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Bwebwenato*: A conversation about the culture and music of the *riṂajeḷ

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss ways of teaching and connecting with *riṂajeḷ* (Marshallese people) students and communities as a *ripelle* (non-*riṂajeḷ*) music educator. Drawing from networking and face-to-face encounters (Tuhiwai Smith 2008) with culture bearers, musicians, and community leaders to inform my research, I explore songs and dances that *riṂajeḷ* students in my town have taught me over a decade of relationship building and subsequent ethnographic research in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). I conclude with practical applications for the music classroom that center deep contextual understanding of *riṂajeḷ* culture and reciprocity.

Keywords: *music education, Marshallese, Micronesia, Oceania,* riṂajeḷ

A few years ago, my school welcomed a new student from an outer island in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). The student came to us with limited spoken English or written kajin Ṃajeḷ[1] *(Marshallese language) proficiency. In time, my colleagues and I learned that the student had suffered through some highly traumatic experiences before arriving in the USA and had engaged in limited schooling in the islands. The student was quiet and reserved, and oftentimes defiant, but when they came to my classroom they would dance along in music class and hum even when they could not sing the words.*

Concerned about the student, I reached out to educators in Majuro, who informed me that the lives of riMajel *(Marshallese people) in the outer islands is significantly different than the lives of* riṂajeḷ *in Majuro, Kwajalein, Ebeye, or stateside. Many parts of the outer islands are still living in the culture and lifestyle of subsistence communities. Life is much slower, less regimented, and scheduled than is expected in Western culture, even when compared to other similar Micronesian cultures or large population centers for* riṂajeḷ *around the world. For*

students arriving in the USA, rigid class schedules and the expectation to remain in a specific place for a long time can be challenging.

I had struggled with how to help this student for months until I started to understand their situation more. Around that time, I had started studying kajin Ṃajeḷ *to aid in my planned travels to Majuro, RMI, and I began to use the student's language when I could to communicate. The first time I said "*jutak" *instead of "stand up," the student looked shocked for a moment, and then stood up. It was even more surprising for them when we were done, and I said "*jijet" *instead of "sit down." I did not single the student out when I did this but used the instructions for the whole class, taking a moment to teach everyone in the class what the words meant so all students got a moment of cultural immersion. After that instance, I used greetings in* kajin Ṃajeḷ *and attempted simple questions such as "*Ej et mour?" *The student began entering my class immediately instead of waiting at my door debating whether they should enter, and they stopped leaving prematurely.*

While the student's change in behavior was certainly not just a result of my teaching or of music class, this riMajel *student helped me to deepen my understanding of an important aspect of education: when we center the cultures of our students, we can cultivate a sense of belonging in the classroom. I also realized that over a decade of relationship-building with* riMajel *students, families, and educators, I had been granted access to knowledge that not everyone had, and that I should share, with permission, what I had been taught.*

Introduction

For most of my educational career, I have worked in the school with the highest diversity in my Northwest city. Coming from a family that traces its cultural heritage back to European colonizers in Virginia around 1720 and growing up in a culture that celebrates and amplifies my own cultural identity, it has been difficult to fully grasp and understand the complexities of my students' backgrounds. Furthermore, learning to be a musician and educator in a system that is fully entrenched in and driven by Eurocentric concepts of musical excellence and pedagogy (Banks 2003), "...major bastions of Western elitism" (Tuhiwai Smith 2008, 129), has led to a struggle to understand the complexities of other musics. I have had to work to identify and continue to challenge and overcome my own internal music biases, such as the primacy of equal temperament, the importance of written musical traditions, Western theory, and the concept of "correct" singing techniques and voice. Having experimented with utilizing Western pedagogies such as Orff, Kodály, and Dalcroze, it quickly became obvious that the best version of my classroom was one that was flexible, adaptable, and reflected diverse cultural concepts of singing, instrumental

performance, movement, creation, and connection. Orff, Kodály, and Dalcroze do well at connecting my students to Western musical ideas and concepts but struggle to help with performance practice in non-Western styles or to enable my students to connect Western music with their own musical experiences. As Dr. Latasha Thomas-Durrell (2021) states:

> Involvement in music instruction helps people recognize patterns, navigate difficult life circumstances, and access feelings... but it also hinders or prevents people's ability to embrace musical knowledge outside accepted education curriculum… Many students enter school music with rich musical heritages...but suffer trauma from having their already-present musical identities erased by an insistence upon ideologies lacking connection with their backgrounds. (111–19)

It has become my ethical responsibility to help my students connect with and express their own musical ideas in ways that celebrate what they already know and support how they learn.

The primary purpose of this research was to examine cultural and historical context as well as ideas for teaching music to Micronesian students with a particular emphasis on *riṂajeḷ* culture. While every Micronesian culture is unique, some cultural tenets are echoed across most of the islands, particularly the importance of lineage, interpersonal connection, and the place of music and art within life and culture (Hau'ofa 1985). The largest Multilingual Learner (MLL) population at my school is *riṂajeḷ*, and my desire to create better, more communal, musical connections with them led me to research and write this paper. In this paper, I explore my struggles and successes teaching and connecting to *riṂajeḷ* students and communities as a *ripelle* (non-*riṂajeḷ*) music educator. Drawing from songs and dances that *riṂajeḷ* students in my town have taught me and subsequent ethnographic research in Majuro, RMI, I discuss relationship-based and inclusive music education practices, and practical applications for the music classroom.

The title of this paper references the *riṂajeḷ* concept of *bwebwenato,* a type of cultural conversation held among the *riṂajeḷ* which emphasizes an open exchange of ideas. I hope that this paper will inspire other educators to begin their own *bwebwenato*.

Methodology

The primary questions I originally sought to answer with this research were, "What examples of music can I use to better connect with my *riṂajeḷ* students?" and "What are the important cultural and historical considerations for me when sharing this music with *all* my students?" I began my research drawing from a decade of *networking* (Tuhiwai Smith 2008, 156–57) with the *riṂajeḷ* community of my school, followed by a 10-day ethnographic study to Majuro, RMI in 2023 in which I met with cultural leaders, musicians, educators, and government officials to discuss culture, music, dance, language, and history (n = 19). Permission to interview and share data was gained through written and verbal consent.

My interviews were conducted assuming I would receive my answers from specific people: musicians would answer me about music and cultural leaders about culture. This was the first challenge to my notions as a researcher. Based on my cultural lens, I assumed that knowledge of music and culture was understood and transmitted separately and that individuals would have different knowledge categorized by their own personal and lived experiences. I learned quickly on my trip that art and music are intrinsically integrated within *riṂajeḷ* culture and that everyone has ways to answer both questions. I soon realized that an important question to ask was, "What do I need to know?" This question allowed the interviewees to lead the discussion, drawing from their specific knowledge of their home and community instead of trying to connect their answers to my way of thinking. In the end, my research questions had morphed into: "What do I need to know?" "What cultural concepts, including music, language, and norms, should I be aware of to reach out to my *riṂajeḷ* students?" and "How do cultural, historical, and geographical contexts affect how students can understand, connect with, and transmit music of all types?"

As I am not affiliated with a university, I did not have the means of seeking approval from a research ethics board. To help maintain high ethical standards, I had to be aware of my own possible internal biases born from my sole immersion in a Western educational and research system. Drawing on over a decade of connection and conversations within the *riṂajeḷ* community of my school, I had learned the importance of relationships in the type of research I was attempting. I had also learned about the distrust of ethnographers amongst

Indigenous communities from my connections to the Zimbabwean music community, and the need for assurances of protection and reciprocity in research. To this end, I worked to ensure an ethical approach to my research that was informed by *riṂajeḷ* values, principles, and ethics and grounded in the diversity of the *riṂajel* diaspora. I drew upon principles similar to those outlined in the Wholistic Indigenous Research Framework by Fournier et al. (2023), specifically, the s*pirituality* and *Indigenous research policies* aspects of the framework (334–37); and what Linda Tuiwahi Smith (2008) describes as a *networking* approach to research (156–57). I didn't intentionally draw on these ethical models when I began; I had not heard of them. However, the models do align with what I had already been told to do by my community over the decade of relationship building in which I had engaged.

