised by grandmothers and aunties, then returned to mothers at some point for schooling. These migration patterns allow for continuity of the extended family einang system but in new ways. It also allows us to further conceptualize home as less of a physical space and more of a metaphysical connection to kin.

Transnational movement did not just reshape extended family relations, but also marriages. Some women moved because their husbands decided it was time to migrate. Migration at times allowed for more family violence, if a woman did not have her kin nearby to support her; at times, however, it also allowed women to gain more power (through education and economic means) to leave a husband, a decision her family may not have supported at home. Separation by islands and now often nations is what scholars and the community call a "Micronesian Divorce." Some women who stay home while their husbands go abroad to earn and send back money, are sooner or later confronted with their husbands finding a new family abroad, no longer feeling obligated to those left behind.

Family relationships are not the only part of social life that is negotiated, the concept of what Chuukese culture is and should be is also in flux. While transnational studies have focused on the deconstruction of notions of bounded communities and cultural specificity, transnational communities are often reifying what they define as culture, solidifying boundaries. Transnational migration reshaped not only dynamics, responsibilities, and connections, but also what people called culture, and Chuuk was seen as the place holding onto the disappearing traditions abroad.

The term culture was especially invoked when women abroad talked about food, language, and respect. Women constantly discussed the fun of going home to Chuuk to eat local food and drink/eat coconuts, and regardless of their mobility, culture came to them: planes coming from Chuuk were always full of coolers containing kón (pounded breadfruit), puna (pounded taro), iik (fish) and núú (coconuts). Culture also included speaking Chuukese – not some hybrid of elementary Chuukese and English – but really knowing the language; a concern, migrant women expressed about their children being raised in the US. Culture included understanding the principles of respect towards brothers, elders, and the family. Those who subscribed to these ideals were perceived to have strong culture.

But it is not that simple. Participating in the US and maintaining tradition is difficult. Complying with cultural rules and gendered taboos abroad are challenging: classificatory sisters and brothers cannot avoid each other as they should when living in crowded housing. Women report that they must change back into skirts when coming home from work and enter the house they share with brothers. Additionally, some young women, such as Cecilia and Marta, believed their US college education further complicated negotiating cultural norms. Cecilia explained:

"Finding a balance between following the elders and knowing what is right as an educated woman. Working in a male environment, not being able to speak out as a woman and younger person... which is the opposite of what is taught at colleges overseas."

Similarly, Martha quipped:

"We thought we know what it means

to be a Chuukese woman, but then we go to college."

This tension between being Chuukese enough and living in the US was not as simple as either/or. People both at home and abroad felt this tension in everyday life. Most wanted these differing spaces to be negotiated in the best way possible, respecting historical norms while also appreciating what educational and economic power living abroad gave them. Saralynn articulated this tension well:

"It scares me, because I like to see more people modernize Chuuk, yet I want them to also traditionalize Chuuk at the same time. Hence, modernize and traditionalize. Keep perpetuating the tradition, because that is our identity. That's more sustainable in the future."

But that future is in part reliant on the social and economic growth in Chuuk, and in part reliant on the impacts of climate change that increasingly threaten sustainable life in all Pacific Islands.

Negotiating connections to land, family, and Chuukese identities

Returning to the opening story: The coffin arrived and has now been brought to the house the deceased was born in; the same house all her female kin have intoned as they lament over their beloved kin. As the woman's own physical life journey has come to an end, her body will be reunited with her ancestral lineage land. Her grave delineates and reconfirms not only her family's property but endorses the continuity of her lineage story. Her gendered connection to the land, the reciprocal relationships that shaped this funeral event, and what it means to be family and Chuukese are all invoked in this practice to commemorate her life and connection. But as we have demonstrated, these elements are shifting for some Chuukese families. Chuukese migrant communities are starting to resemble a more permanent diaspora group, returning rarely. Further, those left behind become fewer as more and more migrate. These trends might be even more likely to continue as people see their possibilities of return or continuity with this land-kin connection threatened by the rising seas. So far, however, those abroad and those "home" are not distinct, discrete categories of people, as mobility is enacted at different moments throughout people's lives. It reflects moments, and sometimes years, but is also fluid. But at any given moment, the people not on the island take presence with them; the absent people still present for those who remain.

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 8: Preparing fish in Chuuk Lagoon.

While land remains central to women's hearts and connection to Chuuk whether home or abroad, it looks quite different for each. For those afar, a common concern has been to keep the islands rooted in their family, so there is always a place through which to return. Ideally, it is a place for new buildings and improved socio-political statuses are enjoyed by those left

Source: R. Hofmann.

Figure 9: Family and kin expressing condolences at funeral in Chuuk Lagoon.

behind; a result of migrants' remittances. While returning is not always an option, many retain imaginaries of their home islands; these visions serve as an anchor for their self-identity and membership in their familial system. But the memories of transnational migrants often cleanse Chuukese island villages of the trouble and hardship they left behind, romanticizing life back home. Instead of remembering the physical labour in the taro patch, the droughts that restrict water usage or the torrential rains that bring muddy drinking water for days, they reminisce over moonlit beaches, abundant space, and food harvested directly from the land. Transnational migrants construct an opposite world which accentuates the perceived hardships of their migration experience, fostering the wish to return home one day. Hence, the major objective to leave is to gain economic wealth, not least to be able to afford a comfortable life on the home islands in the imagined future. Women abroad are often renegotiating gender roles, blaming their new experiences and US education that makes them question their status in their Chuukese family, while reifying what it means to be Chuukese through remittances, dress, and church or familial gatherings abroad. Yet, when they can return, they are critiqued for not being Chuukese enough.

While those abroad reminisce about living off the land, those at home await remittances to live off items in the cash-economy. They struggle to care for the land and properties left behind, and also reminisce of a time in which the number of people on the land was enough to easily obtain subsistence and social structures. The renegotiated gender roles and US education adopted by those abroad only further reinforces the perception that their migrant family members are no longer Chuukese enough. Further, they also distinguish them as rich and unwilling to sufficiently share the wealth they amass, all while controlling the home space through their meagre remittances. As a result, tensions exist between these separated kin and their distinct imaginations of Chuuk.

This paper explored the ways in which absent islanders are present back home, and those who stayed are present abroad and how – in the liminal space between – conceptions of home itself have been redefined as women engage in, redefine, and resist new ways of being. We considered how Chuukese women actively engage in homemaking practices of both spaces culturally, politically, and economically, and provided a salient example of the ways in which 1) connections to lineage land, 2) family obligations, and 3) gender, family relationships and identity are produced, contested, and stratified across transnational boundaries.

The importance of eventual return – if only in death is connected to the meaning of land and kin in Chuuk. Death often triggers the (re)negotiation of land and family. In this moment, families can clear up past concerns and consider the future, as the deceased body is reunited with ancestral lands and symbolically connected to the family. So, although return is often only realized in death, it has generally been central to the comfort with those who enact mobility. But some are no longer considering this eventual return. Additionally, the land is slowly shrinking with climate change. Burials are postponed when airports flood on the way, graves too close to the water are feared to be under water soon, taro patches are getting saltwater intrusion from the seas, and narratives about the disappearing land are abundant. Some of those away recognize this impending future, like Martine, who explained:

"My son in the US asks me to send pictures of our islands. He says they will be under water eventually and he wants pictures while they are still there."

In this reality, how will narratives and connections between home and away shift over time? Further, as all family members navigate Chuukese futures in this environment, how will gender, familial and land connections, remittances and obligations, and concepts of Chuukese culture continue as the land itself disappears and more islanders settle permanently abroad? Micronesians have a long history of adapting to weather disasters that is beyond the scope of this paper, but this new disaster is global in reach. Will the clan system be able to substitute land-connection as the rising seas from climate change eat up the familial land and inspire even more migration out of Chuuk?

Endnotes

[1] Although the Chuuk administration formally recommends the spelling of the Chuukese language as documented by Goodenough and Sugita (1976), it is not strictly taught in schools and local variants show amongst islands. Throughout this paper, we follow the spelling of Chuukese co-author to this paper, Josealyn Eria.

[2] We use composite characters and pseudonyms to represent women's stories and maintain anonymity.

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"Deep in their hearts they still wanna come back" – Sonsorolese people in motion and the implications on culture and identity

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Abstract: The island of Sonsorol, one of the Southwest Islands of the Palauan archipelago, is located about 340 kilometers south of the main Palauan islands in western Micronesia. Its unique culture and language, which the islanders have developed far away from the rest of Palau, set them apart from the main Palauan population, since they are linguistically and culturally related to the people from the outer islands of Yap and the Caroline Islands. At the same time, their isolated location leads to heavy migration to other Pacific Islands such as Saipan, Hawai'i or even to the US mainland. In the past, the people of the Southwest Islands already set out for other island groups with their outrigger boats, but today this happens with a different motivation and in larger numbers. However, despite large spatial distance, their transnational family networks retain their importance even when the Sonsorolese chain migration movements lead to cultural and social transformations both on the home island and in the Sonsorolese communities in the diaspora, which also have an impact on their identity. To preserve their cultural heritage in the context of migration and globalization, cultural revitalisation projects play a significant role in people's lives.

Keywords: Palau, Sonsorol, Southwest Islands, migration, mobility, identity

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Introduction

In the Pacific region, every second Pacific Islander lives far from her or his home islands (Mückler 2006: 64) and more people of islander descent were born in host countries than in the home islands (Lee 2009: 29). The same applies to the people of the Southwest Islands of Palau, who have found a home in the US mainland in much larger numbers than on their islands of origin.

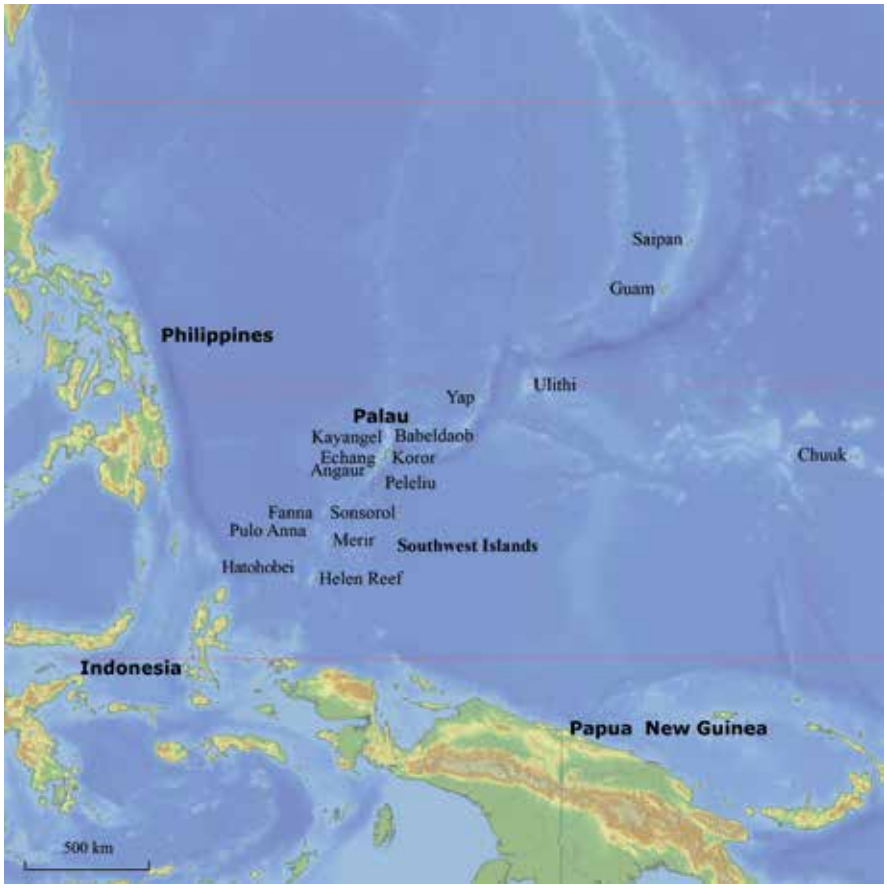
What are the reasons for this out-migration? What does this development mean for those who emigrate, but also for those who remain in their island home? What effects does this have on their sense of belonging as well as on their immaterial and material culture?

To explore these questions, this paper will first introduce the remote island of Sonsorol within the Palauan archipelago and the living conditions on the island. Then the different factors that lead to migration and the destinations people choose as their new home as well as the transnational networks of kin will be examined. The significance of the island of Sonsorol as a return myth is then presented. Subsequently, the impact of migration on my interlocutors' identity and language will be discussed. In addition to this, current projects within the community to revitalize their culture are also described, and finally a look at the future of Sonsorolese migration and its effects will be undertaken.

To study the impact of migration on the identity of Sonsorolese people, I first went to Micronesia in 2004/2005 for a year of field research, followed by stays with Sonsorolese migrants on the West Coast of the US the following year (see also Walda-Mandel 2016).

