## BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Glenn Petersen. *Traditional Micronesian Societies: Adaptation, Integration, and Political Organization.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. Pp. 288. ISBN: 978-0-8248-3248-3. US$42.00 cloth.

*Review*: Laurence Marshall Carucci
Professor of Anthropology, Montana State University

In his comparative work on the inhabitants of the vast swath of the Western Central Pacific region that has come to be known as Micronesia, Glenn Petersen adopts a functionalist, ecological adaptation perspective to analyze social organizational components of the varied societies that are found in this sector of the globe. Even though Micronesia is a European category that local people do not use to ground their own senses of identity, Petersen argues that Micronesia makes sense as a viable culture-area construct since it reflects a set of common cultural adaptational strategies that are shared by traditional settlers of this part of the Pacific, though not evidently by recent newcomers, who have not been required to adhere to the same principles of adaptation. The salience of "traditional Micronesian" adaptations is borne out, Petersen claims, by their deeply embedded and long-lasting nature.

Petersen's work paints Micronesian social practices with a broad brush in order to posit a general set of social features shared by all Micronesian societies. While the author relies on a wide array of archaeological, ethnological, and historical sources to inform his work, little time is dedicated to ascertaining how these sources are themselves differentially constituted in ways that reflect certain theoretical biases and epistemic contours. Instead, *Traditional Micronesian Societies* adopts a classical comparative anthropological approach that requires an equivalence of analytic categories. Not

unlike Julian Steward, Peterson turns his readers' attention to elements of everyday life that fall within the domains of kinship, land tenure, and political organization—the core cultural categories considered most critical to establish a common grounding for the way traditional Micronesian peoples once lived their daily lives. Such an analytic dissection of everyday life marginalizes other recurrent features of activity among West Central Pacific peoples, including those that bridge into the Euro-American domains of cosmology, religion, and ritual practice. These conceptual domains and activities are all condensed in a single chapter (Chapter 8) of *Traditional Micronesian Societies*, pointing to their diminished importance in Petersen's view.

In the author's analysis, the core set of regionally shared sociopolitical features provides ample evidence of a past era of unified social practices. The first such shared feature is an organization into matriclans with constituent matrilineages. Petersen contends that this type of social organizational structure provides the flexibility needed for people to maintain expandable networks of kin that have proved adaptive for people who have had to live with the intermittent stress of an environment made unpredictable by typhoons and drought. A secondary organizational principle that can be found across the region is the "interweaving of lineage and land" (185). Here, too, Petersen sees the Micronesian version of a classical pattern to be one that provides added flexibility in order to adapt to highly variable local conditions. He posits a first settlement scenario under which ranked "lineages" have a priori claims to certain land parcels, but, at the same time, Petersen recognizes that a very different principle—actively working an area of ground—provides a contravening way for Micronesian people to demonstrate connections to land (105 et seq.). Rank, also aligned with land-holding practices, forms the tertiary political component of Micronesian social organization that Petersen believes to be adaptive, and chiefs are the most marked institutional manifestation of the principle of rank by "matrilineal primogeniture" (176). In the ideal, chiefs provide leadership, and Petersen imagines them as functionally beneficial persons able to organize and coordinate social activities and keep exchange networks flowing (185).

Peterson hopes this work will be a general text for anthropology students, a work young Micronesians may consult for a "respectful account of their ancestors' lives," and an account that resonates for fellow Pacific scholars (3). Indeed, *Traditional Micronesian Societies* is the first work of its type in well over a generation, and it is unquestionably the most thoughtful work of this genre to have been written. Certainly, the book is a must read for Pacific scholars inasmuch as it offers a comprehensive analysis of a number of the most important works on the inhabitants of the region.

At the same time, in my view, the analysis is hampered by Petersen's theoretical dependence on a functionalist paradigm that is unable to account for the multifaceted array of symbolic domains and social practices that must be analyzed in a dynamic, historically sensitized fashion for each of the societies and social arenas in the region. Petersen's functionalist theory works from the top down, forcing problematic classifications of divergent social practices onto activities that vary temporally and that are contested depending upon the positionality of social actors on the ground. The condensation of these varied practices is necessary to Petersen's thesis, since adaptational forces, while presenting some very broad constraints on cultural forms, are simply inadequate to account for the diverse and dynamic, historically and intersubjectively nuanced nature of cultural actions in this part of the world. Indeed, Petersen's own line of argument seems to admit the inadequacies of an adaptation-grounded theory. At several junctures, most notably with his chapter on "exceptions"—Kiribati, Nauru, Yap, and the Mariana Islands—Petersen suggests that such things as Polynesian influences from Samoa (in the case of Kiribati) change the shape of cultural patterns. While undoubtedly true, the ready reformulation of the social forms developed in other socioenvironmental settings contradicts the thesis that the social forms emerged to fulfill local adaptive functions. Petersen's oversimplification of such complexities also includes his acceptance of a view of "traditional" that predates the entire "invention of tradition" literature and, therefore, fails to recognize the critical ways in which tradition is an imagined feature of an ever-emergent, constantly changing, cultural epistemic imaginary.