I began by meeting with members of my immediate school community by initiating face-to-face encounters (Tuhiwai Smith 2008) with parents, students, and neighborhood elders, to seek advice on what to look for and do while I was in Majuro. Face-to-face encounters are "about checking out an individual's credentials, not just their political credentials, but their personalities and spirit" (Tuhiwai Smith 2008, 156–57). Next, I broadened from my local community base to include two highly respected *riṂajeḷ* educators from my district who met with me and gave advice on where to go once I arrived in Majuro: who to talk with, what questions I should be asking, and how to interact and build relationships. Upon arrival to Majuro, I met with several locals, both *riṂajeḷ* and *ripelle*, who directed me to others they felt I should meet. Once again, I was placed in the face-to-face encounter and was expected to articulate my purpose and position myself in the minds of the people with whom I was speaking. When discussing music, I was pointed toward culture bearers and well-respected DJs in Majuro, and a contributor to the Alele Museum and noted expert on *roro* (*riṂajeḷ* chant). For the educational aspects of my research, I was told to meet with professors and faculty at College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) and members of the Customary Law and Language Commission (CLLC), including a linguist. I also visited both the Majuro Cooperative School (Co-op), a private, secular school in Delap, and the

public Rairok Elementary School in Rairok.[2] Before visiting, I liaised with the principals of both schools via email.

It was in this initial networking that I experienced what Tuiwahi Smith (2008) describes as *protecting* (158). Interestingly, it was primarily with a *ripelle* in Majuro that the *protecting* aspect was the most evident. This informant was highly suspicious of my motives in wanting to learn more about the music and traditions of the *riṂajeḷ,* and it took a long time to convince them that I was also concerned with safeguarding cultural heritage. As a sign of reciprocity (Fournier et al. 2023; Prest et al. 2021; Tuhiwai Smith 2008), I shared my findings and recordings with the participants of my study to ensure that the information was accurate and properly attributed. It is my hope that the information from this study will benefit the community in two important ways: information is documented and stored so that the people of Majuro may easily access the information. Further, information will be dispersed in a protected format for the use of other educators working with *riṂajeḷ* students. Working towards reciprocity, it was important for me to share the information that I had gathered respectfully, in the hope that it would help better the educational outcomes and community engagement among *riṂajeḷ* families in the United States of America. This was a common request from the people with whom I spoke.

Micronesia: A General Outline

For many *riṂajeḷ*, the history and location of their community is deeply interwoven into their culture. When I was speaking with culture bearers and educators on the islands, they would discuss any modern issues and culture through the historical context of the islands. For this reason, I include a substantial section on historical, cultural, and language context.

Micronesia Layout and History

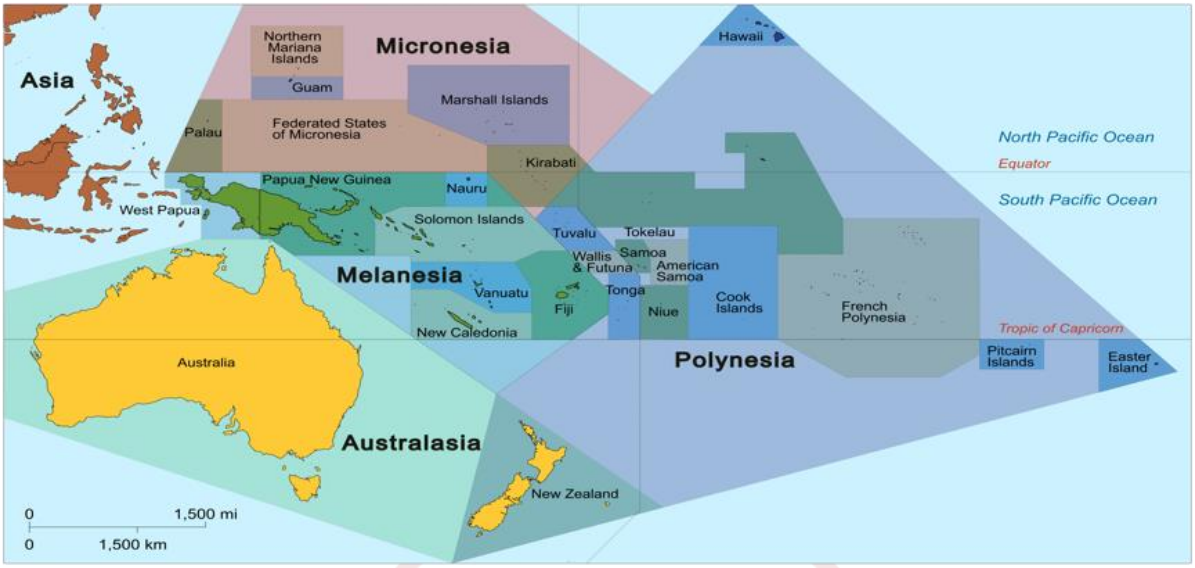

Figure 1: Political map of Oceania (Tintazul 2014). Map of Oceania based on the United Nations geoscheme M49 coding classification, devised by the United Nations Statistics Division. Copyright https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0.

Micronesia is a region of islands and atolls primarily in northwestern Oceania, spanning from Palau in the west to Kiribati in the east and as far north as Wake Island and the Northern Marianas. There are four primary island groups in Micronesia, including the Caroline Islands, Gilbert Islands, Marianas Islands, and RMI, as well as Wake Atoll and the island of Nauru. RMI is in the furthest northeast part of the region, just north of Kiribati. Micronesia was settled in two main migrations of the Austronesian people with long-term settlement beginning first in Palau and the Marianas Islands (Matisoo-Smith 2015). Eastern Micronesia was not settled until much later as people sailed north from Eastern Melanesia and west into the Polynesian Triangle.

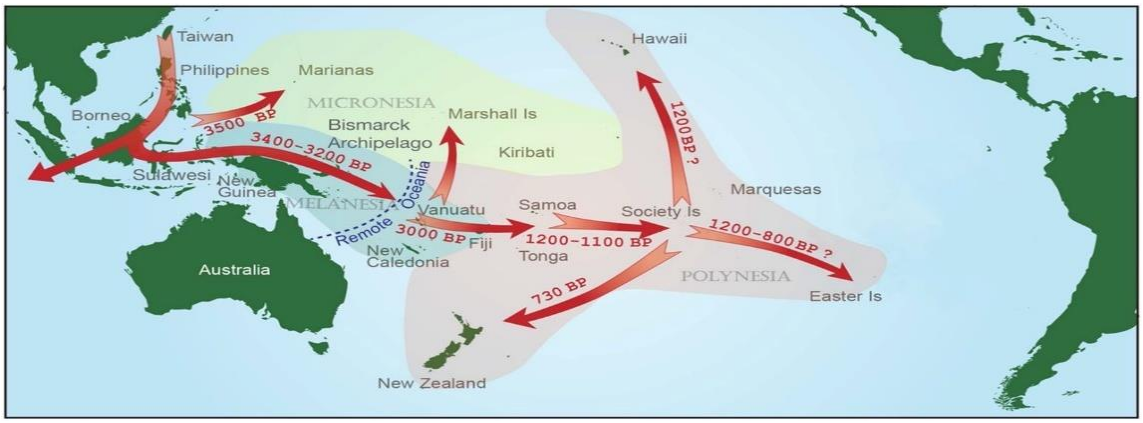

Figure 2: Map of Austronesian migration into Oceania (Matisoo-Smith 2015). Copyright 2015 by Elsevier Science and Technology Journals. Reprinted with permission.

RMI Layout and History

RMI is a series of 29 coral atolls and five major islands located across 750,000 square miles of ocean in Northeast Micronesia, just north of Kiribati and the equator between 4° to 19° latitude north and 160° to 175° longitude east (Alele Museum 2023). This area was renamed RMI in 1767 after the English explorer Captain John Marshall by colonial powers.[3] The islands and atolls are divided into two roughly parallel archipelagos known as *Ralik* (sunset) in the west and *Ratak* (sunrise) in the east (see Figure 3 for a map of the islands).

