

JEKERO: Symbolizing the Transition To Manhood in the Marshall Islands

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Abstract—This anthropological analysis of coconut toddy shows how the production and consumption of palm wine symbolizes the transition to manhood on Ujelang Atoll. Islanders draw parallels between toddy production and processes of maturing which, along with training in processes of toddy manufacture and the unifying actions of a drinking circle, provide one avenue boys follow in their quest to be accepted as men. An historical consideration of toddy consumption links palm wine sharing to newer drinking styles and furnishes a context for understanding recent innovations in the use of alcoholic beverages.

Introduction

The consumption of alcoholic beverages is a major problem for many of the emerging states of Micronesia. One cause of this "problem" has been attributed to a loss of meaningful roles, especially for men, due to increasing urbanization and "westernization" where traditional ego-defining activities are lost. Alexander (1978) has described such a state of anomie for men in the Micronesian ghetto known as Ebeye, Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands. The declining self image and increase in alcoholism and suicide there results not only from an absence of meaningful masculine activities but also from negative self constructs derived from comparisons with Kwajalein islet, a luxurious American military base built on leased land less than two miles across the lagoon. Mac Marshall (1979) has noted the existence of parallel problems on Moen, economic and political center of Truk, Federated States of Micronesia. A similar sense of aimlessness can be found in Uliga, Majuro, Marshall Islands governmental center, and has begun to develop on Enewetak Atoll, where most Ujelang/Enewetak people have lived since 1980.

This case study does not deny the obvious effects of a loss of role identities on Micronesian males in urban settings. Rather, it suggests that, from the first introduction of palm wine (fermented coconut toddy) to imbibing in beer and bottled hard liquor, alcohol consumption has been an activity of considerable consequence to Marshallese men. Marshall's Truk study shows that drinking, like warfare of yesteryear, has become a significant ego-defining pursuit of men on Moen. Similarly, materials from Ujelang Atoll, where Enewetak/Ujelang people resided from 1947 until 1980, indicate the importance of drinking in establishing and proclaiming a male's identity. On Ujelang, preparation and consumption of the alcoholic beverage known as *jekero* 'coconut toddy', came to signify a young man's transition into manhood; in the late 1970's, coconut toddy manufacture and use carried the symbolic weight of traditional maturation ceremonies.

Historical Background

In the past 35 years, Enewetak Atoll has been the testing site for some of the world's most innovative and destructive devices. In order to test these nuclear weapons, the United States relocated Enewetak people from their isolated homeland to nearby Ujelang Atoll. The move to a much smaller and less-productive atoll resulted in significant changes in residence patterns, land distribution, and in the social organization of the Enewetak community (cf., Kiste 1974). Administration of the atoll shifted from military authorities to the Department of the Interior after the first years of residence on Ujelang. Lack of administrative funds, combined with animosities between Marshallese officials and Enewetak people, left Ujelang residents in a state of social and physical isolation (Tobin 1967; Carucci 1980). The people felt they had been disowned. In their new location they did not have access to many of the amenities to which folks from other atolls became accustomed. As a result, Enewetak people on Ujelang had to maintain skills discarded on other atolls, just to survive.

Food gathering and preparation, house construction, canoe building, clothing and clothes repair, were among the essential activities. Males and females, young and old, performed each activity according to well-understood principles of conventional practice. A set of commonly shared signs defined the appropriateness of having certain groups perform specific life-sustaining activities. The signifiers encoded cultural assumptions about how and who should carry out various activities.

A critical feature of linguistic and cultural signs lies in their productive capacity. The move to Ujelang was preceded by Japanese and German administrations and an American missionary effort. Mission-trained Micronesians did not reach Enewetak until Japanese times, but the strict discipline they brought required Enewetak people to radically reassess how they dealt with the world. In the process of cultural reformulation, new sorts of signifying relationships greatly altered, and likely expanded, the interpretations placed on activities and social relationships.

Rites of passage from boyhood to manhood were one process sacrificed during the past 75 to 100 years. Initiation once meant a young boy moved from his childhood home into a house occupied by other agemates where he learned the proper "movements" of a man. Activities of warfare, subsistence (fishing, throwing coconuts, bird catching), residential and community administration, and appropriate conduct in love, were all included. Formal initiation rites that freed young males from the constraints of their natal households were sacrificed when missionaries arrived. The process of becoming a man started to be realized gradually. Maturity now involves the successive attainment of positions of high status and the fulfillment of increasingly important roles. As roles become more diversified, concepts of person continue to change (Carucci 1984).

Certain attainments are central to becoming an adult male or female; they are the symbolic foci which define in vivid detail what it is like to be a particular kind of person in Marshallese culture. In one such event, a young boy goes through the training necessary to make coconut toddy. Ujelang girls learn a corresponding set of skills—weaving mats and shaping other prized female goods. They also begin to receive the knowledge needed to use and interpret the supernatural. A second core aspect of male maturity apprenticed a young boy to a canoe making specialist where skills critical to becoming a man were

learned. The boy joined the sailing group headed by his mentor and acquired all skills to build and sail outrigger canoes. Within the past 25 years, however, canoe building has been replaced by the manufacture of plywood motor boats. Outrigger canoe construction became a specialized art, known only to middle-aged and senior men. Thus, in the late 1970s, making coconut toddy was the central event marking the incorporation of male children into the man's domain. The next section explores the structure of this event, while the final comments situate toddy drinking in the more recently emerging framework of alcohol consumption.