Equally, of course, readers must accept the idea that each of the core categorical features that Petersen posits for the societies of the West Central Pacific are immutable and long-standing cultural beliefs or practices of the peoples who inhabit this region rather than contestable interpretations framed by European and Asian observers with their own historical and theoretical biases. As part of his comparative agenda, Petersen reasserts the Euro-American institutional domains—social, political, economic—without amply questioning their legitimacy. In so doing, Petersen sidesteps several long-standing critiques of such a priori institutional analyses. For example, in his discussion of the Fortes/Worseley controversy, Sahlins (1976: 6–18) points out the problem that Fortes creates for himself by artificially subdividing Tallensi social action into the Euro-centric domains of kinship, politics, economics, etc. (also see Schneider 1984, Chapter 15). In adopting such an analytic approach, Fortes refashioned unitary Tallensi practices into activities that fulfilled different social functions. The apparent functional differences then provided Worseley with the opportunity to critique

the ethnographic construction of Tallensi social action precisely because, in Fortes's rendition, kinship-grounded activities fulfilled economic functions and, therefore, came to be expressed in economic terms. Sahlins, of course, argues that the entire controversy was ephemeral inasmuch as Tallensi themselves do not segment their activities into distinctive institutional domains.

In *Traditional Micronesian Societies*, Petersen engages in an analogous "exercise in classification" (Sahlins 1976, 14). Not unaware of local complexity, Petersen begins cautiously, encouraging his readers to adopt a Socratic idea of "politics," the core institutional domain of interest in this book. Socrates's more inclusive, but pragmatically restricted, view of politics refers to "what people want their communities to do for them and how they set about achieving these goals." In the very next paragraph, Petersen returns to a much more circumscribed interpretation, wherein government means only the "formal structures of political life" (125). By chapter's end we have political and economic systems, sociopolitical rank, and lineage descent groups operating along principles of genealogical seniority and nested hierarchy, land tenure systems controlled by those descent groups, and a selective array of local activities that have been fitted into these Euro-American inspired analytic categories (Chapter 6). While Petersen recognizes the variations and flexibilities in local practices, nonetheless he reimagines the unified social acts of the residents of many social arenas in Micronesia and provides them with a certifying mark as political, economic, or religious activities. Those activities then take on a foreign contour unsuited to the performative contexts and analytic universes in which they were imagined and made meaningful. Having fractured the actions into their proper functional domains, Petersen then seeks to demonstrate an equivalence of kinship principle or political form from one edge of the region to the other. For Marshall Islanders (whom, I presume, may share this feature with other residents of the West Central Pacific), it is hard to imagine any activity that does not have what Europeans or Americans might consider a political dimension. For Petersen, however, the politicized dimension of seating arrangements in a cookhouse are part of the domestic sphere and, therefore, do not figure as political activity. Equally, virtually every Marshallese activity involves elements of exchange, but this is inadequate to have Petersen place all such activities within the economic domain. To presume that a select set of daily activities marks them as primordially "political" or "economic" robs those activities of their character as what Mauss called "total social facts" and extracts them from the historical trajectory in which local actions may, at a specific historical juncture, come to be conceptualized as "religious," "political," or "economic" in ways that overlap

with, but are not identical to, the religious, political, or economic domains imagined by European observers. A good example of this emergent view of local "religious activity" can be seen in John Barker's work with the Maisin or Joel Robbins's work with Urapmin (Barker 2008; Robbins 2004). Similarly, the group I know best, Enewetak/Ujelang Marshallese, develop uniquely religious components of their collective identities as one component of an emergent historical project of reimagining themselves as part of a cosmopolitan world community. Analogous arguments can be made about islanders coming to classify their own activities as specifically political or economic in ways that clearly demonstrate the inappropriateness of presuming that residents of the region known as Micronesia, during the long-unchanging *durée* of traditional times (as imagined by Petersen), considered their actions as inherently political, economic, religious, kin-grounded, etc.

Similar problems exist with each of the core cultural categories that Petersen sees as the principles that unify Micronesia. Most obviously, Petersen asks his readers to think of all Micronesian societies as sharing a common grounding in matriliny. Applying the lineage concept to Pacific societies in general is highly problematic, as extensive literature from J. A. Barnes to Schneider, among others, has pointed out. But Petersen avoids this controversy. The oversight is most notable in the author's selective use of the work of David Schneider, "one of American anthropology's preeminent theorists and an ethnographer of Yap" (244). Peterson references Schneider's early work numerous times but avoids serious consideration of Schneider's *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, wherein Schneider uses Yap to demonstrate the nonexistence of kinship as a viable domain of comparative study and implores scholars to take seriously local Yapese ideas about *tabinau* and *genung*, Yapese terms Schneider had formerly translated as "patriline" and "matriline." After years of closer reflection, Schneider found these analytic terms to be entirely inappropriate. Significantly, while Schneider recognized that the comparative method was unable to account for the rich semiotic contours of local categories and social practices, Peterson requires the a priori acceptance of an etic grid of common anthropological terms to undergird his use of the comparative method to demonstrate the unity of social practices across the region. Micronesian traditional societies *must have* a universal matrilineal clan organization to ground the social organizational unity of Micronesia. For Petersen, *genung* must mean matriline in the same way that Marshallese *jowi* must mean matriclan and *bwij* must, therefore, be a Marshallese clan segment, or matriline. Unfortunately, the distinctive characteristics of *genung* (shared belly) get lost in this formula, as conical clan type social forms are recloaked by Petersen into acceptable anthropological lineage garb. The prevalence of