Majuro (see Figure 4) is one of the most populated atolls in RMI and the most connected to Western culture. Kwajalein is in *Ralik* and is the second most populated atoll, with a little under half the number of residents as Majuro. The outer islands, ones not located in Majuro or Kwajalein, are often sparsely populated and more traditional, with the largest population on an outer island only around one-tenth of Kwajalein.

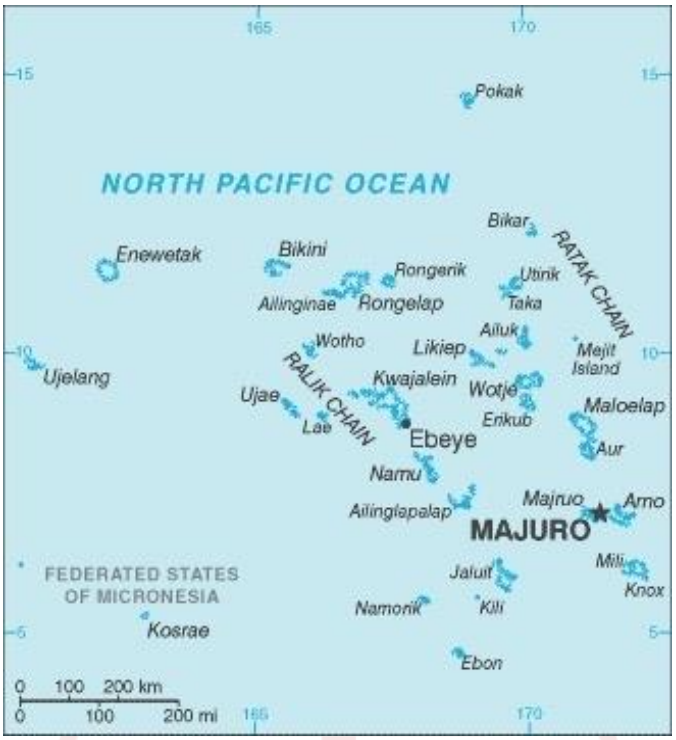

Figure 3: Map of RMI (Central Intelligence Agency 2024). https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/marshall-islands/map/. In the public domain.

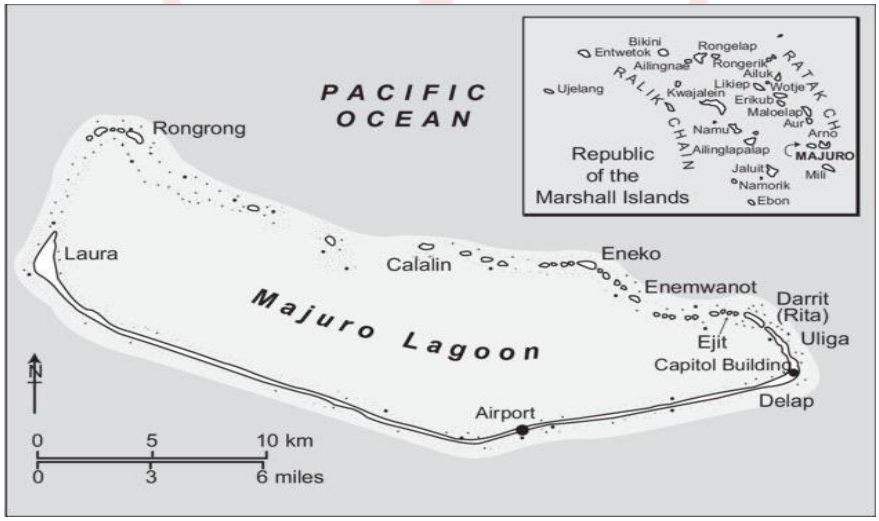

Figure 4: Map of Majuro (Royle 1999). Reproduced with written consent of the original author.

Major settlement of RMI began with Austronesian movement into Eastern Micronesia traveling north out of Vanuatu in Melanesia (see Figure 2) (Matisoo-Smith 2015). Spanish explorers first came into the region of RMI around 1526, and the islands were later colonized in 1592 (Alele Museum 2023). Following the Spanish occupation of RMI, control of the islands was ceded without the input of the *riṂajeḷ* to the Germans in 1884, and eventually, the islands were attacked and occupied by the Japanese during World War II beginning in 1914 (Central Intelligence Agency 2024). After the war, the USA was tasked by the United Nations with the rebuilding and management of RMI when Micronesia was reorganized into the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The TTPI era extended from 1947 to 1996, during which time the area was treated as a de facto territory of the USA. At this time, the USA Navy built a base on Kwajalein Atoll and developed nuclear testing sites on the Bikini and Enewetak Atolls. Bikinians were relocated from their atoll in 1946 before the administration of the TTPI to allow the USA to run nuclear tests. In total, 23 nuclear tests were conducted in Bikini over the following 12 years, yielding a total combined fission payload of 42.2 megatons (over 100 times the yield used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki together) (Diehl and Moltz 2008). Following testing, attempts were made in the 1970s to relocate Bikinians to their homes, but high levels of radioactive material were discovered in the groundwater, food sources, and people, forcing re-evacuation in 1980. Enewetak Atoll was subjected to 23 test bombings, including Operation Ivy, which dropped the first hydrogen bomb codenamed *Mike*. In 1979, RMI broke from much of the Congress of Micronesia to become a self-governing sovereignty, ratifying the Compact of Free Association (COFA), which the *riṂajeḷ* legislature[4] signed into action in 1986 (Marshall Islands 2012). As members of COFA, *riṂajeḷ* have free movement into and around the USA without the need for a visa or green card, which gives them a unique standing in the country. *riṂajeḷ* are not considered citizens, immigrants, or refugees and have no specific legal standing within the USA outside COFA. This history of occupation and colonization has made many within the *riṂajeḷ* communities, particularly in the islands, distrustful of *ripelle* and uncomfortable with sharing much of *riṂajeḷ* culture. This distrust is typically not clear in everyday interactions as *kautej* (the culture of respect) creates a certain expectation for

interactions, particularly with people in authority, but *riṂajeḷ* will always reserve a part of their identity solely for their community. Understanding the history of colonization creates a context for interactions with the community.

Micronesian Languages

The history of colonization in Oceania caused much damage to Indigenous culture, particularly in terms of language loss. This language loss is most prevalent in areas where there were colonizer settlements (Eames 2019). Micronesian languages are grouped into dialect chains that are relatively intelligible within a close range of islands but mutually unintelligible[5] outside that close range (Ellis 2007, 1). From a practical educational standpoint with Micronesian students, mutual unintelligibility means that educators cannot easily connect to students from across Micronesia with language, and students cannot necessarily understand each other even if they were to arrive from the same islands.[6]

kajin Ṃajeḷ.[7] Of the *riṂajeḷ* students entering my school, those coming from the outer islands will be primarily fluent in *kajin Ṃajeḷ*. In contrast, students from Majuro or Kwajalein will have a range of experience with English, from very little to conversational. Marson Ralpho, language specialist at CMI, suggested that many Marshallese students may have no English fluency until high school despite the desire for a bilingual educational system (M. Ralpho, personal communication, April 4, 2023). Marson's assertion was echoed by Desmond Doulatram, a liberal arts professor at CMI, in a separate interview (D. Doulatram, personal communication, April 4, 2023). Students who attend private schools, particularly ones like the Co-op in Majuro that have a large *ripelle* teaching force, tend to be more conversational in English than students who attend the public schools, even on Majuro and Kwajalein. Meanwhile, students born in the USA will be fluent in English and still conversational in *kajin Ṃajeḷ.*

The remoteness and size of RMI means that this location was not ideal for new settlements in most cases, but it was an excellent region for exploitation colonization.[8] The exploitation of *riṂajeḷ* labor to harvest materials for copra (the dried white meat of coconut which is then pressed to make oil) and the large, calm, lagoons of places like Majuro and Kwajalein meant that ships could sail through and load materials without the need to stay in

the area, all the while spreading Western ideas and religion. This is part of the reason that *kajin Ṃajeḷ* has managed to maintain much of its traditional words and sounds, with new vocabulary added as loan words.[9]

riṂajeḷ Bwij and Ancestral Lands

riṂajeḷ are defined by the land of their ancestors and their *bwij* (literally lineage, family, tribe). The *bwij* is made up of a collection of clans and closely related families headed by a matriarch with the assistance of the *aḷap* (lineage head), an advisor from the matriarch's family. The matriarch is the oldest female member of the primary family within the *bwij,* and all land and decisions pass through her. If this person passes away, land ownership passes to the next female in line, even if this person is very young.[10]

As important as the wider tribal and linguistic systems Micronesians are born into is the ancestral location of their birth: "the sense for place is the attachment to the physical locality in which one's ancestors lived and died and in which one lives" (Hau'ofa 1985, 157). Ancestral land is therefore deeply ingrained into the identity of the *riṂajeḷ*. Land itself is of such importance that no land is owned on the islands outside the *bwij,* and anyone, including public services, wishing to build on the land or do work must first gain the permission of the matriarch. This is evident in how the islands are divided. As an example, Majuro is an atoll that is made up of the ancestral lands of the *bwij,* which could be anything from connected land in the primary island to one of the disconnected islets. The various *bukwōn* (village groups such as Rita, Uliga, Rairok, etc., see Figure 4) are established on these ancestral lands.