In order to understand the special dynamics of their migration, I followed the traces of the Sonsorolese emigrants to their individual destinations and thus included different locations in my research as part of a multi-sited ethnography (Walda-Mandel 2017a: 90). As a cultural anthropologist my main method was participant observation, which included living with the Sonsorolese people for a full year, sharing their lives and interviewing them.[1]

Since this first field research, I have been in constant contact and exchange with the people of Sonsorol. This article is therefore based on my own field research results and hundreds of interviews with Sonsorolese people on Sonsorol, in the community of Southwest Islanders in Eang, Saipan, Guam as well as Portland and Salem, US, (that found their way into my publication, see Walda-Mandel 2016) as well as follow-up personal communication with them since then. In this context, special mention should be made of the former Governor of Sonsorol State, Laura I. Miles, who welcomed me into her family with open arms during my one-year research stay. She was my main interlocutor during my fieldwork and answered numerous questions in order to trace an up-to-date picture of the island and its inhabitants as well as their migration movements today.



Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 1: Southwest Islands in the Palauan archipelago.

The Southwest Islands of Palau: Life on Sonsorol Island

The Palauan archipelago consists of 241 coral and volcanic islands and is divided into 16 administrative states, where in 2022 18,233 people reside (Palau population 2022).

Sonsorol is an island so small in area that it is not shown on most maps - like a pinprick in the Pacific. Together with the other low-lying coral islets Pulo Anna, Merir and the uninhabited Fanna, it constitutes one of the 16 states of Palau. The Southwest Islands also include Hatohobei (also called Tobi) and Helen Reef, which together form Hatohobei State. Politically, all Southwest Islands belong to the Republic of Palau, which has been independent since 1994. Previously, Palau was under Spanish, German, Japanese and finally US rule. Nevertheless, the presidential Republic of Palau is still heavily dependent on the US in some areas, for example, Palau's foreign and defence policy and they support Palau economically.

Sonsorol, which is 1.6 square kilometers in size, is also called "Dongosaro" by the inhabitants, which translates "a place where strong currents prevail" and lies approximately 340 kilometers away from the main archipelago of Palau, which is equivalent to a 22-hour boat ride. Sonsorol is quite isolated and only visited by ship every few months. In addition, it is characterized by heavy out-migration of its inhabitants: According to the Sonsorolese people, 150 years ago, 900 people lived on the island. This number has now shrunk to 30 people in Sonsorol State and 44 in Hatohobei State (Republic of Palau Census 2021). Connell (1983: 14) describes the drastic population decline on Sonsorol as follows: In 1946, the population numbered 172, in 1954 it numbered 136, in 1958 it was down to 82, in 1963 there were 75 people and in 1973 it was 56. The 2001 statistical yearbook of Palau counts 79 inhabitants in 1980, 42 in 1986, 61 in 1990, and 80 in 1995 (Republic of Palau 2002: 15). In 2001, there were 39 inhabitants on Sonsorol (Republic of Palau 2002: 21). This population decline led to the following conjecture: "The population profiles of all the southwest islands suggests they are no longer viable" (Connell & Lea 1998: 59). This prophecy has not yet come true, and the government officials are trying to make life on Sonsorol more pleasant: In 2021, an intranet connection was installed at the Sonsorol Elementary School and the Pulo Anna Elementary School, as well as the Hatohobei Elementary School to use within the schools for their different educational programs, however, they are not connected to the worldwide internet. To stay in touch with people on the main islands, the Sonsorolese use radio communication once a day.

At the moment, 17 adults and three smaller children live at Sonsorol Island. Three teachers are responsible for the different subjects for the seven school-age children (Pedro 2022, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022). However, there is no medical doctor on any of the Southwest Islands, but a nurse has been on Sonsorol since 2018. The people use rainwater for drinking water and electricity can be generated by solar panels since the year 2000. The people live on imported food such as rice, which is brought to the island by boat, and on fishing. The municipal and state governments introduced a road and grounds maintenance as well as a coconut beetle control program on Sonsorol and employed the locals. The islanders moreover sell salted fish and coconut crabs and produce coconut syrup (Miles 2017: 22).

Push and pull factors for Sonsorolese out-migration

Like in many other Pacific communities, mobility has always been part of Southwest Islanders' culture. They set out in their outrigger boats to trade with other islands or to maintain social relationships. According to some elderly Sonsorolese men, the spirit of adventure and *rite de passage* also often played a role for young men in these ventures. However, today, in the "age of migration" (Castles and Miller 2020), people from the small islands are drawn in much larger numbers to much more distant destinations. A strong driving force for migration is the pursuit of higher education since there is no secondary school on any of the Southwest Islands. Some of the main reasons for their migration are also often referred to as the four E's: "Education, Employment, Entertainment, Excitement" (Marshall 2004a: 34), since many Sonsorolese people called themselves adventurous and open to new things. In this context,

they also see emigration as a personal challenge.

However, it is not only the school-age children who have to leave the Southwest Islands, the elderly are often forced to do so as well, since there is no biomedical care and traditional medicine is only partially embedded in the cultural memory:

"I was hoping that as our generation retires, some of us would migrate back to the islands. There have been a couple in the past 10 years, but they are never permanent. The main cause of this as I see is the poor health. Most of our population have some kind of chronic illness at our older age and have relied on the Western medical system to sustain our health. The longest duration of stay on the islands is one school year. The majority of the population return back to Koror every summertime: students for health checkup; teachers for training; families to replenish living supplies and other necessities" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

An obstacle to living on the island in the long term is also the transport situation: To access the island, Sonsorol State has to charter a boat that is visiting the islands only about four times a year to bring supplies.

Another reason for migration that plays an increasingly important role is climate change accompanied by sea level raising, exacerbating high tide flooding, coastal erosion and storm surge (Miles et al. 2020: 5). Even when, at this point in time, the climate crisis is not yet a reason for migration away from Sonsorol, the former Governor of Sonsorol State, Laura I. Miles, describes her concerns about the changing conditions in the Southwest Islands due to climate change in alarming words:

"Obviously, my most concerns are unpredictable and extreme weather conditions. I'm concerned about the people there being so far away from everything. I'm also concerned about the erosion on the islands which will cause changes which damage resources and may even ruin the nature of the island and who knows what else" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd 2022).

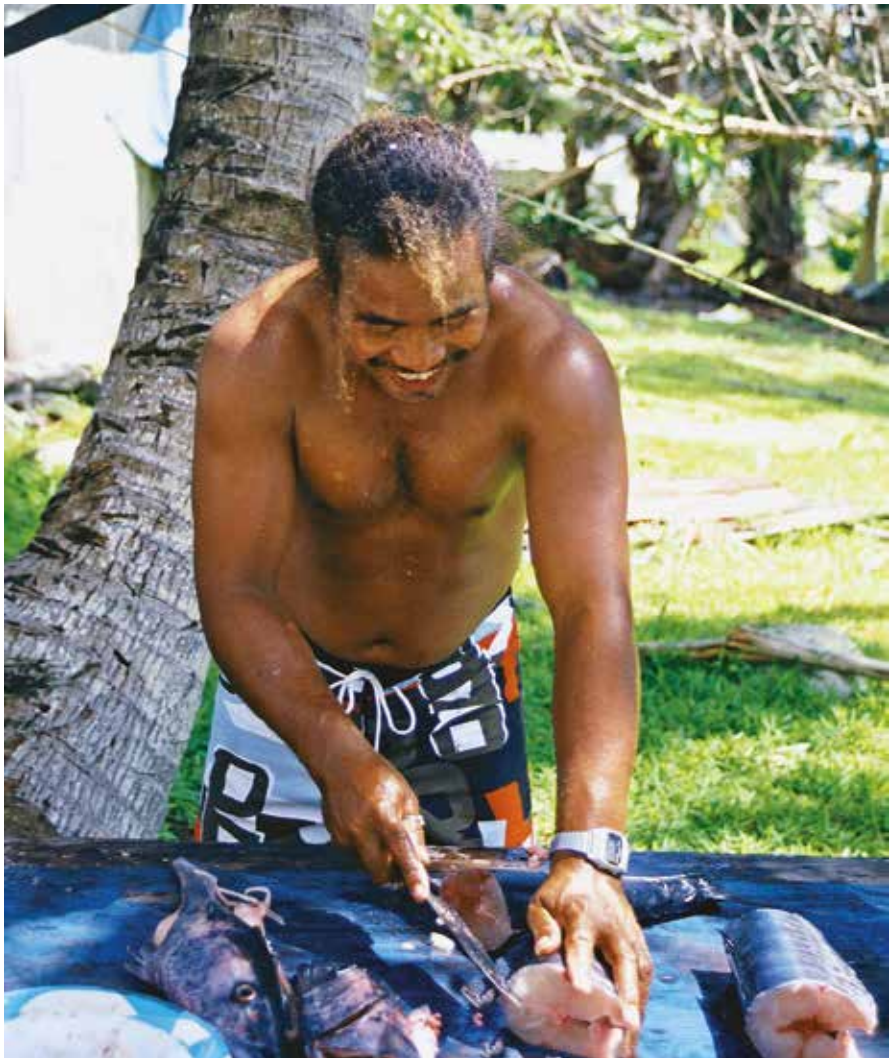
Nevertheless, she does not predict a complete abandonment of the entire island population as a result of climate change:

Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 2: Catching coconut crabs on Fanna (Sonsorol in the background).

"It [climate change] may be a good reason [to leave the island], but I don't think people will migrate out completely. First of all, it is our home island, our identity. In practically, people living on the islands are mostly employees for the state government. Their jobs keep them there" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

However, there are many indicators to show how Palau already suffers from the effects of climate change (Miles et al. 2020: 5). Prolonged drought is a particular problem in the Southwest



Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 3: Hilary Raichy Jonas prepares fresh fish for the family (Sonsorol).

Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 4: Kids relaxing on Sonsorol.

Islands, where the inhabitants depend on rain as their only source of drinking water. The ongoing sea level rise is also a major threat to these low-lying islands and the people's livelihood will likely develop into another push-factor leading to further out-migration in the long term.

Migration destinations of Sonsorolese people

The first step away from their island leads the Sonsorolese emigrants to the small village of Eang, in the southwestern end of Palau (seven kilometers away from the urban center Koror) where about 450 Southwest Islanders (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd 2022) have formed a close-knit village community. In 2005, there were still only about 300 villagers in Eang (Walda-Mandel 2017b: 139).

Source: Joel Miles.

Figure 5: Laura I. Miles, former Governor of Sonsorol.

Another destination of the Sonsorolese is the island of Saipan, which can be reached by plane and belongs to the Northern Marianas, and also Guam, which is the largest island of Micronesia and US territory. Some move even further away to the cities of Portland and Salem (Oregon) in the US mainland, or even to Hawai'i, although few choose the latter as their new home due to the high costs of living. For a few years now, states like Oklahoma, Virginia, Florida, and Nebraska have been added to the list of destinations (Miles, personal comunication, June 8th, 2022).

Sonsorolese set out at all for a destination as distant as the US mainland because Palau, along with the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, was one of the former member states of the Trust Territory to sign the Compact of Free Association in 1993. This treaty allows residents of member states to move freely between their homeland and the US (Connell and Lea 2002: 74).

Originally, out-migration of Sonsorolese people began in the 1960s when young Sonsorolese migrated to the US mainland primarily for higher education. In 1967, Dolores Carlos migrated to Oregon as one of the first Sonsorolese to pursue vocational training as a certified nurse. As a result, numerous other Sonsorolese family members followed her in the course of "chain migration" (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964: 82) to Oregon, as she provided her kin with a first point of contact and support in finding housing and work, so they could fall back on the structures and networks she had established. Being the source of security and encouragement in the context of migration Dolores Carlos can be refered to as a "pioneer settler" (Ravuvu 2002: 93).

Today, most of the young people migrating to the US do so primarily for employment purposes. Sonsorolese take up employment in a turkey factory in Iowa, others secure jobs in the hospitality industry, and work in restaurants in Florida and Nebraska. The US mainland is currently home to some 50 Sonsorolese adults plus their children, about whom no precise information is currently available. In 2021 only three Southwest Islanders moved to the US (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022), which might be due to the pandemic situation.

Transnational networks of kin

Migration always represents a profound biographical break, since you leave behind everything you know and everything that makes you who you are. The situation of the Sonsorolese migrants in their new homes is therefore characterised by an interplay of adaptation on the one, and sticking to the familiar on the other hand. However, their example clearly shows that spatial distance from their place of origin does not go hand in hand with detachment from their home island and their family ties since Sonsorolese emigrants form strong transnational networks with their kin. No matter how long ago they emigrated, all my interview partners showed a very strong sense of perceiving Sonsorol as their home and place of belonging. Kin send each other parcels, visit each other, take part in important celebrations, religious ceremonies, funerals, weddings, family reunions or sport competitions, so that a permanent flow of material and immaterial culture in form of food, clothes, money, but also ideas, songs, dances etc. can be observed between both sides. In addition to this, most of them use social media, such as Facebook to stay in touch, send photos and engage in livestreaming. Through this intensive contact, migrants often provide a window to the rest of the world for those at home – this way they have a strong impact on each other's lives.