Ethnographic Background

Full accomplishment of manhood takes several years during which an adolescent male accumulates honors that reaffirm his maturity. Making coconut toddy is often the first marker to separate a youth from his childhood. As such, it carries the symbolic weight of the move boys made from their natal households into the young men's hut.

Coconut toddy manufacture is an ideal metaphor of male initiation, for not only is it a process that transforms an inactive drink, suited to family consumption, into an intoxicant defined culturally as potent, it also incorporates a diverse range of signs of exclusively male endeavor. *Tallūn nān lañ* 'climbing to the sky' is the first stage of the process. For Ujelang residents, the open sea and the sky are part of the men's domain and disaster can result when women venture into these spheres. Women on the open sea often bring death to fetuses and danger to passengers and crew. Mature females in the open space above the earth's surface appear to mortal men as witches and carriers of supernatural messages. According to folk knowledge, women who venture into high places expose their genitals to passersby, causing alarm and potential embarrassment. Such an episode led to man's initial discovery of sexuality (Carucci 1983).

While women should remain earth-bound, Enewetak men are thought to be particularly well suited to the activity of climbing (*tallūn*). Occasionally young girls shinny up trees, but mature women should never do so. As an exclusively male act, climbing expresses the general opposition between male activity and female passivity. Another component interrelates gender and rank. While high ranking women may be of higher status than unranked men, women, overtly at least, defer to men. High ranking females may even show subservience to lesser ranked male relatives through the use of high status kin terms. When expressed in spatial terms, male above female imagery is a common metaphor for sexual activities. The metaphor is extended to the placement of the *rōjāk emaan* 'man's gaff' or *rōjāk maan* 'forward gaff' above the *rōjāk kōrā* 'woman's boom' on a hoisted sail, and to males climbing freely above the heads of women.

Differences among types of trees are also used to express distinctions between men and women. Breadfruit and pandanus each have female attributes which relate to the color of the fruit, to its consistency, and to the branching, easily-climbed, nature of the trees. Coconut trees, on the other hand, exhibit typically masculine features. They are an important symbol of virility. Coconuts are the tallest trees on the atoll; they stand above the pandanus and breadfruit and they have no branches. In some contexts they are compared to the erect male phallus. Coconut trees are by far the most difficult trees to climb.

Coconut is the most important Marshallese product; Enewetak people consider it cru-

cial to the sustenance of life. Yet the uses of the coconut are quite varied and it would be an over-simplification to say that coconut is simply a signifier of men engaging in male pursuits.

Toddy production deals only with that part of the cycle of coconut growth symbolized in masculine terms. All stages of growth after the coconut has reached maturity, but prior to the time the coconut falls from the tree, are represented as the masculine half of the growth cycle. Drinking coconuts, available during this period, are symbolized as typically male food. Men harvest and process these coconuts. They prepare them in special ways for women (Carucci 1980). The gelatine-like developing "meat" lining a drinking coconut is compared to, and strengthens, semen. Once the nut has fallen to the ground and begun to sprout, it is no longer symbolized as a male food object. Sprouted coconuts metaphorically take on female characteristics. They fall from the heights, change texture, come in contact with the earth (the female symbolized sphere), and begin to sprout (start the tree's reproduction).

Coconut toddy production takes place prior to the appearance of drinking coconuts, when the tendrils which support the coconuts are enclosed in their sheath (*wutak*), but also at a time when the bundled tendrils have begun to mature. The drinking coconut starts its growth as the tree supplies the tendrils with an abundance of sweet white liquid. This thin syrup, itself compared to "weak semen" of just pubescent boys, is *jekero*, the product of a tapped tree. In an uninterrupted cycle of coconut growth, the liquid nourishes the inflorescence, eventually forcing immature coconuts to emerge from the spathe and begin their existence as small drinking coconuts. The coconut growth cycle, itself a metaphor of gender distinctions, is further used to discuss a young boy's passage into manhood.

Making toddy becomes a suitable metaphor of male initiation, since the moment of tapping the tree in the cycle of coconut development corresponds precisely to the time of initiation in the life cycle of young males who are taught how to make toddy and tend the trees. Developmental parallels between trees and men allow traditional initiation rites to be resymbolized through toddy manufacture. A detailed review of the processes of production and accompanying prohibitions shows the liminal character of the enterprise (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969) and indicates how each symbol is given meaning in its cultural context of use (Silverstein 1973, 1976).

Making coconut toddy is surrounded with restrictions that mark the sacred nature of the endeavor and separate it from mundane activity. Sexual contact with women is forbidden, and experts in making *jekero* will boast that they have obeyed the prohibition from the time they began to gather the materials necessary to tap a coconut tree until after the tree produces abundant liquid. Men also give up sexual relations with women if coconut toddy production drops off, blaming the failure on their own lack of restraint. Failure is the penalty for those who disobey the tabu. Falsely proclaimed abstinence may cause a man to become the laughingstock of the village when toddy production decreases.