For families living in the USA, these lineage lines and ancestral lands act as an anchor connecting them back to their traditions and cultures. However, disconnection from the land and traditions of the islands has begun to build a division between the islands and the diaspora. Many students born in the USA may have never seen their ancestral land and can be disconnected from the *bwij* entirely outside of emails, calls, and the occasional visit. The connection to *bwij* can be further complicated in the USA by the communities formed between *riṂajeḷ* in neighborhoods, schools, and particularly churches. While these groups do not constitute a *bwij*, as they are not always related clans and families, they are deeply

important to the sense of self of *riḶajeḷ* students. This is my church, this is my neighborhood, and this is my school (personal communication, M. Bilimon, April 15, 2023).

Relationships

Like many people in Micronesia, *riḶajeḷ* place a high value on relationships, community, and loyalty (Hau'ofa 1985, 156). What is often called "Island Time" by *ripelle*, a misconception that time is irrelevant to people from island nations, is an obvious expression of this concept. "Island Time" is used in many ways but is most often defined as a loose sense of time or "...time moving at a slower pace" (Oroz 2022, 9), which can be seen as a disregard for Western ideals of punctuality. However, the term "Island Time" must be problematized considering its historical use "...in ambiguous discourses of naturalisation, exoticisation, and alienation" (Oroz 2022, 14). Especially when this term is used to speak of islanders in the diaspora, it is meant to point out ways that they are not conforming to Western concepts and cultures. When I have heard frustration with "Island Time" voiced by other *ripelle*, it is always from the angle of inconvenience to themselves or others and frustration at the lack of conformity to the Western cultural norm (Oroz 2022, 15). Ultimately, Micronesian people value the primacy of relationship and would rather take the time to let a conversation reach its natural end than risk offending or damaging a relationship in favor of another future obligation that could be rescheduled (L. Quinata, personal communication, July 12, 2022).[11]

The central nature of relationships and community extends into the structures of families, extended families, and larger group dynamics. Everyone within the community is responsible for the care of all others in the community, particularly the young, infirm, and elderly (Hau'ofa 1985). Lazaro Taitano Quinata and Kirk Johnson (2022) state, "...children [are] taught from a young age to think of those in the community as extensions of one's immediate family" (48). It is not unusual for Micronesian children to have many "Aunties" or "Uncles" (often with no direct relationship)[12] who are raising them along with their primary caregivers/guardians. This looseness of terminology can confuse Westerners who are not familiar with the familial structure and cause problems for Western educators and education systems.[13] Understanding how a student's communities are structured can help

educators identify which children have direct connections to others, who can help educators understand the specific musical and dance traditions of their students (which often differ by many factors including family, location, community, and even church), and who may be, culturally speaking, already recognized as leaders.

Kautej: Cultural Respect

In my interviews with participants in RMI, I learned that quietness for the *riṂajeḷ* is seen as a display of respect, and it can be difficult for children to even look at the faces of elders and people of authority because this is often taught as disrespectful. This quietness can sometimes be interpreted as shyness, lack of understanding, or disrespect when viewed through a Western lens. However, when asked about this concept, Desmond Doulatram said, "I think there's a culture of silence in the Marshall Islands where we tend to be reserved and are taught to be humble. Hence the shyness, because we don't want to be perceived as arrogant or taken as showoffs" (Desmond Doulatram, personal communication, April 30, 2023). This humility, which comes from the concept of *kautej,* can sometimes act as a barrier for *riṂajeḷ* in schools in the USA, particularly those coming from more traditional families or the outer islands. It is not unusual for students to avoid answering questions when asked, not because of a lack of understanding but because of a worry about standing out. Often, students who volunteer to answer questions first become the spokesperson for the whole group.[14] This worry of being a show-off can often be easily exacerbated by the presence of elders or *ripelle,* whom *riṂajeḷ* children can often find intimidating. Amata Kabua, the first president of RMI, spoke on this observation when he wrote:

> In ancient days, taciturnity seemly characterized the mode of life and affairs of the people and state under a dominion. Although normal trends of conversing within the members of families prevailed, at times it is inhibited by the presence of the elders, the heads of *bwij* and more so when a sense of no confidence is felt by the common membership. The untrained and inexperienced segments of the families would turn silent for the reason of their limited purview, particularly when the exchange of views would turn into a discussion of substantive and important matters and issues. (Kabua 1993, 24)

While it is important and encouraged by *riḶajeḷ* educators in RMI and the USA to help students find their voice and be confident with it, it is also important to be careful in how this is done to not make students more withdrawn. It is only by developing a rapport with students that they will feel confident in sharing their ideas openly. This rapport is developed through a concerted effort by the teacher to reach out to students in a place where they are comfortable (Hamal 2020).

riḶajeḷ **Music and Dance**

Music in RMI is deeply ingrained into everyday life. Music is often present in celebrations and social gatherings, despite what time it is or who else is around.[15] Many *riḶajeḷ* play various instruments, particularly the ukulele, and most people sing and dance in diverse situations. Depending on the denomination, dance is often built into the service at church, and attendees will form dance groups with congregations participating, including students in early elementary school. *riḶajeḷ* dance groups will often perform in their community at special events such as parties, celebrations, and holidays.

Traditional *riḶajeḷ* music grew primarily from *roro* (D. Kramer, personal communication, April 4, 2023). The *roro* were traditionally used as a means of sharing important information about survival, such as when to plant, how and where to fish, and navigation:

> In fact, all of the empirical knowledge and cultural philosophies, whether in the art of navigation, weather forecast, astrology, medicine, including common sense and rule of life itself, were recorded in chants memorized and passed down to the descending generations" (Kabua 1993, 21).

Manutil Lōkot, *Chant of Lejoñjon*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqv_sv69pzo

There are also *roro* for traditional stories, the five long *roro* which convey important information surrounding aspects of the interpersonal community, including information surrounding reciprocity, lineage, and life (F. Langinbo, personal communication, April 10, 2023).

Lijon Eknilang, *Traditional Marshallese Navigation Chant*, https://vimeo.com/109300280

While these *roro* are, in essence, the same story across the islands, they are often told with different emphasis or landmarks based on the *ri-bwebwenato*[16] (storyteller). This practice of adjusting stories and traditions according to location and *ri-bwebwenato* is similar to a pattern noted by Epeli Hau'ofa as a common practice among Oceanic peoples: "the recording and communication of ideas, of customary laws, genealogies, historical events, and rights and obligations of all kinds were very flexible, creative and highly politicised" (Hau'ofa 1985, 157). Even the five long *roro,* which cover everything from creation to the first canoes to navigation, are flexible based on where the *roro* originates. Jack Adair Tobin (2001) would often include multiple versions of a story in his anthology to highlight the way that storytellers use familiar characters and concepts in different ways. The people of various atolls have slightly altered versions of how the first sails were used, for instance, or how the navigation chant is sung.