Nostalgia and the return myth

It is striking how, with increasing temporal and spatial distance from their island, the attitude of Sonsorolese emigrants increases to nostalgically transfigure and romanticise their home island. Sonsorol becomes the myth of an ideal island world, a stress-free environment, which has an identity-forming effect and combines images and memories of the island into an overall picture with positive connotations. The closer one is – geographically speaking – to the island, the more one is naturally involved in the challenges there and the more difficult it is to romanticise an abstract ideal. However, this longing or nostalgia is not only found among the expatriates themselves, but also for those who did not grow up there and know the island only from the stories of their relatives or from short visits: "In fact, transnational actors do not need to have been born in the 'homeland' to identify strongly with the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, and to participate in diasporic transactions" (Francis 2009: 203).

This ideal is closely linked to the myth of return (Lee 2009: 27), the realisation of which usually does not work out in practice. Often, emigration takes on a permanent character by building a life in a foreign country with marriage, investments, obligations etc. Living conditions on the home island also often make it difficult to return and for those who return, it is not always an easy process (see also Connell 2009a), since personalities and problem-solving strategies can change through the process of migration. For example, at college in the US mainland, Sonsorolese students often experience an open dispute culture. However, this is commonly an undesirable social behaviour on the small islands, since openly dealing with conflicts on a small island can put the whole group at risk. It is proper for younger people to be silent when older people speak, even when they disagree. If return migrants then show a discursive behaviour they can be perceived as a disruptive factor in an otherwise smooth island life. However, it is not only the migrants who have changed, often also the home island has gone through changes while they were gone.

Especially for those who grew up in migration, returning to the Southwest Islands is sometimes fraught with difficulties. In migration, they clearly define themselves as Sonsorolese, even if they were born in the US. However, when they visit Sonsorol Island, they often lack some of the cultural and linguistic abilities, so that they sometimes get into awkward situations and are mocked by other islanders in a playful way.

Source: Victoria Nestor.

Figure 6: Palauan first born ceremony in the Soutwest Islanders community in Eang.

However, not many people are migrating back to the Southwest Islands for good.

The same pattern applies to Eang: In the past ten years, no Southwest Islanders have moved back from their migration destinations to Eang on a permanent basis. However, they do return for special occasions, such as familiy reunions. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected these temporary visits, so that since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, hardly any Southwest Islanders have come back to Eang to participate in such festivities.

Culture, identity and language in the context of out-migration

Collective identity is usually created through shared ancestry, history and culture (Hall 1990: 223). Despite increasing mobility, people retain a fundamental need to belong to a community. In addition to this sense of belonging, the basic prerequisite for a sense of identity[2] is social acceptance. Members of a cultural community share certain identity markers, which are also dynamic and can therefore be subject to change.

In the course of migration, cultural practices become increasingly dispersed and Sonsorolese culture is also lived in the new homes as much as possible.

On Sonsorol, detailed knowledge of fishing techniques or navigation were important male identity markers every man used to know in the past. For young men today (especially the ones who migrated), these identity markers are less valid, and they often lack detailed knowledge. Such social transformations are observed in Micronesia in general and can negatively affect the self-esteem of young men (Rubinstein 1992: 67). However, there

Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 7: Master carver Samu Bemar teaching canoe building (Eang).

are certain identity markers that still play an important role for all Sonsorolese today: family ties and showing respect (especially towards elders), as well as some basic cultural knowledge. In the past, it was also very specific knowledge (local healing techniques, chants, dances, customs, craftmanship, fishing techniques, navigation skills and ideologies about seeing the world etc.) and Sonsorolese language abilities. However, these have been subject to change due to migration: "Moreover, that both their home societies and diasporas change constantly in response to internal and external challenges and developments. As well, in this context, kinship ties and indigenous political, religious and economic values undergo significant consideration" (Keck & Schieder 2015: 125).

Sonsorol (as well as the rest of Palau) has been exposed to strong influences from the Catholic mission, as well as from the various foreign dominations (Spain, Germany, Japan and the US). In the 1900s, Christianity was introduced to the Southwest Islands, and as a result the inhabitants all converted to Roman Catholicism, so today there are Catholic churches on Sonsorol, Pulo Anna, and also in Eang. Due to this former impact, some identity-forming elements of their culture are difficult to practice today. According to my interview partners, this applies to traditional tattooing, which was condemned by the missionaries, so that people pursued this art less and less. According to my interlocutors, the traditional dances were also partly banned by the missionaries as being too erotic, so they were no longer danced by the population and were forgotten over time. Today, there are often not enough people in the islands to do the dances that they still memorize. The situation is similar with traditional healing methods, as these were also banished by the mission and thus no longer passed on from generation to generation in many cases. Since cultural knowledge has been passed down orally and through general practice, the chain of information breaks where knowledge is no longer passed on or practiced due to migration. This break in the chain of knowledge transfer in the context of migration also shows in daily life: In Eang (as well as in the other destinations) most Sonsorolese people are employed and during the day, they usually leave the village to work in the city of Koror. Young Sonsorolese also go to school or community college. In short, there is hardly any time to sit together and pass on traditional myths, stories or even detailed knowledge about traditions, Sonsorolese values and language like in the past:

"We are losing our language. Most of our young population speak English. Respect for siblings and elders is washed out. We have in our culture a certain form of language used to show respect among different gender siblings and older people. It is not used among our young people. I keep trying to make my own children use the form of language with each other but to no avail. I guess it just doesn't fit their way of life today. I also think that we have adopted some of the Western culture so that we may have a truly different culture which is neither any of them" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

The influence of US culture can be seen in different spheres of life away from their island: The official currency in Palau is the US dollar, children wear US school uniforms and are taught with US textbooks, even when they do not reflect the reality of their lives. Even the television channels that can be received on Palau's main islands are dominated by US channels. Thus, through television and social media, and through reports from expatriates who have returned, US style of dress, language, and music have found their way into many Sonsorolese homes.

At the same time, Sonsorolese culture is also becoming more and more permeated by Palauan customs and traditions. This is evident, for example, when Sonsorolese move to Eang, and realize how the first-born ceremony has entered the Sonsorolese community. This custom, which is originally Palauan, celebrates the mother after the birth of her first child. After giving birth, she receives very hot herbal baths and then appears in front of the crowd, rubbed with curcuma (turmeric

powder) and festively decorated. In this way, she is celebrated by the family as a productive member of her lineage. When Sonsorese women leave their island and form partnerships with Palauans in migration, from which children are born, they sometimes adopt this Palauan tradition.

The way Sonsorolese are treated when they migrate impacts on their identity and self-image. The Southwest Islanders are seen as a minority by the Palauans and were discriminated for decades in the past, even though the relationship between the inhabitants of the main islands and the Southwest Islands has improved greatly in the last 30 years. The reason for the unequal treatment was the Southwest Islands' own language and culture, which has nothing in common with the main islands of Palau. Southwest Islanders also experience competition for land and jobs when they settle on the main islands.

The situation of the Sonsorolese as a more or less latently discriminated minority in the past can be traced back to events in 1904/05. At that time, a severe typhoon had destroyed parts of the Southwest Islands, and the then Ibedul (the High Chief of Koror) officially allowed them to settle in Echol and later in Eang. Since then, Palauans have repeatedly tried to dispute this donation of land, but court decisions have always granted it to the Southwest Islanders. In 1998, this conflict escalated and Palauans stood in front of the Eang village entrance with signs saying: "No more typhoon - Go home!" (see also Loscalzo 2006: 72-76). These incidents reminded the Sonsorolese in the past that they were not seen as a part of Palau after migrating to Eang: "In my opinion, at that time, these words hit to the heart of the Southwest Islanders, reminding them how they arrived in Palau and that they were still very much considered to be non-Palauan outsiders" (Tibbetts 2002: 70).

However, these hardships and the discrimination they had to face seems to lie in the past now. Miles explains the changes for the better in the relationship between Southwest Islanders and Palauans as follows:

"We are more accepted than we were in the past, with the presence of other nationalities who are obviously more different (Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos etc.). I guess we have become more Palauan-like. I believe it is also a change of attitude on our part, too. We have changed our attitudes, the way we dress and carry ourselves; we have learned the Palauan language; our youth are actively participating in youth activities and others; all these I believe are some of the contributing factors to change. There are also intermarriages, which bring families together and create more familiarity and familial connections. I'm sure there are other contributing behavioral factors. You know, we live in a global world even while living on this small island nation" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 8: Samu Bemar healing Mark Nestor's broken arm (Eang).

Revitalization of the Sonsorolese language and cultural heritage

Sonsorolese identity and culture face many challenges on the island of origin as well as in the different migration destinations. These effects are already being felt in the community of Southwest Islanders in Eang:

"Just by the fact that we do not live on our home island in itself is a big cause of loss of our culture, because we do not use the language that relates to the unique environment and the activities unique to that environment which is the island. What little I learn while I'm here, I forget too soon because I do not use it again. There is no maintenance of what I learn. For example, I learned to chant two years ago. Today, I cannot even remember how to begin. When I read the survey of Krämer [Augustin Krämer: Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition] made in the early 1900's I see the big loss in our culture" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

When it comes to other cultural practices such as traditional tattooing, young Sonsorolese today no longer get any traditional tattoos, as Pacific Islanders from Samoa or Hawai'i often do to wear a part of their homeland on their skin – also in the diaspora.

Nevertheless, the Sonsorolese are fundamentally interested in their cultural heritage today:

"I've seen t-shirts with tattoo designs and catchy slogans or words. They like using our language because it seems to be a challenge to them. Many young people were interested in the weaving classes and the canoe building project. They enjoy doing the dances and the chants. I think it gives them a feeling of uniqueness, connecting them to their true identity that seems to be elusive" (Miles, personal communication, May 2nd, 2022).

In addition to cultural practices, the Sonsorolese language poses even greater obstacles for those no longer living on the island, which also has to do with the fact that the Sonsorolese language is a purely oral language without written fixation. The children of Sonsorolese growing up in the US diaspora often no longer automatically learn the language of their parents in everyday life. However, my interviews show that they are still very interested in the language. To nourish this enthusiasm for one's own language and culture, cultural practicioners established a few projects to keep the Sonsorolese cultural heritage alive.

For example, the Sonsorol State Women's Association (SSWA) in

Source: Young Historians of Sonsorol State.

Figure 9: Meeting of the Young Historians of Sonsorol State (Eang).

2016 wrote an illustrated storybook of traditional Sonsorolese children's stories (including audio files) in an effort to preserve the traditional Sonsorolese storytelling as well as the language. They were supported in this by The Young Historians of Sonsorol State or "Wonoula lei Hatinapa ri Faruya", a youth organisation founded in 2014 by Sonsorolese students from the Palau Community College (PCC) realizing being raised not on Sonsorol, but in Koror, they were displaced from the island's culture. The group grew to 18 members ranging from 16 to 35 years old. One of their main goals is to collect and preserve the history, culture, custom, and heritage of Sonsorol State for the youth and future generation and create programs that teach the traditions, customs, and history (Miles & Nestor 2017: 22). The SSWA also have held basic basket weaving classes for kids and adults in the community. Parallel to this there is Thafaas (Sonsorol Men's Association) which taught Sonsorolese traditional canoe carving. This was videotaped for preservation of the craft and the language as well. The recordings help to document and preserve the knowledge for future generations as well as for the ones living in the diaspora. The Sonsorolese community also has a Sonsorolese Bible translation project, which is ongoing and is also an effort for language preservation. Another project is the ethnography effort by a PhD Student at SOAS, University of London and a Sonsorolese BA student from Hilo (Hawai'i) to standardize writing for Sonsorol and Hatohobei. In addition to this, there are annual national cultural events that give opportunities for the younger generation to learn some traditional dances and chants, for example United Nations Day (24 October) or "Olechotel Belau Fair", where all the states and all nationalities in Palau showcase their cultural heritage. This is when Sonsorolese people perform their cultural dances and show or sell handicrafts as well as traditional dishes. Such festivities are an important part of Sonsorolese cultural identity and a sense of belonging to Sonsorol. Often performances of dances and other practices are recorded so that migrants can participate.