The presence of women with malintent commonly ruins the productivity of a tree tapped for coconut toddy. Magic is performed to counteract this danger, but the antithetical and destructive force of menstruating women or ghosts may ruin drinking coconuts by souring the liquid or causing the soft meat (*medi*) to turn black. An inedible coconut of this sort is termed *kolombo*. Women also cause wells to go dry if they use them during menstruation. These mishaps indicate the negative relationship between female-controlled

force and drinking-class objects (*lime-*). At the time of toddy production a coconut tree provides a substantial source of drinkable liquids.

Women are one of many dangers to be avoided at coconut toddy time. Only the most knowledgeable are successful in making coconut toddy, and most who try, even with the aid of a specialist, either fail or have modest success. Processes of production are shrouded in secrecy; men who disregard instructions and fail to avoid all dangers will meet with misfortune:

This *jekero*, it is a difficult thing. Like a baby it must be protected, like an ill person you must watch it constantly, like a school of rabbit fish it requires forethought and planning first. It is not for unfortunates but for those who think like men, it is not for know-nothings, but for those with knowledge. And if you don't know the procedure, seek out one who does.

Most older men know which trees have been successfully tapped in the past, but only a few experts can determine a potentially productive tree. Young boys, eager to make coconut toddy, try to pry information from their mother's younger brothers (*rūkora-*), but only after boys have matured are they allowed to tap productive trees. Adolescent males will point out accessible immature trees which young boys can try to tap for some syrup. For their part, the young boys pursue their projects with dedication, learn some crucial techniques and return with token amounts of toddy. Their small successes heighten interest and allow them to brag about their expertise. Small amounts are contributed to subsistence and, through a display of knowledge or 'know-how' (*jelā*), the boys are allowed to act like men.

The accumulations and changes in knowledge are themselves a critical mark of increasing maturity throughout a man's life (and even after death). In the process, knowledge takes on a deeper moral character transforming know-how into situated knowledge (*jelā lokjen*: knowledge of proper modes of being). While the preparation and consumption of fermented toddy takes place under the tutelage of mature males, "learning to be drunk" on Ujelang does not result from mimicking the actions of mature males (cf., Marshall 1979: 116). Indeed, young unmarried males typically enact uncontrollably drunk selves while older men, precisely because their knowledge is situated, should "know how to be drunk" (*jelā [wāween] kadek*). Crazy drunkenness (*kadek im bwebwe*) is thus expected of young unwed males who have not been tamed by society and who have little control of culturally textured knowledge.

When boys enter puberty, mature men take their interests in toddy production sincerely. A young boy's grandfather, mother's younger brother, or a more distant relative adept at toddy manufacturing will teach the youth to make toddy properly. After a review of precautions and prohibitions, the elder sends his trainee out to collect all required tools. Three or four containers are needed to collect toddy. Carved coconut shell containers were once used, but nowadays bottles, ritually purified, serve the purpose.

The instructor isolates student and selected objects from female pollutants. Sexual abstinence is recommended. Ideally, the ocean side of the islet at the windward tip of the atoll will provide containers. This location is symbolically suited to male objects in two senses: viewed as center and periphery, Marshallese see the outer reef and ocean side of an atoll as the male symbolized sphere; using the "sailing code", itself a specialized lan-

guage suited to male endeavors, windward is a higher ranking direction than leeward. Flotsam is limited, however, and liquor bottles or large shoyu containers (1 liter bottles of soy sauce) are often taken from symbolically polluted locations. Purity remains a consideration, though, so bottles should be washed thoroughly in the ocean and rinsed at a secluded well that is not used for tasks like bathing and washing clothes. Containers should be hidden in the bush so only those directly engaged in making coconut toddy will know their whereabouts.

Coconut sennit (*ekwaal*) is then made to wrap the tendrils and secure the spathe after tapping a tree. Each man should manufacture his own sennit, but few under age 40 now know how to make coir. Younger men show little interest in such arduous tasks. Younger men must use sennit made by others, thus increasing the sources of contamination. Evil magic, readily embedded in braided hair, the woven ends of baskets, or *ekwaal*, is often blamed for declining returns of toddy. To make sure the coir is free from defilement, a young boy's instructor frequently provides his twine. When a tree does not produce well, the sennit will be replaced. It could be too large in diameter, contain too many splices, or have been imbued with evil magic, even after its manufacture.

A special knife must be found to cut the spathe and trim the tendrils of a toddy producing tree. To ensure purity, the knife should not be used for other tasks. Along with some extra coir, it is wrapped in gauze-like *inebil* and tucked away at the base of the fronds, high above the reach of passersby and out of their gaze. A whetstone or fragment of pumice may be included to keep the knife razor sharp. If the knife is used for other purposes, it must be purified and resharpened. It should never be used in food preparation or for other types of "women's work".

Once cord, containers, and cutting tools have been obtained, the lad selects a spathe (*wutak*) that will yield substantial amounts of liquid. Most youth have a general idea how the inflorescence develops, but they have not been allowed to tap mature trees. Nor do they know how to distinguish promising trees from those with little liquid. Only a few experienced elders can teach a young man to judge a tree's potential from its appearance. Men who learned to collect toddy "on their own" simply select trees which have been good producers in the past. If the tree gives less, weak, or bitter toddy, one of the few who know the look of promising palms will be consulted.