Over time, as Western influence through colonization grew, the *roro* became connected with sung music and instruments in a similar way to Hawai'ian *mele* (D. Kramer, personal communication, April 4, 2023). The music derived from *roro* is typically created

through basic chord progressions (specifically I–IV–V) with repetitious lyrics and melodies (S. Stege, personal communication, April 6, 2023). Harmonies feature tight vocals, typically in two or three parts (Kammerer 2010), which are constructed similarly to hymns with a less predominant melodic lead and a more integrated musical structure. Vocally, the music features the slightly nasal singing quality common in Micronesian music, often in a higher octave, particularly for women. Traditional *al* (songs) are often rhythmically and metrically complex, emphasizing the flow of the lyrics and extending over the confines of bar lines. This is often seen in songs such as *Al im Trum,* where music holds over into an additional bar with an altered meter (Moonlight String Band 1969). This more fluid metric and rhythmic structure derives from the song's original connection to *roro,* which were not bound by Western musical structures. The most common instrument used in early *al* was the guitar, but it has since shifted to ukulele and electronic keyboards favored in churches for projection and expanded sound choices available in computer synthesizers (Stege 2006). The cost and availability of the ukulele, coupled with the ease of learning to play, has made the instrument particularly popular among young *riṂajeḷ* musicians.[17]

Jorelik Tibon, *Jiduul im Kaddol*, https://youtu.be/DRTWONt-Wdg?si=nwuZtv8UgEl6TUvz

Modern instruments in RMI are highly influenced by Western musical traditions and less by ancestral music. As mentioned, ukulele, guitar, and piano are, by far, the most popular instruments, with piano performance techniques usually informed by local church styles. Traditional instruments include a type of drum called *aje* (Alele Museum 2023). These drums, made from local wood and topped with a thin membrane usually from *pako* (shark) skin, were used in ceremonies to accompany *jobwa*[18] dance, during long voyages to keep canoes together, or during warfare to drive on the fighting. Unique to RMI in Oceania, drumming was traditionally the work of women, not men. *Roro* was performed by men while women accompanied them on *aje.* During battles, women stood as a second line of attack in case the enemy broke through the front lines and would throw stones at attackers

over the lines of hand-to-hand fighters, or drum, shout, and wail to spur on combatants. Modern *aje* are still built primarily to be performed by men for performances of *jobwa*.

Inaam Sakaio, *Jorreen by Solé Jibas*, performed by students from the Assumption Catholic School in Majuro, https://youtu.be/JKEbB8e9LVo?si=fa-V9VIyBxb0aHkN

Most *riṂajeḷ* music is still not written down, remaining an oral tradition, though there have been efforts through organizations like UNESCO and individuals such as Scott Stege to record, transcribe, catalog, and document the music (S. Stege, personal communication, April 3, 2023). The more traditional musical style has been maintained into the modern era and evolved through integrations of Christian spiritual music, Western hip-hop, and Island Reggae (D. Kramer, personal communication, April 4, 2023). Artists such as Les Anjolok and Yastamon, for example, have created secular Island Reggae albums placed right next to deeply spiritual albums, using modern computer sampling, traditional string band styles, ukulele performance, *roro* rhythms, and church music.[19]

Les Anjolok, *Ijo Koba*, https://youtu.be/Mk4xeYnG0Y8?si=HKQJMu0ViOtuPenh

Utilizing the music of modern *riṂajeḷ* artists can help younger students bridge a gap between the traditional music of their culture and contemporary tastes. Particularly for students in the diaspora, access to this more modern style can help to build more *kajin Ṃajeḷ* fluency and help students connect with traditions from the islands.[20] However, despite the availability and clear inspiration of Western music, Marshallese popular music has not shifted much from the traditional styles, particularly in vocal performance (Kammerer 2010). There are many types of dances within the islands, but not all can be shared outside the community. When I was first planning my trip, one of my former *riṂajeḷ* students learned about my research goals and became very nervous about me going because I (as a *ripelle*) was not allowed to perform certain dances. After talking with my student, I realized that they were specifically referring to the *jobwa*, a dance so sacred "...it

can only be performed by the High Chief and families of his choice" (Jericho Saucedo 2019, 24). The dance, always performed in traditional outfits, involves stamping feet and using sticks that are struck against the ground and each other. My student informed me that the dance was originally revealed to an ancient *irooj* in a dream that showed him everything from the specific steps to the construction and look of the sticks and outfits, and I would be cursed if I tried the dance as a *ripelle* without permission.

Sirenah Ewba, *Marshallese Jobwa Stick Dance at the 2016 Festival in Guam*, https://youtu.be/Wi2-FrezYhk?si=WHzWJA-cSGYqVgDu

However, there are many dances, for example, line or stance dances, that are appropriate for everyone to take part in, including *ripelle*. These dances are unique to specific communities and are usually taught by rote, first to older children, who then pass them onto their younger siblings and members of the community. One style of dance called *piit* (which can also be spelled as *biit*) is a good example of a unique *riṂajeḷ* dance that has connections to other Oceanic styles. *Piit* "showcases the performers in complex, interweaving lines of dancers of opposite gender" (Schwartz 2019, 128). Sticks are sometimes used to play beat and rhythms, either on their own or with a neighbor's sticks.

Piit includes separate styles of dance for men and women, often with the boys stomping their feet and the girls gesturing with hands. The stance of the dancers is also different as boys bend lower at the waist and girls are more upright. While students will switch parts to practice if they need more partner groups, *riMajel* are typically insistent that these are gendered movements.

Micronesian_Pasifika, *Marshallese Contemporary Traditional Dance (Beet) – 2023*, https://youtu.be/aLepAkdqnzU?si=do1_WTzCrM7ccZcm

Efforts are underway through organizations such as the Customary Language and Law Commission (CLLC) to build libraries of songs in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* and English to help school systems spread *riṂajeḷ* music and language. A book, called *Al (Songs)*, created by Nik Willson, contains *al,* both in English and *kajin Ṃajeḷ* with ukulele accompaniment (Bilingual Education Unit and Customary Law and Language Commission 2019). Figure 5 is a copy of a song from this book called *Libbukwe*[21]*,* which is easy for students to sing and play on the ukulele. The book contains both the *kajin Ṃajeḷ* lyrics and an English translation called *Pearly Shells*.

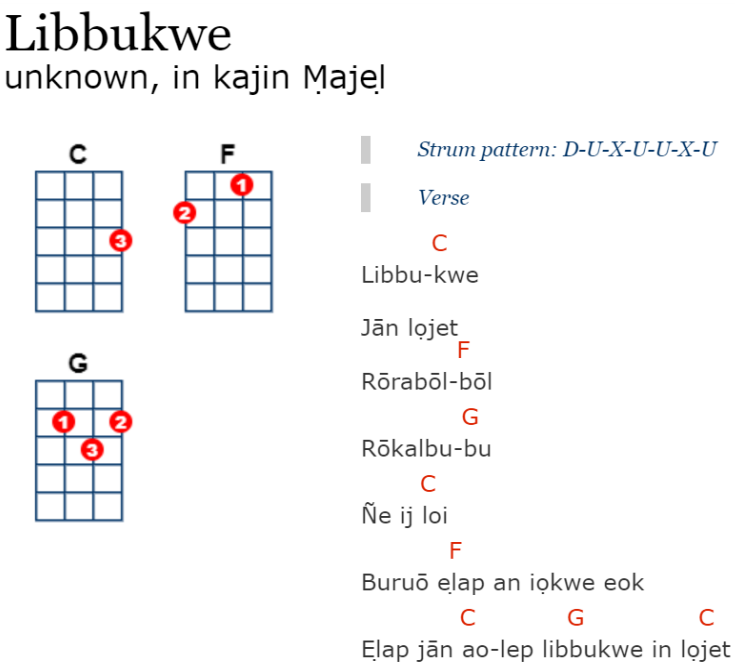

Figure 5: Libbukwe. From *Al (Songs)* by the CLLC (Bilingual Education Unit and Customary Law and Language Commission 2019). Reproduced with the written consent of Nik Willson from the CLLC and the performer Bethany Fisher. Listen at https://figshare.com/articles/media/Marshallese_songs_recorded_in_Majuro/25521040/1?file=45403861

Waan Pinana (Banana Boat) from *Al* is an excellent example of how *roro* connects with modern songs. *Waan Pinana* is a children's work song about bananas and papayas arriving by boat. The lyrics describe the arrival of the boats with fresh produce that cannot grow on the atolls and what to do about them. There are explicit instructions that pass on knowledge to children about what to do and how to prepare and store the perishable items that likely arrived under-ripe.