In 2005 the Sonsorolese community also had a canoe carving project in Eang as part of the Southwest Islands Community Learning Network for the youth of Eang where a master carver taught them how to build a canoe, and the project was enthusiastically received. Traditional healing is also kept alive in Eang as much as possible. Samu Bemar, a traditional healer, for example, straightened my Sonsorolese brother Mark's broken arm every day after a fracture, prepared an herbal packet and let it act on the arm. This way, no plaster cast was needed, and the arm healed in a very short time without any problems. Mark combined the best of "both worlds" and took advantage of both conventional medicine and traditional healing by also bringing x-rays from the hospital in Meyuns to the first session with the traditional healer.

Conclusion

Migration has always been a key feature of Sonsorolese identity. However, the biographies of Sonsorolese people today are much more diverse than in the past and developing a Sonsorolese identity growing up away from the island faces numerous challenges – depending, especially on the cultural knowledge of the family and connections to their home island, but also on how Sonsorolose are treated in their migration destinations. Due to the influences to which the Sonsorolese identity is exposed in migratory contexts, people constantly have to renegotiate their identity and Sonsorolese manage to do this through their great flexibility. They often combine the positive aspects of the opportunities that open up for them in their news home with their cultural heritage.

In addition to that they strongly identify with their home island and they continue to interact socially and culturally with their or their ancestors' place of origin. Therefore, Sonsorolese emigrants are not caught between two cultures or have to give up their culture of origin. Instead, they navigate both systems. By flexibly dealing with and synthesising the cultural influences of different sides in the course of their migration, they and their children growing up in migration are able to form and maintain new stable Sonsorolese identities.

For many Pacific Islanders migration is a normality and mobility as well as return visits to the islands are an integral part of their lives (Connell 2009b: 162). However, even though migration has always been part of the everyday life of Sonsorolese people, a much larger dimension is currently emerging. In that context, their transnational family networks retain their extraordinary importance and Sonsorol remains an anchor of their cultural identity in the diaspora.

Even though most Sonsorolese are very comfortable "navigating in two worlds", from the outside, it sometimes seems as if the Sonsorolese culture has been weakened in part. However,

the people have an awareness of these developments and are actively steering against them. Therefore, the importance of their material and immaterial culture is strengthened by numerous revitalisation projects that aim at teaching and preserving their material and immaterial cultural heritage and make it available to future generations and those living in migration. This is particularly evident in the activities of the "Young Historians of Sonsorol State", an activist group that demonstrates how young people living far from their island of origin are working to preserve and pass on their culture.

The preservation of the Sonsorolese language is more difficult and it has undergone major changes in the last 15 years due to influences from outside Sonsorol. However, the Sonsorolese are counteracting this development successfully through various projects.

Despite all the obstacles, the Sonsorolese see themselves as an active community with agency and not as victims of out-migration and globalisation.

It remains to be seen how future generations of Sonsorolese growing up in the diaspora will deal with these challenges, how they will relate to their cultural heritage and how they will maintain and reproduce their cultural knowledge in the diaspora.

In this context, it will be interesting to re-examine issues pertaining to Sonsorolese culture, language and identity in a few years' time – for the ones in the diaspora as well as those remaining in the home island of Sonsorol.

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Endnotes

[1] Due to the small number of Sonsorolese people on Sonsorol and the migration destinations visited, I had the opportunity to speak with all adult Sonsorolese at the time of my research.

[2] For a detailled discussion of different identity theories and different types of identity relevant in this context, see Walda-Mandel 2016, chapter 4.

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Invisible belongings: Carolinian practices of personhood and space as moral principles

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Abstract: Based on field research and published sources, this paper examines Micronesian migration in regards to principles of order and values on their home atolls. For Carolinians, place names and personal names are part of the web of intangible knowledge that can serve to assure certain positions and rights. They unfold the untold facts of gender and hierarchy and can be used as a peephole into social practice. Names and places represent stability and continuity in an otherwise fluid world. Migrants, I argue, can use such shared experiences of their "invisible belongings" to re-create some sense of home and build a community based on versions of these principles and values.

Keywords: Micronesia, Carolinians, personhood, identity, invisible belongings

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Introduction

In this article I explore the relevance of names as identity markers for Carolinian people. If, following Mauss (1938), we assume that personhood and naming are closely related, the question arises how this affects mobility, in this case, migrants' movements, and their association with places and family (see also Stewart & Strathern 2000:7). Here, I will focus on the Central Carolinian Islands, using historical and contemporary sources as well as my own field research data[1].

As I learned during my fieldwork in Guam, Saipan, and on Woleai atoll, to Carolinians, the movement of people in space is at all times a matter of gendered rules of sharing within the larger family. The relatedness of persons affects their choice of places and daily routine and is notably structured into separate, almost parallel worlds. People accept these inhibitions of free movement without reservation as they are more concerned about their status than about the desire to roam around. Individual paths in time and space give evidence of their personal qualities, just as the appearance of a compound, path, garden, or house gives evidence of the taste and diligence of those who work there. Children's attitudes reflect on their care-takers just as adult behavior reflects on personal virtue and family bonding. Enacting the rules of respect is paramount to being a respected person. Places become meaningful by being used and worked on; their appearance is the product of its ecological features and human agency. Micronesian author and activist Lino Olopai has also pointed out these values in his 2005 memoir. He told me about his urban upbringing on Americanized Saipan Island and his canoe voyages to Satawal atoll that helped him connect to his ancestors' way of life (pers. comm., Jan 2005).

Source: All photos by the author.

Figure 1: A family home on Woleai, 2004.

Toponyms are referential to the description and expression of experiential realities, they are, in Feld's words, "deeply linked to the embodied sensation of places" (1996:113). They are anchors of memory as they tell stories of the past as well as of individual travels (roots and routes, as Clifford [1997] coined it); "mapping place into identity, conjoining temporal motion and spatial projection, re-inscribing past into the present, creating biography as itinerary" (Feld 1996:113). Basso has argued that "placenames may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations – associations of time and space, of

history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life" (1988:103). For Carolinians, toponyms are central to their sense of communality, as Peter, himself a Carolinian, has aptly stated: "If there is a frightening notion that most islanders share, it is the concept of being lost, being out of place, or the inability to make connection with a place" (2004:261). Without the knowledge of names, a person is lost in both physical and social space. Alkire has described place names as a system of Carolinian order (1970:69). The names of larger order are common reference points, such as a canoe house or a taro patch (Alkire 1970:41). He noted that "[t]he term *bwogotai*, which usually means 'of my land' or 'my relatives', may even be extended to include individuals of another island within the same lagoon, but certainly not between islands of different lagoons" (Alkire 1970:7).

Here, I am concerned with these values of the past and argue that they continue to be part of the process of settling as a migrant. While mobility and the adaptation to the hosts' value system have the potential to change the Carolinian concept of person, sense of place, and cultural identity (see Flinn 2000:157), names, codifying practice of identity, constructed as hierarchical relationships, continue to serve as identifying markers of being *refaluwash* (people of the sea, the local term for Carolinians). Today, Carolinian communities are spread throughout Micronesia and into the US (see Hezel 2001:146-14). For example, Marshall has described how "virtual kinship" is created through e-mail and telephone communication among migrants from Namoluk atoll to the US (2004:99). Underlying these and other emerging forms of diasporic and transnational (virtual) kinship are, I argue here, "invisible belongings" that shape what Carolinian migrants carry along (see Kuehling 2012); in a similar fashion as older notions of beauty are integrated into contemporary Roman-Catholic ritual on Pollap (Flinn 2010:141), or as flower garlands are used as manifestations of Carolinian identity on Saipan (Kuehling 2012).

Names: One of a kind

Carolinian naming principles point to a concept of the person as a unique entity, connected to the world in partial relations (Strathern 2004). Linguistic research on the proto-oceanic words for 'person' show that the concept (**tau)* includes spirits and the notion of being emplaced (**kai*[*n*]) (see Pawley 1985:98). Names are not inherited but individually composed and they are the standard form of address (unlike in many other areas in Oceania such as Pohnpei, Lieber 1990:92).

Figure 2: Women sharing food with their menfolk, Woleai 2004.

As persons and their places are conceived as a unity, names are central to identify one's position in social and physical space (Kawai 1987:121; Moral 2001; J. B. Thomas 1980). The importance of local names did not escape the German colonial officers who regulated the principles of naming and orthography, prioritizing the continuation of pre-existing names (Anonymous 1903:453-454). Personal names, for persons and places, appear as a stable element in the otherwise fluid and adaptable world of Carolinians. Due to their uniqueness, and because they are regarded as valuable knowledge, names are keys to history and power, as I was told on Woleai; and thus part of the 'invisible belongings' that Carolinian migrants carry along.

M. J. Fox was involved in the de-colonizing process of the curriculum in Yap State (1999). In that context, she conducted many meetings with local elders of both sexes within Woleai atoll to develop a "culturally relevant curriculum" (1999:20) between July 1996 and August 1998. The lists of relevant topics that she has published in appendices begin with "respect for persons (chiefs, elders, guests, clan, family, each other)", next is "respect for places (land/island, sea, lagoon, living area, high places, house front, men's house, front part of the men's house, others' places, land property/family land, to stay in one's own area, sacred and scary places" (1999:247).

I hold that the order of this listing was carefully structured by the elders, reflecting on the similarly ranked order of persons and places. To respect an island, and the ocean, can be translated as an overall attitude of care and conservation, the adherence to the rules and ethics and the acceptance of the existing hierarchy. This includes the general rule of staying in one's own area and not to bother others without good reason. The ranked pattern of named persons and places is brought to life by the islanders' practice, their embodied experience, and their gendered personalities, life histories and relations. Fox has observed that to Carolinians, "respect" is "a set of prescribed actions" (1999:226) rather than a personal feeling (ibid.).

The invisible connections between people, places, spirits, animals, plants, and the ubiquitous breeze that connects them all combine to a world view that is not restricted to a specific space but rather a flexible set of identity markers.[2] Ingold proposed the notion of "sentient ecology" to "capture the kind of knowledge people have of their environments (2000:25). If we follow Ingold's (2000:232) definition of mapping as "the re-enactment, in narrative gesture, of the experience of moving from place to place within a region", names are the narrative key to maps that enable individuals to position themselves, and others, in the limited space of their atolls. Such mapping is important for morally valued behavior,

Figure 3: Families having their evening bath in their respective beach zones, Woleai 2004.

and every individual continually updates a gendered, age-specific mental map of people and their places as well as the paths that lead to them.

Place: the world of atolls

On the atolls, everyday practice requires knowledge of the hierarchies of persons and places. There is an invisible grid of rank that distinguishes the compounds, based on the relative position of the owner clan, resident clan, and the seniority of the lineage within the clan. The ranking order of place deserves attention because it prescribes spatial movement, the perception of the environment, and the sense of place in various ways. When staying at places of others, a visitor needs to show respect (*gassorou*) by taking up little space, stooping with a hand behind one's back (*gebbarog*), and never walking past the front of persons who sit on the ground (Lessa 1950:45). The physical environment of Carolinian atolls is divided into named zones. These areas are distinguished by their appearance and value. Place names are based on particular characteristics, events, or people, associated sometime in the past with the location (Alkire 1970:56). Names that I was told include past events (e.g., 'cutting a turtle'), personal history ('people washed to the beach', 'head rest place of chief' etc.), orientation in space (e.g., 'look over the lagoon'), the character of persons (e.g., 'to do something well with hands'), landmarks (e.g., 'under the Lel-tree'), the presence of spirits or persons (e.g., 'where Yaat is in the ground'), esoteric/navigational knowledge (Maailap/the star Altair), or points of secret measurements in canoe making (Maluwelmeng, pers. comm.; 2002: 102).

Being at one's home compound, or at a closely related place, gives a person the right to walk around freely, to check the kitchen area for leftovers, to use the well and the beach that belongs to the compound, to enter the house for a nap, in short, to feel at home. It also means that one is treated according to age and gender; a woman may be asked to assist with domestic chores while a man may be asked to provide woodwork or move a heavy object. Feeling at home includes a constant awareness of cross-sex-siblings' movements, to avoid touching their belongings and to stay away from them if possible.

All land and lagoon areas (as well as fishing spots in the ocean) belong to one of the ranked matrilineal clans and are nominally controlled by its elders and, ultimately, by the clan chief. In this way, Carolinians live in a gendered, stratified space, where multiply linked relatedness is realized in individual efforts to activate the social options. The complexity of links is organized in hierarchies of named units, of both persons and places, as on Ifaluk, where "[a] hierarchy of rank runs through the whole society. In it each individual has a place; and standards of good behavior require each to show by his conduct that he 'knows his place'. This involves not only deference towards superiors, but a certain lordliness toward inferiors not in informal contacts, but on occasions of state" (Burrows & Spiro 1953:179).

The relative status of a clan is based on the time of settlement on the island (Moral 1998:61; Burrows & Spiro 1953:184). The amount of land under the control of a clan is a second determining factor (Alkire 1970:60; Metzgar 2008:393). Each clan has a specific role in the political life, in line with, or stemming from, the ranking order of clans (Alkire 1965:32; 1970; Flinn 1992:47; Metzgar 2008:80, 302).