adoption in Yap and the deeply embedded way that *magar* (work) requires a radical rethinking of the basic postulates of what lineage actually means to anthropologists are lost in Petersen's need to discover universally shared Micronesian matriliny. Whereas Schneider suggests that neither *tabinau* nor *genung* represent anything remotely similar to biological identity transmitted across generations, Petersen reinvents them as lineage forms. Ironically, Peterson does not even consider Schneider's first formulation of Yap as a society with double descent—with patrilineal-like *tabinau* the dominant/public social form and *genung* the "hidden," unmarked, form that has few social "functions" outside of defining appropriate partners in a marriage. Like Kiribati, such a patriline-dominant formulation could only create additional headaches for Petersen's thesis of universal Micronesian matriliny. Indeed, for Kiribati, which Grimble considered to be patrilineal, Petersen sees the "patrilineal emphases now obvious in Kiribati social organization" (214), as a substrate of the underlying (necessarily earlier) flexible and nested characteristics of Kiribati social forms. In Peterson's view, these characteristics point to "an underlying pattern ... rooted in Micronesian matriliny" (214). Petersen's thesis requires readers to agree with projected waves of invented culture histories to explain the contorted appearance of anthropological classificatory categories that simply do not exist on the ground. Rather than working from the ground up, from *tabinau* and *genung*, for example, to meaning and practices that shift through time, Petersen works from anthropological categories like matriliny down to the highly varied social forms that are the momentary products of historically contoured local imaginaries and highly varied in social practice. Based on my own research among Marshall Islanders and my reading of the literature from other locales, I agree with Petersen that there are filaments of a matri-biased imaginary that can be found throughout this region. But to transform the multifaceted threads of that cultural consciousness into lineage identity grounded in the transmission of biogenetic material from one generation to the next is a radically different proposition about shared social practices. If Schneider is correct, the latter view has no support among Yapese, either in the 1940s or the 1970s, and it has no support among Marshall Islanders with whom I have worked. To contend otherwise is truly the invention of an anthropological tradition to provide categorical support for an imagined Micronesia.

The ways in which residents of Micronesia interweave their constructions of person and land in my estimate seem to be widespread throughout the region, even though the symbolic imaginary used to lend specific contour to this idea varies from place to place. Therefore, both in terms of flexibility and widespread distribution, Petersen may well be on target. But

these features also extend into parts of the Pacific beyond the Micronesian region. Moreover, the flexibility of these patterns is far more notable than is Petersen's idea that ties to land will be interwoven with matrilineally grounded identities. As early as 1949, Spoehr raised serious doubts about the lineal character of the supposed matrilineages on Majuro Atoll (Marshall Islands), and certainly on Ujelang and Enewetak, outliers to the Ralik Chain of Marshall Islands, all claims to land are bilateral in character, aligning with the contours of *bwij*, or bilateral extended families. *Bwij* means "umbilicus/belly button," with a direct link to feeding/nurturance and some association with females who are, in some idealized sense, expected to be nurturing. But, other than the fact that Ujelang/Enewetak *bwij* are typically (though not universally) defined as female-headed, there is nothing in their character that makes them lineage-like. They take the shape of ramages or conical clans, and membership may be claimed through many avenues, not only through an umbilical link at birth. In particular, acts of feeding (not only feeding through an umbilicus) are frequently used to create a pathway to *bwij* membership. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that the contemporary linkage of identity and land is historically constituted and becomes a predominant way of grounding identity as daily activities shift away from sailing and fishing toward copra production in the late 19th century. Thus, the "mud and blood" hypothesis may itself be daubed together as the contours of daily life shifted for Marshall Islanders and others during that particular era. All this is to say that Petersen is observant in his recognition that land and identity are closely intertwined, but to project this congeries of symbolic alignments onto the ossified imaginings of a long-standing past is beyond what can be demonstrated by a close assessment of a variegated array of Micronesian pasts.