> Banana boat, papaya boat,
> Bring them up and cook them all up
> And store them, and wait for them to sweeten up
> So we'll eat them all together.
> I am full, you are full, I am so full
> (Bilingual Education Unit and Customary Law and Language Commission 2019).

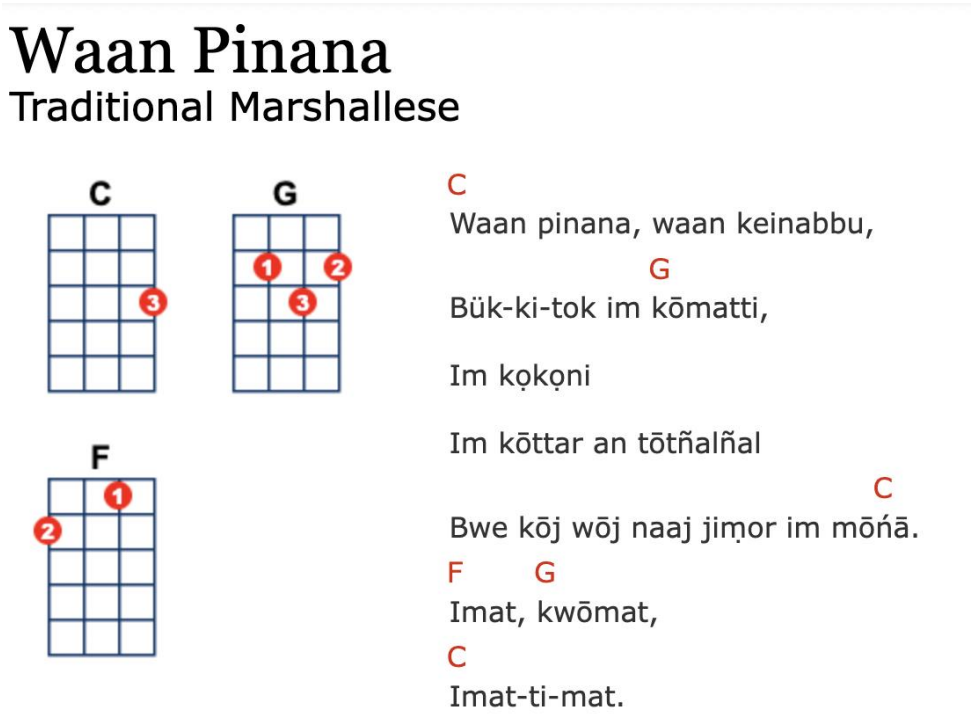

Figure 6: Waan Pinana. From *Al (Songs)* by the CLLC (Bilingual Education Unit and Customary Law and Language Commission 2019). Reproduced with the written consent of Nik Willson from the CLLC and the performer Bethany Fisher. Listen at https://figshare.com/articles/media/Marshallese_songs_recorded_in_Majuro/25521040/1?file=45403858

While a Western-style, harmonic and rhythmic analysis of this song is possible, it benefits the performer and teacher to think of this in a more *riṂajeḷ* way. The chord progression is balanced differently compared to Western folk styles creating a unique phrase length where the V chord is extended over much of the song before resolving. However, when this song is considered in the traditions of the *riṂajeḷ,* the longer phrases make sense, matching up to the speech patterns of *kajin Ṃajeḷ* in connection to *roro.* This connection is further emphasized by the short phrases at the end, "I am full, you are full, I am so full," switching from sung to spoken voice (a technique used in *Al im Trum*). In general, this song emphasizes the connection to *roro* through chanted sections, phrases aligned with the words rather than the melody, and the variable length of chord changes. When teaching this song, scaffolding should start by listening to the song to identify the *roro*

feel, then trying to speak the words. Utilizing a chant style to teach the song, further connecting it to *roro*, makes the less standard phrasing and rhythms easier to identify and sing.

Practical Application

When working with culturally diverse students, it is important to not just understand the cultural contexts of a group but to understand the specific student within the context of their histories, cultural perspectives, and historical and lived experiences (Gay 2002). Simple efforts to build these relationships outside the teacher/student/caregiver dynamic can include using *kajin Ṃajeḷ* in class as a way to break down barriers and make students feel comfortable despite their level of language fluency. Phrases such as *iọkwe* (hello), *Ej et mour?* (How are you?), *eṃṃan* (good), *ṃōk* (please), and *jab* (no) are fairly universally understood and can help break down a few barriers with students. This practice also helps to honor Indigenous knowledges[22] by centering *kajin Ṃajeḷ* in your everyday practice, a process that Tuiwahi Smith calls *indigenizing* (Tuhiwai Smith 2008, 146). I have utilized this in my classroom by, for example, occasionally using *jutak* and *jijet* rather than "stand up" and "sit down." This honors and centers *kajin Ṃajeḷ* in the classroom and provides an opportunity for *riṂajeḷ* students to be leaders.

The ability to deepen a relational connection with students is often easier for music educators because of the amount of time they have with students (up to 7 years for elementary educators) and the unique nature of their job. Using songs and *roro* as a teaching tool is a familiar concept to many *riṂajeḷ* for whom music and *roro* are integrated deeply into the fabric of culture. Emphasizing chant and rote teaching techniques of *al* rather than Western musical reading in the sequencing process can make the pedagogical process more culturally relevant. Utilizing songs in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* can help newly arrived students from the islands feel connected to the school more quickly, particularly if they are *al* that other *riṂajeḷ* students know. In my experience, dance and songs have even helped to transcend some of the divisions between *riṂajeḷ* who come from the islands and those who were born in the USA. Differences in the understanding of *bwij*, disconnection from land and

lineage, and language barriers can perhaps be overcome when everyone is dancing to the same song.

Another effective way to make connections with older *riḶajeḷ* students and to build rapport is utilizing *bwebwenato* in your classroom. As mentioned in the introduction, *bwebwenato* is a type of cultural conversation. It functions as an open forum for people to meet and talk, to share time and food together, and to tell stories and share wisdom. Mylast Bilimon, a Marshallese studies professor at CMI, utilized the concept of *bwebwenato* to have serious conversations with students about health (M. Bilimon, personal communication, April 5, 2023) and saw a huge increase in interest and participation in the talks. When Mylast told me about these gatherings, she emphasized that *bwebwenato* are not meetings but conversations. Around six years ago, older *riḶajeḷ* students, both from the islands and the diaspora in grades 4–6, began to use my room to practice dance and ukulele. My students would arrive and sit to talk or eat their lunches and then periodically get up and dance through a song or play a little on the ukulele, and to perhaps have an informal *bwebwenato*. This tradition has continued even after those first students left. In the Spring of 2024, many of my students began using my music room during their lunch to practice a line dance with sticks. While it began with a group of fourth graders, it grew to include students from first through fifth.

Spokane First Marshallese, *Spokane Marshallese First Biit (prt 1),* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7de8QD0EsNw

Teaching and using *riṂajeḷ al* in class can give students who are not fully fluent in English the opportunity to be leaders or to feel celebrated. Figure 7 is a popular *al* called the Marshallese Happy Birthday song, which is extremely well known and the first one that I learned. The lyrics translate as:

Happy Birthday to you
Congratulations on your day
As you know, you've reached a new year
Happy birthday to you.

The *al* is in a 4/4 meter, reflecting the musical and dance style of the *riṂajeḷ.* The strumming pattern provides a driving feel, making the *al* more up-tempo, particularly when combined with the rapid rhythms required of the lyrics. The melody of the *al* is complex, with several melisma and a melodic shape moving through low and high rapidly, reflecting the singing style of the *riṂajeḷ*. Harmonically, the *al* features an I–IV–V chord progression and tight harmonies that are not fully essential to the song. The rapidity of the middle lines

"...*kotepar juōn iiō ekāāl...*" matches the speech pattern of *kajin Ṃajeḷ,* which often starts slowly and is followed by a rapid cadence.