Mature spathes are selected so palms will not be excessively damaged by extracting toddy. A properly tapped toddy tree expels all of the syrup it would have directed toward producing a bunch of coconuts (from three or four to forty or more). The coconut continues to send out new spathes which will develop mature branches of nuts. But a tree only produces about ten spathes each year, fewer if soil conditions or planting techniques are poor. (Murai, Pen, and Miller [1958] note that in the Southern Marshalls one spathe appears every 26–30 days.) Cutting two or three spathes to find one suitable for toddy could greatly reduce a tree's yearly production. The spathe should be cut as it approaches full length, but well before it begins to split along the bottom to reveal the inflorescence. If a spathe has begun to rive, the one just above it in the spiraling sequence of fronds will be about ready to cut.

After close inspection to determine acceptability, two or three fronds are removed from around the spathe to allow easy access. A circular cut is made at about two-thirds of the length of the spathe and another about half way up the woody sheath. The cuts must

penetrate the spathe without scarring the inflorescence. The tip of the sheath is moved up a few centimeters and the tendrils are cut with the re-honed, razor-sharp blade. The short center section of the spathe, slit lengthwise, is slid up the tendrils far enough to begin wrapping them with sennit. A firm but not constricting coir binding replaces the center spathe. The freshly cut end of the bound tendrils is covered with specially fashioned strips of coconut frond to protect the *jekero* (in this case, the bound tendrils) until the time of manufacture. This phase of *jekero* bears some parallels to circumcision or superincision (cf., Levy 1973), but Ujelang people perform no such rituals nor draw such analogies.

The next days are spent readying the tree for extraction. Two or three times each day the end of the spathe must be drawn downward with a length of sennit secured to a lower coconut frond. At least once a day, the covered inflorescence must be trimmed and re-enclosed to prevent the tendrils from "healing", thus cutting off the flow of liquid. The spathe must be bent gradually to prevent the tendrils from breaking and the sheath from being split. "Strengthening the *jekero*" with chants or special forms of magic to enhance productivity may take place at this time.

Once the tip of the spathe has curved downward to the level of its base, a good *jekero* will begin to produce substantial quantities of liquid. The tender attaches a container (*jeib*) to capture the sap and fashions special pieces of coconut frond (*kwimij*) to funnel it into the flask. New fronds, tapered to the central rib on each end, replace the covering that secured the trimmed face of tendrils. The ends of these ribs (*nok*) are placed alongside the tendrils and bound snugly to the inflorescence. Another piece of frond, tapered on one end, is fastened under the oozing tendrils, folded alongside the protruding pieces of frond that cover the face of the *jekero*, and inserted into a container suspended from a hoop of sennit looped over the soundly lashed tendrils. Weckler records a sequence on toddy tending in the film *Mokil*, but Ujelang people would consider the approach too cavalier to yield much sap.

Cutting, binding, constructing a new coconut leaf cover and funnel, and replacing the collection container, require skill and dedication. They are "men's work". Skilled toddy collectors contend that trees should be tended just at daybreak and again at dusk. They continually chastized me for failing to adhere to an early morning schedule. The best trees require a third tending at midday, with the sun directly overhead. Each time, a minute sliver must be shaved off of the end of the bound tendrils with a single stroke of the honed blade, exposing fresh buds and tendrils for production. Initial failures are always blamed on a dull knife and on lack of skill in making a single clean cut.

Once regular collection is under way, a young man distributes his toddy. In the past, one initial share of the best toddy went to the chief, but nowadays the only requirement is that the liquid must be divided equitably. One share, "belonging to women and children," is used as a sweet drink before and between meals or as a sweetener when refined sugar is unavailable. The syrup should be transferred from the collection bottle, taken into town, and boiled to prevent it from souring if not used immediately.

Another share, for men only, will be hidden in the bush and fermented into palm wine (*jemañün*; also termed *jekero* by some Enewetak people) (cf., Kramer and Nevermann 1938). Daily addition of fresh liquid keeps the mixture active as it ages. Each few days the brewer tests his concoction for strength and flavor. The entire fermenting process must be carried out in secrecy to prevent women from seeing the process, making magic

on the liquid, and causing it to go sour. Severe illness can be caused if a small reddish-brown gnat finds its way into the container of fermenting liquid. Women are often accused of introducing these gnats, though most undoubtedly come from uncautious toddy tenders. Unlike normal toddy, which is said to strengthen the semen and increase a man's potency, contaminated liquid will cause semen to be weakened, it will make urination difficult, erection impossible, and dreams of desire excruciating. In short, while the fermenting phase of toddy manufacture normally parallels and actually contributes to the appearance and strengthening of semen in young males, the gnat can short circuit the process with disastrous results. If all goes well, however, the palm wine continues to ferment until it is judged to be potent (*kajour*) by the producer. At that time the strength of the drink is ready to empower the consumers (*kakajourur*) who themselves take on, or reconfirm their strength as "real men".

The Drinking Circle: Toward a Pragmatics of Significance

The man who has tended the tree and made the wine plans a drinking circle where the mixture will be consumed. He should not announce the occasion until his brew is fully fermented, but, often, young men are too proud of their newly acquired status to keep the planned gathering a secret, and word rapidly spreads through the village. Most guests are agemates of the sponsor and older men known not to be troublemakers, but highly tabued relatives and church members are never invited. Anyone who puts in an appearance must be seated, even though unsolicited guests are a common cause of conflict. Public embarrassment or fines are prices one must pay for not keeping the event private.