When Petersen turns his attention to issues of rank and chieftainship, he is hampered by some of the same constraints of method that have been noted for the other domains he has selected for analysis. My own experience in the Marshall Islands suggests to me that Petersen is probably correct in thinking that considerations of rank are deserving of particular scrutiny when investigating social relations in this section of the world, though I do not believe there is a sharp line that meaningfully separates the types of formulations found in Micronesia from those in parts of Polynesia or Melanesia. However, rather than viewing rank as a conceptual model grounded in certain counterbalancing principles that are continually tested and contested on the ground, Petersen focuses on the social relational components of chiefly action and ultimately sees all Micronesian people manifesting some institutional variant of the principle of rank by "matrilineal primogeniture" (176). Unfortunately, this is simply not true,

inasmuch as Ujelang/Enewetak chiefs are, in accord with the dominant model, governed by a principle that is rationalized (most consistently by those who are members of the chiefly lines) as patrilineal. Equally, while primogeniture is intermittently evident in the local historic accounts of these lines, other principles are also considered in the selection of any particular chief. Given his own reliance on an etic typology to typify Micronesian chiefs, Petersen's critique of Sahlins's overly general formulation of the contrast between chiefs and big men as "abstracted sociological types" (246) seems particularly ironic. While informed by a substantial knowledge of Pohnpeian chiefly practice, ultimately Petersen relies on a comparative typology of Micronesian chiefs that is separated only by the level of generality when compared with the comparative schema proposed several decades ago by Sahlins. Unquestionably, Sahlins's big man/chief typology is an ideal-type formulation that posits characteristics so general they are of limited use in accounting for the vast array of particular formulations and practices dealing with rank that are found in the Pacific. But, Petersen's proposal that matrilineal primogeniture serves as an appropriate designata for the diversity of rank formulations found throughout Micronesia suffers from precisely the same dilemmas of overgeneralization and reification as Sahlins's formulation. Of course, being an astute scholar of Pohnpeian social practices, Petersen correctly notes that the principle of matrilineal primogeniture is often modified in practice by performative elements that require the best chiefs to display the aspirations of Sahlins's big men (247). Certainly this is true in the Marshall Islands, where extant chiefs are far from impersonal in their activities. In practice, Marshall Islands chiefs are always judged by their ability to counterbalance elevated rank with practices of generosity and "caring for" those who indulge them with a sense of superiority. Nevertheless, this pervasive feature that always places a constraint on the power of extant authority figures simply cannot account for the fact that certain forms of social hierarchy in Micronesia, much like Ujelang/Enewetak chiefs, are the antithesis of matrilineal primogeniture.

Obviously, while Petersen's field of interest is selective—largely dealing with concerns of anthropologists and others with an interest in political economy—his coverage of the literature is stellar. The problem I have with Petersen's analysis has to do with his theoretical and methodological focus. Nevertheless, these analytic choices have very real implications for any understanding of the worldviews and social practices of the peoples who inhabit the West Central Pacific. Nowhere is my disagreement with Petersen's method more obvious than in his discussion of chieftainship. In an extended footnote, Petersen recounts an exchange with David Schneider in which Schneider argued that the use of the English word chief was

problematic, since he doubted that it was truly meaningful. That is, "there was, even within Micronesia, no indigenous category or concept that was consistent enough to be translated by a single English-language term" (244). In contrast, Petersen says, "there is little doubt in my mind that Micronesian societies do share a common sense of chieftainship," with differences within any society as great as differences among various Micronesian societies (244).

This footnote is particularly important since it deals with what Schneider considers a significant problem—the issue of translation. As he suggests for Yap, it was his translation of Yapese statements and actions that led him to suggest that *tabinau* meant "patriline" and *genung* meant "matriline." It was Schneider's own semiotic practices that caused him to refashion Yapese practices into the reified categories of anthropology in his "first description" of Yap. In Schneider's second description, translation remains a messy matter, but he moves directly from *tabinau* and *genung* to rough approximations of what local Yapese mean by these terms, eliminating the anthropological categories. Of course, Schneider's perspective led to a reification of shared cultural meanings and placed comparative projects on the back burner. Petersen works very hard to resurrect the comparative project and also remain attuned to local discourses and social actions. This commitment is critical, since contemporary anthropologists clearly recognize that cultural practices are historically emergent and, ultimately, embedded in larger interactive contexts that are regional or even global in scale. Nevertheless, by reintroducing the anthropological categories and forcing local meanings and practices to submit the primacy of their own contextually refined meanings to the formal meanings of the analytic categories, Petersen requires his readers to adopt an unacceptable solution to the comparative project. Apparently, Petersen feels compelled to follow Guyer's logic (Petersen 2009, p. 85n1)—"one has to use descriptive terms"—to relegitimize the discursive categories of analytic kinship. If Schneider imagined culturally distinct and potentially irreconcilable "senses" of dealing with concerns of social hierarchy throughout the region, Petersen's theory requires him to project a priori anthropological categories, including a shared category "chieftainship," onto all Micronesians.