Flexibility is created by adoption of babies. When a woman adopts her brother's child, a frequent form of 'sharing children', he or she may assume his biological father's clan identity (see Marshall 1983:211). Most children are adopted and mostly live with their new family, frequently visiting their birth family and performing at the ceremonies of both families if possible.[3] The role that they assume during celebrations of birth, puberty, and the rituals of death alludes to their family relations, but activities are the only clue to kinship as this is not a topic of open discussion and as everyday activities are usually carried out within the adopted family.

The matrilineage, hence, is not the normal residential unit as adoption mixes up relations of descent. While matrilocal residence is the norm, with most women living under the watchful eye of their mother, lineages are often spread over the entire islet and even further. Lineages are not named but the name of the compound of residence is used as reference. Every person belongs to the maternal compound, and most people are also attached to their adoptive mother's compound. They feel equally at home at the father's and/or adoptive father's place. This sense of belonging to places is indicating their relative rank and their set of relatives more than a genealogy based on descent (based on author's fieldnotes).

Land is divided into male and female zones that partly remain stable (canoe house, taro patch) and partly are created when the need arises (parties for visitors, female celebrations, care for sick relatives). Rules of brother-sister avoidance encourage men to spend their time in the company of other men, in a canoe house, or off shore in a boat. Women are expected to stay near their compound areas, keeping the children nearby for constant supervision and monitoring. When a woman notices a brother approaching on the same path, she will simply sit down at the side and wait until he has passed by. As Waterson has remarked for Eastern Indonesia, "the predominant theme

is not separation and opposition, but rather the complementarity of male and female and their bringing together in fertile fusion" (1993:225).

Women spend most of the time in their compound and their attached beach strips, in the taro gardens, or between these places. Some areas near the beach are restricted for men at special occasions. When giving birth, or celebrating the first menstruation of a girl, women temporarily move into a small and often rather shabby hut in the beach area. Great amounts of food are prepared and the men bring a large quantity of fish to be cooked and distributed there. These female zones can be entered by men, e.g., when they bring fish or pick up cooked food, but men are expected not to stay around.

Figure 4: Women spending the afternoon with various chores and moments of leisure, Woleai 2004.

Men spend most of their time in the canoe houses (unless they are harvesting palm-toddy) or in a boat. The men's daily rounds, at 6 am, noon, and 6 pm, when the palm toddy is collected by virtually all men who are allowed to cut toddy, are kept with an intense punctuality, in Alkire's words, "the one task each man will complete each day, save when on his death bed" (1965:88). At these times the women mostly remain around the compound, sitting and waiting for their brothers to bring their share of non-alcoholic toddy. The fermented toddy is consumed in the canoe house and women are not supposed to drink it at all (Damm & Sarfert 1935:47).

Each of these canoe houses has a personal name. These names often refer to winds, or to something that can be seen when sitting there, e.g., "watch the canoes approaching", "house in the wind", or "look over the lagoon". Building such a large house was a secret art of specialists (Alkire 1970:17; LeBar 1963:68; Metzgar 2008:200). The strip of land between the canoe house and the beach is occupied by the men's drinking circle setup, some logs or a free space with basic sitting facilities. The canoe house area extends further into the lagoon, to a passage for canoes in the reef. An overgrown spot of sacred land under a coconut tree nearby may be used for rituals. These large houses are called *fal-*, or *ut* – with various specifying additions and some regional variations. They are used as sleeping place for unmarried men and men under sexual restrictions, as a place to host visiting men, and as shelter for the canoes. The clan who builds it uses it for meetings and, formerly, for rituals involving spirits, healing, sorcery, and weather magic (Kubary 1889:51; Metzgar 2008:176; Schlesier 1953:98; Yalfaleyal 1997). While in the past there were special men's houses for the purposes of magic and the teaching of secret knowledge, conversion to Christianity has led to a general decline of magic and to the exclusive maintenance of canoe houses. These houses are only used by men and children, but women are allowed on the land-facing side when explicitly invited by the chief (Damm & Sarfert 1935:124-125; Damm 1938:79-80). Women can only enter during special rituals, such as at *shuufeliuw*, i.e., the appointment of a new chief (based on author's fieldnotes).

Men usually spend most of their time at the canoe houses, making ropes, repairing nets, carving, building and maintaining fish traps, canoes, and looms, or observing the sea and the sky (see Burrows & Spiro 1953:318). In the past, they also produced wooden boxes for fishing tackle, decorated bamboo containers, and large bowls for ceremonial food presentations and other carvings (see Krämer 1937:239), but these arts are not practiced any more. Hambruch characterized male endeavors as "active but slow" (Damm & Sarfert 1935:27). My male informants insisted that this was an outsider's view and that they were rather on "stand-by mode", ready to jump into action when necessary, and constantly alert in watching the coastline (Alkire 1965:95).

Inside the canoe house, the communal fishing net of the village is stored. It nominally belongs to the chief who rules the canoe house and its surrounding area (Burrows & Spiro1953: 146, 166; author's fieldnotes). When a new net needs to be made, a ten-by-ten section of the net is given to the canoe house by each compound. These pieces are joined together to be kept there and used by the men. Distributions of fish follow these house units in an egalitarian way, as those places that have contributed will receive a share of fish, whenever the net is used (Damm & Sarfert 1935:115). The kinship and connectedness with the place, symbolized by each segment of the net, is memorized together with the other compounds that have contributed. Those fishing nets hence become a legitimizing tool for questions of land rights and family relations – invisible to any Western researcher but a good example of the stability, flexibility and the veiling of actual relationships. As these nets do not last for more than 10-15 years, the re-evaluation of distribution patterns for fish caught with nets occurs in these intervals.

In Carolinian songs and stories, names of islands, canoe houses, sea space, and persons carry sentiment and implicitly situate the performer in social space. Burrows' substantial collection of songs from Ifaluk (1963) shows that, unlike in some other areas of Oceania, topogenies (see J.J. Fox 1997) are rare (unless they have not been recorded). The songs about persons are still practiced, composed, and memorized, in spite of the changes in lifestyle. As a principle, only women compose songs (Alkire 1991:384). They are, with a different melody, sung over dead bodies (Maluwelmeng 2002:26; Damm

Figure 5: A meeting inside the canoe house, Woleai 2004.

& Sarfert 1935:270). Some people believe, however, that their importance is declining because of the attraction of Western music (of foreign and local making). Metzgar has confirmed that there is "a very rich body of folklore, some of which is restricted to chiefs, lineage heads, and *rong* practitioners" (2008:146).

Every few years during typhoon season, violent gales and torrential rains destroy the agricultural and horticultural efforts of the women, eroding the soil on footpaths and in the residential areas, flooding the taro swamps with salt water, felling shrubs and trees, and wrecking the buildings and flower gardens. An adaptation to this contested space is embedded in the islanders' sense of place. As it is based on memory, relationships, practice, and knowledge, individuals can reconstruct the layout of invisible boundaries that divide land and sea between them. This sense of place can survive the physical destruction of all resources and a displacement of its inhabitants because of their mental mapping and their successful system of decision-making. Once the landmarks and boundaries are re-established, gendered, emplaced practice takes over and ensures survival.

The following example from Woleai Atoll will show how this system operates. In World War II, small Falalop islet became a victim of international politics. In 1944, the islanders were displaced and 7,000 Japanese soldiers were stationed there.[4] American bombing cut Woleai from new supplies so that most Japanese died on Falalop. Their conditions during the sixteen months on Falalop were characterized by Peattie as "living hell" (2000:305). In spite of their efforts to plant vegetables most of them died of starvation and infections while hoping for a ship to bring food and medicine. Too late, submarines broke the blockade – after the surrender, only 1,600 Japanese were evacuated by the Americans (Peattie 2000:306).

When the islanders could return home, they faced a wasteland: the soil was bare or covered in concrete, almost all the trees were gone and the main taro swamp was partly covered by a runway. The islanders knew that no food could be grown for a couple of years. To them, their islet had turned into *welielango* (a big pile of rocks outside in the sea), not only because the place was just as barren but also because it resembled a traditional maritime graveyard, where the bodies decay but the stones that are used to sink them remain in place. The few Japanese vegetable gardens were ready for harvest and in the bunkers, so I was told, they found food that the Japanese had left behind. So, for four and a half years the islanders lived on fish, rice and canned provisions until the land was re-cultivated and yielded the first crops again. Chief Mairal recalled that

"The chiefs looked around the island, they believed that we can survive, that we have food and they made a party, they called it Falalop (Woleai) day, on May 9, and we celebrated. Like thanksgiving" (pers. comm., June 2004).

In short, island space, though totally bare of its previous landmarks and spotted with new structures and bomb craters, was returned into island places without significant conflicts.[5] The joint effort of the islanders and their helpers built up two dimensions of their place. Their mental maps had to be unfolded on the islet, re-establishing the main patterns (compounds, villages, areas of clan land). As beaches, reefs and the coastline in general had remained relatively unaltered by the events of WW II, inland areas could be reconstructed according to their relative positions. Thanks to the chiefs' ultimate control over clan land, these 'hard boundaries' were re-installed without difficulty. Alkire also comments on the "close approximation of the pre-war condition" (1970:65n).

More generally, pre-war practice, such as gardening, picking of flowers and medical plants, and collecting fruits and firewood, had led to a detailed knowledge of the terrain in their small areas, as individuals worked on their plots of land – in the taro swamps, near the compounds, and in dry inland areas. In some places, especially in the center of the islet, however, user rights had to be modified to cater for the needs of all families and to compensate for the loss of a large swamp area that had become the runway. Other new features, like those bomb craters that could be turned into taro patches, were taken into consideration as well to provide a fair distribution.

The fluidity of kinship relations and the tendency to veil one's range of options until they are activated in public is in line with the use of place names as a code for kinship. These names are markers of memory as they transcend death and devastation. Chief Mairal, a child at that time, recalled this process of re-naming the land in a conversation with me:

"If the lands were attached, they went to see them in different family groups and stood around 'and this is maybe that land – *they called the name* -, and maybe that land – *they called the name* – maybe our boundary is here' [laughs]; they did like that. Also in the taro patch: if these two or three different families came and looked around for boundaries, and they did not agree, they said 'maybe that person there or that person there will know' and they go and call [him or her] to come and to estimate the boundaries" (Chief Mairal, June 2004, emphasis added).

In sum, the underlying political

principles of seniority and matrilineal descent in a ranked clan system help to avoid both wasteful neglect and resource exploitation by organizing the tasks in a consensus-based form of discourse in which chiefs come to a decision that most people support. While flexible systems of integration, fusion and fission within the wider region are required for coping with typhoons, disease, and conflict, certain stable factors mirror Carolinian identity:

- The use of names for orientation in time and space
- A grid of dualisms: inside/outside, back/front, low/high, female/male (see Alkire 1970:66, 70, 1972; Alkire & Fujimura 1990:75; Feinberg 1988)
- The practice of this dualism and of social relations by following the rules of respect, in spatial movement and language as well as in relationships (Douglass 1998:138)
- Fish and fishing, especially in the world of men (see Lieber 1994; Maluwelmeng 2002)
- The gardening of food and flowers, and the raising of children as female fields of qualification and stability

These "invisible belongings" fit into any suitcase and pass any customs; they allow Carolinians to bond and re-create family ties based on shared spaces and constructed ancestry.

Mobility: Linking the dots

Alkire writes that "(t)he world of the Woleaians is made up of numerous small dots of land scattered about a vast ocean. Survival, to a certain extent, depends on maintaining contact between these discrete units (1970: 71)". So far, the focus of this paper has been on atoll life, but for Carolinian men, movement on the ocean has always been the most important side of their lives. Fishing, trading, visiting, exploring, and returning home to a good meal were as important as the option to load the family and flee the atoll when a typhoon has destroyed all the foliage and crops (see Flinn 1992:31; for eye witness accounts on typhoons see, e.g., Born & Fritz 1907; M. J. Fox 1999:91).

The navigators know their paths across the open sea, using individually named units and the movement of the stars as references. While the sets of names differ between the various schools of navigation, the principles are similar

Figure 6: Typhoon damage on Woleai, 2004.

(Alkire 1970:46; 1980). In Woleaian, the fundamental distinction between land and sea is a central metaphor, because the term for 'in' differs according to the sphere referred to. "In the house", or "in the taro patch", for example, are expressed with the prefix *ni-*, while the prefix *le-* is used to refer to the maritime world, as in "in the canoe", or "in the ocean". The vernacular also alludes to a metaphorical link between the land and the sea, as clan land is called "our canoe" (Chief Mairal, pers. comm., 2004).