In the same way toddy production signifies male maturation, the drinking circle symbolizes shared masculine identity. Unity is expressed by drinking rules that stress equality; masculinity is emphasized through sharing a liquid prohibited to women. All participants drink equal shares of *jekero* from the same cup, a common practice in kava ceremonies elsewhere in the Pacific. With palm wine, each person consumes an entire cupful of fermented toddy before returning the empty container to the pourer to be refilled. An initiate host and another man appointed to fill the cup are the last to consume a cupful of the beverage in each round of drinking. This signifies to each participant the privileged position of the guests. All drinkers, however, are said to be equal, each sits in the circle crossed-legged, facing all other participants. Their placement in space communicates to others that those present sit and share with mates.

Women never participate in palm wine circles, nor should they ever consume alcoholic beverages. Old men tell stories of earlier times when men were stronger and could face greater danger. Their strength, some say, has been compromised by unsuited actions like attending drinking circles with women. On Ujelang in the 1970's several young women would sit in on such gatherings with their husbands. They sat on the periphery. They were not given, and did not give themselves, full participatory status. Especially in the context of a palm wine circle, older men often grumbled about the disruptive effect of female kibitzers on palm wine drinking circles. Even though wives and female companions sat on the periphery as observers, grumblers claimed each member of the circle must be "of one head" or "of one throat (heart)". Females were disruptive because they were unlike the participants. They represented a force antithetical to the aims of the gathering.

For old drinkers, the drinking circle represents masculinity as well as unity, the combination of signifying elements that made toddy production a perfect metaphor of the transition to manhood. For the young, however, those symbols have begun to change their significance in accord with new social settings.

As we have seen, learning to make coconut toddy is a critical step in men's knowledge of proper modes of being. (The drinking circle provides a prototypical context for the expression of such shared understandings. Since Marshallese men claim they are better able to manipulate knowledge than are women, the presence of females in a setting where knowledge was being formulated, reviewed, and reworked proved threatening to older men. Drinking circles provide an opportunity to share knowledge in spite of adversity. Discussions reflect the group's solidarity; statements are commonly made reminding other participants that all involved are "really one" or "really the same". Frequently old stories are recounted, topics of community concern also may be discussed, but theoretical topics without pragmatic application and jokes about relationships with women are predominate. The occasion is not suited to polemical oratory on subjects of potential disagreement. Outspoken opinions, intended to sway the attitudes of others, should be saved for council meetings.

At all drinking circles sponsored by lads just learning to tend trees, the young man himself will be a focus of conversation. It will be said that the young man has done a good thing by sponsoring the gathering, that his success tending a tree has proved his dedication and indicates that he is now "a real man". For those just initiated into coconut toddy production, the drinking circle confirms their status as men.

While drinking circles have a unifying intent, it is not uncommon for violence to erupt. Outbursts are directed toward someone on the outside or toward an uninvited guest. Marshallese men are easily agitated, and the intoxicant helps expose the aggressive tendencies that are part of the man's true nature. Other members of the drinking circle often empathize with a troublemaker's complaints and agree that he has been a victim of social injustice. Rules of deference are dismissed and, uninhibited, the man begins to search for the one responsible for his discontent.

When the person who caused the problem is found, verbal abuse and physical aggression are seldom avoided. Soon a crowd gathers to witness and mediate the event. Women wail as at a death and throw themselves upon siblings or sons seeking retribution in an attempt to prevent further damage. Little can be done, however, for an inebriated man is said to be made stronger (that is, his inherent male force is increased) by drinking. Only when a life-threatening act is being considered will the gathered group of men combine their strength to stay the attacks of an inebriated man presenting his complaint. Even when a feud erupts into fist fights or rock throwing, the inebriated offender is not held responsible to any great degree, for, under the influence of alcohol, the strength of masculine energy has been allowed to surface.

Fermented Toddy as Alcohol: Concept and History

Production and use of coconut toddy in the Marshalls has a relatively short history. According to Marshallese, and to historical sources, methods of coconut toddy production were learned from the Gilbertese (Kramer and Nevermann 1938; Mason 1954; Marshall

and Marshall 1975; Marshall and Marshall 1979). Kotzebue (1821, 1830) exhaustively recorded foods and drinks in the Ratak Chain but failed to mention coconut toddy. By the time missionaries arrived in the southern Marshalls in the 1850s, however, residents seem to have known how to make sweet toddy but not its fermented counterpart (Doane's Journal). With the introduction of copra as a market commodity in the 1860s, though, the use of fermented toddy began to take root. Between 1860 and 1900 copra became the major cash crop throughout the western Pacific, and it remains a major source of income for island residents today (Erdland HRAF; Spoehr 1949; Tobin 1967; Kiste 1968; Pollock 1970; Rynkiewicz 1972; Carucci 1980). Descriptions in Kramer and Nevermann (1938) and Mason (1947) indicate the increasing importance of toddy production to Marshall Islanders, and we have seen how Ujelang residents fit this product into an indigenous pattern of significance and use. It remains to be shown how Enewetak people have continually refashioned their ideas to take account of a wide array of alcoholic beverages and drinking situations that share some features with fermented toddy yet in other respects are quite different.