In contrast, as a scholar with long experience in the Marshall Islands, I have absolutely *no* idea whether Micronesians share a common idea about chieftainship, and I am not sure this is actually knowable by any single anthropological researcher. Indeed, even Marshall Islanders do not share a cohesive sense of *irooj*, much less common senses of chiefs throughout the region. What is eminently clear is that there is a huge gap between Marshallese people's statements about the abstract idea of *irooj* (as well as

comments about how ideal chiefs once acted), the practices of any particular person who claims to be a chief, and contentions about the adequacy of that person's actions as a chief. By failing to systematically separate for his readers this distinction between the (locally contested) conceptual idea of *irooj*, the actions of those who claim to be *irooj*, and discussions about any person's adequacy as an *irooj*, the waters become more than slightly cloudy. What about the further claim that "Micronesian societies ... share a common sense of chieftainship"? I presume that Petersen means that the members of those societies share a common sense of chieftainship. Equally, readers must think carefully about the grounding of Petersen's claim, i.e., that he has witnessed people from across the region discussing this common sense of chieftainship. These regional claims require a much larger leap in reimagining what all residents of a large sector of the Pacific may believe, even if we take what they say they believe as representative of their conceptual notions about their actual beliefs (and ironically, in other intellectual contexts, Petersen and I share a belief that what people from Pohnpei or the Marshall Islands say in a certain social setting is often specifically designed to obfuscate what they may believe or, at least, the types of things they say about the same topic in other social contexts). In discussing a facet of this issue with an Ujelang-Kosraean man and another Ujelang resident several years ago (in the Ujelang dialect of Marshallese), the Ujelang man said: "Deacons and elders are the *irooj* of Kosrae these days," and the Ujelang-Kosraean man responded, "Well, sir, there were once Kosraean *irooj*, the thing is, well, almost like *irooj* in the atolls of the Marshalls, but today, well those elders in the church, they walk about acting like *irooj* even though they have no *maron* (right/ability/legitimate claim)."

The complexities of Petersen's highly overdetermined claim that all people in Micronesia share a common sense of chieftainship are apparent here. In my interpretation, the Ujelang man suggests that church elders are today's "*irooj*" in Kosrae. In other words, Kosraean chief-like beings are close enough to *irooj* to fall within the Marshallese category, and deacons and elders fit that category. But, the Kosraean/Marshallese consultant doubly contested this view. For him it was not clear if Marshallese chiefs, *irooj* (already lumping considerable differences between Ujelang chiefs and other Marshallese *irooj*, something Ujelang people frequently avoid), and the once existing Kosraean chiefs were the same. His interjection suggested they are sort of the same, but not entirely. And then, for this consultant, the idea that Kosraean church elders are chiefs exceeded the acceptable limits of what it means to be a chief within his own view of the world. Unfortunately, I did not ask whether the church elders were not chiefs because of the way they acted, on account of their lack of a pathway to a

chiefly line, or because they were not *inea* (that is, they lacked supernatural power/*mana*).

To complicate this scenario, current-day Enewetak/Ujelang people (along with many other Marshall Islanders) contest the very idea that today there are *irooj* in practice at all. Of course, in making the statement, those who hold this view demonstrate that each of them does have a conceptual category of *irooj*, even if there are no longer any living *irooj*. It is just that today's *irooj*, like the Kosraean church elder/*irooj*-like beings, do not exhibit the characteristics that would allow them to fit that person's culturally imagined category. They refer to today's would-be *irooj* as *riap in irooj* ("false chiefs," *riap* meaning literally "lies"). And today's "nonchiefs" take several forms. In the Marshall Islands, this may mean that today's *irooj* are in reality only *bwidak in irooj* (the descendants of male members of matriclans whose female members once could birth "real chiefs"). It may also mean that today's *irooj* are "bourgeoisified chiefs" (Carucci 1997a) who, all too often, act in selfish ways rather than in proper ways (by distributing their wealth in accord with the practices of imagined chiefs of old). Or on Enewetak, it may mean for local people that the patrilineal-linked pathway through which today's *irooj* claim their right as "chiefs" was invented just over 100 years ago, in line with the desires of German administrators, and, prior to that time, identity as an *irooj* could only be claimed through females (as in the remainder of the Marshall Islands). Of course, this latter claim is highly contested by those who assert that they *are* the contemporary *irooj* because their fathers (by birth or adoption) were *irooj*. Until recently, they could track their chiefly roots back to Aninij, Boninij, and other figures who constitute the primordial array of Enewetak chiefly persona, just as the would-be *irooj* with matrilineal-linked claims could do the same (though, of course, those legitimizing pathways were *not* identical). All of this, of course, only points to the reasons it is critical to keep discourses regarding the concept of chiefs separate from chiefs on the ground and from the statements about the adequacy of the practices of anyone who claims to be, or even acts like, a chief. What is imminently clear is that Schneider, working from local categories up to the analytic categories that anthropologists valorize, had good reason to doubt any universalizing claims that are required by a comparative functionalist model. Even if all residents of the Micronesian region do formulate comparable discourses about the idea of chiefs as a way to conceptualize rank, it is quite clear that matrilineal primogeniture is an inadequate way to typify what is shared in the nature of these beliefs.