The transmission of spatial knowledge of the sea is an individual affair, where male students are chosen according to their clan affiliation, intelligence, and personal conduct. Metzgar explains the system of inheritance of such restricted knowledge based on clan affiliation and personal conduct:

"The *taurong* looks at his children and adopted children and observes their behavior. Who gives him fish and tobacco? Which of their wives sends him food? Those who give most receive most" (2008:149).

To sum up, place names and personal names are part of the web of intangible knowledge that can serve to assure certain positions and rights. They unfold the untold facts of gender and hierarchy and can be used as a peephole into social practice. For Carolinians, whether on their home atolls or in urban settings, names and places represent stability and continuity in an otherwise fluid world. These values and principles of old might be in conflict with the messages of the market economy, but in creative ways, migrants use their shared ontologies to build new identities as Carolinians by unpacking some of their "invisible belongings" to re-create some sense of home and build a community.

Figure 7: A canoe from Woleai, 2004.

Endnotes

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[2] I have discussed the relevance of the breeze in a previous article (Kuehling 2012). Dernbach mentions the option of Mortlockese to name a child after the initials of a spirit (2005:315).

[3] See Alkire (1965:54, 142); Carrol (1970); Douglass (1998); Flinn (1992:64); Lessa (1966:94); Maluwelmeng (2002:18).

[4] Local elders estimate that there were about 300 adults on Falalop, half the current population. According to Burrows & Spiro's informant 'Tom', 375 people came to Ifaluk during WW II (1953:51).

[5] Some of the debris from WW II was removed after a while. Americans helped to clear the explosives but the bodies were retrieved much later by the Japanese who also left a memorial plate. Burrows & Spiro mention a U.S. coast guard detachment on Falalop (Woleai) (1953:2).

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Figure 1: Aerial photo of a typical Mortlock Island.

Source: Chuuk Public Utility Corp.

Adopting Micronesian children across international borders

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Abstract: This paper discusses adoption, commonly referred to as moumou, in the Mortlock Islands, Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Moumou remains a common practice by the Mortlock Islands community in the 21st century even within the setting of the Compact of Free Association with the US, which allows Mortlockese to set up permanent homes in the US. This paper introduces moumou and ponders if and how it can potentially co-exist with US family laws. Further, it considers how Mortlockese can continue to practice moumou outside the FSM.

Keywords: Micronesia, Mortlock Islands, adoption, US diaspora

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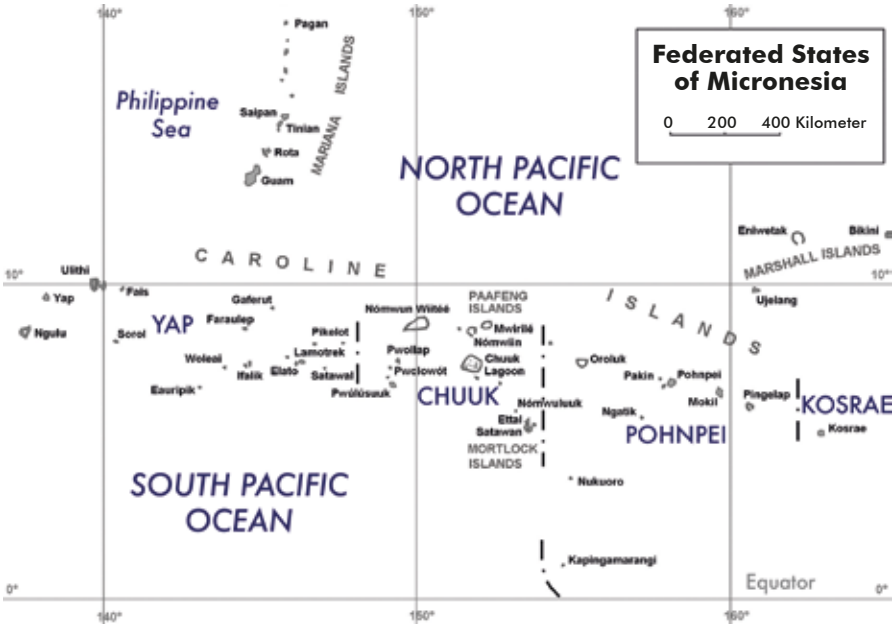
Introduction

Moumou is traditional Mortlockese adoption and has been an integral part of Mortlockese (and, by extension, Chuukese) Islander identity and continuity.[1] In this small Micronesian community, it strengthens social relationships within extended family networks and the clanship system and fosters the forging of new alliances to expand family networks beyond national borders. The practice of *moumou* has been evolving and adapting to new circumstances brought, amongst others, by globalisation and international migration laws (cf. Puas 2021).

Although studies of local forms of adoption have been undertaken in different parts of the FSM, there remains a dearth of scholarly publications about *moumou*. This study explores how the adoption of Mortlockese children across borders and how it is challenged, hampered, and potentially denied by national legal frameworks. In this light, this paper is largely empirically driven and considers data collected by myself, an indigenous scholar of Mortlockese descent, and my ongoing efforts to convey an understanding of moumou children across international borders from a Mortlockese-Micronesian perspective.

To scrutinise possible differences between Mortlockese and Western attitudes towards adoption as illustrated



Source: Hofmann 2016: 38.

Figure 2: Map of Micronesia.

by the Compact, I start by explaining the concepts of family and moumou and its significance for Mortlockese cultural continuity. Building on that, I argue that *moumou* has many benefits to the islands' community and its diaspora as it connects its members by interlinking extended families not least by the exchange of goods and political support. As such, *moumou* has the propensity of maintaining Mortlockese islanders' solidarity for the purpose of continuity in a globalised world.

The Setting

The Mortlock Islands are located in the South of the State of Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). All are low-lying islands far away from the hub of economic activities within this Pacific Island region. The total population of the Mortlocks is around 10,500.[2] The Mortlocks region is divided into three subregions (Upper, Mid, and Lower) with eleven municipalities, each of which has its own constitution.

The FSM entered into a Compact of Free Association (commonly referred to as the 'Compact') which allows FSM and US citizens to migrate between the two countries freely without visas. Consequently, many FSM citizens began to set up their permanent homes in the US and over time formed a new diaspora. Yet, *moumou* in its culturally specific manner is as such not acceptable within the framework of the Compact of Free Association treaty. At the same time the FSM, having become a sovereign nation-state, was responsible for signing treaties in its own name. As a result, the FSM is expected to abide by international conventions or treaties it signed. Relevant to *moumou*, the FSM must abide by the "Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation" (1993) or the "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" and several of its "Optional Protocols." These conventions latter often pose a threat to *moumou* as they all too often and too quickly oppose the culturally specific adoption of children across national borders as 'child trafficking.'

Since the Compact, the extended families and clans (*ainang* in local vernacular, see further down) have established a global network beyond the Mortlock Islands, by virtue of the new diaspora in the US (and other places). Today, Mortlockese are scattered throughout the FSM, Guam, Hawai'i, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and continental US but also Japan and Australia. With the diaspora, tension arises between the concept of *moumou* and the Western concept of adoption. For example, to follow the legal requirement to protect the child, guardians must provide legal documents to relevant authorities for the purpose of establishing that children who accompany adults are not victims of human trafficking when traveling to the US from the FSM. This legal situation poses the interesting question whether (or not), and in which disguise *moumou* remains (or can remain) a part of Micronesian culture in the diaspora.

In this context, my ongoing research explores legal conditions the Mortlockese diasporic community must observe to ensure that the practice of moumou can potentially be recognized in US jurisdictions and aims to contribute to the literature on adoption in Oceania more broadly (e.g., Brady 1976; Silk 1980).

The Concept of *moumou*

To understand the socio-cultural significance of *moumou*, certain aspects of the Mortlockese concept of 'family' need to be addressed. First, Mortlockese people relate to each other through their clanship (*ainang*) system. Second, and this is crucial for understanding the culturally specific concept of moumou, there is no distinction between biological and social parents due to the specific allocation of duties, responsibilities, and obligations which members of the extended family share. For example, terms such as 'cousins', 'uncles' and 'aunts' do not exist. All cousins are either *pwwi* or *mongeai* depending on the gender of the subject person. In this classificatory kinship system aunts and uncles are called and ranked as *inai* and *semei*, just like his or her birth parents.

What is more, there is no common definition of 'a child' in the Mortlockese society, as each community perceives differently what a child is. In the social practice of moumou the phrase "nai moumou" refers to the cultural relationship between the moumou child and the adopting family. The adopting parents consider the adopted child as their own 'blood child', whether it is biologically related to them or not. Moreover, *moumou* is not restricted to only small children since adults can be adopted as well (which I describe below).

Mortlockese live in a closely-knit island community whereby everyone knows each other by first names. Within this expanded network, adoption is not a secret matter, but a display of family affinity, which is respected by the whole island community. If a child is adopted, the child must be weaned gradually from the biological family. While the child is weaning, it is expected that the couple or relative of the child to be adopted should give material needs as well as psychological support to the biological parents. The weaning of an adopted child needs to be determined by the biological parents to ensure the child is psychologically ready, with all the social support in place before the child can be given to the adopting parents. This is to facilitate a smooth transition in the transfer of the child before moumou takes effect. Once the child is judged as ready, the child is taken to his or her new home. However, this is not to say that the child is permanently severing ties with the biological family. The adopting family is free to visit the biological family when possible and maintaining relationships between the two families remains important to the child. This assists in developing the child's future security and self-esteem in growing up in the extended family system and in a close-knit island community where it is not possible to avoid each other. Such practice is considered as looking after 'the best interests of the child.'

Ultimately, the *moumou* child is cared for by the extended family but resides with the *moumou* parents. The *moumou* child knows the relatives (i.e., biological as well as adopted parents and relatives) and is free to wander between relatives' households. Yet, everyone knows who has primary care of the child. In the long run, however, *moumou* is about cutting the ties between the child and the biological parents to a certain extent as will be shown below.

Anthropologist Mac Marshall, who has conducted extensive research on Mortlockese communal life, indicates that there are three major reasons why moumou is so important in the Mortlockese society. Firstly, it reinforces family connections within the clanship system. Secondly, it fulfills the cultural expectation that every married couple should have at least one child. Thirdly, it enlarges the external network of the family system, which is a crucial aspect of sustaining life in a world of small islands (Marshall 2004).

In short, *moumou* has many benefits to the islands' community and its diaspora. It puts adoption at the heart of extended Mortlockese families in the Mortlocks and beyond and allows members of the extended family to assist when, for example, specific monetary needs arise, in the US and the FSM. *Moumou* is therefore about reproducing the Mortlockese value system for the purpose of continuity. This practice has benefits and challenges within the diaspora.

The benefits of *moumou*

Apeshakila aterenges ("to strengthen matrilineal family ties") refers to the reinforcement of family connection in the clanship system both domestically and in the diaspora. *Ririn famili* ("lashing families") is the creation of new family connections with a different clan for the purpose of expanding its power base and influence on other islands. The Mortlock Islands are a matrilineal society; the child inherits rights bestowed upon him or her by birth as a member of the mother's clan. Yet, parents and relatives of the biological father also recognize the child adopted to another clan outside the father's family. In so doing, it solidifies the connection between the clans of the biological parents (both of the mother's and the father's clan) especially if the child is the first born – locally referred to as *mwanichi* (male first-born with special standing in the extended family) or *finichi* (first-born female) (Goodenough 1978: 30-33). Put differently, *moumou* improves the influence and standing of both families within the community.

Pupulu monson epe eoor naur ("all married people will/shall have children") refers to the social expectation that every married couple should have at least one child, including those less fortunate who cannot produce children of their own. In the eyes of the community, the childless couple can finally start a real family on a firm footing. *Moumou* thus provides a social security benefit for the couple especially when they enter old age, and the adopted child is expected to look after them as the primary provider. *Tumun lon tong* ("caring lovingly") is the emotional connection based on love for the child and is often the reason for the adoption of a child by sisters and brothers or grandparents of the biological parents. *Echimwir* is the practice of adopting a female child to continue the matrilineal line when there are no other descendants. This means that adoption can confer rights of inheritance and continuity of the dying clan. *Shapan shaa* ("substituting/compensating blood") is a concept relating to restorative justice. It is a traditional term referring to the replacement of a child caused by someone else's conduct especially from unrelated families. For example, if a member of a family murdered a member of another family, the assassin's family would perform customary apology. The family of the victim would accept the apology and ask to adopt the culprit to replace the victim.[3] The court can also accept the outcome of both families' settlement. Naulap refers to when a child is adopted by a new partner of one of his adopted parents due to the death of one of the biological parents. *Ponnen pwipwi* is the concept of 'promised brother' and normally operates between best friends who are not from the same family or clan but where both families consider the other child as part of their own family. In circumstances where one child dies, the surviving promised brother's relationship to the other family continues.