Marshall and others (see Marshall 1983; MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969), have discussed the effects of alcohol as a disinhibitor, a theme brought out by the way inebriated Ujelang males are able to publically air grievances. Much as I have shown for Ujelang and Enewetak, these researchers show how significantly culture shapes reactions to intoxicating beverages. Nonetheless, styles of drinking have also been affected by outside influences and, as Marshall suggests (1983), "how to be drunk" (disinhibition as an appropriate form of drunken comportment) was modeled on colonial European patterns. Marshall's hypothesis is equally provocative in leading us from a discussion of the signifying potential of acts to ideologies: "not only the behaviors involved in drunkenness were copied, but also the beliefs about the drunken state as one of mindless disinhibition" (ibid.: 197). Alcohol consumption on Ujelang, however, may prove particularly instructive, for while residents appropriated certain signifying elements from Europeans, they did not *copy* them. Instead, those elements were rethought in terms of the signs and social relationships that made sense to Ujelang people. Early sailors, Germans, Japanese, and Americans provided many examples from which Enewetak/Ujelang folks abstracted a model of behavior but they certainly embedded these perceptions deeply in a model for action based on their own view of the world (cf., Geertz 1973).

The original acts of drinking that were witnessed (whatever they may have been) are far less important than the indigenous apperception of them (cf., Boas 1889). Enewetak people have reformulated their ideas about alcohol several times in the past century, and each conception has been repeatedly manifest in different meaningful patterns of action. An idea like "mindless disinhibition" must, thus, be placed within a specific contextual framework at a particular point in Ujelang history in order to lend it significance. In the late 1970s it could be very roughly translated as *kadek im bwebwe* 'crazy drunk', a label for unruly drunken comportment used by women and church members. These two groups represent social stability and moral restraint, the very antithesis of "craziness" as nonconforming, asocial action. Whereas drunkenness, particularly when it becomes unruly, is by definition a social threat to women, it is expected, if not ideal, behavior for men. Similarly, "time out" for married men, an opportunity to get away from their acquired roles within society, is "time in" for unmarried youth. As "time out", married men use drunk-

eness as an excuse for a temporary return to their mature unmarried selves, and as “time in” young men use coconut toddy, western alcoholic beverages, or “yeast” to define their actions as particularly masculine, an identity condemned by those culturally defined as being in society’s center (cf., Carucci 1984). Like “mindless disinhibition”, “time out” (Marshall 1983: 197) can only be roughly translated into specific scenarios for action: for married men, drinking provides rest (*kakije jidik*) and a chance to “throw off tiredness” (*jolok jidik mōk*)—legitimate symbolic pathways that lead a man back to his status prior to marriage; for young males “taking on strength” (*buk kajour in*) is a reason for drinking that requires no justification, for strength is the essence of true manhood (*lukuun emaan*). For married males rest or re-invigoration becomes the concomitant of taking on strength for those first making coconut toddy. For all males, drinking provides a route to assuming the role of “real men”, a mode of being that, by definition, exists on society’s periphery.

Drunken comportment is not acultural action, an escape from all social rules, as might be suggested by “time out”; nor is it an action attained, unmodified, by diffusion from another society. Alcoholic beverages, like all drink-class things but in a more actively potent way, are male symbols. Like maturing young men, alcohol has a strength brought out through fermentation and aging. Its negative image makes a good joke:

You watch yourself [imperative] miss, you’ll get drunk—drunkenness suited to women (*kadek in kōrā*).

This laughter-provoking quip, directed at a young girl kneading fermented breadfruit, points up how implausible is the possibility of producing drunkenness/women from fermentation/food and, by negation, how appropriate to create drunkenness/men from fermentation/drink. It is also a sign which points in both directions simultaneously, for not only does the man make the drink (as in palm wine production) but the drink makes the man—fierce fighting men on Truk and Ujelang. In the latter instance, at least, the strength of the liquid is a sign at various levels: it symbolizes the strength of the mature young male, and it contributes to that strength iconically, by transferring strength to him and by contributing to the potency of his semen.

To this point I have attempted to indicate how toddy production fits into specific conceptual schema with its own patterns of use. It remains to be shown how that particular form is placed in an indigenous historical perspective with its own dynamic of change, both in terms of patterns of use and in regard to other styles of alcohol consumption.

In early German times, Enewetak people say coconuts were very scarce; only a few producing trees provided coconuts for men of rank. Reflecting on this state of shortage, some claim that these men shared communal cups of palm wine, but others contend that toddy drinking developed much later on Enewetak, in Japanese times, when local men finally acceded to their colonizer’s desires and planted the atoll with coconuts. By this account, what it meant to be a man had to be rethought when confronted with copra production. Men had always dealt directly with the sea—fishing, canoe building, and sailing—and their aversion to planting coconuts is recorded in humorous tales about early planting days when seedlings were consumed instead of being planted. The atoll was finally made into a copra plantation under duress, but the Japanese merchants who demanded fresh drinking coconuts were given nuts half-filled with urine. In the end, how-

ever, coconuts were planted, and men's and women's roles had to be rethought in terms that refigured the associations between males and coconut trees.

Missionary teachers who reached Enewetak in 1926 radically transformed the mode of discourse that surrounded toddy production. They put an end to traditional initiation rites, including tattooing, and tabued alcoholic beverages and smoking. The very production of toddy became illegal since it could be made into a drink that was, in their eyes, unsavory. As part of this prohibition, fermented coconut toddy came to be classed with other alcoholic beverages. It is significant, though, that older men on Enewetak, even today, do not classify fermented toddy along with bottled alcohol. These elders admit that "you have the possibility of getting drunk with toddy" but, at the same time, "it differs from" other inebriants. Along with this classificatory change came another result of the tabu. As Mary Douglas would remind us, the element of danger was brought into much closer association with all types of alcohol by polarizing the distinction between the sacred and the profane (Douglas 1966). Conversion to Christianity became almost universal in the 1930's and popular "vices" were replaced with prayers.