Indeed, when it comes to his discussion of matriclans and theories of chiefly relationship, it is my belief that Petersen does himself a disservice by his distrust of local accounts of the past (i.e., 63n34). The reason for

Petersen's differential ranking of certain cultural features over others escapes me, inasmuch as all are statements about various parts of a cultural imaginary that people selectively deploy to make sense out of their world. Nevertheless, there are real effects to Petersen's overreliance on stories about contemporary social organizational practices and his distrust of accounts of the past. This is particularly important in relation to chiefs since, as I have just noted, the *talk about chiefs* is every bit as important as the daily practices of chiefs and, indeed, the two exist in a complementary, dialectical relationship to one another. Given the conclusion to his chapter on Politics and Leadership (Chapter 7), I believe that Petersen and I are in agreement on this point, though the way in which our arguments are framed are quite different. Here, Petersen talks of the "contradictory dynamics of these (social structural) principles and practices" and the ways "people make conscious use of centralization and decentralization, hierarchy and equality, shared knowledge and concealment, people and place, and tribute and redistribution" (186) pointing out that dynamic outcomes of the application of these counterbalancing principles in practice would make it extremely difficult to reconstruct what an original regional social structure might have looked like. In the case of chiefly hierarchy, however, we do not have to know what the shape of an original social structure may have been to know what local people believe those shapes to have been. Whether actually true or not, these primordial ideas have direct effects on practices in the current day. Thus, in terms of primogeniture, one of Petersen's universal features for ascendancy to chieftainship, Marshall Islanders have various versions of the story of Jebro and Loktanur, primordial deity/chiefs of the Marshall Islands, which already provide a template for some critical expectations of *irooj* in the current day. Indeed, while the story (which I have analyzed previously [Carucci 1997b]) does reference the conceptual possibility of chiefly claims through primogeniture, it also (in several variant versions) provides a type-case in which the characteristics of "loving and caring for others" are even more important characteristics of Marshallese chiefs. In the story, it is through the actual enactment of these practices that Jebro, the youngest sibling born to Loktanur, the primordial chieftainess, comes to become the chief of the Marshall Islands or (in other renditions) to share the position of *irooj* in a seasonally shifting manner with his oldest sibling, Tumur. Again, as with most of Petersen's analysis, I agree wholeheartedly with his emphasis on the multivalent character of local practices, with their flexibility, and with their dynamic balance and seemingly contradictory character. It is his requirement to universalize categories and principles and apply them across the board to all of the members of all of the societies in Micronesia for all of "traditional times" with which I have a problem. In this case, the story of the primordial

Marshallese chiefly family, Loktanur and Jebro does contain an element that suggests "inheritance by primogeniture," but, at the same moment, it suggests a more important principle that must characterize chiefs—a principle that, in fact, gives church elders, or the most generous and caring of them, an equally legitimate claim to be considered an *irooj* as anyone who may fall along a pathway of matrilineal- or patrilineal-ascendance to the chieftainship. On Enewetak, for those who wish to legitimize the patrilineal-ascendance model, there is a huge gap where one older male sibling is entirely overlooked as the proper person to hold the position of *irooj*. The rationalizations for why this person did *not* become chief are multiple, but all focus on social relational inadequacies of this person and of his close relatives. Not until the House of *Irooj* was created with the founding of the Republic of the Marshall Islands did a member of this family finally occupy the Enewetak/Ujelang seat therein. While this family member was not the first to be seated, a local decision to elect appropriate members to occupy this formal position, and the decision to rotate among various people with claims to be an *irooj*, reversed the long-standing decertification of members of this pathway—a route that certainly held the most legitimate patrilineal-pathway claims of primogeniture among the patrilineal claimants on the atoll. People adopted a "let's see" attitude since, given a new set of social conditions, if the person occupying the Council of Irooj seat proved to be as stingy as the rationalizations about this family of miscreants contended, if that person proved as unable to watch over the members of the atoll as they were unable to watch over their own extended family . . . whatever the "ifs," the selection would only be temporary, and a new choice could be made during the next election cycle. Conceptual frames, while far more consistent than daily practices, are themselves dynamic. They are fashioned in relation to a far greater number of inputs than just adaptive constraints of an island or atoll environment.

For these reasons, I believe that Petersen's model is inadequate to the task he has set for himself. He tells us about political organization as government, when emergent and shifting ideas about "governmentality" (Ong 1996) would provide a much more powerful model. Petersen works from the top down, attempting to find evidence of universally shared chieftainship and of shared matriliny. In the case of chiefs, Petersen tells us that what he has learned about people's common understandings of chiefs today somehow indicates that these shared ideas are not an emergent historical phenomenon but have been around since precolonial times. In terms of matriliny, Petersen overlooks the very real possibility that the entire idea of lineality may not have conceptual validity for Pacific Islanders, even if patrilineal and matrilineal linkages of various sorts do appear in the conceptually varied array of symbolic devices that West Central Pacific Islanders

have designed to interweave their identities with one another and with the sea or the land where their daily lives are lived. Rather than relying on an imagined traditional base line of cultural forms, Ong encourages us to see the way that local people engage with a shifting global dynamic to produce emergent forms of power at both the conceptual level and at the level of practice. In the case of chiefs, I would argue, everything we know as a result of reading manuscripts that presume to inscribe past practice must be analyzed as part of the shifting global dynamic that Ong suggests. Given these complexities, using the Marshallese practices I know best as an example, I fear we know nothing substantial about what *irooj* were like at the moment of European contact.