Moreover, a new form of adoption known as *moumou towau* exemplifies how Mortlockese are adapting to globalisation. According to this new form, an academic named Paul (D'Arcy) from New Zealand of European ancestry, was adopted into a sub ainang of Sor on the island of Lukunor. There was no opposition to this adoption, but overwhelming support. All traditional requirements had been fulfilled, and Paul was briefed about them. The *sub ainang* awaited his arrival on Lukunor in person so that his adoption could be formally performed and ritualised. Paul (or Pol in local pronunciation) is now considered a member of the subclan and the whole ainang of Sor, not just on the specific island, but within the Sor diaspora. As a historian, Paul can access sacred knowledge pertaining to the family history as well as access to land to farm and harvest. Paul understands his obligation and duties as an adopted member of the subclan. However, it remained unclear whether the adoption is valid under the law. Many argued that it is valid because it complies with traditions as recognized by the national constitution. That is, the constitution recognizes customs and traditions of each island or group of islands based on the doctrine of cultural diversity of the FSM.

The challenges of *moumou*

Moumou is not only beneficial to the adopting family but can also cause problems such as rivalries between competing childless couples who want to adopt the same child. Social gossip sometimes arises and creates friction in the community, or eventually even leads to physical violence and social rupture in the extended family system. Relatives can get involved as well in order to protect their own family's reputation. Jealousy may also arise between the moumou child and the biological children of the adopting family. This can be seen in the distribution of properties where biological children may deny the adopted child their share of the inheritance. They would claim that the moumou child has no blood connection and therefore is not entitled to properties, even if the *moumou* child is customarily regarded as blood child to the adopting family. In one example, a man from Lukunor married a woman from a distant island. The wife already had a young child. The husband raised the child as his own. When the husband was on his deathbed, he explained how he wanted his property to be distributed and gave his adopted child a parcel of land. When the husband died the adopted child was told that he was not entitled to the land since he was only a moumou child. Fights broke out and finally the issue was settled by legal means in which the adopted child was successful. Other adopted children expressed their resentment for being adopted out in the moumou network. They often feel hurt as they think their biological parents do not want them.[4]

One of the most challenging dimensions of *moumou* arises when the adoption of children involves border crossing and as such encounters conflicting laws of different national jurisdictions as well as international conventions. The Compact, for example, has allowed many Micronesians to settle in the US as legal migrants. Like other immigrants before them, they brought with them their culture and ideologies about child welfare. Inherent in their ideological transplantation is the traditional practice of moumou, which remains an integral part of their Mortlockese identity. Traditional *moumou* however clashes with the US legal system. Here, I will turn to

the challenges of retaining Mortlockese *moumou* in a foreign environment such as the US, paying attention to a selected number of potential legal hurdles.

Moumou and the Compact of Free Association

The outline of *moumou* and related cultural concepts provided above indicates that it does not necessarily equate to the contemporary notion of the adoption of children in international law or across national jurisdictions. As noted earlier, historically, moumou is a practice that has been established between extended families within the clanship system. It is a practice that strengthened family connections as well as social relations in the island community and has familiar social footprints in relation to familial expectations, duties, and obligations with regard to care and other support. Hence, adoption is confined to known cultural processes to ensure the security or the best interest of the child within the inter-island clanship system. Although a child may be adopted inter-island, the child remains in the hands of all relatives within the clan's diaspora.

While *moumou* remains a common practice by Mortlockese in the 21st century, it was challenged when the FSM became a nation state in 1986 and the Compact was installed. The Compact allows islanders to set up permanent homes in the US; yet, as they migrate to the US, they are subject to the laws of the new state they live in. Family law in the US, for example, is a subject of the states' jurisdiction as is adoption. Consequently, it needs to be explored how the practice of moumou can co-exist with US family laws: is it ultimately possible for the Mortlockese to continue to practice moumou in the diaspora?

The closest equivalency of moumou in the Mortlock Islands in the US is the Western concept of adoption. Adoption in the Western sense is referred to as bringing a child into a specific legal relationship as one's own to give the child – be it of disadvantaged circumstances or an orphan – a new opportunity to experience family life. Adoption is then about protecting the child's welfare through legal instruments by non-biological parents (see Legal Information Institute 2022). This legal frame is problematic when applying to Mortlockese cultural practices of adoption. For example, traditionally, moumou is a practice that does not need legal recognition and enforcement.

Although the FSM has a constitution, it leaves family law to the member-states and municipal jurisdictions.[5] However, the national constitution acknowledges customary practices wherein court decisions shall be consistent with Micronesian cultures and traditions based on the social configuration of the FSM.[6] The Court system ensures that Micronesian customs and traditions are not compromised when decisions are made in accordance with the traditions of each state and municipality. *Moumou* is a traditional practice and as such is protected by the law.

To start with, the Mortlockese observe both traditional and legal forms of adoption despite the former not being recognised in the US, whereas the traditional practice prevails when people do not intend to stay in the US permanently. For example, Mortlockese who have relatives in the US would travel to adopt a child as arranged through the extended family network and, once in the US, social arrangements are made. To adhere to US laws, a biological parent would accompany the adopting parents back to the FSM, or else they must legally formalize the adoption for the relationship to be recognized by US authorities. This, the Mortlockese acknowledge, just as well as they understand the costs and benefits involved in the legal process.

The benefits, for example, are related to social security support, health, education, and insurance. These benefits can be obtained if the child is legally adopted. Nevertheless, the tension between the law and traditions is a challenge, and Mortlockese have become creative to continue the practice of moumou without offending the law. Supporting benefits by the American welfare system, for example, are collected by the biological parents, but handed over to the adopting parents (be they living in the US, too, or someplace else) if the adoption has not been legally formalized in the US.

However, there are also some cases of Micronesian children transported to the US under the pretense of adoption, but eventually serving as a source of income. For example, a Micronesian couple in the US contacted their relatives in Micronesia stating that they would like to adopt one of their children. The child was then transported to the US by the relative and given to the couple for adoption. It emerged later that the reasons for such an adoption was to increase the income of the adopting couple since the child becomes entitled to economic benefits under US laws. The issue becomes very complex in connection to the best interest of the child. For instance, the child remains an FSM citizen. He was transported to the US for his relatives' interests who are also FSM citizens but residing in the US. It is obvious that the best interest of the child was not considered since the primary purpose of his moumou was for economic interests of the adopting parents. Moreover, it became very difficult for other relatives of the adopted child to monitor his wellbeing due to the geographic distances involved. A further complication also arises in the case when the child wants to return to his biological parents but does not have the support of close relatives to provide the means to transport him back to the islands. The tyranny of distance plays a big role in undermining the best interest of the child.

The increasing movement of citizens between the FSM and US also means that inter-marriage and trafficking of children can become subject to intense scrutiny. Already there have been some cases of human trafficking, and some involved children. While earlier in the Compact, it was easy for children to accompany relatives to the US, US authorities tightened up the loopholes when it emerged that children can be abused while in the US. It now requires strict documentation of children being transported from the FSM to the US. That means the FSM authorities must provide evidence of children being transported with close relatives to ensure their safety and welfare are properly monitored. For example, there are cases where children were transported to the US without proper documentation and were forced to return to the FSM by US authorities.

Hence, by virtue of signing the Convention, the FSM citizens are required to adhere to US standards in family law when living in the US. At the same time, American influence on the Micronesian legal system led the FSM government to enact laws that ensure the protection of children especially when they are transported to US jurisdictions under the Compact.

Moumou and the Mortlockese diaspora – where to from here?

The Compact between the US and the Federated States of Micronesia has allowed Mortlockese islanders to travel far beyond their shores and to settle on US territories. Yet, traveling is not new to Micronesians as it has been part of their history as oceanic people for centuries. Traveling therefore is a historically grown cornerstone of Mortlockese identity and allows them to 'transport' cultural practices such as moumou across vast geographical spaces and to adapt to new circumstances over time, including US legal frameworks. To further serve the Chuukese diaspora in the US, while complying with the Compact and adhering to its own laws, the FSM will probably have to negotiate a bilateral treaty to protect the best interests of the child before transporting them to the US. As of now, *moumou* is a challenge to many authorities as it is transforming itself to suit new circumstances of the Micronesian communities in the US. For example, the family laws in the US are transparent but moumou in many instances continues to operate outside the law. The people of the Mortlocks are employing strategies to continue moumou without breaking US laws – or they make use of US laws for their own benefit.

To sum up, while *moumou* is a customary strategy used to perpetuate and reinforce the survivability of the extended family network, in the aftermath of independency and the Compact, the legal system now installed in the FSM is forcing *moumou* to become a legally formalized part of it instead of remaining a customary practice in its own right. Many claim that the legal system has the potential to destroy moumou as part of Micronesian culture as it might pursue the idea that the best interests of the extended family system is not as important as the best interests of the child. This becomes a crucial aspect of the Mortlockese diaspora as moumou so far is understood to safeguard Micronesian continuity and thus deserves to be explored further.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

[1] For first insights, see, Petersen 2009: 119-121; for an in-depth study, see Rauchholz 2009; for an example of a Mortlockese community, see Marshall 1976.

[2] Florensio Harper, the current senator of the Mortlocks, estimated the population of the Mortlocks as around thirteen thousand, excluding those in the diaspora (personal communication, spring 2022).

[3] Francis X. Hezel deals with this – for a Western reader rather curious mechanism – in his reflections about how to make sense of Micronesia (Hezel 2013: 148pp.).

[4] These examples show that more research on emotions and feelings of people concerned with adoption is needed as they are not necessarily in line with general ideas and imaginaries of moumou as an integral, but more importantly, undisputed part of Mortlockese society (cf. Rauchholz 2009).

[5] The Constitution of the FSM recognizes the family as the basic unit and so it is left to each island community to deal with family matters. However, where there are legal issues concerning custody of children between the parents of different jurisdictions, the law interferes to ensure that the best interest of the child is paramount.

[6] The social configuration and geographical principle refer to different customs in the Federated States of Micronesia. See the FSM Constitution Article XI, section 11.

Source: G. Puas.

Figure 3: Modern transnational adoption, Paul D'Arcy, from New Zealand as recognized by custom.

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BOOK REVIEW

"There is no place like home" Migration and cultural identity of the Sonsorolese, Micronesia (Walda-Mandel, S., 2016)

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For her monograph 'There is no place like home', Stephanie Walda-Mandel followed people from Sonsorol, one of four coral islands in the West of the Palauan archipelago, to Echang (Palau), Saipan and Guam (in the Mariana Islands) as well as to Portland and Salem in Oregon, US. Today, only a minority number of Sonsorolese still live on the islands while the Sonsorolese population is highly mobile and migrant communities are ever growing. The author describes how the Sonsorolese construct their identity and how they use elements of their 'cultural identity' in places with varying (physical, cultural and temporal) distance from their home island and thus in the context of, as Walda-Mandel claims, increasing external influences. Over the course of almost two years of conversing and living with Sonsorolese in their various communities, she collected an impressive amount of material revealing how Sonsorolese deal with multiple strings of identity, managing external conditions related to home-making practices in their new places of residence, and how time spent away from their island bears on them upon return. This study, which builds on the author's PhD thesis, is an ethnography of a rather 'typical' case of Pacific Islands mobility, with themes, however, that might become ever more pressing with increasing out-migration rates – be they due to economic, personal, (climate-changed induced) environmental, or other motifs.

The book is divided into ten thematic chapters; chapter eleven represents a list of her interlocutors. The introduction is followed by an outline of Walda-Mandel's research motivation, leading questions, and study design (chapter one). Chapter two provides a detailed ethnographic description of the island of Sonsorol and its people and history and closes with a reflection on the author's methodology and her role as anthropologist in the community. Chapter three sheds light on the paths and patterns of migrating Sonsorolese. In typical fashion to Micronesia, these are a combination of step- and chain-migration – people often start at close-by places such as municipal centres within the state, before venturing out to other island states with which (colonial) historic ties exist or to other oversea-places, where they usually take advantage of a broad network of previously migrated family. Chapters four and five expand on the theoretical background on identity construction in migration. While the former focuses on cultural, collective and ethnic identity, the latter expands on major concepts in migration scholarship (transnationalism, diaspora, nation), complemented by notions of home and belonging. The following chapters focus on the analysis of her empirical research. Chapter six lists a plenitude of (traditional) identity markers that the Sonsorolese carry along in the daily life to places they migrated to. Walda-Mandel reveals how Sonsorolese inhabit these new places and how church, sports and food become identity-defining dimensions that are activated in home-making processes without breaking up relationships with the home islands (chapter seven). While this allows for lively diasporic Sonsorolese communities, chapter eight puts a focus on education and language as challenges to 'typical' Sonsorolese identity, and sheds light on Sonsorolese' anxieties associated regarding the loss of 'culture'. Chapter nine draws on the two previous two chapters and discusses people's self-perception and their positioning in the residence societies. Walda-Mandel concludes her book by summarizing how "a new form of Sonsorolese culture" (p. 290) develops, one in which family, however, continues to form the anchor that balances frictions and amalgamated elements that the Sonsorolese encounter in the diaspora (p. 291) (chapter ten).