After the battle of Enewetak (February 1944) a new conceptual era began—one that reinforced the inclusion of fermented toddy as alcohol. American military personnel on Enewetak and Ujelang drank and smoked; they even convinced a few youth that these activities might not lead to eternal damnation. Servicemen shared in toddy drinking sessions. They taught Enewetak people how to make home brew from yeast and brought young men bottles of alcohol in exchange for arrangements with local women. For five years after the war, on Enewetak and then on Ujelang, patterns established after the battle of Enewetak continued. During this time the local residents received support from U.S. Navy personnel. A weather station was maintained on the main islet on Ujelang, and regular flights brought supplies and western movies. Military restrictions were not as stringently enforced after the war:

The fellow, my friend, was a husky white man with a deep voice and each night after work he and I met in the bush and shared a bottle. The thing was whiskey, Johnny Walker. Then we would go to the movie, drunk, but the elders would be very upset—old ones like Ernej, Jonni, Ebrean, Debij—and they did not like the American workers because they were troublemakers and did not adhere to laws of the church. But we drank anyway. And we made "yeast" and put raisins in it . . . and sometimes I would bring a big container of fermented toddy and he would bring bottles, sometimes cases (or 'a case' of hard liquor) and we would drink down at the end of the island until we fell asleep. And we would drink and sleep and drink and sleep. And one time, I brought him Elata (pseudonym), our cross-cousin, and he provided me with one entire case of Johnny Walker. They were good friends and many cases he brought me for combining them. . . .

Two major reconceptualizations come out of these accounts. Men's roles, which had been brought into closer association with women's roles during the early years of copra production were symbolically realigned with fighting men. *Ri torinae* 'those who fight' came to include Japanese and American military personnel, particularly the enlisted men with whom Enewetak men identified both as co-workers and as fighters, that is, those who *did* the fighting—much like the warrior grandfathers of Enewetak men. Women's roles also shifted in a significant way, first by becoming involved in the production of handicraft

for foreign visitors and, second, by themselves becoming commodities in the exchange of sexual favors for alcohol.

Themes of women's exploitation are easily read into this interpretation, but Marshallese males and females both view the shift more subtly. Marriages have always been contracted with an eye to various benefits that result from the match. Alcohol added another valuable to this exchange. One couple explained the introduction of alcohol as an extension of the health maintenance responsibility a woman has for her cross-cousins. Thus, a woman should have sexual intercourse with her cross-cousin (a potential spouse) to prevent him from becoming too filled with sperm, which could cause him to die. But the young man could also arrange a match between one of his cross-cousins and a serviceman who would then provide alcohol that would reinvigorate the young man's masculine energies. In retrospect, at least, alcohol is conceived of as another way to create or preserve the essential stuff of which males are made. During the post war era, young women participated in the process as part of a long-established exchange which was modified, but not radically altered, by the addition of alcohol.

After this era of excitement, the late 1950s and 1960s brought time of isolation, sadness, and self-doubt for people on Ujelang. Military personnel departed and United States support dwindled. Promised ships did not arrive. People were hungry. Some starved. For over 20 years life was difficult, but people survived.

Even in these difficult times, Ujelang culture was very much alive. It was in these years that the complex celebration known as *Kūrijmōj* was conceptualized (Carucci 1980), and the production of palm wine came to be an important way to symbolize the passage of boys into the status of young men. This was an era when elders educated in the old ways and introduced to mission teachings as newly married men and women began to pass away. Americans had encouraged the election of officials, and for the first time in the late 1960s, someone other than a chief was chosen for the highest post. At the same time, critical elements of masculine endeavor were being curtailed. By the early 1970s canoes were scarce, and the central importance of canoe building groups ceased to be a factor in the move from boy to man (Tobin 1967: 160 et. seq.).

Coconut toddy manufacture became a symbolic statement about male maturation at an appropriate historical moment. It is an arena of activity in which each element helps to inform a young boy about what it is to be a man (Turner 1974). The youth learns about maturity by manipulating signs which themselves confirm his status. He implements those signifiers for the first time in the process of making palm wine, though he may have toyed with them earlier in life. As we can see, however, palm wine production is not a reinstantiation of an ancient rite. It is creative and new. It constructs a cultural message out of symbols and events that have undergone substantial change in the past. Toddy production has been gradually refashioned to convey a message around the central themes of solidarity and transformation as they relate to age and gender.

We know that symbols and action sequences encode the cultural significance of events (Schneider 1968; Geertz 1972; Beidelman 1980), but the fact that symbols are malleable is equally important. New significances are created in everyday discourse, but not without reference to an established cultural order (Sahlins 1985). With this in mind, the review of Enewetak's past also points to the future.

The return to Enewetak in 1980 meant different things to different people. For the old

it represented a return to the ancient homeland, but for the young it stood for a new life with access to wealth, Western goods, and *den* 'water' (alcoholic beverages). On Enewetak, men's and women's roles have changed rapidly, as have the meanings of symbols out of which people construct their respective identities. In a short period of time, women have been incorporated into drinking circles (albeit not those with the complex symbolism of Ujelang coconut toddy circles), and men of various ages have developed divergent responses to this change.