For this reason alone, I am unsure we can say anything meaningful about "traditional" *irooj*. Nevertheless, subsequent European and American records do provide evidence that Marshall Islanders thought about governmentality in terms of *irooj*, *latoktok* (intermediaries), and *kajur* (strength/"commoners"). However, the effects of colonialism on chieftainship as a classificatory form rapidly and radically transformed the intersubjective understandings of *irooj*/commoner relationships as well as the set of practices that could be observed on the ground. As Petersen and I agree, Europeans presumed Marshallese (and other people in the region) adhered to a feudal model, and they inscribed local chiefs as instantiations of that model. The model suggested that Marshallese chiefs were all-powerful, holding rights to all of the land, and the people were their subjects. Yet, local practices once involved rituals of *kairoojoj*, installation ceremonies, through which chiefs were literally "made" by their supposed subjects. Nevertheless, in their new interrelationships with Marshallese *irooj*, new types of *irooj*/chiefs began to be fashioned. Thus, contemporary local accounts often contend that ancient *irooj* were all-powerful, even though nineteenth-century documents indicate that chiefs of that day were not as powerful in practice as in story form. In 1879 or 1880, "the principle chief and lord of Ralik," considered by Europeans to have life and death decision-making power over his subjects, had difficulty gathering more than a handful of his subjects to work on the pier in Jaluij (Finsch 1893, 22). Indeed, looking closely at the accounts of this now-famous Kabua line of Ralik (the "sunset" chain of Marshall Islands), their practical empowerment clearly depended on access to European technologies, including iron, weapons, and ships. Sixty-five years prior, a visit by Kotzebue had a similar effect on Ratak *irooj*. In both cases, the chiefs expanded their power from one or a handful of atolls to a much larger territory. Equally, the appropriation and use of chiefs as intermediaries in the newly established German copra trade had transformative effects on daily practices. With imported labor considered too costly, local labor had to be used to produce copra,

and the disciplinary authority of chiefs to gain access to local labor was both presumed and reinforced at every juncture.

These comments provide only the briefest outline of the way in which Marshallese *irooj* were gradually refashioned into chiefs by certain formulaic alignments with European expectations that were grounded in feudalism. In lieu of those alignments, we have *irooj*, but no chiefs. Therefore, as Ong might suggest, the contours of governmentality were crafted in direct relation to the categories and practices of Europeans, Japanese, and Americans. Rather than hypothesizing as "traditional," universal Micronesian chiefs who obtained their power through matrilineal primogeniture, and then dealing with the degenerate varieties that result from interactions with outsiders (as does Petersen), Ong's perspective of a varied set of emergent and shifting modes of governmentality, which align with an equally dynamic array of negotiations of power in the specific historical contexts in which those relationships in fact arose, provides a more powerful framework for analysis.

Of course, while imagining "Micronesia" as a valid analytic category, Petersen points out that Micronesia was not a meaningful category to local people, but rather, he argues that it serves as an appropriate geocultural category to classify a set of societies that, in his estimate, were all (matri-) lineage-based, all shared perspectives on rank, and all shared practices that interwove notions of identity and land. As Petersen undoubtedly recognizes from various local perspectives of identity construction, and from Ong's related ideas about emergent modes of governmentality, in certain circumstances (particularly among migrants from this region and undoubtedly in other contexts within the Federated States), "Micronesian" is an emergent identity category that is used selectively in an analogous fashion to the ways the identity categories of "Marshallese," "Chuukese," etc. were used in the recent past. Even though Petersen rationalizes his analytic use of "Micronesia" in relation to Hanlon's view of "Micronesia" as a product of European imagination, Petersen's analysis also certifies the legitimacy of an alternate, ahistoric use of the term. By isolating the era of "traditional Micronesian life" from a dynamic historical perspective, Petersen fails to engage with a variety of indigenous culturally and historically emergent uses of "Micronesian" as a meaningful identity category, a category with multilayered meanings that are of increasing concern to local people.

Peterson's depiction of the flexible nature of social organization in the various societies of Micronesia is appropriate. However, analyzing those flexible contours does not require the adoption of an overly simplified set of universalizing anthropological categories to make sense of the complex cultural historical processes that have shaped cultural practices in these locales. *Traditional Micronesian Societies* is well-grounded in the historical

accounts, and at times Peterson brilliantly critiques those sources, recognizing, for example, that early Marshall Islands' ethnographers refashioned Marshallese chiefs in the feudal mode and, in neighboring Kiribati, that Grimble worked assiduously to explain away matrilineal-biased features to purify his patrilineal depictions. But, Peterson's incisive critiques are selective. In his own theorizing, categories like matrilineal clanship continue to drive the analysis in spite of the multiplicity of variegated local forms and practices that make it up. Ultimately, Peterson's theory forces him to resurrect a kin-based society reliant, in part, on "acts of procreation" that "can be conceptualized in essentially the same terms as Western notions about genetics" (110). David Schneider argued strongly that neither the semantic fields of *tabinau*, nor those of *genung*, could be logically aligned with such a biogenetic formula. Certainly, Marshall Islanders, who I know best, do not share any such genetically grounded formulations. If Peterson's kinship categories are generalized Euro-American forms projected onto the symbolic constructions and daily practices of local people, then "Micronesia" remains unified only through European and American symbolic machinations. For this reason, I question whether Peterson has provided the necessary support to justify the classification of Micronesia as a distinct culture area.