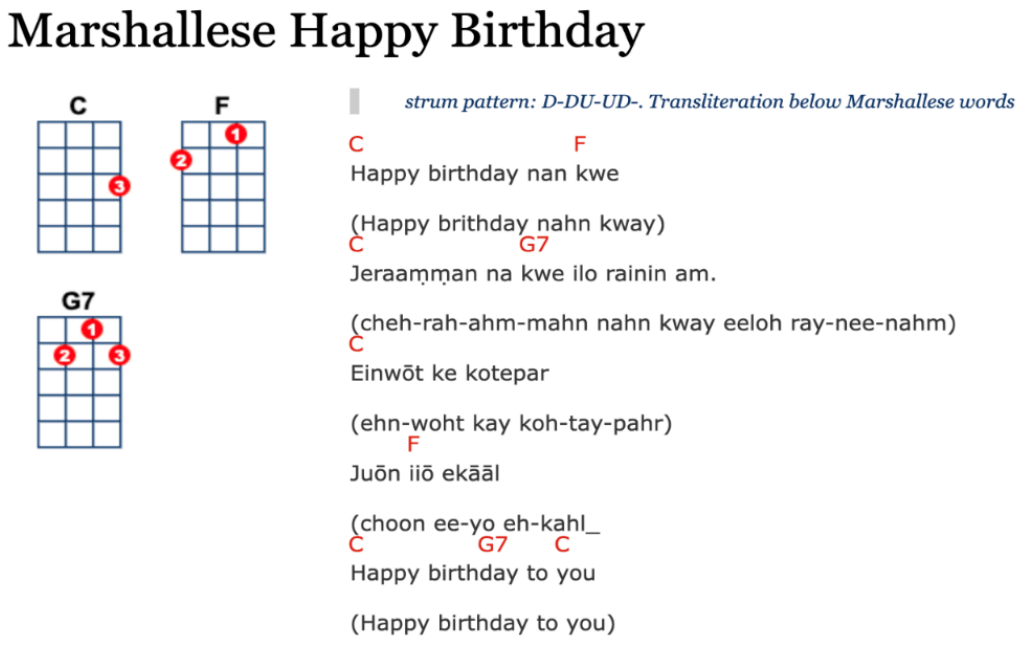

Figure 7: Marshallese Happy Birthday. Transcribed by the author from recordings by students.

Nanyu Cheng, *Marshallese birthday song,* https://youtu.be/E3sJ5Gd5beU?si=Zg2oLba-WxQL3OdV

Particularly for Micronesian students, history, both personal and cultural, is deeply important to an understanding of identity and place in the community. As mentioned before, *riṂajeḷ* identity is defined by the *bwij,* lineage, and land of the family. Understanding the history of the islands helps an educator's frame of reference with which they approach their students (Gay 2002). Particularly for *riṂajeḷ* students born outside the islands, attachment to ancestral land and history may already be frayed but is still deeply important.[23]

Conclusion

For educators hoping to connect with *riṂajeḷ* students, a strong understanding of culture, history, values, and traditions is essential. The history of exploitation, destruction,

and colonization that RMI has endured has created a certain level of distrust and desire to hold onto aspects of *riḶajeḷ* culture. This distrust, particularly of ethnographers and ethnomusicologists, was prevalent throughout my ethnographic research in Micronesia. A history in which "...intellectual exchanges with Eurocentric scholars devolv[e] into a form of settler colonial appropriation—taking a few things they feel are useful—but failing to commit to solidarity in broader projects that bring amelioration to Indigenous communities" (Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt 2019, as cited in Prest and Goble 2022, 208) has led to distrust of academics who are often seen as attempting to steal cultural identity and history. This feeling is no different regarding educators seeking cultural information, which is why they must build rapport, establish networks, and engage in reciprocity (Fournier et al. 2023; Hamal 2020; Prest and Goble 2022; Tuhiwai Smith 2008). Speaking to the importance of relationship and reciprocity, I was unable to learn anything about my *riḶajeḷ* community outside a surface-level understanding until I stepped out of my comfort zone and worked to develop a rapport and to understand my community on a deeper level. It took over a decade of demonstrating an effort to honor *riḶajeḷ* cultural contributions, histories, lineages, and relational patterns (Gay 2002) before I was trusted to be a faithful and trustworthy transmitter of *riḶajeḷ* culture. I had to meet face-to-face, then return again, and again before the community believed my intentions were genuine. During face-to-face encounters (Tuhiwai Smith 2008) with culture bearers across Micronesia, I was always tested first to understand my true intentions before anyone was willing to share with me. Sometimes, these tests were blunt, such as informants indicating their mistrust of me, to subtle, such as when an informant took me to lunch in Hagåtña, Guam, and let me explain why I was there, asking me simple questions before revealing any information about CHamoru culture. Educators who take time to develop relationships with their *riḶajeḷ* community, to deepen not just their explicit knowledge of that culture but also the context that surrounds that knowledge, and who work to provide reciprocity for the knowledge they are granted, can foster a sense of belonging that empowers learning and centers their culture.

About the Author

Shawn Tolley is an elementary music teacher at Stevens Elementary School in Spokane, WA. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Composition and is a Fund For Teachers Fellow as well as a recipient of the National Education Association Learning and Leadership grant. These two grants sent him on research trips to Guam, Hawai'i, and the Marshall Islands. A strong proponent of culturally responsive and decolonizing teaching practices, Shawn has built a program reflective of his school community. The annual cultural event that he directs has become the highlight of the academic year at Stevens. An extensive extracurricular, cultural performance group, Shaura World Music and Dance features world dance, Zimbabwean-style marimba, Taiko, ukulele, singing, and drumming, and has become a regular feature in Spokane, performing at schools and events across the city and helping to establish several other cultural fairs in the district. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Shawn Patrick Tolley, Stevens Elementary School, 1717 E. Sinto Ave., Spokane, WA, 99202, United States. Email: tolley.shawn@gmail.com

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Appendix A

Language Reference

riṂajeḷ: Marshallese people (ree-mah-jhel)

ripelle: Non-Marshallese, foreigner (ree-bel-lay)

bwebwenato: conversation, strong cultural importance (buh-way-buh-way-nah-toe)

kajin Ṃajeḷ: Marshallese language (kah-jhin mah-jhel)

roro: a *riṂajeḷ* chant (roh-roh)

ralik: sunset (rah-leek)

ratak: sunrise (rah-dahk)

kautej: the culture of respect (kow-tehj)

bwij: lineage, crowd, family, tribe (bu-wihj)

aḷap: maternal uncle, lineage head (ah-lahp)

bukwōn: district, division of an atoll or island, village (buck-won)

irooj: chieftain (ee-roh-ohj)

jobwa: a sacred dance style (chohb-wah)

aje: drum (ah-jhay)

al: song (ahl)

Appendix B

There are a total of 24 unique letters in the *kajin Ṃajeḷ aḷbapeet* (alphabet); nine total vowels, *a, ā, e, i, o, ō, ọ, u,* and *ū,* each with a unique pronunciation and 15 consonants including, *b, d, j, k, l, ḷ, m, ṃ, n, ñ, ṇ, p, r, t,* and *q* (Rudiak-Gould[24] 2004). The pronunciation of vowels is often affected by the word they are in and the context in which they are spoken. For example, *wōn* (woon) means "turtle", but *wōn* (won) means "who". There are also, often, subtle differences in how a word is spoken, which complicates not just learning to speak the language but the ability to understand it while listening. *Eṃṃaan (*ehm-mah-ahn) means "man", as in "The man over there," and *emmaan* (ehm-mah-ahn) means "to tie up a canoe or be at anchor" (Marshallese-English Online Dictionary 2019). In these cases, *m* is pronounced as it is in English (like "mom"), but the *ṃ* is pronounced like "mom" with a darker inflection and toward the back of the mouth. More so, the difference between *eṃṃan* (ehm-mahn), which means "good," like "I am good," and *eṃṃaan* is that the "*a"* sound in *eṃṃaan* is held longer. Reading and writing in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* is further complicated by a recent shift to a new *aḷbapeet*. Signs on the islands are in either system, and families write in the old or new system by preference or understanding. For music educators trying to learn songs in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* for their students to sing, it is often best to utilize your student's knowledge to help or, better yet, a recording of the song you can play for classes sung by a native speaker. I have included a list of useful words and phrases for teachers in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* in Table 1.