'There is no place like home' is a good testimony of the anthropological quest to ponder how local identities materialize in times where even the remotest islands expand into global life-worlds. Unfortunately, Walda-Mandel focuses

Source: Stephanie Walda-Mandel.

Figure 1: Children on Sonsorol waiting for the boat to arrive (photo from publication).

almost exclusively on 'classic' theoretical concepts in migration studies and thus potentially risks overemphasizing 'Western' views on migration. Her monograph would have certainly benefitted from an engagement with local Pacific ideas of mobility and place-making in (and beyond) Oceania in the chapters outlining the theoretical framework to the study. While she cites Pacific authors such as Lola Quan Bautista, Vilsoni Hereniko or Brij Lal as well as many others with decades worth of Pacific experience, relevant works remain mostly juxta-posed to the voices she collected. This makes it at times difficult for the reader to distinguish and put into relation (older or newer) academic discourses and local narratives. By comparing her wealth of ethnographic data with already existing works and the growing body of indigenous literature on the topic, Walda-Mandel could have attempted to develop alternative theoretical approaches to what it means to be Sonsorolese in the 21st century.

For example, the author states that for her informants, 'questions about their identity and their sense of home often were hard to answer' (p. 189). At a later point she resumes that this insecurity is driving them into a 'limbo state' (p. 254), coming to bear especially when people return home as outlined in the book's conclusion by one of her interlocuters: 'I am not the person I used to be when I was on the island' (p. 286). Yet, at the same time, Walda-Mandel reasons that Sonsorolese 'have their island on them at all times: An internalized home away from home' (p. 286). I wonder whether we – as Western educated scholars and despite our well-intended efforts to do otherwise – still adhere too much to our epistemology, fogging indigenous ways of navigating 'staying', 'moving' or 'returning' not as rivalling but as complementary dynamics.

In summary, the book's clear structure and delineated subchapters guide the reader through the complexities of Sonsorolese identity-making in the context of migration. With its wealth of original ethnographic material, enriched with local voices that are heard throughout the book by way of the many citations from Sonsorolese and other Palauan islanders, it is an excellent introduction to Pacific Studies as well as a convincing example of the appropriateness of multi-sited ethnography.

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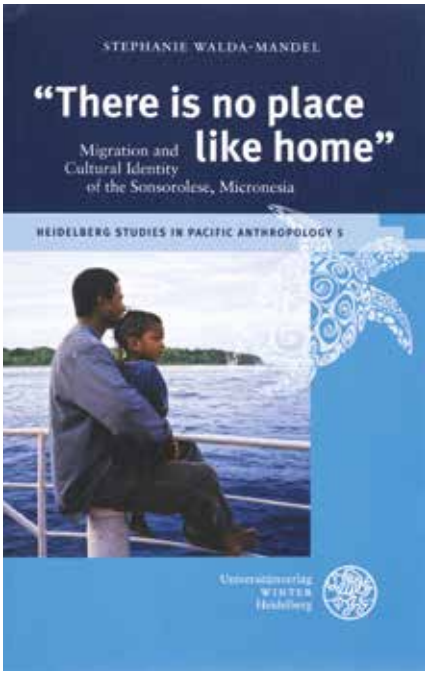

Source: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Figure 2: Cover sheet of the book publication

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BOOK REVIEW

An island world vanishes into the ocean (Piciocchi, A./ Angeli, A., 2017)

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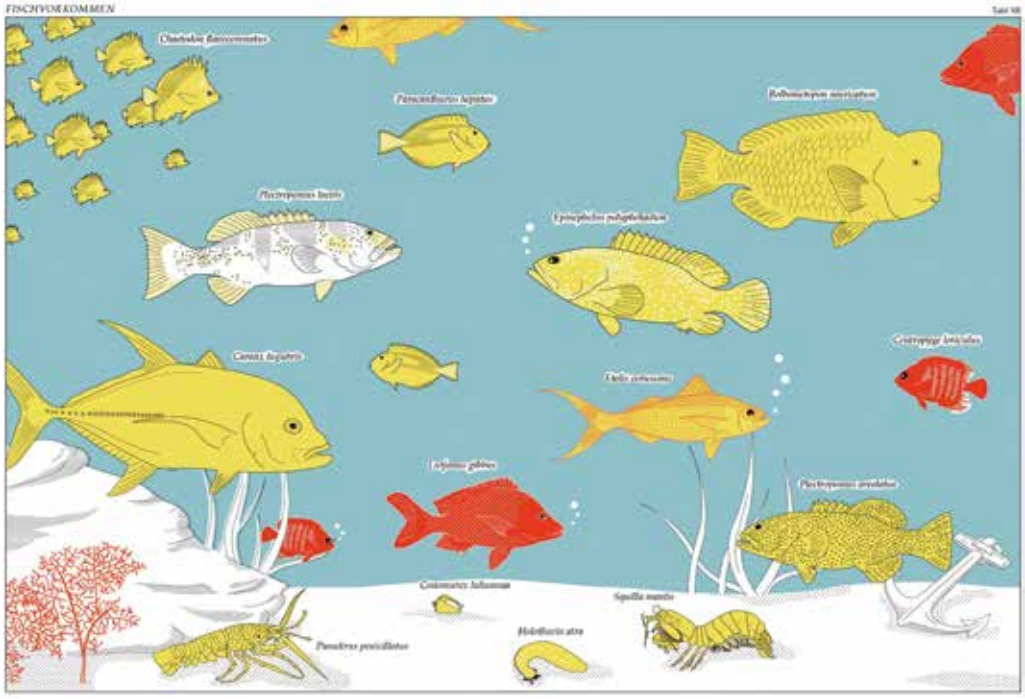
This book is a jewel! Anyone who appreciates books with a bibliophilic design and who also appreciates an artistically sophisticated layout and creative design will be delighted with this book. Already the hardcover contains beautiful colored pen and ink drawings of central elements that have their special meaning in the culture of the I-Kiribati – as the inhabitants of the East Micronesian island nation of Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas) call themselves. Practically every page of this book is lavishly graphically designed; for each page of this book, the two authors have carefully considered what and how to depict each culturally significant element, which should replace many explanatory words and at the same time be so meaningful to provide a comprehensive overview and insight into the (traditional) culture of this island people.

The two authors from Brescia and Milan – Alice Piciocchi, who is responsible for the texts, and her life partner, the architect Andrea Angeli, who implemented the graphic design – have obviously thought about how best to present this book, previously published in Italian in 2016. The question was how to present to a readership the things that are important to the lives of an island population in a way that clarifies their importance, but also connections that are anchored in a larger ecological, even cosmological context, far beyond their practical use? They found the answer in graphic representations inspired by the popular infographic diagrams and graphs that are increasingly used today to explain complex relationships in an image-fixated world. They are a mixture of illustration and table, with cartoon-like and even comic-strip elements, and these are found together with pictograms and elements from statistical representation (e.g. pie charts), which amalgamate with painterly, atmospheric settings. The delicate lines of Andrea Angeli's pen-and-ink drawings do not rival the sparing use of coloration. Rather, they form a unity that runs through the book like a common thread, taking the viewer on a journey in which each individual page represents a "cliffhanger" and one is already eager to see what the next page might show and explain.

The two authors describe the chapters devoted to the respective topics as "illustrated chronicles" with which they attempt to present the lifeworld of the I-Kiribati and "...a summary of the ingredients that make up the binder we call belonging" in order to ultimately generate an image: "To transform those dots on the map into something more" (cf p.11). The two Italian authors succeed in this in an extraordinary way. Readers are encouraged to read this book in a circular manner, so that the things mentioned at the end of the book in turn lead to the beginning, thus completing a contextual coherent circle. Each of these illustrated chronicles has portions of text and directly corresponding portions of images, which are panels that visualize the essential elements of practices, rituals, crafts, everyday activities, symbols, and much more. Each of these panels would be worth describing here separately in detail, and only some of the topics can be listed here: traditional healing methods and the plants used for them, the role of religion and the church(es) on Kiribati, the structure and social arrangement of a traditional meeting house called a mameaba, the buildings of a homestead and the location of the houses of a village in relation to each other, fishing methods, traditional seafaring and navigation methods, the food and its cultivation and processing methods, the role of traditional pre-Christian beliefs, rules of conduct for dealing with guests as well as challenges of everyday life, traditional customs and cultural practices such as dances, as well as traditional expectations and the influences of modernity, which lead to disruptions and reorientations. Each of these panels provides additional insights and unanticipated information. For example, not only are the fish that are important for the islanders' diet listed, but also the depth of the sea at which each is found and therefore must be captured using different fishing methods. How can you represent a traditional dance in a pictorial representation? By drawing in longitudinal and transverse axes as position and pivot points, by means of arrows outlining the individual movement sequences, and by cartouche-like inserts at the edges, even head and eye movements are comprehensibly illustrated. Playing with inclusive and



Source: https://sieveking-verlag.de.

Figure 1: Illustration from the publication

exclusive listings makes it possible to illustrate what does and does not exist in Kiribati: for example, there is a single escalator in a half-finished shopping mall in Bairiki, but there is no elevator on any of the 33 islands.

The importance of distances between islands is thematized, as is the popularity of the game of bingo. Practices and behaviors when it comes to averting misfortune are graphically transposed, as are the formative, structuring events in people's lives: birth, reaching adulthood, interpersonal matters, marriage and death. In the texts, personal incidents and encounters that happened to the two traveling Italians on the spot are recounted. Each of them is the occasion for taking up a specific aspect of the life of the I-Kiribati. Many of the illustrations also focus on the changes that the islanders have undergone and are undergoing in the past and present. An extensive glossary, also illustrated, as well as a chronological table and a select bibliography complete the chronicle chapters.

This book is one of the finest books on Oceania that has found publication in recent years. It is surprising that, in addition to the German-language edition, the same Munich publisher is responsible for the English-language edition reviewed here. The Sieveking publishing house is to be congratulated emphatically for the extremely affectionate realization of this book project. The ambitious publishing team has succeeded in creating something special with this book. As a reader and reviewer of this book, I found myself wishing I could be on site to experience, inquire about, and try things out for myself. Although not primarily conceived as a scholarly book, it offers so much detail about the lives of the I-Kiribati that it generates added value for anyone interested in Oceania and brings together many different and complex topics in a clear and easily accessible way.

This book by the two Italian authors describes the culture of the people of Kiribati with great interest, respect and, yes, affection. As the title suggests, the two authors are concerned with taking stock of a world that may not be with us before long. Whether due to a climate-induced or a work-induced forced exodus, this snapshot is both a balance sheet and a warning of what could be lost if a culture is subjected to dramatic change. Piciocchi and Angeli leave open the question of whether this will happen.

In any case, this book deserves to be widely read.

Bibliographic information: Piciocchi, Alice/ Angeli, Andrea: Kiribati. An island world vanishes into the ocean (dt. Eine Inselwelt versinkt im Pazifik). Munich 2017: Sieveking, 144 pp., over 120 illustrations, hardcover, 31,50 US$ (29,10 Euro), English edition: ISBN 978-3-944874-77-7; German edition: ISBN 978-3-944874-74-6

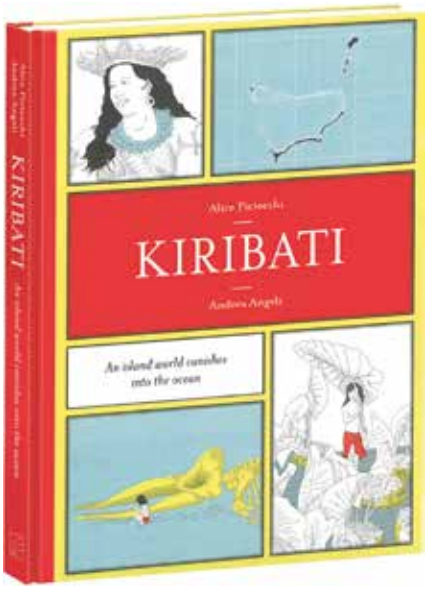


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Figure 2: Cover sheet of the book publication

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PACIFIC GEOGRAPHIES' PHOTOS

Impressions from a fieldtrip to Vanuatu in the frame of a Horizon 2020 RISE project

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Figure 1: Principal and secondary school teachers of Tafea secondary school, Tanna island.

Figure 2: Kava preparation in the village of Imaki, Tanna island.

Figure 3: Market in the village of Lenakel, Tanna island.

Figure 4: Students working in the garden in the frame of agriculture lessons, Montmartre secondary school, Efate island.

Figure 5: Small school garden at Ulei secondary school, Efate island.

Figure 6: Interview with a teacher at Tafea secondary school, Tanna island.