Does this mean that a comparative project on the grand scale Petersen has proposed is simply invalid? The answer is certainly "No!" In spite of the widely varied set of discourses and social practices found in the West Central Pacific, I do not think we have to move back to a Schneiderian solipsism to appropriately analyze and compare the various forms. Indeed, Schneider's cultural categories are themselves too rigid from edge to edge, not allowing for the types of positioned social actors with varied conceptual imaginaries that Bourdieu has encouraged us to incorporate into any meaningful social analysis (Bourdieu 1990, 1991). Even though Schneider notes that Yapese changed their conceptual frames between the time of his own research and that of Labby and his compatriots (Schneider 1984, 28), his theory still lacks the sort of expansive and power-infused dynamic of a comparative theory like Elizabeth Povinelli's (2002, 2006). Rather than arguing from a hypothesized construction of Belyuen belief and social practices, Povinelli argues that those beliefs and practices are both dynamic and internally varied. She allows her readers to hear the internally situated voices of members of the Belyuen community and, simultaneously, makes it extremely clear that Belyuen beliefs do not exist in a cultural vacuum. Rather, community members, while acting in terms that make sense internally, are simultaneously governed by a set of ethical sensibilities and claims to legitimacy that circulate in liberal settler colonies as geophysically separate as Australia and the United States or Canada. The imagined scenarios

that are manifest in stereotypes about how Aboriginal peoples must act, to be heard, as "genealogical" subjects have real effects on the everyday shapes of social action. As Belyuen beliefs and practices change, local people may wish to act in ways that demonstrate their existence as autonomous "autological" subjects. However, both within the Belyuen community and certainly in their interactions in the courts and other settings where Euro-Australians are present, Belyuen people are disciplined and constrained by the requirement to act as genealogically motivated subjects should act. While Povinelli encounters certain dilemmas, including (as she admits) the ability to specify the clearly varied contours of a unitary and epistemically central liberal settler ethos, she provides a dynamic comparative theory with the necessary parameters to explain the types of substantial historical, cultural, and interpersonal variations that Peterson encounters in the complex region he has selected for investigation. Povinelli ties the forms of an historically generated consciousness to the daily practices of social actors on the ground in order to demonstrate how differential access to, and the differential deployment of multisited constructions of, emotional energy and power come to have very real effects on people's lives (Povinelli 2006).

In spite of the complexities created by Peterson's analytic framework, *Traditional Micronesian Societies* is the finest comparative work to date that deals with this part of the Pacific. Certainly, his work represents a much-needed update of William Alkire's *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia* (1977). Undoubtedly, *Traditional Micronesian Societies* will become one of the new standard works for students enrolled in introductory courses on the Pacific. In this regard, I see the work in a mixed vein. Clearly, Petersen's engagement with the detailed variants of Micronesian social practices is extraordinarily valuable. At the same time, the theoretical premise of the work will not place students in the most empowered position to demonstrate the critical nature of anthropological inquiry in today's world. Equally, Petersen's attempt to write a "respectful account" of Micronesian pasts for the residents of this region may not be as well received as he hopes. In my estimate, without close attention to local voices and to locally sensitized histories, young islanders cannot understand "why Micronesians do things the way they do them" (3). Indeed, the grand comparative history proposed by Petersen elides the entire significance of a multiplicity of locally contested histories that are of great interest to specific island and atoll dwellers throughout this region. Nevertheless, *Traditional Micronesian Societies* is a critical comparative work and a must read for Pacific anthropologists and historians, as well as for scholars in other disciplines who can appreciate Petersen's substantial knowledge of this section of the Pacific and who have the time to give this work a close and critical reading.

## REFERENCES

Alkire, William
1977 *An introduction to the peoples and cultures of Micronesia*. Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishing Company.

Barker, John
2008 *Ancestral lines: The Maisin of Papua New Guinea and the fate of the rainforest*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1990 *The logic of practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.
1991 *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Carucci, Laurence Marshall
1997a Measures of chiefly ideology and practice in the Marshall Islands. In *Chiefs today: Traditional Pacific leadership and the postcolonial state*, eds. M. Lindstrom and G. White. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.
1997b *Nuclear nativity: Rituals of renewal and empowerment in the Marshall Islands*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press.

Finsch, O.
1893 *Ethnologische Erfahrungen und Belegstucke aus der Sudsee*. Wien, 1893. (translation of pp. 119–82 on the Marshall Islands in The Pacific Collection, Hamilton Library, Univ. of Hawai'i, Manoa).

Ong, Aihwa
1996 Cultural citizenship as subject-making. *Current Anthropology* 37 (5): 37–62.

Povinelli, Elizabeth
2002 *The cunning of recognition*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.
2006 *The empire of love*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.

Robbins, Joel
2004 *Becoming sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Sahlins, Marshall
1976 *Culture and practical reason*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Schneider, David
1984 *A critique of the study of kinship*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press.