kajin Majeḷ	**Transliteration**	**English**
iọkwe	yawk-way	hello/goodbye/love
bar lo eok	bahr low yawk	see you later (goodbye)
koṃṃool tata	koh-mohl dah-dah	thank you very much
jouj	choojh	you're welcome

Ej et mour?	ehj eht mour?	How are you?
eṃṃan	ehm-mahn	good
nana	nah-nah	bad
aet	ah-eht	yes
jab	chahb	no
mōk	muhk	please
jutak	choo-dahk	stand up
jijet	chee-jhet	sit down
err itok	ehr ree-dohk OR ray ee-dohk	look at me
roñ jake	rohng-uh chah-gay	listen
komelele ke?	koh-may-lay-lay kay	Do you understand?
etal	eh-dahl	go
itok	eedohk	come
al	ahl	song
baba	bah-bah	father
mama	mah-mah	mother

Table 1: Useful words and phrases in *kajin Ṃajeḷ* for educators. Phrases gathered through conversation with students and my community and study of Rudiak-Gould's book (Rudiak-Gould 2004).

[1] Please see Appendix A for pronunciation and definitions of Marshallese words as they appear in this article.

[2] Delap and Rairok are village divisions within Majuro. See Figure 4 for a map of Majuro with divisions noted.

[3] According to tradition, the names of *Ralik* and *Ratak* were set not just for cardinal directions but because of the path of settlement. "It is because of this navigation culture that the Marshall Islands is also known as Ralik Ratak, which is not only the name of the two chains but also the directions in which the atolls were first settled from West to East" (Doulatram 2018, 27). However, there are many names that RMI is known by. "The last name which Marshall Islands is also known as is Aelon Kein Ad which means "these our atolls" and it is often used in conjunction with the proverb "Ad Jolet Jen Anij" literally translated as Our Blessed Inheritance from God" (Doulatram 2018, 27).

[4] A bicameral organization made up of two branches; the elected *Nitijela* and the advisory Council of *Irooj* (chiefs).

[5] Mutually unintelligible languages are defined as sharing aspects of phonology (sounds the language uses and produces) but are diverse in vocabulary. Languages that are not intelligible cannot be easily understood despite similarities.

[6] By comparison, Polynesian languages from Oceania are mutually intelligible and share many commonalities. Dr. John Mayer, associate professor of Samoan at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, specifically mentioned this concept when I met with him, and he mentioned the Swadesh list (Swadesh 1952) (a list of words which would be common across related languages as everyone experiences them, such as "sun" and "water") as a way to identify these languages. I have included some examples from the Swadesh list (below) in *kanaka Maoli* (Hawai'ian), Samoan, and *te reo Māori* (Māori) and then in CHamoru, *kajin Ṃajeḷ*, and Chuukese to demonstrate this point.

English	**Kanaka Maoli**	**Samoan**	**te reo Māori**
Ocean	moana	moana	moana
Water	wai	vai	wai
Sun	lā	la	ra
Moon	mahina	masina	marama

English	CHamoru	Kajin Majel	Chuukese
Ocean	tåsi	lojet	mataw
Water	hånom	dān	konik
Sun	atdao	aḷ	akkar
Moon	pulan	allōñ	maram

[7] See Appendix B for a brief overview of *kajin Ṃajeḷ* including the alphabet, pronunciation tips, and a chart of useful phrases.

[8] Exploitation colonization is an extension of extraction colonization where permanent roots are not the goal, but colonizers utilize Indigenous labor, often forced, to take resources (Eames 2019).

[9] The use of loan words can be seen in the word *amimono,* a *kajin Ṃajeḷ* word for handicrafts (woven items such as ties and bags), which comes from the time of Japanese occupation (Kyodo News 2017).

[10] I learned from Tony Alik, an educator and leader at the sailing academy Waan Aelōñ in Majel (WAM), that this situation could lead to an *aḷap* needing to seek permission to change or build on ancestral land from their much younger family member (T. Alik, personal communication, April 10, 2023).

[11] I saw this in Majuro when Desmond Doulatram chose to be late to his class to finish his conversation with me, even though it was a spontaneous conversation for which he had not planned. Knowledge of this emphasis on relationships can help schools and educators be understanding and accommodating of people within this community. This has been an aspect of my own internal biases I have had to wrestle with, particularly when there is a performance or event, and we have a schedule to meet. However, when the culture of punctuality in the West comes into conflict with this people-centric ideal of Micronesia, educators should take steps to accommodate this cultural sensitivity including being reflexive, educating colleagues and the community, planning around a flexible timeline, or providing various ways for students and communities to participate.

[12] In this situation, “Aunty” and “Uncle,” typically loan words for Micronesians, are terms of endearment reserved for important community members. Most of this information regarding familial relationships was gathered through extended observation of the community over a decade of working with them. There have been many writings that also identify this unique familial relationship amongst the *riṂajeḷ* including, *Majuro, a village in*

the Marshall Islands by Alexander Spoehr (1949, 182–221) and *Land Tenure in the Marshall Islands* by J.A. Tobin (1952, 14–24).

[13] This familial closeness can generate problems associated with pick-up at the end of the day. Many students will go home with "Aunty" or be told to walk home with "cousin" or even "brother" and "sister" even though those people are not indicated as family members or trusted adults.

[14] I experienced this first-hand while teaching a music lesson in Rairok. One student led the performance of the welcoming song and was selected by their peers to answer any questions I asked. When I asked if anyone wanted to play ukulele with me, a different student was volunteered by the group, and anytime I asked questions about music, this student was expected to answer.

[15] While I was visiting Rairok Elementary School, I was greeted with a dance and song performance, and the principal told me the students often start their days with dance.

[16] I have only seen this term in Jack Adair Tobin's anthology of Marshallese stories. He describes the *ri-bwebwenato* as "...one who is knowledgeable in the oral tradition of the Marshall Islands—more so than others" (Tobin 2001, xi–xii)

[17] While visiting both the Co-op school and Rairok Elementary, students were excited to see me with the ukulele and wanted both me to play for them and the opportunity to play for me.

[18] The *jobwa* is a sacred style of dance performed to drums in traditional outfits with sticks. The sticks are struck on the ground and against each other while dancers chant. The dance is so sacred only people chosen by the High Chief (*irooj)* may dance it.

[19] Anjolok's music is very popular, particularly in the diaspora, and can be found on Spotify. However, Soundcloud is often the easiest place to find examples of Marshallese music.

[20] Much can be said on the topic of ways music bridges the gap between *riṂajeḷ* on the islands and in the diaspora. This is a topic that merits further exploration in future research.

[21] In the case of all *al* represented in this paper, permission, where required, was granted by Nik Willson and the CLLC of RMI in written form. Figure 7 is a transcription created by the paper's author.

[22] An important aspect of the *spirituality* framework discussed by Fournier et al. (2023).

[23] When I was in Majuro, I had conversations with *riṂajeḷ* who speculated on the identity of those born outside the islands, wondering if the disconnect from the land had made them

more *ripelle*. However, when students interact with *riḶajeḷ* culture, and through dance in particular, everyone in the community of my school, both born in the islands or stateside, cheer, dance along, record, and share videos with their community back home. For students struggling with this issue of disconnect to the islands, it becomes imperative to help ground their experience of *riḶajeḷ* music and culture within the "...cultural values, traditions, communications, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (Gay 2002, 107) of the student's primary culture.

[24] The author Rudiak-Gould is a divisive figure in RMI because of two books he wrote based on his experiences teaching there. One is *Practical Marshallese,* which is widely considered by *riḶajeḷ* and *ripelle* to be an excellent resource. His second book, *Surviving Paradise: One Year on a Disappearing Island*, is more controversial, particularly among the *riḶajeḷ* and academics. While the book gains note for being an interesting read with details of culture, history, and experience woven in, it is noted as problematic for its depictions of the *riḶajeḷ.* His tone is often "...dismissive, patronizing, and hypercritical..." (Labriola 2011, 251).