On Ujelang, women of questionable reputation often sat in on drinking circles where *iiej* 'yeast' or *batto* 'bottled hard liquor' were consumed. Some even tried these intoxicants. With the return to Enewetak, it is not uncommon to see women indulge; in fact, a few sponsor their own drinking parties. They emulate patterns in the governmental center where women frequent clubs or drink at private homes. These female participants are summoned to account for their actions by older community members, even renowned heavy drinkers. Since accepting smoke and drink is assumed to be a sign of willingness to share sexual favors, they are called *kokañ* (often glossed as 'prostitute'). A popular ballad mytho-poetically attributes the first Marshallese *kokañ* to 1981, but *kokañ* may be best understood as 'exchangers'—derived from the earlier significance, 'barter' (as opposed to buying and selling). As we have seen, a woman's responsibility to her cross-cousins (ideal spouses) has long included dispensing sexual favors that help maintain a male's healthfulness. Gifts and assistance were often returned but, after the war, military men with alcohol increased the complexity of the exchange. Today's *kokañ* are young women who play an active role in courtship and marriage arrangements which consistently extend beyond the boundaries of bilateral extended family and clan. Instead of relying on the judgment of their cross-cousins, young women now control supra-familial exchanges where they acquire goods in encounters involving "foreign" men, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages.

The composition of drinking groups and their significance has shifted in response to changing circumstances, or perhaps to anticipate them; greater stress has been placed on symbols of oneness, unity, and sharing—less on the opposition between men's and women's force. But in spite of new trends, the "core symbols" and organizing principles are not gone. They manifest themselves in different ways. For men, violence associated with their very nature, and exposed by alcohol, is easily kindled. Ideas that alcohol improves men's communicative abilities and increases their allure also persist. Women, who have always controlled an objectified exchange system in which sexual favors are distributed and tangible goods return, now perpetuate this pattern in a system mediated by alcohol and tobacco. One young woman contends that females use drink to contact men, but that they are little affected by the intoxicant. It is the men whose "craziness" is brought out by alcohol, while the women have an interest in establishing a long term tie which will bring in goods. Indeed, along with co-residence and children, this is the same as *koba* 'combining', the outcome of primordial courtship procedures.

Old men will die with the conception that an inescapable bond links men with drinkable objects (*lim-*), and drinking intoxicating toddy brings out a man's true nature—his wild and warring self. These men cannot approve of women drinking, for alcohol contradicts their very nature—tame, nurturing, creating and stabilizing society from within itself. In contrast, young men often approve of mixed drinking because it has become a way of

meeting women from other atolls. Young men and women who drink together stress different aspects of Marshallese ideology—the unity, sharing, and sense of oneness that are products of the drinking circle. These things lend legitimacy to new drinking styles.

The promised return to Enewetak was one source of new ideas about drinking. The temporary return program (1977–1980), established to allow the oldest members of the community to see their ancestral homeland before their death, soon found elders longing for Ujelang where they could dine on Marshallese foods, sit under grown coconuts, and pass the time with their families and familiar agemates. Younger people flocked to Enewetak instead to gain access to Western goods and alcohol. Where laws on Ujelang prohibited imported alcohol, young Enewetak residents, maybe even the district administrator's representative, began to question whether Ujelang laws applied at all to Enewetak. These questions were raised again when most of the community moved home in 1980.

Following the 1980 return, coconut toddy production was never again significant to maturing males. Since making toddy was environmentally untenable (recently planted coconut trees were years, even decades, from maturity), the manufacture of *iiej* 'yeast' and consumption of bootlegged liquor took on some of the symbolic properties of fermented toddy. Tabus against these beverages were no longer enforced as strictly as they had been on Ujelang, perhaps because older leaders had sacrificed their positions to a new group of younger, Japanese-educated, men who did not govern with missionary strictness. These new leaders had known the revelries of post World War II GI drinking groups. In part, they empathized with modern ideas.

In this climate of social ferment, the cultural logic which gave meaning to toddy production changed focus, but it did not die. New tales about drinking use the same sorts of thought processes to refashion concepts of maleness, maturity, and sharing into new metaphors about the strength and social exchange value of alcohol. As females are accepted into drinking circles, discourse about alcohol has begun to stress maturity and sharing over themes of maleness. Nevertheless, fragments of the old ideology allow men, accustomed to having total control of drinking circles, to summarily dismiss women participants when they tire of their companionship. A range of actions are thus justified or brought into question using an ideology which is itself in a constant state of change. Due to environmental disruption of Enewetak, coconut toddy cannot be used as a metaphor of male maturity. It is, however, one historical presentation of a Marshallese pattern of thought and action which leads to a better understanding of how alcohol is incorporated as a signifier of maleness, maturation, and sharing. As a sign vehicle, alcohol, in its production and consumption, takes on significance only in relation to other parts of a dynamic, ever changing, cultural code. While the details that interrelated men and toddy production on Ujelang are not likely to be reproduced, the broader metaphors that align alcohol with masculinity, maturity, sharing, and incorporation provide a refractory lens through which the diverse Marshallese drinking patterns, and those of other Pacific societies, can be considered.

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